



Welcome!

Before we get to the good stuff I just wanted to take a moment and thank you from the bottom of my heart. That you two have decided to get me on board for one of the most important days in your lives means the world to me.

It's this trust that inspires me every day to create the best work I possibly can.

I know there is a ton of information out there and it can feel overwhelming at times. This book is meant to give you a little guidance along the way. The advice in here will not only allow for stunning wedding photographs, but it will also ensure that you get to enjoy a relaxed wedding day.

That said, all tips in here are merely suggestions. Only you two know what feels right! After all, this day is here to celebrate you, your unique personalities and your decision to spend your lives together.

I am so honored that I get to be a part of this amazing chapter of your story.

Melizza



ENGAGEMENT SESSION

An engagement session is the perfect way to kickstart our relationship, get you used to being in front of the camera, and calm your nerves before the wedding day. It's also a ton of fun!

I love to meet you where you're comfortable, whether that's on extended hikes or other adventures where we can create something beautiful in a relaxed atmosphere, or in a downtown setting and over drinks at your favorite spot. The results are also the perfect addition for wedding invitations and Save the Date cards!

*Sounds like something you'd be up for?
Great, let's get to planning!*

PLANNING A WEDDING

The different stages of planning a wedding are exciting, but things can get stressful, too. Trying to realize your own vision and listening to a mountain of (well-intentioned) advice from all sides, whilst simultaneously juggling a budget and figuring out how to plan a wedding day (something you are most likely doing for the first and only time in your life) is, well.... a challenge. But I've got your back! Here are a few things to keep in mind when tackling your wedding planning to do list:



Celebrate The Process

With all these big and small stepping stones approaching your one big day, it's easy to lose sight of how precious the here and now is. That's why you should make an effort to celebrate every milestone, every get-together, every rehearsal. Grasp every opportunity to spend quality time with your loved ones. Looking back it will seem like the time just rushed by.



You Don't Have To Do It All On Your Own

Delegating tasks leaves you with more time to enjoy and focus on the top priorities on your to-do list. Gather a team of awesome people around you and don't be shy to ask for help if needed. Your friends and family members will be happy to help you.

Invite The People You're Excited To See

This should be a no-brainer, shouldn't it? You'd be surprised at how many couples long for an intimate wedding day, only to find that their invitation list keeps growing. Your friends want to bring new partners you've barely met, your grandma expects you to invite all those very distant family members and there's this aunt you just know will have zero nice things to say, but she's family after all... Stop! Instead of your invitation list escalating along with your stress levels, you have my permission to only invite the people you know you will be truly happy to see once the day rolls around.

Focus On What's Really Important

When something doesn't go quite as planned, try to take a deep breath and relax. You two have decided to spend your life together and, with that one important thought in mind, most incidents truly aren't that big of a deal. Trust me on that one.



INSPIRATION

The internet has an abundance of wedding inspiration in store for you - so much so, that it can feel overwhelming when you first dive in. Below you'll find a collection of my favorite blogs & online magazines that have a ton of helpful advice and beautiful imagery to get you inspired for the big day.

www.stylemepretty.com

www.marthastewart.com

www.munaluchibridal.com

www.greenweddingshoes.com

www.weddingsparrow.com

Pinterest is undoubtedly every bride's favorite place to surf throughout the wedding planning process. There's a whole world of inspiration right there at your fingertips and that's amazing. However, it can get super addictive. My advice would be to take regular breaks and check in with yourself: Is this truly what you want or did you just get carried away? Does this really fit you and the style of your wedding or does it only make for a pretty picture? Let your intuition be your guide.

