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FOREWORD

I'm sat here, holding the very same copy of the very same book that you are reading right now, in absolute stunned awe. A dream, realised!

Maybe I should rewind!

Rachel and I created Wedding Espresso with a vision to the become *(at least)* the UK's largest Wedding Planning Video Blog. We succeeded. But not only that. We also became the UK's longest running Wedding Planning Podcast about Wedding Suppliers. In 2019 we published our first 5 star rated Wedding Planning Book, "Life Happens! Weducation Helps!". This was a tremendous success right from launch, having been read by over 3,000 happy couples, and counting. Our next mission, was somewhat larger.

Rachel and I knew that there was more. Over the years we've developed such incredible friendships with other Wedding Suppliers, they've literally become family to us. Their stories, their experience, their wisdom, their insights, all amazing. We wanted more than anything to create a vehicle that could carry the words of these truly genius level Wedding Suppliers, straight to you.

And now we're standing in the present. The book you hold in your hands is the collective work of our best Wedding Suppliers friends, our family. In particular, the ones who are local to you. The stories contained within these pages have made us cry, made us laugh, made us proud and connected us all like never before.

We wrote this book together, and what you're about to experience is quite unlike anything you have ever seen before. We are pleased to say that this is genuinely the first book of it's kind for couples in the UK looking to get married, either here or further afield.

You're in for an absolutely unparalleled treat!

JAMES PEARSON
Wedding Espresso

CARPE WEDDING DIEM BABY! LONDON EDITION, 2020

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CHAPTER 1: HANNAH LARKIN, WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHER

I take photos – but I deliver memories. Wedding photographs are one of the few tangible keepsakes from your wedding. Growing up you might remember seeing photos of your parents', grandparents' and even great grandparents' weddings – they become family heirlooms, a way of treasuring and reliving wedding days. My parents only have a few photos from their wedding day, but I remember as a child sitting between them on the sofa with their purple photo album on my lap, loving to look at each one.

I believe your wedding photographs should tell the story of your day. I want them to let you relive the day, see the emotions of those around you, bring back memories and share moments you missed. I want them to let you share your wedding story with everyone who was there and everyone who couldn't be.

I WANT THEM TO BRING BACK MEMORIES AND SPARK EMOTIONS, SO YOU'RE FILLED WITH HAPPINESS AND TAKEN RIGHT BACK TO THAT DAY EVERY TIME YOU LOOK AT THEM.

I want you to be smiling at them together when you're old and wrinkly – photographs to be treasured all your life and for generations to come.

I've worked as a wedding photographer for over 6 years now – photographing weddings from intimate elopements for two, to huge Indian celebrations with hundreds of guests, from registry offices to manor houses, outdoor ceremonies to religious weddings, festival-

style parties to family focused events. I've felt honoured to be trusted to photograph weddings across the UK and overseas – and feel so lucky that many of my couples have gone on to become my friends.

Choosing your photographer is a big decision. You'll spend a lot of time with them on the day, their approach can affect the feel of the wedding and their style will determine how your treasured memories look. I'll talk you through the important things to consider so you can feel confident that you know what you're looking for and can find a photographer who is a perfect fit for your wedding.

Most people have never hired a photographer before, and with so many options it can be hard to know where to start. I'll take you through the process step by step so you can understand the differences between photographers and know exactly what's most important to you.

I take on only a small number of weddings each year and dedicate time to get to know my couples, talking about their plans and understanding what's important to them.

I CARE ABOUT CONNECTING WITH MY COUPLES, HELPING THEM FEEL CONFIDENT SO I CAN CAPTURE RELAXED, NATURAL AND EMOTIONAL IMAGES THEY CAN TREASURE FOREVER.

Alongside my photography business, I'm also a psychologist – I think that's why emotions and connections are so important to me. By getting to know my couples, spending time with them so they feel comfortable with me, I'm able to create photos that truly reflect them.

If, like a lot of my couples when they first contact me, you think you hate having your photo taken or think you're not photogenic – I can help you to feel relaxed and confident in your photos. And if you want beautiful wedding photos that still feel like you, that show your personality and capture the things that mean the most to you – then I can help you to choose the right photographer for you. As a wedding photographer and a psychologist, I

have a unique perspective to help you feel relaxed and let the emotions you're feeling shine in your wedding photos.

