

# Intimate invitation

**DON'T LEAVE IT TO LUCK IF YOU'RE ASKED TO PHOTOGRAPH A WEDDING – FIRST GET SOME EXPERT ADVICE FROM THE WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR, MARK SEYMOUR. *OLYMPUS USER* GETS THE LOWDOWN ON MAKING THE MEMORIES FROM THAT SPECIAL EVENT LAST FOREVER**

PHOTOGRAPHING WEDDINGS IS not a task to be undertaken lightly. Apart from requiring technical mastery of your Olympus camera, an unflinching eye for composition and the patience of a saint, it's hard to think of a more high-pressure environment. Time is limited, expectations are high and the margin for error is narrow indeed – particularly when the photographer is being paid good money by the excited bride and groom, who are looking forward to receiving images they can show off for a lifetime. Certainly, wedding photographers reflect this pressure in their fees, but well-meaning friends and relations who are taking the shots as a favour can feel the heat when the big day arrives, too. At the same time, advances in camera and home printing technology mean that more and more amateurs are prepared to try their hand at wedding photography.

So, we thought we'd get some expert advice from one of the country's most successful exponents, Mark Seymour. In fact, we're selling him short. Mark is the expert's expert, having recently been named Wedding Photographer of the Year by the Master Photographers Association, and the International Wedding Photographer of the Year 2007. He's a keen Olympus user, too. Mark's at the top of his game, but remains a passionate photographer who's more than happy to share some of the secrets of his craft.





**Aiming high**

We begin at the beginning – how did Mark get into photography, and wedding photography in particular? “Photography’s been a lifelong interest, and my parents have a photo of me holding a Box Brownie when I was about five or six,” he explains from his studio in Berkshire. “I got into wedding photography through luck, really. Money was tight when I got married back in the ’80s, and in 1986 I responded to an ad in the *Daily Telegraph* looking for someone to sell wedding photographs – so to begin with I was a salesman, rather than a photographer. Then I asked the company I was working for, National Weddings, to teach me how to take wedding photographs, and worked for them as a full-time photographer for a year.”

While he acknowledges the great on-the-job training he received, Mark yearned for more creative freedom. In an impressive act of chutzpah, he decided to just work part-time for National Weddings so he could set himself up as a wedding photographer in his own right. “I took out an ad in Yellow Pages, even though I’d never taken a wedding photograph as an independent professional,” Mark recalls wryly. It was clearly a case of fortune favouring the brave, as before too long he was booked up nine months in advance.

“I started at the bottom, photographing weddings in village halls, and worked my way up,” he remembered. “I had to make my own opportunities, and worked hard to cultivate the ‘higher end’ of the wedding photography market. A lot of photographers are interested in photography, rather than the business of photography, but I am interested in both.” Mark’s photographic skills and business acumen soon paid off, and he’s now recommended by both Claridges and Hempel Hotels as a wedding photographer.

Mark was also savvy enough to see the fantastic potential of new technology for wedding photographers. Six or seven years ago, when digital photography really started to catch on, he was made redundant from his part-time position at National Weddings. He wisely spent his redundancy money on a digital camera and laptop. “I was one of the first wedding photographers to sell shots online. I was subsequently introduced to the Master Photographers Association, a professional body for portrait, commercial



and wedding photographers. They invited me to talk to their London Portrait Group about the future of digital photography and online sales.” Through the London Portrait Group, Mark went on to meet and advise many famous photographers, including Bob Carlos Clarke (one of his biggest influences), John Swannell and Lord Patrick Lichfield.

**A great privilege**

As mentioned earlier, shooting weddings can be a stressful occupation, especially when dealing with swish hotels and demanding clients with high expectations. How does Mark cope with the pressure? “I don’t see the

job as stressful, it’s just part of my life,” he says disarmingly. “You get used to it. It’s like being a vicar, I never get Friday or Saturday off!” That’s not to say he underestimates the responsibility of the job, however. “When I go to work, I know the client can be demanding, because I’m being allowed to see some of the most intimate moments of their life.” Mark cites the recent example of photographing an orthodox Jewish wedding, though he’s also keen to stress how rewarding he found this experience. “I was there for 10 hours, and was allowed to see the bride getting ready. As a man, this was a great privilege and I had to follow the rules of the Jewish Orthodox



## toptips

### Secrets of the wedding professionals

We asked Mark for specific tips to help readers of *Olympus User* take better shots at weddings.

**1 Look for the moment** The first thing I'd say is that I am always looking for the 'moment' as I'm walking around the wedding day with my camera up to my eye.

**2 Focus on the bride** You should always concentrate on where the bride is – this is normally the centre of everything that's going on.

**3 Follow the pattern** I've also learned from experience that all weddings follow a similar pattern. For example, when the bride and groom first appear at the reception, friends will crowd forward to look at the ring. This is a great opportunity to take candid shots.

**4 Share your vision** My biggest tip for the amateur is just to do your own thing, and to give the bride and groom your particular vision of the day – everyone sees things differently. There is no point trying to emulate a professional since, as an amateur, you'll never get the same shots.

religion. The ceremony lasted until midnight so it was very memorable.”

As well as being a great experience, this wedding proved rewarding in other ways, as three of Mark's black-and-white shots from the day bagged him the Wedding Photographer of the Year prize from the MPA. Mark goes for informal, candid shots rather than a more formal portraiture style, so why does he think he won? “Simply because they were the best images in the competition and they were different,” he shrugs. “To do well in competition, the first thing you need is impact. I might shoot 50 to 60 weddings, and only a handful will have three or four really good images. The thing to remember about these competitions is that the judges will see hundreds of very similar fashion shots of brides. So you need to do something different.”

#### The technical side

The technical challenges of wedding photography shouldn't be underestimated,

and many amateurs have discovered to their dismay that the bride's dress turned out grey, rather than white, because they haven't set the camera's exposure correctly. As you'd expect, Mark is now at the stage where all this is second nature. “Photography is my passion and my camera goes everywhere with me, so I don't think about it. I'm not a big camera geek but I love my Olympus E-510 SLR. It's quite small and discreet, so great for candid photography where you want to capture people at their ease. I particularly like the 14-54mm f2.8 lens, as the optical quality is fantastic.”

Every image is edited in software, though he doesn't do this himself for the majority of his jobs. “I'm not arrogant enough to think that I'm the only person who can improve my own pictures, so I have an assistant who does this for me. With 80 to 90 per cent of wedding pictures, the only thing they need is colour correction. But all the images I enter for competition are worked on exclusively by me, as you'd expect!”



#### Mark's awards

To learn more about Mark and his photography, see his website at [www.markseymourphotography.co.uk](http://www.markseymourphotography.co.uk) (he's an expert portrait photographer, too). As mentioned, Mark is one of the most respected and successful wedding photographers in the UK.

#### His awards include:

- Acerboni Wedding Photographer of the Year 2005
- MPA Portrait Photographer of the Year 2006
- MPA Master Photographer of the Year 2006
- MPA Acerboni Wedding Photographer of the Year 2007
- International Wedding Photographer of the Year 2007