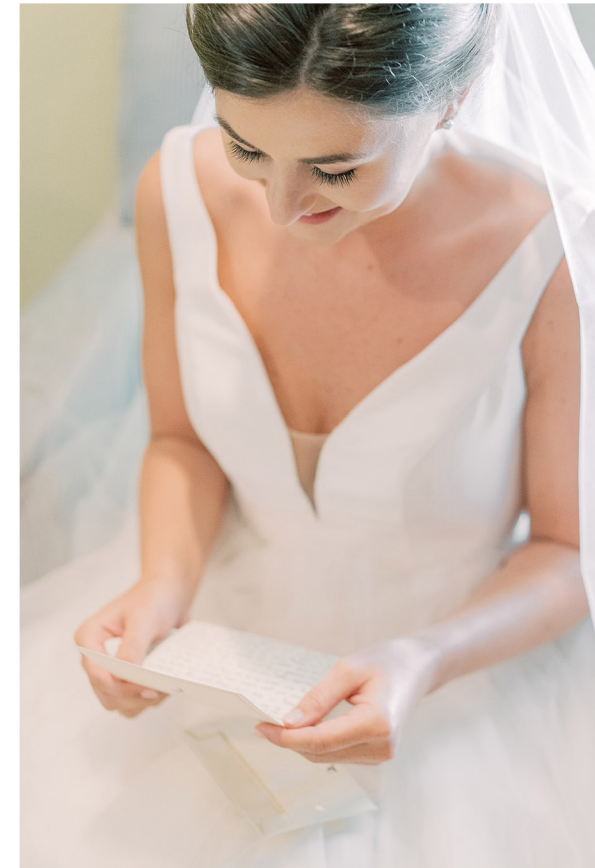


TIMELINE



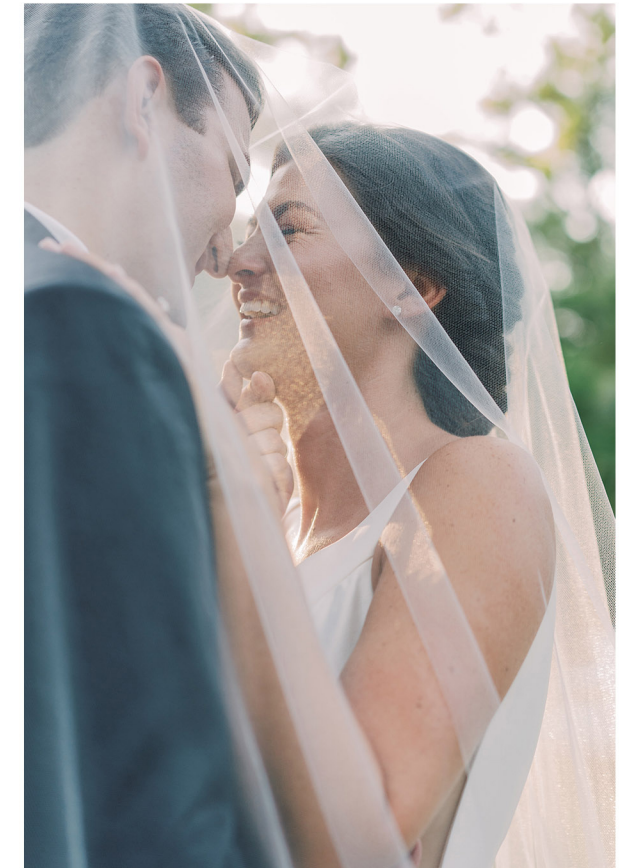
Don't Start Too Early

Oftentimes, couples are worried about how to keep their guests entertained throughout a long wedding day. The best solution that I've found? Don't start your day too early! A ceremony in the late afternoon (or even in the early evening hours) allows you to sleep in and start the day in a relaxed manner. There's a natural flow to how things progress and people won't even realize how time flies by. It's so much more pleasant than having your guests wait around with a champagne glass in their hands, wondering when things will pick up speed.



Leave Some Wiggle Room

Try and abstain from filling up the day's agenda down to the last minute. Instead, add an extra 10-15 minutes to every activity, because, from my experience, a lot of things take longer than originally anticipated. That's normal and shouldn't be a reason to get stressed out. Instead of spending your day chasing down your own schedule, give yourself some breathing space so that you can relax and enjoy every moment.



Pay Attention To Light

From a photography standpoint, light is a key factor and will greatly influence the mood I am able to capture during the ceremony, the couple shoot, the evening etc. Simply keep that in mind, especially for everything taking place outdoors, and feel free to consult me for any questions that may come up. I have also included lots of advice on how to make the best of different light scenarios in the upcoming chapters.