I started taking photos when I was little to show my mum *(who is housebound)* the things I was seeing and share my experiences with her. Then I got the travel bug and explored the world – I took my first flight aged 19 and by 25, had visited every continent – again taking photos to share my story. I trained as a psychologist and got married in multi-cultural ceremonies in the UK and Malaysia – together these things made me really pay attention to emotions and connections in photos. I started to photograph families and newborns *(which I still love to do)* and 6 years ago started to capture the emotions and connections in wedding stories too.

I feel very lucky to love my job – and that other people love my photos. I've been featured in magazines, weddings blogs and books – I still share my photos with my mum *(she says it's lovely as it feels like she's attended lots of weddings!)*, but it's always most important to me that the couple themselves love the images.

I'VE LEARNT THAT EACH COUPLE IS LOOKING FOR SOMETHING SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT – EVEN IF THEY DON'T REALISE THIS TO START WITH.

For some it's really capturing a sense of the place, while for others it's the details that they've spent so much time and effort choosing or making. For some it's mostly about their immediate families – who perhaps are meeting for the first time at the wedding – while for others it's about catching the fun of the party. However, I've learnt that it's the shots that show emotion that are the ones people truly treasure. And I've learnt that the thing that means most to me is going on this journey with my couples, getting to know them, understanding what makes them tick, sharing in their wedding day, giving them photos they'll treasure, and continuing to follow their story as friends, and perhaps through maternity, newborn and family photography shoots.

I think knowing I really care, that I take time to talk and listen, is what makes the difference to my couples. I'm always happy to talk through wedding ideas – especially about multicultural weddings, outdoor ceremonies, quirky details, personal touches and pets at weddings!

I'm a list lover and like to help my couples to organise their wedding day so they can spend it enjoying themselves and celebrating, rather than stressing, worrying or wasting time. I use my expertise and experience to work with them on a timeline that fits, that's totally tailored to the couple and their preferences – so what's important to them is given plenty of time, rather than spending time on things they don't want. Because each wedding is unique. I don't want my couples to feel that they have to do anything a certain way. Instead, I want to help them work out what's most meaningful for them and capture that.

I'VE LOVED SEEING WEDDINGS CHANGE.

I was so happy when gay marriage was made legal, meaning that now any two people who love each other can get married. I think celebrant-led weddings are becoming more popular and it's great that they allow for much more personalised ceremonies. And recently, I've found couples seem less afraid of 'breaking the rules' and more keen to do things in the way that makes most sense to them.

And it's so exciting that you're now at this point of planning your wedding! Working out what matters most to you, how you want to celebrate your love and commitment to each other and what sort of memories you want to create.

I'd love to help in any way I can.

So how do you go about finding the right photographer for your wedding?

Perhaps counterintuitively, I'd suggest that their photographs are only part of what you should consider. On your wedding day your photographer is going to be with you while you're getting ready and in those moments before the ceremony, they'll be managing your guests for any group photos you'd like, spending time with just the two of you to capture

your portraits and they'll never be far away throughout the ceremony and reception. Yes, you need to love their photos – but you also need to know this is someone you'll feel comfortable with, someone you like being around, someone you trust to capture all these special moments. So, my first tip is to make sure you like your photographer.

Some photographers take on huge numbers of weddings each year which can make it tricky for them to take the time to get to know you before your wedding. Ideally you should be able to get a sense of them from the words on their website and social media. If these appeal to you, then reach out to them. If you've had a chance to talk to them before your wedding, ideally met them and had an engagement shoot with them *(so you know how they work and can feel relaxed in front of their camera)*, then hopefully when they arrive on your wedding morning you'll smile, relax and feel happy to see them. For me that's really important as I want my couples' wedding photos to be relaxed and natural with happiness shining out of them. So, consider how you'll feel having someone with you for all those intimate moments if you don't know them, and how much your photos will show the real you if they don't know you at all.

Of course, it's no good having a photographer you feel super comfortable with if you don't like their photos! With so many different photographers out there, I'd start by working out the sort of approach you want them to take – this will help you narrow down the options. Approaches broadly range from 'reportage' to 'dramatic'.

