



*the wedding guide*

*by Michelle Breiter*

## Hey I'm Michelle

And I'm a wedding photographer who gives a shit.

After working multiple weddings over the last few years, I've discovered pain points for the couples I serve and helping them have their wedding vision come to life. This likely is your first wedding you've planned, and you may or may not know that the majority of your wedding planning is based around a solid timeline, good lighting, and a great attitude.

I hope this guide serves you well. You may find some helpful tips for wedding planning in general, but overall these pages come from a photography standpoint. Because after it's all said and done, the last thing you'll have left from your wedding are the memories are the photographs.

I'm giving this away for free because I care about the wedding industry. And I care about you, even though we haven't met (yet). When you get your photos back from one of the most important days of your life, I want you to remember how it felt. Not that the sun was in your face during the ceremony or how Becky's suitcase was in all of your getting ready photos. With these tips, I hope it sheds some light on some small things you can do to have the wedding (photos) of your dreams.



# Money

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That inevitable conversation. You can really blow through your budget quickly if you don't give every dollar a name right away.

Time for a bottle of the good stuff and a team meeting. Both of you sit down (without the influence of family and barring their opinions creeping into your brain- don't let other people spend your wedding money) and have an earnest conversation about the most important aspects of the day to each of you. Narrow it down and make sure you're on the same page about where the money is going to go. Keep in mind that you will be spending a lot of your budget to feed your guests (which may mean cutting your guest list and telling your parents they can't invite people you don't know) and on your venue.

Once you have your list of what's important, you will be able to assign approximate percentages from top to bottom of how much of the budget you're allotting each category. You can expect a combined 50% to go to the food and venue. You will also be able to refer back to what you wrote when it comes time to make choices or when you're feeling like you've lost sight of what you want. Brainstorm your favorite places if you don't want to spend money on a traditional wedding venue. Having a wedding in the great outdoors often times only requires a permit. Reception ideas could be anything from backyards to your favorite bar or restaurant to somewhere super unique to you.

This is your party.

*Spend your money in the ways that  
are most important to you.*

# You + your photographer

Sure, I'm a bit biased because I'm a photographer. But I truly feel that the relationship between you and your wedding photographer can determine the outcome of your wedding. You need someone by your side who knows what the hell they're doing. Cranky mom who has a lot of opinions? You need a photographer who knows how to handle her and still keep your timeline in check. Drunken groomsmen who can't get it together? You'll DEF need some sassy but cool who can wrangle them in a way that doesn't feel like a babysitter but also "we got shit to do." The photographer you choose HAS to have a personality that can handle it all.

I think the days of cheesy poses are gone. Photos should be a reflection of you and your honey. They should reflect how the day actually felt and when you look at your photos you should be able to be taken back to that exact moment and remember what it felt like. The key to get that done right? Your photographer needs to know you and at the same time, needs to be observant to look for those moments that make you, you.



# TIMELINE BUILDING

## *considerations*

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### THE FIRST LOOK:

People are usually really set on or against a first look. There usually isn't much space for an argument once the decision has been made. The first look is the pivot point for me when building a timeline. It indicates how much portrait time is needed and how early I need to arrive/when and where to place all the other photo times needed during the day. Having a first look? Cool- that means we can knock out the bridal party and the immediate family photos prior to the ceremony, leaving nothing but portraits and party time after. A timeline not including a first look is typically one where there isn't much going on prior to the ceremony and then we try to cram everything into the hour after. Here is what I want you to consider before deciding whether you will be having one or not.

1. THIS IS NOT ABOUT TRADITION- its about maximizing time on a chaotic day where every minute is accounted for. There are things that happen during a wedding day that our out of our control and cannot be predicted. These can greatly affect the amount of time we have for couples portraits during a wedding day. I've even had it happen where the wedding was so behind that we didn't get ANY sunset portrait time at all. Having a first look is a fail safe as it allows for TWO portrait times. One immediately following the first look and another during sunset portraits. If for some reason, your wedding runs behind, you will at least have portraits from the first part of the day.

2. YOU GET TO SPEND YOUR WHOLE WEDDING DAY TOGETHER- This is the whole point right? Instead of spending the last 5 hours of your wedding day together, you can spend 10. Win/win.

