



*My handsome husband
and me walking in to the reception.*

Laurie Rhodes

A bride her Photographer

By Jennifer Chen

As a bride living in California but planning her wedding in Long Island, NY, I could only correspond with all my vendors via email and phone. Out of all the elements in my wedding, I knew I wanted to spend more on a photographer. No one remembers what the invitations or programs look like, but everyone will remember the photos I send out on my thank-you card. I looked for a photographer three ways: asking my recently married friends, searching on The Knot (www.theknot.com) and consulting a bridal book called *Bridal Bargains*. All three avenues gave me plenty of names (and this was before I started working at *RangeFinder*). Of my newlywed friends, one, Erica, wrote me a page-long email about her photographer: Laurie Rhodes. Erica raved about Laurie, saying, “[My husband] and I just got along with her and trusted her. It’s hard to beat that.” And she loved every single picture Laurie took of her, commenting, “As hypercritical as we are of ourselves in pictures, there wasn’t one picture that I was in that I thought was a bad picture of me!” Laurie stood out from the group of photographers that I contacted. From the get go, she was professional, responded right away and, most importantly, sent me slide show samples of her work, showing a range of shots.

Booking Laurie

As a former theater marketer and television executive at CBS and Paramount, Laurie immersed herself in stressful artistic endeavors—all of which helped her prepare for her wedding photography

business. Straight out of New York University’s top business school, Stern School of Business, Laurie was recruited by CBS and worked in television production for a variety of shows. A colleague who left CBS brought Laurie along to Paramount to help run *The Maury Povich Show* and later she moved on to the short-lived *Jon Stewart Show*. While still working at Paramount, Laurie took up an old childhood hobby: photography. She shares, “I had taken a picture of my friend’s daughter in a sink. My friend saw that and said, ‘You should become a photographer.’” She shrugged off the suggestion, commenting, “Here I am with this big career in television and I thought, ‘No.’ But a seed was planted. A friend at the *Maury Povich Show* said, ‘No one has taken a picture of me that I liked except for you.’ And she recommended me to do a friend’s wedding.”

Laurie balanced her full-time job at Paramount while shooting weddings on the weekends and attending photography classes at the International Center of Photography (ICP). She started photographing children and bands for little money just to study the craft of photography. She officially left Paramount in November 2000 and launched her website in January 2002 and business poured in. Laurie cites her mentor, School of Visual Arts instructor Sardi Klein, as being instrumental to her burgeoning photography career. “She looked at my work and said, ‘I can refer work to you.’”

Personally, I was in love with her website—clean, crisp images that were not simply wedding photographs but pieces of art. My fiancé, Brendan, and I loved Laurie’s work but her rates were the

highest. I didn't want to rule her out simply because of that and instead discussed her rate with her during one of our first phone consultations. She explained that one hour of shooting a wedding equals three to four hours of work post-wedding. She discussed the type of equipment she uses. Over speakerphone, Brendan and I nodded along while she spoke. I mouthed to him, "We should book her." He nodded. And we made it official.

Months Before the Big Day

Over the course of several phone calls, Laurie got to know us and we got to know her. She asked us what we liked in her slide

shows and we discussed how much we loved her reception shots. She captured the essence of people—dancing, a bride hamming it up with her bridesmaids, an intimate conversation between two elderly women. One particular shot stood out to me as what I wanted our reception shots to look like: an elderly woman in a pink dress (see pg. 124) hitting the dance floor, kicking it up, and having a blast. Laurie agrees, "She was the perfect person. I saw her and thought she's going to be amazing. Shooting a reception is like being a sports photographer. You have to be one step ahead of what they're going to do. You train your finger to shoot one second ahead of what

you think they're going to do." Adding, "I am a junkie for moments. I get a big thrill of catching the exact right moment."

To us, it was evident that Laurie loved what she was doing and had an eye for the true beauty of people and marking the special moments of weddings.

She went over with us what she needed step by step—a group portrait shot list, the address to our venue for a site visit, photos of ourselves that we liked and how we envisioned the day panning out. Laurie comments, "I ask my clients to send me pictures where they feel they look good; to see what they like about themselves."

We discussed taking photos together beforehand, then during the cocktail hour with the bridal party and immediate family with time left to mingle with our guests and, of course, our dancing shots.

Two Weeks Before

As someone prone to control-freak tendencies, my time as a stage manager in college helped me stay calm (albeit tired) during the last two weeks before flying out to New York for my wedding. I tried to think of it as a big play we were putting on to remind myself that the show would go on despite any mistakes or missteps. When I share my wedding-as-play theory with Laurie, she laughs, "People get really anxious and I say, this is your day, people are here for you. And if you're half an hour late, it's okay. Everything is about you today."