STYLING

When it comes to wedding dresses, every woman is different. Maybe you've had a vision of your perfect dress ever since you were a little kid. Perhaps you want to surprise yourself. Maybe you've decided to have your dream dress tailored for you. Or you've been browsing vintage shops for the last couple of months waiting to find a golden oldie to walk down the aisle in. Styling is such an individual thing, but no matter what your dress goals are, there is one thing you should never forget:

Stay True To Yourself

While there are certain traditions, there's absolutely no rulebook when it comes to what a bride or a groom has to look like. Follow your heart. Stand your ground when bridal shop owners, makeup artists or relatives want to convince you of anything that doesn't sit right with you. Believe me, a couple of hours into the wedding day, these choices will make all the difference. And how comfortable you are will shine through in every photograph.

Here are a few more things to keep in mind :





Schedule Rehearsal Dates For Hair & Make-Up

This advice applies no matter how lovely and competent your makeup artist seemed on first impression, and no matter how much you adore every portfolio shot of your hairdresser's creations. Scheduling a rehearsal date is crucial to ensure you have a similar vision, discuss your preferences and no-gos beforehand and try different things without time pressure.



Choosing The Dress

Only bring a small group of people to your dress fittings. They should know your style, shield you from obtrusive shop owners, be kind and honest and also know when to shut up. This is exactly the squad a nervous bride-to-be needs by her side.



Keep It Natural

I urge both of you to choose something that feels like YOU. Something you can move around in with ease. A skirt that won't stop you from dancing. Shoes that won't stop you from hopping up on a tree stump for that one epic wedding photo. A hair style and makeup that look beautiful, but effortless and natural in photos. And remember - I take the utmost care to keep you looking your best, but it's perfectly normal that over the course of the day a strand of hair loosens or an epic adventure session leaves some traces on the underside of your dress. Don't worry about it and don't let yourself be limited by an outfit you're only wearing this one day. Instead, create some memories in these clothes!



FOR THE GROOM

This part of the wedding guide is written for you, the groom. I don't know yet how big a role you're playing throughout the wedding planning process. Maybe you are actively engaged in every part of the journey, or perhaps you are standing on the sidelines, nodding through ideas, not quite sure what all the fuss is all about. Either way, that's totally cool and I'm not here to sell you on any particular wedding ideas either way, but I have accompanied many couples through this time in their lives and there are a couple of things that I would like you to know.



THIS IS YOUR DAY, TOO

A huge part of the wedding industry caters towards brides and their ideas and visions. However, this is your wedding, too, and you get a say in what it will look like. Take a moment and ask yourself what's important to you. What are you looking forward to the most? What do you need in order to enjoy the day? Whether it's amazing food, a live band playing all your favorite songs or a relaxed morning with a ton of time for your buddies. Make sure to set some priorities and communicate these things clearly with your bride-to-be and everyone involved. Your fiancée will be ecstatic to have you actively participate in the wedding planning process instead of just being a sounding board for her ideas.



THINK JAMES BOND, NOT BARGAIN SALE

Your future wife is most likely putting a lot of thought into her wedding dress and the accessories she will wear. But what about you? Are you still procrastinating on what you fear will be an endless odyssey through men's apparel stores until you finally find a decently fitting suit that's an okay color? Don't make that mistake. Get inspired by what's possible for you on the day. Think James Bond, Thomas Shelby or Harvey Specter. No matter your taste and style, there is a suit out there to emphasize your personality instead of making you feel masqueraded. You can have it custom-tailored, but if that's not an option, take your suit to the tailor after buying it to make sure it's perfectly fitted and the length is just right. It will make a world of a difference and you'll look pretty darn cool.



A WORD ON PHOTOGRAPHY

From my experience, occasionally only the bride that insists on having a professional photographer for the day. Some grooms are more skeptical when it comes to photography. I assume it's because they are worried I will force them into a bunch of lovey-dovey poses and expect them to put on a cheesy front for the sake of a romantic picture. And while I do my best to communicate that this isn't the case, I understand that there often remains some hesitation on the side of the groom. Here's my promise to you: If you show up for the couple shoot in a great mood, happy to create something awesome and willing to trust me with my approach and ideas, then I have everything I need to create epic photographs with the two of you. It'll be much more fun than you might think and ultimately you'll be happy to have taken some time out of your day to create these photos. These snapshots of your day will last a lifetime, so I will make sure that you have fun creating them.



