

Head of the Class

David Jay leads a youth movement in modern wedding photography

By Jeff Kent

Ten years ago, when David Jay's father started his own business, he told his son, "David, in business, if you truly desire to help other people, you'll always have plenty of work."

Those words have always stuck with Jay. They were his guiding principle when he founded his wedding photo business straight out of college in 2002, and they've helped him quickly rise to the head of the class in wedding photography's new generation of shooters.

Jay got his start in photography when he had to take an art class in high school. More of a jock than an artist, Jay figured photography would be the easiest way to go. He was hooked almost instantly. Later, while attending Westmont College, Jay honed his skills at the college yearbook and helped initiate Westmont's first photography course. After school, he jumped straight into wedding photography, forming David Jay Photography in Santa Barbara, Calif.

It didn't take long for Jay's career to take off. With a fun combination of photojournalistic and fashion photo styles, Jay's work caught on in the progressive West Coast wedding market. Jay combined his good imagery with impressive business acumen, and quickly established himself as one of Southern California's premier wedding shooters. He formed a partnership with Pictage (www.pictage.com). He began speaking at trade shows and industry events. He worked with local and national publications to get his name in front of the right crowd. It all worked. Jay now travels the country doing high-profile, big-dollar events. In fact, to get this interview we had to snag him in between trips to Atlanta, Puerto Vallarta, Hollywood, Boston, Santa Monica, San Diego and Oregon — all within the course of about six weeks.

When we finally did grab him, here's what Jay had to say about the life of a young photographer in the wedding industry.

StudentPhoto.com: Why did you choose wedding photography as your specialty?

David Jay: Actually, my friends chose it for me. They all begged me to shoot their weddings, and I'm a softy so I couldn't say no.

SP.com: What appeals to you most about wedding photography?

DJ: Wedding photography provides a lot of variety by allowing me to shoot different subjects and styles without having to deal with an art director or a client asking for specifics.

SP.com: What inspires you? What motivates you creatively in your work?

DJ: Music! Sounds weird, but the emotion I feel through other artists really inspires me to take my art to the next level. On my Web site you can hear bands like BarlowGirl (www.barlowgirl.com) and Joy Williams (www.joywilliams.com), whose words and sounds capture beauty in a whole new way and inspire me to do the same.

SP.com: What are the best things about photographing weddings for a living?

DJ: Freedom, flexibility and traveling. With the technology available today, I can operate my business from anywhere. Just this month I've been in Atlanta, Puerto Vallarta, Boston, L.A., and I leave next week for Oregon. Most clients don't even know where I'm based — and sometimes I don't know either!

SP.com: What are the worst?

DJ: Stereotypes. In the old days wedding photographers were looked down upon. I still run into some people who haven't realized that times have changed and now there are incredibly talented photographers in this industry blessing brides every weekend.

“Church ladies” are a struggle, too.

SP.com: Where do you think the field of wedding photography is going from here, both artistically and in a business sense?

DJ: Artistically, I think it's quickly bending towards fashion. The Aussies are leading the charge in that respect.

Business-wise, it's just beginning to become a real industry run by professionals, rather than the older “mom and pop” mentality. Pictage started this and over the past five years has consistently helped photographers run more profitable businesses and enjoy better lives as a result.

SP.com: Do you recommend wedding photography as a good field for young photographers?

DJ: Absolutely! There is a huge need for young professionals, and the wedding industry is begging for them. Sorry to all the grandpas with their “hussies” — their time is up. The new digital kids are taking over.

SP.com: What would be your best advice to photography students and emerging photographers who are interested in doing what you do?

DJ: One, develop yourself. Marketing Guru Harry Beckwith says in his book, *What Clients Love*, “People don't hire you for what you do; they hire you for who you are.”

Two, focus on your network. Think about where you want to be in 10 years and develop relationships with the people who can help you get there. The business you develop is what your career, and essentially your life, will rest on. So remember that your business pays the bills, not your photos.

Three, continue learning. Read books and find mentors who can help you get to the next level.

*To see a whole lot more from David Jay, check out his Web site at www.davidjay.com.
He's got plenty of examples of recent work, plus details about his business and a virtual peek inside his wedding photo gear bag.*