3. PRIVATE TIME-a basically nonexistent part of the traditional wedding schedule. Instead of rushing straight from the ceremony into family photos and bridal party group shots and reception entrances,etc., etc., you can spend time alone together before the ceremony. Helps with nerves, allows you to read private vows or go for a walk and kiss and cry alone (well, with me. Still counts.). You can walk the entire day together from that point on.

# *The all important light*

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Let me save you from a crucial mistake. Once the ceremony time is set, printed and mailed off to all your nearest and dearest on your invites, that's it. There's no going back. Picture this- a 4 PM ceremony in July (when the sun sets at 8 PM), both of you in your finest, sweating like animals at the front of a blazing hot aisle while one of you squints at the other. Not only are you uncomfortable and sweating in unmentionable places, but one of you has your back to the sun and the other is facing right into it. Not only can I see every drop of sweat but your photographic result will be less than ideal because your partner's face is totally shaded while you are as bright as the sun you're under.

*things to consider when choosing ceremony site:*

-TIME OF DAY

-TIME OF YEAR

-LOCATION OF CEREMONY IN RELATION TO THE SUN AND SURROUNDING AREA (directional, trees, etc.)

This will also depend on geographical location. Certain parts of the world are known for their overcast skies. Things like mountains, trees and especially bodies of water will also have an impact on light. Don't worry though! I am here to help you figure it out.



# Location

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*tip:*

Visit your ceremony space as close to a year before as you can get so you can check the lighting before you decide a ceremony time. Avoid full sun if you can, otherwise you'll be squinting in all your photos.

You can't control the weather. It might start downpouring in the middle of your outdoor reception. We don't cry, we don't panic. We breathe in deep and embrace the chaos and dance in the rain. Your day is going to be what it's going to be in that respect. What we can control though are the locations we utilize by understanding how the sun will fall on them at that exact time of day. I recommend you visit your ceremony site on a day that will have the same sun up and sun down times, prior to setting your ceremony time (try the same season, the year before, a year to the day- EVEN BETTER.) Snap photos of where you were originally thinking of getting married at that time. Photograph any other potential ceremony options on the property as well and send them to me so we can brainstorm. Shoot, I even WELCOME a FaceTime call while you're scouting so I can help you plan for the best lighting and photos.



## *Distance*

Something we will also want to pay close attention to is how far apart all of our different locations are from one another. Drive time has the potential to eat up huge chunks of time, so if it can be controlled, its best to choose locations that are within 20 minutes of each other.

*Locations to map to ceremony site:*

- Both Getting Ready Locations (or the single location- make sure to also note the travel time between these as I will have to photograph both of you.
- Ceremony to Reception site (if different)
- Any Specific Photo Locations You Want to Shoot at During the Wedding Day/ Their Distance From the Venue



# Family photos

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If there is ever a time to involve your Mom in the wedding, this is her area. I can't even tell you how many parents have commandeered family photo time because the photo combinations they want were not included in the list. Besides mostly causing annoyance between you, , it also is a one of the most frequent causes of running behind schedule.

## *Tips for planning your family photos:*

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- Ask both parents for their list (usually this is where mom gets opinionated.)
- Don't use any guidelines you find off of Google. You will end up with 20 pages of photos.
- Once you make your list, plan on 1 minute per combination. This is a good way to let you know how much time the photos will take.
- Try to keep the two of you in as many of the combinations as possible.



# Getting Ready



The getting ready space is important. I don't care what anyone says. Not only am I going to be shooting all of your details there, but you will also be getting ready FOR YOUR WEDDING there. It is of course important to look for a space with good lighting (windows!!) Barns and wood panels are a nightmare to photograph. And please please please, designate someone to clean the getting ready rooms before your photographer arrives. The last thing you want is water bottles, tampons, and random bags in your photos. Some places have limited options and if beggars can't be choosers- you can't go wrong with good light and white walls.

*Choose a Getting Ready Space  
with Good Light + Compliments  
Wedding Aesthetic*

## *Other Items:*

1. Speeches- Think about controlling the amount of time per speech. Too many speeches for too long of time have the potential of eating time for other things, like sunset portraits. (4-5 minutes is perfect). This will vary by timeline but you also have the option to split some speeches between the rehearsal dinner the night before and the wedding reception. Try not to let the microphone get passed around or you will listen to 2 hours of speeches AND NO MIC DROPS- unless you want a hefty \$500 replacement fee. (It's happened.)