BRIDAL PORTRAIT SESSION

Dear Bride,

Let's meet up a couple of months before the wedding for a Bridal Portrait Session! It's an awesome way to create stunning portraits of you in your wedding dress that can later be given as a gift to friends and family or even be displayed at the wedding day.

The process is simple: you get your makeup and hair done, bring your dress, shoes and beautiful accessories, as well as your dearest friends. Then we'll have a ton of fun creating beautiful images, and you have the perfect portrait to display at your wedding reception (and have posted online before guests post cell phone pics).

Meeting up for a session like this has many advantages. For one, we have zero time pressure. You will be able to build your confidence in front of the camera, which will calm the nerves before the wedding day. Seeing the results of our get-together will make you feel amazing. It's also a great way to get an all-around impression of your outfit and the way it looks in photographs before the big day.

Whilst Bridal Shoots often take place at the wedding venue, you are completely free to plan yours any way you want to. The earlier you let me know, the more flexible my schedule will be, so let's get creative!



GETTING READY

The morning hours of your wedding day are so precious and it's one of my favorite parts of the whole day, capturing you two getting ready for the celebration ahead.

When the groom-to-be buttons up his shirt with trembling fingers and the prospective bride's mom can hardly hide the tears seeing her little girl in her wedding dress. When little love notes are exchanged, hugs are shared and you can almost taste the anticipation in the air.

Putting a little bit of thought into the setting and details of this emotional and very exciting first chapter of your wedding day will set the perfect tone for everything to come.

What Do You Need To Consider When Choosing A Getting Ready Location?

An open and calm space with lots of natural light (big windows) is perfect to document everybody's preparations. I would usually recommend a hotel room or AirBnB whose interior fits the overall feel you are going for on your wedding day.

If you decide to get ready at home, choose the brightest and biggest room in the house and transform it into a sacred space. That means getting rid of any distracting elements (goodbye laundry baskets and home trainers!) and surrounding yourself with beautiful things and your favorite people.

Keep in mind: whilst the bride usually receives the most beautiful room, it's important to put some thought into where the groom will get ready, too. A scarcely lit hallway or a tiny room with no natural light isn't good enough. Instead, check in with the hotel staff whether it's possible for the guys to get ready in another free hotel room in the morning, check for some cool barber shops (or other awesome venues) close by or make sure that another room on location is being prepared for the groom and his groomsmen.

SAMPLE TIMELINE FOR A 9 HOUR WEDDING DAY



PRE - CEREMONY

2:00 - I arrive & photograph the end of hair and makeup
2:30 - Details (dress/jewelry/flowers/invitations)
3:00 - Photograph bride getting into dress
3:30 to 4 - Photos of bride and girls outdoors
4:15 - Photos of groom & men getting ready
4:25-4:45 - Guys' formals outdoors

FIRST LOOK

5-5:15 - First Look at Ceremony Location
5:15-5:30 - Combined Bridal Party
5:30 - All bridal party in place/hiding
5:35-5:55 - Photograph ceremony details

CEREMONY & FORMALS

6:00 - Ceremony!
6:45 - Guests go to Cocktail Hour
6:45 - Photos of B&G with family
7:15 - Portraits of Bride and Groom
7:45 - Head to Reception

RECEPTION

8:00 - Reception Entrance & First Dance
8:15 - Time to eat!
9:00 - Cake & Toasts
11:00 - Sparkler exit



HOW MUCH TIME DO I NEED TO CAPTURE THE GETTING READY?

There are a few factors to consider when calculating the time needed for capturing the Getting Ready. How many people are going to be there? When will the makeup artist and hairdresser get to work? How many hours have you booked with me?

Usually, two hours is a perfect timeframe. It allows me to capture the setting and mood, the beautiful details, you (and the bridesmaids) getting the finishing touches of hair and makeup done, you putting on the dress, as well as lots of candid moments in between.

Depending on where and when the groom gets ready, I will need to leave for some time in the middle or at the end of the bride's Getting Ready, too. Simply keep that in mind when creating the schedule. Having a few extra minutes at the end of each of your Getting Ready sessions to take portraits of you individually before heading out really helps, too.

