

Working Lives

Words & Pictures:
Nikki Hill

NIKKI HILL

A typical wedding day assignment for Nikki Hill, laced with drama, dodgy weather and a bride and groom who are the perfect clients.

IT'S JUNE 23, 7am and I wake, bolt upright (a rarity indeed) with a real sense of anticipation. Reality dawns in an instant. I'm photographing a wedding today - Liz and Ron's to be precise - a mature couple (actually they're a real scream and not in the least bit mature at all!).

For the first time I'm going to have an assistant for today's wedding. Debbie (current job - nanny) is looking to make the transition into wedding event management - the perfect candidate! She turns up 20 minutes early - fantastic! By 10am the car is exploding with camera gear (I'm utterly convinced now that my kit breeds between shoots). Time to take stock and use the journey time to brief Debbie on the day's events. Quick phonecall to Ness, trusty sidekick and brilliant photographer, to make sure she's en route to photograph Ron and his best man.

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Debbie looks at my notes "What's the funky chicken?" I laugh and explain it's a method adopted from my Annabel Williams training days. A reminder for the couple to stand tall and extend the neck *subtly* to give a more flattering look. Almost certainly lost in translation, but thoroughly tried and tested, I swear by it. The notes are for Ness's benefit. "Ron's quite happy to do the funky chicken" it reads.

We arrive at Liz and Ron's house, hopes high for a break in the incessant June rain. Defying convention, Ron spends the night at the family home. He leaves as I arrive, armed with travel cot in one hand and Rowan, their gorgeous one year old son in the other. I meet Liz's three stunning daughters for the

first time, who are all eager to put their bridesmaid's dresses on two hours too soon. I give Liz a hug - she already looks fantastic in just her turquoise pyjamas.

Time flashes by too quickly now. Debbie prompts me as each half hour passes - her planning and organisational skills are already proving their worth! Once I'm in the zone I tend to totally lose track of time and will spend over 30 minutes getting the perfect shoe shot if I'm not careful. A designer dress by Chantal Mallett, amazing Parisian shoes, flowers to die for, hand designed butterfly hair piece, the most stunning bride and beautiful bridesmaids. Quite a mix, and I push my camera and lens to the limits to shoot using only available light - 90 per cent of the shoot will be with my 70-200mm IS lens on the Canon 1DS Mark II. I LOVE the combination. A 5D with an array of other lenses serves as second camera. I stand outside shooting in to get the

bridesmaids shots using diffused porch light and get pelted with rain for my trouble. Who cares? I'm on a roll and the light on their faces is amazing.

Plans change last minute as the 40 minute car journey to the Chewton Glen Country House is not conducive to sitting in a wedding dress. Liz hops into the Bentley in turquoise pyjamas, hair and make-up intact, sheltering from the heavy rain, with plans to dress at the Spa. I'm car number four in the convoy as we travel 'Italian Job' style through torrential downpours.

As we arrive, however, the sun makes a welcome appearance and we are graced with little or no rain for the rest of the day. Ness and I work seamlessly, barely having the chance



ABOVE
Follow professional photographer Nikki Hill as she shoots a damp June wedding to remember

to talk as we carry out our pre-defined shooting roles. Chatting with the guests, I'm welcomed in as one of the crowd. Candid shots are the main order of the day for Liz and Ron, with a hint of 'soft' posing thrown in to get the magical bride and groom shots. The guests mimic me as I take the final shot of the day - my bottom (a tad on the large size, I'm afraid) unceremoniously stuck in the air and ear to the ground as I take the shot - and we end up rolling around with laughter. You see, I've spotted the glitter ball and ceiling reflections that I'm determined will feature in the 'first dance' shot to deliver something with a certain wow factor.

Despite a genuinely relaxed and outgoing persona, the adrenaline pumps from dusk till dawn, the sense of responsibility huge. I'm my own harshest critic and look to create a full set of stunning shots at each and every wedding I shoot. The client is at the heart of everything I do. In truth, I never feel I've 'bagged' the shots. I always feel I could shoot something better. This means I never really rest at a wedding - it's part of my make-up and I've learned to live with it. ☺

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