



# Memories are made of these

Photojournalism is no longer the domain of newsmen. This photographic style has shifted to the unlikely area of shooting weddings. So forget the stiff, studio shots of yore, that big day is now captured naturally and beautifully presented like a picture storybook. CHIN MUI YOON gets behind-the-scenes with three new style wedding photographers.

Photos courtesy of GRANT CORBAN, KID CHAN AND LOUIS PANG

**F**LOWERS wilt and music fades – what remains of a wedding after the guests have left? For many couples, photographs are the most tangible reminders. What the camera caught of that big day can make them smile, shed a nostalgic tear or two, or ... cringe!

The cringing is usually in reaction to the stiff and formal poses of the couple shot in a studio. As with most things, be it make-up, food or even photography, artificial is out, natural is in.

Today's couples seek relaxed, unpretentious images that capture the essence of their big day as it unfolds. They've had enough of exhausting eight-hour shoots in bridal studios with the couple dolled up and dressed in nyonya or mandarin costumes or pictured lying against a backdrop of a field of lavender.

Famous French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson once declared that the camera is "a sketchbook, an instrument of intuition and spontaneity." So why shouldn't it be used for capturing the most important day of our lives too?

The modern wedding photographer creates an artistic visual record in a photojournalistic style. He accompanies the couple through the day, photographing public moments and behind-the-scenes.

The mandatory moments such as the *berinai* (henna staining) ceremony, the exchange of garlands, or exuberant *yam-seng* (toasting) sessions are recorded. A mosaic of memories is also created through details – the posies of roses, the tearful mother, a father hugging his daughter, the nervous groom fidgeting with his bow – these moments are frozen into a collection of precious keepsakes.

"Wedding photojournalism is simply to

record people's emotions and the day's sentiments and joy," explains Grant Corban, 42, a New Zealand-born photographer who has been residing in Kuala Lumpur for 14 years.

"People are more affluent today and exposed to trends. They demand for the type of pictures they have seen in overseas weddings, magazines and newspapers. People are realising they should enjoy their wedding day, not suffer through it."

Sabah-based photographer Louis Pang, 33, is a newcomer to the industry, having started off as a photojournalist with *Borneo Post*. He loves the heady excitement of weddings, which he calls "historical moments in our lives".

"I'm in the business of keeping loving memories for people," he says. "The moods, laughter, chatter and energy levels are different on a wedding day that simply cannot be repeated or replicated."

A keen sense of anticipation makes the difference in getting ordinary and extraordinary shots.

"After the bridesmaid finishes her speech, often, the bride will hug her spontaneously. If the photographer is not prepared, he'll miss the shot. Speeches often trig-

ger strong emotions or recognition that should be captured," says Corban.

Both he and Pang have had their own experience of unsatisfactory wedding pictures, which motivates them in shooting each wedding like it's their own today. Pang has an advantage of a photojournalist background with a balance of artistic and intuitive skills.

"Our weddings are headline news in our lives!" he says. "Just as in news-gathering, I record the key moments and the people involved in creating the day's news. My clients are ordinary people like you and I. They too deserve to be treated like the celebrities I have covered."

With the aim of capturing unplanned, unguarded moments, it is vital for the photographer and couple to be comfortable with each other. Kid Chan, 28, known for his glamorous portfolio of Malay weddings, is well versed with protocol having covered high profile events attended by eight Sultans and VIPs.

"My clients have become friends as we make it a point to know them and put them at ease," he says. "We avoid unflattering shots like when people are eating."

Couples who favour photojournalistic styles are often young, urban professionals in their 20s and 30s. However, Corban has shot couples in their 60s at marriage re-dedication ceremonies.

While hardcore photojournalism opposes planned shots and includes both the bad and the good moments, Chan says it's impossible to practise pure photojournalism here.

"The client is still the king," he says. "We can't just shoot the things we want. It's their wedding. The parents who paid for the event or the auntie who organised it must appear in the photos. We just try to go through the event unobtrusively without participating in or dictating the proceedings."

Being polite Malaysians, embarrassing moments are avoided on camera, such as if the bride takes a tumble or a groom faints. "I usually refrain from recording these moments to retain people's dignity," explains Corban. "After all, we won't really want to keep these photos in our albums."

Couples now allocate 10% of their wedding budget for photography, a far cry from the days when it was last on the list. Photography charges start from RM3,000 for a basic package. Foreign photographers start at US\$1,000 or US\$4,000 (RM3,700 or RM14,800). Are the charges worth it?

"Definitely!" says Chan. "What event is more important than our wedding day? We're hired also for our experience and expertise. Not everyone who carries a camera is able to create good pictures."

Insiders report that previously, some studios charge RM7,000 upwards for such photography. Many studios also regularly hire news photographers to moonlight at weddings, as they are favoured for their instinct at capturing key moments.

Corban shoots in raw format where the images are later edited. As many as 950 pictures out of 1,000 raw images will be returned to the couple with the best selected for the album. Most other photographers will only return the edited few hundred shots, depending on the package.

Digital photography gives instant results and a competitive edge. But film photographs offer a distinctive creamy texture that digital prints cannot give. Black and white remains a favourite for its timeless, classic quality.

The emerging trend means demand surpasses supply. The wedding photography market is huge, says Corban, and there is many opportunities for photographers to work together instead of competing. Overseas bookings are also becoming regular.

Corban is due to fly to Nottingham, Britain, to photograph a wedding. Chan was flown to London for three hours and back, and is opening a branch in Brunei.

