

# The Pros of Hiring a Pro

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Cody Ellerd?

Seattle Bride sent local writer and amateur photographer Cody Ellerd to shoot photos alongside a top wedding professional and set the record straight once and for all: Is it worth it to hire a friend or family member who's "pretty good with a camera" for your wedding?



"This image is so painfully inferior," says author Cody Ellerd about her image (above). "My angle is bland while Joey's is creative. His is crisp and perfectly exposed, while mine is washed out and grainy. Joey knew exactly how to take advantage of the sense of motion created by this cool backdrop."



I CONSIDER MYSELF A PRETTY GOOD amateur photographer. I've taken a couple of classes, I have a nice Nikon D60 and, as a professional travel writer, I've even had a few of my shots make magazine covers and pages. If you didn't budget for a professional photographer at your wedding, I'm the friend you might call to take pictures.

So when *Seattle Bride* sent me to the late-winter wedding of Vicky Wu and Chris Nicoll to shoot alongside Joey Hong of John & Joseph Photography, a local award-winning team of two brothers who have been shooting commercial, fashion and wedding photography for more than eight years,

I was curious to see how well I could keep up with a seasoned pro.

From the moment we started shooting in the bride and groom's hotel room, I was floored. "Vicky, look down at your shoulders...put a gentle smile on your lips. Chris, look straight at my lens—no, smile. Relax your forehead." Joey's attention to such minute detail went way beyond "Say cheese" and brought out the couple's absolute best. He knew how to manipulate the room's light and reflective surfaces in ways I never would have dreamed of, transforming what I thought was an unremarkable setting into a photo studio with endless possibilities.

“This was such a cute moment, totally unscripted,” Ellerd remembers. “They bumped fists and it was clear it was a little habit of theirs, one that conveyed their friendship. Joey was right there to catch it while I was fumbling with my focus ring.”



“The couple was getting a little photo fatigued,” Ellerd says, “but Joey turned it into a beautiful and intimate shot. I thought there was enough light, but without using a flash and spoiling the cool light bouncing off the building behind them, I couldn’t get my hand quite steady enough.”

For this “exit shot,” the clarity and color of Joey’s shot (far right) versus Ellerd (right) is evident. “Notice the white car in front of Chris and Vicky,” Ellerd says. “Joey magically made it disappear—I’m not even gonna try.”



Joey commanded family portraits with a gentle control and confidence that only comes from years of experience. He had the right flashes and steadiness of hand for getting great dance photos, while I snapped shot after blurry shot in a mild panic that my precious memory space was quickly dwindling. I was giving it my best, and in a few instances it showed: an inside shot of Vicky simply glowing in the window's natural light; a close-up kiss in the sunlight where the couple wore the sweetest smiles. But when those spontaneous moments that are here and gone in the blink of an eye happened, Joey caught them with lightning speed, while I lost many of them to improper focus or exposure.

I now disagree more than ever with the digital-age adage that "now everyone is a photographer." Tens of thousands of dollars in education, equipment and experience separate me from the pros. Professional photographers, like any other artists or business owners, need to spend money to make money. When you hire them, you're helping them pay for their investments.

"Photography is a very equipment-intensive business, and the equipment is expensive," says Scott Squire of NonFiction Weddings, a Seattle-based photography team with 10 years of experience. To each wedding, he and his partner bring six or seven top-drawer lenses, a handful of strobes, three camera bodies, one backup and innumerable accessories. (In contrast, if my equipment had failed, my backup would have been my camera phone.)

Staying on top of new technology in the digital age is its own challenge, one that takes a professional commitment and expense. "The rate of change [in digital media] can be stupefying," laughs longtime Seattle-based wedding photographer Sharlane Chase. She keeps up with the flow of information at annual week-long workshops and seminars, and it shows in her final product.

On a side note, like all of you reading this magazine, I also happen to be planning my own wedding. My fiancé and I are on a tight budget and had planned to take a gamble and hire an amateur photographer friend. Now? We're determined to find a way to get a pro.

Vicky and Chris would have been pretty disappointed if I had been their only photographer. If anyone ever does ask me to take pictures at their wedding, I'll be happy to show up with my Nikon, and I may even take the best disposable-camera shots of the whole night. I just hope someone like Joey is there, too. \*