2. A timeline helps guide us through the day but it's definitely okay to go off the rails and things always happen during the wedding day. Don't be glued to the schedule. These tips are just to help us do our best to make sure we have a blueprint for the day.



# INESCAPABLE TRUTHS ABOUT

*Remember:*

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- It's better to have the dress altered to a smaller size later than to buy too small a size to pressure yourself to lose the extra pounds you think you're carrying .
- Don't listen to your mom, aunt Mildred or controlling best friend on dress choice. I have a few brides a year say "I wish I hadn't chosen this dress" on their wedding day. People love to peer pressure the couple. Go with what you love and what you know you are going to want to be photographed in. Also- **BE COMFORTABLE!!**
- A textured wedding dress is an easy way to camouflage any areas you feel insecure about.
- Go nontraditional if that's you- it's okay to be unique. You can wear a cape, hat or bowl of fruit on your head if you want.

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*wedding attire*

Nothing will kill your vibe more than not feeling beautiful on your day. Making sure you choose the right wedding dress for your taste, body style and location is crucial . The dress takes up huge visual space and if you don't like it on your body, you definitely aren't going to like it in your photos. I don't photoshop my couples to look anything other than they are so choose something that makes you feel beautiful in your skin. Celebrate the body you're workin' with. Choose a cut that compliments your shape, isn't clingy in any areas you don't like and has a fabric that won't wrinkle intensely across the abdomen the second you sit down. Strapless is almost always a bad idea in my experience (it slips all day and makes you self-conscious about your armpits). Mermaid cuts are also challenging because you quickly discover you can't pee or dance. Try to find a dress with some movement or texture that you can also move IN.

If ever there was a time for a tailored suit, the wedding day is it. A boxy suit can make a man look much wider in the hips and chest. Nobody wants to look like a 10 year old wearing their dad's suit on their wedding day.

# Venues

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Guess what. Sometimes the venue will drop a doozy on you after you've signed the papers and committed. Could be that they require you to use their list of preferred vendors after you've already hired your own. They might require you to have a planner when you had already decided where to allot your budget and that wasn't included. Make sure you read the ENTIRE contract. Be obnoxious with the questioning. Don't just sign away on the most expensive mistake of your life. Grill the venue- ask them about service fees, gratuities, whether they require your vendors to be pre-approved, whether your vendors are required to have liability insurance and what the alcohol rules are (this can turn into a huge issue and cause drama on your day- not what I want for you). Make sure you know every little thing that is included in the cost, ask about anything not in the quote and ask for a list of the rules for the venue- then inform your entire bridal party (I've seen things happen).

Also make sure you really like the place. Visit it, ask them to show you where the sun sets (is it over a parking lot?), take pictures of all the important areas and make sure it's what you really want. The venue is going to be a monster drain on your dollars, so it's okay to be picky.



# Planning

If you have it in your budget, it may be a good idea to hire a professional planner (if not- we will fair just fine without). Be aware that a coordinator and a wedding planner /designer are two very different things so make sure you know what kind of service you want. A day of coordinator is another option (some venues come with this) to help run everything. While DIY weddings can be a great way to save money, you also end up having to set up and tear down the night of as well as field questions about where things go throughout your wedding day . A planner allows you to enjoy your day without the hassle. They exist to help you find ways to curb costs, locate vendors and formulate the perfect design and execution. (See the last page for my favorite planners.)

*quick tip for choosing colors:*

Makeup palettes always have coordinating tones. Visit the make up counter of your fave place or use your favorite palette as a guide to choosing bridesmaids dresses and colors that compliment to incorporate into your day.



# Make it you

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This is the only party you are ever going to have in your entire life that celebrates the two of you with every single person you've ever loved in attendance. This is your chance to do **WHATEVER** you want. You can screw all the traditions and create your own. If you want to smash a pinata and have it rain candy, do it. If you want to have a tattoo artist set up at your reception- go for it. If you want to smudge your ceremony space, do it. If you want to pass your rings to every single person in attendance during the ceremony, do it. If you want to get married in the bar you met in- do it. Want to run away and elope? **BYEE!** Do it! Bring elements from the things you love and are passionate about into your day. **DO WHATEVER MAKES YOU HAPPY.** Have the best day of your life. This is your carte blanche. Run wild, dream your dreams and get as creative or simple as you want. Don't let other people (ahem mom and dad) take over your only wedding day- stay true to yourself and you will never regret it.