All three photographers unanimously agree on the single most important advice for couples: relax!

"The couple should NOT be directing their wedding," says Corban. "The work must be delegated to friends and relatives. Weddings don't have to be perfect. Guests attend a wedding not for the food; it's a time to celebrate and mingle with others."

"No wedding is more special than a happy one," says Pang. "The day is fleeting; the couple needs to relax and savour the moments!"

■ The works of the photographers interviewed can be viewed at their websites: [www.grantcorban.com](http://www.grantcorban.com), [louisipang.com](http://louisipang.com), and [kidchan.com](http://kidchan.com).



Top: The joy of the priest presiding over this couple's wedding is captured by Louis Pang. Above: Samples of Pang's Love Storybooks.

# Happy stars of the show

KATE Pang wanted her wedding day to be perfect. That included the photographs of herself and her groom in their finery. So she sought out the services of a large photo studio, even though it was in Kota Kinabalu and they lived in Tawau.

Arrangements were made for them to fly over and from 9am till 7pm, the couple painstakingly posed and paraded in a variety of bridal gowns and eveningwear for the camera. And it was all done under the brilliant glare of studio lights that left them hot and sweaty.

"We were posed in different ways, told to tilt our heads at various angles and asked to give each other smouldering looks and act lovey-dovey - it was all so uncomfortable and unnatural!" recalls Pang, 40.

The couple was able to view the results the next day through the computer. What they saw left them totally disappointed.

"We looked as awkward and tired as we had felt!" says Pang, an accountant. "Worse, the studio told us that our chosen 21 pictures did not fit in the albums they offered so they suggested we select a few more. But that meant they would charge us extra, which we felt was unjustified as we had already paid over RM3,000 for the shoot."

A church friend heard of their unhappiness and showed them Louis Pang's work. The couple signed him up for a full day of shooting for their wedding on Oct 15 last year, inclusive of two copies of his Love Storybook and two albums.

"It was different as my husband and I were allowed to be ourselves," explains Pang. "At the dinner after the morning's church service, Louis screened the pictures as a slideshow. They were lovely!"

"The moments were captured sensitively and as they had happened. There were no poses. I love my Love Storybook so much that I still look through it every couple of days. My husband laughs at me but every time I look at the images, I feel like I am reliving that special day."

Like Pang, it was seeing the wedding album of a friend that made Farhaimi Farsi, 25, decide on Kid Chan as her photographer.

"I loved the candid, natural shots that Kid and his team of four photographers produced," says the Kuala Lumpur-based tax consultant who married in September last year.



Almost every minute of the special day is captured, like this sweet moment in the intimacy of the wedding car.

"They were different and we could feel the emotions of the people as they were pictured laughing, joking and just enjoying themselves.

"Best of all, my husband and I were not even aware of the lenses focusing on us. It was all done discreetly. Kid met with us before the wedding and we felt at ease with him," she says.

Farhaimi adds that it was always her dream to have a contemporary garden wedding.

"So for my big day, my garden was turned into a floral fantasy with beautiful blooms everywhere. The air was full of fragrance and my guests loved the relaxed setting. I am so happy that the pictures managed to capture the mood and the setting and every precious moment!"



Kate Pang and Yapp Su Hen wanted to appear natural in their wedding photographs.



Clockwise from above: Veteran wedding photographer Grant Corban in action, passionate newcomer Louis Pang, and the celebrity-savvy Kid Chan.



## Tips for a *trendy wedding*

### Destination weddings

More couples choose to hold weddings at exotic locations such as Bali and Phuket. Sometimes, this is even cheaper than holding elaborate feasts at local hotels. Corban has travelled on Air Asia flights where wedding guests accounted for half the passengers on board. Miss Malaysia 2003 Elaine Daly fondly recalls a best friend's wedding held at the hideaway resort of The Alila Ubud surrounded by rice fields and forests.

### Resort and out-of-town weddings

City hotels like the JW Marriott Kuala Lumpur continue catering to over 100 weddings a year. Resorts too report of an increase. Urban folks are shifting their weddings to out-of-town locations such as The Avillion in Port

Dickson, Pangkor Laut Resort and The Datai, Langkawi. Corban has photographed an Irish couple at the Lake Gardens at their tropical-styled wedding. The Singapore Zoo is also promoting its landscaped gardens as a venue for weddings in the wild!

### Presentation counts

Wedding memories are not confined to clear plastic pockets anymore where they collect dust and yellow with age. Louis Pang is the first in Malaysia to offer attractive, glossy photography books printed and bound in Japan he calls "Love Storybooks" with quality on par with fine art coffee-table books.

The handsome, hardcover books are created via Digital On-Demand Printing Press. He will soon offer an online

service for wedding guests to order their pictures. Grant Corban offers magazines and photo montages while Kid Chan's gold satin-wrapped, embossed albums cater to his illustrious clients.

### Intimacy, please

More couples are favouring intimate weddings with fewer than 20 guests. Classic restaurants such as Bon Ton are favoured for small garden weddings. People are seeking to enhance relationships during weddings instead of "keeping up with the Joneses".

Corban has covered a dinner reception for 14 guests on the beach while Chan attended a wedding with just the couple accompanied by their pastor at The Datai, Langkawi. "It reinforced the point that a marriage is all about a union between two people," he says.

Compare this with the "as big as possible" lavish feasts thrown in the past, and remember this when you think you "don't have enough money to get married".