

Digital vs. Film

Digital technology is moving at an astonishing rate. Prices for both consumer and professional cameras are plummeting just as fast as performance and quality are increasing. Due to the tremendous advancement, many wedding photographers have made the move to digital. Less than five years ago when I started photographing weddings full-time, only a few photographers offered digital wedding photography. Now industry experts estimate that nearly all weddings are completely or partially shot with professional digital cameras.

You probably own a digital camera yourself, one you can stick in your shirt pocket or inside your purse. You've marveled at the quality of your images, but is digital good enough to capture one of the most important events of your life? Your wedding day? Decide for yourself as I explain the pros and cons of digital vs. film.

Digital

Instant feedback. That is what everybody loves about digital. Believe me, professional photographers love it just as much as you do. How often have you gotten a photo back, only to discover that several people blinked at the crucial moment? Shooting digital helps ensure that every shot turns out the way the photographer intended.

Resolution. Most professional digital cameras are capable of capturing images with a resolution of 10-12 MP. That is 10 million mega pixels per image - enough pixels to print beautiful photographs just about any size you want. You would be hard pressed to tell the difference between a print from film or a print made from a digital file!

Never change film rolls. Of course with digital there is no film. Digital cameras use tiny little re-usable cards that store high resolution digital files. The newest cards hold 8GB of data. That translates to over 2300 images! Or in film terms 63 rolls. You'll never need to worry that I'll run out of film at a crucial moment. Another amazing aspect of digital photography is the ability to move from bright sunlight to a candle-lit church and still get perfect pictures. The camera's sensitivity to light, also referred to as ISO, can be changed with each image. It's done with the flick of a thumb. That's just not possible with film.

Black & white and special effects. Just about everybody has heard of Photoshop, an amazing, but complex image editing software. Certain effects that were previously created by using certain films, filters and processing techniques can now be done on the computer in a fraction of the time. Color is converted to black & white, black & white is sepia-toned, black & white images are hand-colored. But Photoshop allows for even more creativity in telling the story of your wedding day. I create photo collages, mix color and black & white images on a single print, use images as transparent backdrops for other images, even "swap heads" in group shots to get the best picture possible. I have invested substantial time in learning Photoshop's complexity. If you "go digital" you should ask each photographer you interview about his or her Photoshop skills. If they are not doing it, they are paying another professional to do it. That cost gets passed back to you.

Cost. Speaking of costs, digital photography is a two-sided issue for many professional photographers. Many say it is less expensive, since there are no film costs and no photo lab processing expenses. However, that is about the only saving. As the technology advances so quickly, photographers are now replacing their cameras every year or two. Before a well-taken care of camera could last 5-15 years or more. And of course there is computer equipment, more hard drive space, software, printers. Well, I'm sure you get the idea. But the biggest hidden cost factor is time. Work previously done by photo labs is now done by the photographer - editing images, producing special effects with Photoshop, and creating the custom designed wedding album. For this reason, digital photographers generally charge the same as they did in the film days. The winner in all this is you. You now get a lot more bang for your buck!

Film

Print size. A few years ago, one of the only advantages film still had over digital, was its capability to produce super large prints, if they were shot with a medium format camera. However, that no longer holds true. Digital technology has made such tremendous advances, that you can literally produce a billboard poster shot from a digital camera.

Fine Art black & white prints. You can certainly make beautiful black & white prints from digital files, but if you are a fine art collector or simply have your heart set on silver-based fiber paper, your wedding photographer must shoot with black & white film. As I also have a keen interest fine art photography, I will, upon request, complement your wedding pictures with traditional black & white film.

Why not have a friend shoot your wedding with their digital camera?

I'm sure you have already asked yourself this question. Here is an honest answer. A lot more goes into photographing a wedding successfully than just showing up with a camera. No doubt your friend may be gifted, but they is often not enough. It also takes special people skills, organizational talent and experience with problem-solving to create consistently good images of a wedding – and to keep everyone happy. Professional photographers have the experience and know-how to make your photographs sensational. They understand how to create a mood by using proper lighting, posing and timing. They are "on" the entire time, constantly looking and observing, looking for those glimpses, anticipating and capturing the emotional highlights. based on their experience. Your friend may become distracted, after all they are also a guest. You may be feeling slightly guilty, and encourage him or her to enjoy themselves, thus missing many important moments. Remember, it's YOUR wedding day. There are no second chances.

What happens after your wedding is over? A professional will edit through hundreds of images to pull out the best ones to tell your story. Post production is very labor intensive and includes skilled retouching work to create the spectacular images you will want in your album. In addition, many top albums are only sold to professional photographers that your friend will not be able to acquire.

Are all digital cameras the same? Professional vs. Consumer

Resolution and Zoom. Resolution is not everything. Even though several cameras targeted for consumers boast some impressive numbers, there are other factors to consider. All professional cameras use interchangeable lenses instead of a fixed lens. The optics on these lenses are far superior to those of built-in lenses. The zoom factor is generated optically rather than digitally, which in turns results in a higher quality image.

Delay and Noise Factor. Have you noticed that several seconds pass from the moment you press the shutter until the image is taken? And then it's not quite what you thought you were photographing? This delay is to blame for all those missed candid moments. With professional digital cameras, the image is taken the instant the shutter is pressed. When industry experts talk about noise they are referring to the artifacts and graininess in a digital file. The chips used in point & shoot cameras are not as sophisticated and do not perform as well as those in professional digital cameras. Noise is most visible when shooting at high ISOs or zooming to the maximum distance. My talent lies in anticipating and capturing those precious moments when nobody else can and delivering them to you as high quality images.

I hope this article has shed some light on aspects of digital photography you may have been wondering about. I also hope it has eliminated any fears you may have harbored about "Going Digital" for your wedding. If you still have questions I welcome your email and your comments. You can reach me at christine@cksweddings.com

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