

## WEDDINGS

## The New York Times

FIELD NOTES

# She Watches Weddings, One Click at a Time

By **Alix Strauss**

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For the past 22 years, Genevieve de Manio has photographed more than 475 weddings, including those of Chelsea Clinton, Nate Berkus and Jeremiah Brent, and John Henry, the owner of the Red Sox. She charges between \$12,000 to \$15,000 per job.

“A truly good image stirs something in you when you see it, a feeling of adoration, love, sorrow, joy, hope, or surprise,” said Ms. de Manio, 52. “I constantly scan the room looking for connections between people. I feel a real responsibility to tell their story in the way they want to remember it.”

Ms. de Manio has been married for 21 years. She and her husband, Tim Downing, have three children: Emily, 19; Caroline, 17; and Michael 15. The family lives in Carlisle, Mass.

Ms. de Manio graduated from Hollins University in Virginia in 1988 with a degree in psychology. Feeling disappointed and passionless for the subject, she turned her attention to photography.

“I wanted to feel alive with what I was doing,” she said. “I took a photography class in college to fulfill the arts requirement and fell in love with the creative process.” Two days after graduating she went to Atlanta to attend the Portfolio Center’s two-year photography program in advertising. The next six years were spent in New York working as a freelance assistant to fashion and commercial photographers until she shot her first wedding for her twin sister, Jackie, in 1996.

### **Do you think coming from an advertising background was good training?**

Absolutely. Shooting a wedding is a bit of everything — architecture, fashion, documentary, products, portraits, action shots — all in one day. I love telling a story and being in charge of the image.

### **Have you ever had a horror client?**

In 20 years I’ve had one. She took forever to get ready so we missed our window for family photos. When we had an opportunity to take them later in the evening, she wanted to dance. She was a true diva who had multiple hairdos and dresses. I never got the shots I needed.

### **What equipment do you use?**

Two digital Nikon D810s. I wear one on each shoulder, and usually shoot with a long and wide lens. That way I have the important images captured on two different cameras with two different looks. Then I have four other lenses that I’m constantly using.

### **What’s your process?**

I take about 5,000 photos. I edit them down to 1,200 to 1,500 shots, which can take 25 hours, and then give them to the couple. If you give people too much it dilutes the impact of the images. I also give the couple the thumb drive and present them with a

physical album, which has about 200 photos. Everyone wants to post and fire off an image, but the process isn't complete until you do an album. It's important to have something to hold in your hand.

### **What's your biggest asset?**

I'm 5 foot 11 so I don't have to bring a ladder.

### **What are some unusual visuals you've captured?**

Rose petals being dropped from a helicopter, aerial artists, vases and lamps made out of greenery, Chinese lanterns floating away with good wishes for the bride and groom, rotating stages and a couple entering the reception on an antique fire truck.

### **What's your favorite moment to capture?**

I love the father-daughter dance. It's a moment of pride, sadness, joy and letting go. It's trust from the father that she's making the right choice. You can feel the connection. If I do my job correctly I capture all of those feelings in the photo.

### **How do you know you've captured the right moment?**

You feel it in your gut. Some just pop. There can be a shift in the next frame of same image; the head is turned or eyes are different. I shoot a lot because the scene and story are constantly evolving. Others you can sense are going to happen. I could see this guy winding up to do a back flip. I ran to the spot and in that split second caught it. If you miss it, that moment is gone. If I ask him to do it again, it's not the same.

### **What do you do with couples who are nervous?**

I stop and pretend we're finished. Then they start to laugh, and then I snap the photo again. Then they really laugh because they feel tricked, and I take more shots.

## What are some tips for taking a terrific photo?

The couple has to be comfortable and connected with each other, so if they're having trouble doing that, I tell one of them to whisper something romantic or sweet in the other person's ear so they'll have an emotional response. In terms of timing, couples should carve out at least 45 minutes for their formals. Don't expect to do it in 15. You want a range of poses, emotions and locations. And for a location, you want one that's not super busy or cluttered with a lot of lines. Trees can be too dark. Go for the simple background.

## Can you tell which couples won't stay together?

No. But that's because I'm not looking for that. The day of I'm completely believing they love each other. That's what I'm looking for. That's what I'm capturing. A wedding is all about hope. I'm right there with everyone hoping this union will be successful.

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