We can always work with less time, but please note this often means some things have to fall by the wayside if the schedule gets delayed.



HERE ARE A COUPLE MORE TIPS ON HOW TO MAKE YOUR GETTING READY A SUCCESS:

1. Detail Shots

Often the Getting Ready starts with me taking detail shots of your dress, jewelry, shoes, cuff links, invitation cards etc. It will save us a lot of time if you've already put all these things together in one place, so that I can access them easily and arrange them for some lovely detail shots.

2. Sit By The Window

When you get your hair and makeup done, please make sure you sit by a window facing outside. This guarantees the best light for the photographs. Your makeup artist and hairdresser surely won't mind, as they will look for optimum lighting anyway. It will also ensure that your makeup looks just right in the daylight.





3. KEEP THE SPACE NICE AND CLEAN

Even if you're in a hotel room, things quickly get messy with hair straighteners, (plastic) bags, clothes, half-eaten energy bars and makeup containers lying around everywhere. Sometimes it makes sense to decide on a certain corner (or room) where everyone can drop their stuff or, perhaps you could ask your bridesmaids to do a quick cleaning session before I arrive. Keeping the space tidy will ensure that we don't constantly have to move distracting (or straight up ugly) elements before taking a shot.

4. SURROUND YOURSELF WITH YOUR FAVORITE PEOPLE

Having all seven of your awesome girlfriends, your two sisters, your aunt and your mother join you in the morning may sound like a good idea at first. But please keep in mind that with too many people around it often gets very busy. Things take longer than anticipated and you will have a hard time relaxing and taking it all in. My advice would be to choose a handful of your favorite humans to share these precious first hours of the day with and give the rest of your beloved friends a big hug as soon as you see them later in the day.

5. THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU WILL WEAR BEFORE YOU PUT ON THE DRESS

I will take quite a few photographs before you put on your wedding dress, so maybe you want to put a little bit of thought into what to wear beforehand. A morning gown or a Kimono look beautiful in the photographs and are just as comfortable as your favorite sweat pants and a shirt.

6. WRITE LOVE LETTERS TO EACH OTHER

It's very likely the two of you will be incredibly nervous during those hours you spend separately. So, why don't you write each other little love notes that both of you can read before you head off to the First Look or ceremony? It is a beautiful, loving gesture that calms the nerves and will make you overflow with gratitude. You'll get goosebumps every time you look back on these moments through the photographs.

FIRST DANCE & PARTY

MAKE YOUR FIRST DANCE MAGICAL

Your first dance is a one of the final highlights of the day so make sure to put some thought into the setting it is going to take place in. Look for a nice area with a beautiful background and lots of space for your guests to stand and watch. Natural light sources such as sparklers and fairy lights create a nice and romantic atmosphere. For the sake of getting beautifully lit photographs, ask the venue to switch off any colorful spotlights. There is one exception; a warm light in the background pointed at you two can have a beautiful effect.

AND NOW, IT'S TIME TO LET GO AND ENJOY!

It's party time and that means there's nothing left to do but dance your heart out. Make sure people are allowed to join you on the dance floor right after the First Dance, so that the vibe will be at its absolute peak.



GRAND EXIT

Most weddings tend to wrap up by 10-11. To round things off, you might consider planning a Grand Exit to end your day with a real showstopper, like a sparkler exit. Let me know well ahead of time if you're planning something like this so that I can make sure I get in the best position to capture this last big moment of your day as it unfolds.

If you're having a sparkler exit, it helps to have someone organize all the guests to the right spot and hand out sparklers. When your final song comes on, grab hands and head out into the night, under the sparkling lights, ready to live out your happily ever after.

If your venue doesn't allow sparklers (it happens!), don't worry - there's a ton of great alternatives out there. You can always go for glow sticks, confetti canons or bubbles. For the latter we only need to make sure there are a bunch of external light sources, so that guests can actually see what's going on and I am able to capture some epic images.

After the Grand Exit I'll be happy to leave you to yourselves, while I set forth with tons of beautiful photographs on my memory cards and a big smile on my face.

Rest assured: I can't wait to show you all the stunning photos we have created together that day.