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Heart of the matter

Who's the most experienced attendee at a wedding? The photographer, of course – no one else has been to so many, with a bit of luck! As Tony Bramley points out, that makes you well placed to see the bigger picture

'You've always got to be looking for emotion,' says Tony Bramley, the driving force behind Storm Photography. 'Guests can do snappy snaps and candid shots, but capturing the extra-special moment with careful thought and planning is what earns the money. You have to see what others can't.' He continues: 'You might call it the "feature" shot, but there should always be images that trigger the emotions when the couple see the pictures for the first time.' In other words, taking a nice set of shots is not enough: 'It's a special day and as a professional you are the most experienced individual present – that should give you a special ability to see beyond the stress and the schedule. Sometimes the families hardly know their own minds in the heat of the moment. In some part, that's why they've hired you – to see it all and capture it perfectly.' However, it's equally important to never forget that you're a photographer after all: 'To get something special and different, awareness of light is the key factor – how →

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→ different sources balance up in the composition of an image. No matter how good the location is, the photographer's effective use of it is the real-world skill.' Tony's well-placed to cover the two counties that apparently have the highest concentration of wedding venues in the UK – those being Essex and Kent. At times, one can be forgiven for thinking that this south-east corner of the British Isles is also the most crowded – jam packed with traffic as it seems to be. But the weddings business for Tony was a means to escape the proverbial 'rat race'.

A better way

One of the great attractions of photography as a means of making a living can be its incredible flexibility. These days, the idea of working from your home base is just so much more normal than even a mere five or so years previous. There isn't a whole lot that you can't do from one's spare room and with just a few simple considerations it can be easy to ensure both the smooth running of home and office. For many, just the notion of being able to keep up to date with the washing is enough to make working at home pretty much essential! However, sitting in the very neat and tidy office of Storm Photography and glancing out of the large window into an expansive, green and pleasant garden it's not difficult to understand why photography can be so attractive a proposition. Storm is the trading name of Tony Bramley and his wife, and he's quick to communicate the many benefits of the office being a simple left turn out of the living room: 'It might not work for everyone, but in the spring and summer you can look forward to lunchtime in the garden with a bit of sunshine. Everything seems to go so much more smoothly when life is properly focused on one place!' Two Siamese cats lie snuggled up nearby. They look as though they haven't moved all winter. Could this be a picture of home-working bliss? Well, yes. There's an impression of efficient simplicity and focus that emanates from Tony. There's a brooding Mac Pro loitering under a desk that's uncluttered and host to a neat little Wacom tablet and an Apple Cinema display. Nothing else. The walls, therefore, draw the attention and are crowded with images – some framed up, some just hung up with bulldog clips. It's like a creative map of Tony's brain and we get more into that a bit later on. But let's first fill in a few gaps.

We don't usually think of the early 1990s as a long time ago, but since we've hit 2010 I figure it's time to appreciate that we're talking 20 years back. This was when Tony was dreaming up a plan to leave the normal run of the rat race by means of a phased shift to wedding photography. 'My brother-in-law had initially helped get me interested in photography,' says Tony. He continues: 'After a while I saw another photographer's wedding pictures and to be honest thought "I could do better than that!" It was a different world back then, however. The fundamentals of the photographer's skills were the same but the work was entirely different and clients had a different mindset →



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→ and expectations. Photography was traditional in style – it's amazing to think that I would – back then – shoot 60 frames on 120 film and perhaps put 30 images in an album.' How the world has changed. Tony expands: 'Now we're really looking at a world where the actual doing of the shoot on the wedding day is a fraction of the work involved in supplying a product to a very discerning client – there's design meetings, days of post-production and client liaison. On one occasion when all of this was complete, the Groom (who usually keeps reasonably quiet) commented: "I understand now exactly why we booked you and agreed to pay what we did".' There's wedding photography, and there's *Wedding Photography* after all.

Much is said about style attracting work, not least in this magazine, but Tony explains how it's important to be aware of trends and where to find reference: 'When I began I had a five-year to plan to shift over to full-time operations. In the end I got there a full 18 months earlier than expected. This was partly due to picking up on the reportage style. People were asking for it and not a lot of photographers at the time were doing it well. At Storm

we tagged it on as an option – if people liked the results then they paid for them. Now trends have moved on once more to a contemporary feel that's influenced by fashion and lifestyle magazines. It's necessary to be aware of this and really it's no good reading the photographic press to look at approaches and styles – they've already happened by the time they're in magazines that you pick up in the newsagents. The only photography magazine I read is *The Photographer!*' He says this with an entirely straight face, and there's no reason not to believe him. The point is very real, joking aside. →

Advertising page

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Advertising page

→ The team at Apple credited with the iPod sure weren't spending their time looking at what else was around at that time for *inspiration* – if anything just to see what was missing. The same angle can be offered when it comes to photographic style, or indeed anything original. The style of your photography can only come from your own head – and it's great if that head has a creative and a business side! What does Tony think about it? 'I'm certainly very conscious of the never-ending need to be developing my work. I don't think it's enough to be standing still or becoming some kind of "jobbing" wedding photographer. It is important to be trying to press on and attempt new things very consciously. If there's a venue where I work repeatedly through the year, I'm able to think through ideas for creating new angles and therefore new product directions. My style is evolving and with digital capture there is more creative freedom – if you're into mixed lighting for instance, it's fantastic – when I stepped over to digital this was one of great benefits. Whatever your approach, being a clone of another photographer is just not an option for someone starting out.'

I can't help asking what's behind the Storm Photography brand name – why not plain old Tony Bramley? 'That's exactly the point!' he retorts.

'To my mind this is a matter of being memorable. When a couple are in the business of spending good money on wedding photography they are going to look at a fair few options before making their minds up. I have a background in branding and the equation is simple – use a strong single syllable that's distinct. How many people say "I'm no good with names"?' Quite. So perhaps the befuddled bride with a head swimming with photographers' names might come up with Storm faster than John Smith Photography. Tony has a feeling that it also gets him known outside of the immediate weddings industry: 'It's the old idea that a brand name makes you immediately appear →



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greater than the sum of your parts. People have a confidence in an entity rather than just a person's name.'

Indeed, Storm is a better reflection of the fact that this is another husband and wife operation. Such an arrangement of able assistant and second shooter can come into its own sometimes, especially when disaster strikes: 'A couple of years ago we were on our biggest wedding of the year. The weather wasn't good – it had been raining heavily. And I slipped on a



carpet that had been laid to cover wet grass... and I broke my arm! One of the guests was an A&E nurse... There was no choice but to head for the hospital whilst my wife continued to cover the wedding. After a number of hours I returned to help finish the job armed with some Gaffa tape to aid single-handed camera operation!

Trouble and strife isn't doesn't only come from one's own accidents either: 'There's only been one or two instances in all these years where as a photographer I've been shut out by the bride,' says Tony (with some relief). He continues: 'Once I arrived to be told in no uncertain terms to "Keep Away From Her" by the mother. It's impossible to work properly without communication and understanding. You have to think that a good part of the job is to put stressed people at their ease and help them see that you're able to see things differently and with a wider perspective. The families are maybe there for the first time, no one has the level of experience of the situation that the photographer holds. If you can get mutual understanding then you can get the best results.' **tP**

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