Reportage is a paparazzi or documentary style – the photographer doesn't move items to create a clearer backdrop, they don't ask you to pose or move into different locations, they capture what happens as it happens. In contrast, dramatic is highly posed or staged – the photographer will find the perfect space for you, they'll set up the shot often using external lights and spend time getting you into the perfect pose.

In between the two you'll find photographers like me with a 'lifestyle' approach – aiming to capture a sense of the real you on a very good day. I do look for pretty backdrops and move items that are distracting, but I don't use external lights and instead of instructing you on an exact position, I tend to give gentle prompts to help you into relaxed natural poses.

It's worth spending time to work out which approach will fit best with you, as the photographer's approach can affect the feel of your wedding. If you want to spend all day partying with no posed shots, or want every moment captured, but choose a photographer with a dramatic approach then both you and the photographer are likely to end up frustrated as you try to get on with your celebration while they try to set up specific shots. If you want some perfectly lit, romantic and beautiful portraits, but choose a photographer with a

reportage approach, they'll be trying to photograph you without you noticing them while you're wanting guidance about where, when and how to stand. Once you've thought about the approach you'd like your photographer to take, look for this in their portfolios and ask photographers to describe how they work.

Once you've worked out the approach you want, pay attention to the photographer's style – as this will determine how your treasured memories look. A photographer's style is separate to their approach and can range from dark, moody images with lots of shadows, to very light white images – between these two are colourful images.

I'M A NATURAL LIGHT PHOTOGRAPHER AND MY STYLE TENDS TOWARDS LIGHTER RATHER THAN DARKER IMAGES, BUT I ALSO LOVE COLOURS SO YOU'LL NOTICE MY IMAGES ARE GENERALLY AIRY BUT WITH COLOURS CLEARLY SHOWN.

Figure out what style of images most appeal to you – it's a personal choice, so look at lots of images and see which ones you find yourself drawn to. If all the images you love are very dark and moody, but you pick a photographer with a very light style you'll be disappointed – similarly if you love airy images but choose a photographer with a dark moody style. If you've spent ages choosing the colours for your wedding and choose a photographer whose style focuses on shadows or whose style is mostly white, then those beautiful colours won't be captured the way you might have hoped.

Sometimes couples will choose a photographer because they are local, cheap or a friend of a friend – and sometimes this might work out really well. However, please don't choose a photographer with a dark and moody style and reportage approach and then ask them to pose you with external lights and create light and airy images or vice versa. Photographers may be able to flex their approach and styles a little, *(for example we all use an approach that is mostly reportage during the ceremony as we capture what's happening without interrupting)*, but it's far

better to choose a photographer because you like their approach and style, rather than asking the photographer you chose to work in a different way. If a photographer uses their own approach and style, the images are likely to be much, much better than if they're trying to do something outside of their usual approach and style.

Photographers frequently travel across the UK and beyond to photograph weddings, so don't feel restricted to choose a photographer based in your local area. Wedding budgets are tricky to manage, but if you can, try to allocate a good portion to your photography – remember your wedding photographs are one of the few tangible keepsakes from your wedding and go on to become family heirlooms. So take your time: think about the approach you'd like your photographer to take, notice the style that you're most drawn to, see if the words on their website and social media resonate with you, get in touch and see if they really listen and are able to get to know you. Do you like them, feel relaxed and comfortable with them? Do you want them to share the day with you and trust them to capture it? If so, you've found the perfect photographer for you.

THE VERY FIRST WEDDING I PHOTOGRAPHED, I STEPPED IN 2 DAYS BEFORE WHEN THE COUPLE'S PHOTOGRAPHER UNEXPECTEDLY PULLED OUT.

The couple were friends of a friend, who had suggested me based on my travel and family photography. I made it really clear I'd never photographed a wedding before and strongly advised them to hire an experienced wedding photographer – even sending them details of photographers I knew. However, from speaking to me they decided it was me that they wanted to capture their day. It turned out their initial photographer hadn't met them, hadn't spoken to them, hadn't asked them what they were most excited about, hadn't talked to them about how the day might look or what was important to them. For me, those things just seemed natural and so despite my lack of a wedding portfolio, the couple could tell that I genuinely cared about their wedding which made them feel comfortable and trust me to be their photographer.