Add visual interest in whatever way suits you.

*Lights, accessories, textiles,  
colours, confetti, prints and textures.*

# THINGS TO *remember*



The dress is beautiful but it has to touch the ground.

*all wedding dresses get filthy dirty on the bottom. It's a fact.*

Test run your makeup.

*seriously. and don't go crazy with it if you're not a make up person*

Weddings are famously never on time.

*breathe. embrace it. your day was already written before it began.*

Things might not go the way you planned.

*rain and wind are romantic*

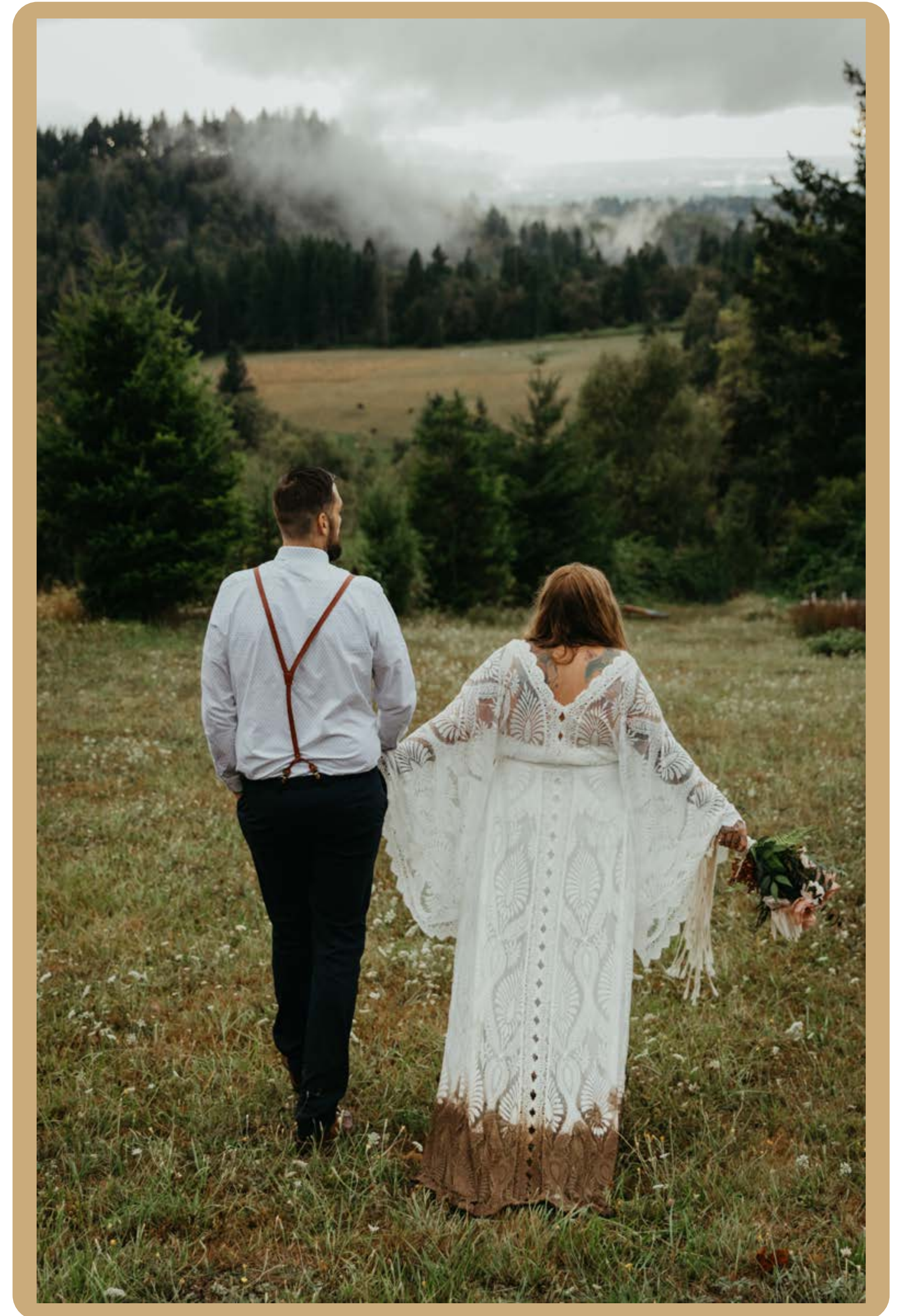
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# Finally..

