

Damon Tucci

By Harvey Goldstein

From 10 Years at Disney to Highly Stylized Weddings

Orlando-based Damon Tucci has had a camera in his hands since he was in high school and tagged along with filmmaker Glen Lau. After attending Florida State University, where he studied cinematography, Damon continued to work with Lau during the transition from 16mm film to video. Damon began doing production stills for Glen Lau Productions until he moved over to Walt Disney World in 1990.

Damon wore many hats during his 10 years with Disney. A typical day could include photographing President George H. W. Bush in the morning and a magazine cover assignment in Cinderella's Castle in the evening. "Everyday was filled with celebrities and excitement. It was a magical time to work at Walt Disney

World," he says.

Damon began working with the rapidly growing Disney Photographic Wedding Services in 1992. While the company was looking for a more traditional style, Damon took a more avant-garde approach (which was not always appreciated). "Disney acquiesced to the new style in wedding photography but insisted that we capture family shots as well," Damon says. "We had to work extremely fast. The great Tony Corbell coined the term 'guerilla wedding photography' to describe what we were doing. I would photograph more than 250 weddings a year in addition to the commercial and corporate events. Some of these weddings were two hours, and I might do five in a day. They still contained all of the ele-





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ments of any other wedding. We would also photograph two full-size weddings every weekend. It was at this time that my style was born; it is a mixture of stylized fashion and documentary.”

In addition to his honed ability to create beautiful images, Damon attributes his success to his team’s commitment to customer service and exceeding clients’ expectations. “I feel that the one man or woman photography studio has their hands full with the minutia of wearing too many hats and ultimately client services such as call backs, fulfillment of photographs, albums, digital files and vendor relations suffer.”

Because Damon believes in simplicity, his camera of choice is the Nikon D3, which he uses whenever possible with only available light, a reflector and an ISO of up to 6400. His goal with each wedding is to tell the “who, what, why, when, where and how.” His new book, *Step by Step Wedding Photography*, published by Amherst Media,

explains in detail how he approaches these goals. He is also soon releasing an educational DVD, *Urban Bridal Portrait/How to Be a Visual PIMP*.

Wedding photographers know that each event is unique and the key is to realize what makes each one special. “Being a wedding photographer means being part artist and part psychiatrist. You must know when to step in and make things happen and know when to step back and stay out of the way.” Damon arrives at a wedding with a small array of lenses. He brings a Nikon 24–70mm and an SB800 on-camera flash, a 16mm fisheye, 17–35mm f/2.8, 80–200mm f/2.8 lens and a Quantum Turbo SC battery all nestled nicely in his new Shootsac. He also carries a backup camera body with a 24mm f/2.8, 50mm f/1.4, 60mm micro f/2.8 and an 85mm f/1.4, which he keeps locked in his vehicle.

Says Damon, “I feel that time is your main enemy at a wedding and to combat

it, I have become a photo opportunist, a ‘visual pimp’ if you will. I constantly look for things where there is nothing. The whole process happens in my mind instantaneously. I see it, I execute it and hopefully it resembles what I initially visualized. Sometimes it does and sometimes it morphs into something else.”

Damon initially had a hard time with his exposures. At the age of 14, his photographs did not always turn out as he envisioned with his Nikon FE. He strived to become a human light meter. He would study the referential exposures on a box of film. He came to know that he would set his exposure at $1/125$ at $f/16$ at ISO 100 for a full blue sky exposure or $1/125$ at $f/8$ at ISO 100 for open shade or $1/4$ second at $f/5.6$ at ISO 400 for an indoor exposure. These guidelines might not be exact, but close enough for a starting point. Because Damon originally comes from the world of film and transparencies, he still likes to get



it right in-camera, rather than relying on multiple exposures to get one that works. Today he photographs RAW and JPEG at the same time as a safety precaution, referencing the RAW files if necessary. A typical wedding provides the client 70 images an hour; from a six-hour wedding, the bride and groom receive 420 edited images.


After the wedding, all of the images are downloaded, renamed and backed up to a DVD. Damon uses Ron Nichols' retouching software and Kevin Kubota's and Parker Pfister's Photoshop actions to polish the images. It takes approximately five hours to edit, post and print a six-hour wedding. The edited files are placed online approximately two weeks after the wedding and the client receives a proof magazine. The online images make it convenient for family and friends to view and order images, but Damon believes that it is important for his client to have something tangible in their hands from which to select their album photographs.

If the bride and groom are procrastinators and do not make their choices for their album, Damon's partner and creative director, Rosy Usmani, offers them two options. The first is an artist rendition and the second is a two-hour viewing session for family and friends on their 100-inch screen

where album photos and wall portraits may be selected with the help of ProSelect software. Once they have selected their 100 "must have" photographs, Rosy lays out the album using Martin Schembri's YSI [You Select It] software and orders the images from Miller's Professional Imaging before ordering the finished album through Kambara, Leather Craftsmen or Graphistudio.

Damon and Rosy have grown their wedding business with a solid local base of referrals from past clients and vendors

with whom they have worked over the years. They have partnered with high-end hotels, coordinators, florists and designers. Their marketing strategy is one of building relationships; marketing to the vendors is as important as marketing to the brides.

Damon's advice to new wedding photographers is to embrace the basic fundamentals of lighting, posing and composition, which all seem to be getting lost with the digital revolution. Shares Damon, "They must embrace Renaissance art and Greek and Roman sculptors. They should also find current inspiration as well. I like to look at *Italian Vogue* and other fashion magazines. Ultimately, they will need to develop their own style, their own vision to really succeed. Don't be a clone of the latest and greatest photographer of the day. Be true to yourself, be honest with yourself and most importantly, be yourself." 

Damon Tucci will be presenting a platform class at WPPI 2009 on Feb. 17 titled "Step by Step Wedding Photography—What REALLY Happens on Saturday!" The program will be in MGM's Conference Center, Rm. #318 from 6:15 p.m. to 8:15 p.m.

Harvey Goldstein from Branford, CT, has been in the photographic industry for 35 years. He is a former studio owner and presently edits numerous association newsletters and magazines, as well as being a freelance writer.