One thing that definitely helped me photograph that first wedding, and many weddings since, was my own experience of being a bride. I was lucky to celebrate my marriage to the same person twice, once in the UK and later in Malaysia. Each time I found the experience of finding the right photographer quite overwhelming – there are just so many options! I also found the style and quality of photos vary hugely. Looking at literally hundreds of different photographers helped me to be really clear about what I liked *(and didn't like)* from a visual perspective.

However, I also found that the personality of the photographer makes a big difference. It was so nice to know our photographers before they turned up on our wedding day, even if we'd only been able to meet our Malaysian photographer virtually. It was also really important that I felt they knew and understood us, so I could relax and trust them to capture the day perfectly. My mum sadly wasn't able to join us in Malaysia and our photographer made sure to capture details they wouldn't normally photograph *(like the food that was served)* so she could experience the whole day through the photos. They also spotted me video calling her and without me having to say anything, immediately came over and discreetly took shots of her on the screen so her face was included in our wedding photos.

RECEIVING OUR WEDDING PHOTOS MADE ME REALISE HOW MUCH I VALUED BEING ABLE TO KEEP ALL THE EDITED PHOTOS – RATHER THAN JUST CHOOSING A LIMITED NUMBER THAT I COULD BUY.

It's why all my packages include all the edited digital images as standard. I don't believe you should have to choose which images to purchase – if you like them, I want you to have them. I found that while some of my favourite photos were shots we'd planned, like a portrait of my parents, others were spontaneous and I didn't even realise they were being taken – like me laughing with my mum, or our friends' faces as they opened the little cards we'd written them. One of our photographers created a slideshow of our wedding day that I watched over and over and loved. It made me realise how it's easier to share more images

with friends and family in a slideshow than a gallery, and that it's a great way to tell the story of the day – this is something I now love to offer my couples.

I know it's really important though that I don't just use my wedding as a template for what other couples' have planned! When I was approached to photograph a Hindu wedding I was very flattered, but knew I'd have to work hard to learn exactly what this entailed, how it would take place and what the couple were looking for, to ensure I could deliver my usual standard of images. I spent time reading up on the various steps of the Hindu ceremony and met several times with the couple to ask questions, making sure I understood the importance of each element and which moments meant the most to them. I think research before a wedding is always time well spent – not only for an unfamiliar type of ceremony. Being prepared, well organised and having ideas about locations including wet weather back up options, allows me the mental space to be flexible and creative on the day.

MY APPROACH TAKES MORE TIME BEFORE YOUR WEDDING THAN OTHER PHOTOGRAPHERS WHO JUST TURN UP, MEET YOU AND GO – BUT I THINK IT MAKES A BIG DIFFERENCE TO BOTH THE EXPERIENCE AND THE IMAGES.

Some of my favourite bits of feedback focus on this too:

"During the wedding we developed a very good friendship, which is reflected in the images she has captured… She is very passionate about capturing a couple's happiness on their special day… On the day of the wedding, her amazing personality helped us to relax during the more tense times of the day." Meera and Raj

"…her warm and caring presence, along with her expert and gentle guidance, helped us to feel totally at ease. Feeling so relaxed allowed us to enjoy every moment and to just be ourselves. We cannot thank her enough for the beautiful photos; we love every single one." Anneka and Kuba

"…she put us all at ease right away and one of the biggest bits of feedback I got from all the guests on the day was how seamlessly Hannah blended in and captured so many wonderful moments throughout the day… Everyone thought she was so friendly, kind and lovely, and all our photos really reflect the laid back, relaxed atmosphere that pervaded throughout our wedding day." Niamh and Matt

I think it's worth the time beforehand for us to get to know each other, if it means you feel more relaxed and at ease with me on your wedding day – which in turn means you'll have more relaxed and natural images which really let your emotions shine through.

AS YOU'VE PROBABLY GATHERED BY NOW, WHAT I REALLY LIKE ARE PERSONAL, THOUGHTFUL WEDDINGS.

This means that wherever you choose to celebrate your wedding, if it means something to you, if you make it your own, then I will love it. However, there are some types of venues that I particularly enjoy photographing…

* Glasshouses, greenhouses, conservatories or orangeries – As a natural light photographer I capture your day using the light already available and these light and airy venues always make me smile. Some of my favourites include the Great Conservatory at Syon Park, the quirky Barbican Conservatory hidden in the iconic brutalist building and the beautiful glasshouses at Kew Gardens.