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- Just like in all work places, sometimes your wedding vendors won't click. Make sure your videographer and photographer (and planner and photographer) are on the same page about your priorities for the day. Set the tone for how you want the relationship to go.
- You will probably be asked if you want to serve "vendor meals" and in all likelihood, you will assume this is a hot meal for your team. A lot of times, a vendor meal is a cold sandwich or a handful of wilted lettuce on a plate. Make sure your caterer and venue know exactly how you want your photographer treated. Your photographer should eat when you eat so they can get right back to bird dogging you. Make sure the planner/ caterer knows this ahead of time.
- Be sure to ask your venue if they require the photographer to carry liability insurance when you book them.
- And lastly. Please hire people who know what they're doing. I'm all about saving a buck in life but this is your WEDDING. Budget, plan, and execute accordingly and you won't be disappointed with hiring professionals.



# vendors to check out

## Photography

*Michelle Breiter Photography*  
<https://michellebreiterphotography.com>

## VIDEO

*The Breiters*  
<https://thebreiters.com>

*Lady Mountain Films*  
<https://www.ladymountainfilms.com>

## Planners/Rentals

*Alyssa B. Events*  
<https://www.alyssabeventswv.com>

*Ella & Company*  
<https://www.facebook.com/EllaandCompanyWV>

## Florists

*West Virjeni (Shepherdstown)*  
<http://www.westvirjeni.com/>

*Perennial Floral (Morgantown)*  
<https://perennialfloral.com>

*The Putnam Market (travel)*  
[theputnammarket@gmail.com](mailto:theputnammarket@gmail.com)

## *Southern WV Venues*

Carnegie Hall

<https://www.carnegiehallwv.org>

The Greenbrier Resort

<https://www.greenbrier.com>

Confluence Resort

<http://www.confluenceresort.com>

## *Charleston Area Venues*

Benedict Haid Farm

<https://www.benedicthaidfarm.com>

JQ Dickinson Salt-Works

<http://www.jqdsalt.com/>

HoneyBee Hills

<https://www.facebook.com/HoneybeeHills2019/>

Stonewall Resort

<https://www.stonewallresort.com/wv-weddings>

## *Eastern WV Venues*

SnowShoe Mountain

[www.SnowShoeMTN.com](http://www.SnowShoeMTN.com)

Daniel Vineyards

<https://danielvineyards.com>

# Vendors, cont.

## Food Trucks

*That Donut Place*

<https://thatdonutplace.com/>

*Rollin Smoke BBQ*

<https://www.rollinsmokebbqribs.com>

*Joney's Food Truck*

<https://roaminghunger.com/jonesys-food-truck/>

## Photo Booths

*Happy Little Photo Bus*

<https://www.happylittlephotoboothbus.com>

*Mountain State Photo Camper*

<https://www.mountainstatephotocamper.com>

## Honeymoon Planning

*The Island Life*

<https://theislandlifeagency.com>

*Lovin Away*

<https://lovinaway.com/>

## Misc & Fun!

*Hitch Mobile Bar*

<https://www.hitchwv.com>

*Chestnut Ridge Mobile Coffee Bar*

<https://chestnutridgecoffee.com/catering>

*Party Rentals and Carnival Games*

<https://thomasfamilyentertainment.com>

## Venues (cont.)

### *Various Locations*

- Little Tennessee Event Farm (Huntington, WV)

<http://www.littletennesseeeventfarm.com>

- The Mohicans (Ohio)

<https://www.themohicans.net>

- Eastern Grace Event Venue (30 minutes from Huntington)

<https://www.facebook.com/EasternGraceEvents>

- Hale Street Center (Charleston, Urban)

<https://halestreetcenter.com>

- Flour and Feed (Morgantown, urban)

<https://www.morgantownflourandfeed.com>

- Four Fillies Lodge (Monroe County)

<https://www.fourfillieslodge.com>

- Little Acre Farm (Princeton)

<https://www.littleacrefarmwedding.com>

- Boydville (The Inn at Martinsburg)

<http://boydville.com>