"As a wedding photographer, you have to be a therapist and a stage manager all at the same time. I did a wedding a couple of months ago where the bride and groom were coming in on a horse-drawn carriage. The two flower girls got scared. I was showing them where to walk while photographing them. Everyone was watching the carriage. So I was juggling them and the couple. You are often called upon to do everything. The wedding goes better if you take it all in stride."

While we went over the shot list again and which of my friends she could ask about who was who, most of all, Laurie remained a calming presence in the midst of the brewing storm.

The Wedding Day

Once we landed at JFK airport, time whizzed by and suddenly we were at the





rehearsal dinner, videotaping our friends acting silly and staying up way too late. The morning of the wedding, I am surprisingly calm. My cousin stops me in the hallway, remarking, “You look so peaceful” My bridesmaids even say I look so laidback while relaying past bridal experiences of being yelled at by an overly anxious bride. I am just so happy to see all of my friends and family in one place—there is nothing that can take the smile off my face.

Laurie shares with me how she prepares for the big day. “A couple of days before, I check my equipment, change the batteries and format all my CompactFlash cards. Twenty-four hours before, I start to visualize the wedding in my head. What the light looks like and what I’m going to do. The day of the wedding I don’t plan anything and I try to relax. I get up, do my yoga and keep my mind clear. I never do an errand before. It’s all about complete relaxation. This way when I get there, I can focus.”

The nerves begin to set in as I get into my dress and realize that this is really happening. I call in one of my bridesmaids—a friend I’ve known since I was in second grade—to make sure everything looks okay. She holds my hand, nodding, “You look beautiful.” She, as a budding wedding photographer, accompanies Brendan and I to meet Laurie for our pre-wedding shots.

As promised, Laurie is there way before we arrive. With her equipment straddled on her—two Canon EOS 5Ds, along with an 85mm f/1.2 lens for portraits, a 28–70mm, and a fisheye lens—we make our way to the golf course grounds at Timber Point Country Club in Great River, NY, our wedding venue.

She poses us on the lush green lawn, asking us to walk away from her and then toward her. Says Laurie, “My goal is always to take the most incredible pictures ever and to do something very different. You have to be artistic, technically correct and the image has to be beautiful.”

As guests arrive, Laurie keeps us calm by always focusing her attention on us and keeping our eyes on her. As the day moved forward in lightning speed, Laurie was by our side without intruding. I saw her but never posed for her, instead enjoying my time with our friends. During cocktail hour, we moved through the shot list with precision and got to spend time with our guests. We danced up a storm with Laurie

clicking away as my 12-year-old cousin out-danced us all. Never once did I have to look for Laurie and ask her to take a shot. She was always there—even running towards the dance floor when we busted into a rousing rendition of “Living on a Prayer.”

After the Wedding

Days after the wedding, my husband and I are relieved to have our weekends back. No more assembly lines of pre-wedding work. Except for the pesky thank-you cards. I email Laurie for some photos we can use for our cards. She emails a few of her favorites from our pre-wedding session—and I love them all. We end up choosing four photos and printing our thank you cards with Bay Photo Lab. After we sent them out, I got texts, emails and Facebook posts about how much everyone loves our photos. I give all the credit to Laurie. When she sends candids for our holiday cards, I post them on Facebook and friends comment on how in love we look and how amazing the images are. As I look through the candids, I realize how truly happy I was. Laurie captured me—



laughing, smiling, dancing—and, just like my friend Erica predicted, I loved every single photo.

Erica couldn't attend my wedding because she had given birth to a beautiful baby boy, Oscar, two months before. Shortly after my wedding, Laurie pho-

tographed Oscar's first months with his parents, admitting that all of her children's photography comes from her past brides and grooms. “I have all my clients in my database and I send them a holiday card. I consider them part of my life. It's definitely a continuation. In fact, I even get corporate jobs from my brides. I get holiday cards from all my clients. It's like we're one big family,” says Laurie.

As I join her circle of satisfied clients, I eagerly post on wedding websites, raving about Laurie. I want other brides to know how important it is to choose a great photographer, not just the cheapest or the one with the best package, but a photographer who will document your day with an eye for detail, artistic vision and technical skill and, most of all, a sense of humor. To view more of Laurie's work, see her website at www.laurierhodes.com and her blog www.laurierhodes.blogspot.com.

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My family kicking up their heels.