* Outdoor weddings – I had an outdoor wedding myself and find they always have such a special feel. Whether you opt for a garden, woodland, vineyard or field, and whether you celebrate under a pergola or bandstand, in a yurt or tipi, surrounded by trees or in a wide-open space, you can enjoy your day with the wind in your hair and end it dancing under the stars.

* Garden weddings – I love gardens and they make beautiful settings for weddings. There's a huge range of options including walled gardens like Chelsea Physic Garden, working gardens like Petersham Nurseries and park spaces like the Hill Garden and Pergola in Hampstead.

* Town Halls – Perfect for intimate ceremonies and elopements which are always a privilege to capture, there are some stunning Town Halls. Chelsea Old Town Hall, Islington Town Hall and the Old Marylebone Town Hall are all beautiful buildings full of gorgeous staircases and spots for wedding portraits.

And if you're wondering how to make your wedding meaningful and to reflect you as a couple, I think the best way to find wedding day inspiration is to think about what you love…

* Love books? Choose a library for your reception, ask your guests for their favourite book as a wedding gift, use well-loved novels as table names, have readings from books that are important to you or create paper flowers printed with meaningful quotes.

* Board game lovers? Fill your venue with your favourite games, have a cake decorated with dice, try giant garden games, design your stationery to include game pieces or cards, use scrabble tiles to create place names or ask guests to sign a game board as a special wedding keepsake.

* Art lovers? Choose an art gallery reception, arrange to have artists painting live or drawing guests at your wedding, perhaps design or paint your own stationery, have your favourite pictures hanging or displayed on easels and consider an art station for guests to get creative.

* Comic book fans? Consider comic book bunting, create your own comic to tell the story of your relationship, perhaps superhero cake toppers or a superhero themed cake, place comics on each table, decorate your shoes with comic book images or even wear a wedding cape!

* Festival goers? Perhaps a glamping style wedding is for you, complete with wedding wellies *(weddington boots!)*, ticket style invites, wrists bands for guests, live music, a glitter bar and a silent disco letting you party late into the night!

* Harry Potter fans? Consider a Harry Potter location *(Leadenhall Market is the location for Diagon Alley, Kings Cross Station is home of platform 9¾ and Alnwick Castle was the setting for the first film)*, perhaps a golden snitch ring box, wand favours with a description for each guest, and house colours for your tables.

Whilst I fall into most of the categories above – I chose three things I love to include in our wedding:

* I love travel – I created a Lonely Planet guidebook-style order of service, chose a spherical wedding cake iced like a globe and used a vintage map of the world as a table plan. If you're

big travellers you might also consider a suitcase for guests to place wedding cards in, flight ticket invitations and postcards for guests to write messages on – or perhaps you opt for a destination wedding in your favourite place.

* I also love animals – my wedding shoes were white mice *(complete with whiskers!)*, our cake included a sugar crafted polar bear *(as we headed to the Arctic to watch them for our honeymoon)* and if I'd had a pet they would definitely have been there! If you're a pet owner and want to include them choose a pet-friendly venue, craft them as a cake topper, choose them a special collar or bowtie, or incorporate illustrations of them into your stationery. You'll find lots of 'Pets at Weddings' inspiration *(from cats and dogs, horses and donkeys, to rabbits, guinea pigs, llamas and tortoises!)* on my Pinterest board: pinterest.com/hannahlarkinphotography

* And of course, I love photos – we used photos of our friends instead of their names for place settings, we had a slideshow of images of us playing on a digital photo frame and created a guest book where each guest found a page with their photo on ready for their message. Old cameras can make beautiful centrepieces, photos can be displayed like bunting around your reception and some of my couples have printed engagement photos on canvas for guests to sign.

I'm always happy to talk about wedding ideas, plans and ways to incorporate the things that you love into your wedding. You can see my images and message me from www.hannahlarkinphotography.com and it would be great to connect on social media – you'll find me at facebook.com/hannahlarkinphotography, twitter.com/hannahlarkin or instagram.com/hannahlarkinphotography

Hannah
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