

# Studio Photography

THE BUSINESS BEHIND THE IMAGE

◆ **BUSINESS** matters

presentation tips

TEXT BY MARK ZUCKER  
IMAGES AS SHOWN

## Less Is More Overcome the Temptation to Over-Design Albums

Album designer Jennifer Gilman, of Mark Garber Photography ([www.markgarber.com](http://www.markgarber.com)), in Dayton, Ohio, thinks of herself as a best-selling “author.” Like a good novelist, Gilman creates a clear and logical storyline with a powerful beginning and a dynamic ending.

To make the story a page-turner, each chapter is fresh and unique. To maintain focus, she avoids details that are confusing or distracting. By consistently applying her best-selling techniques, Gilman has created her own “book club”—clients who can’t wait to recommend her award-winning albums to their friends.

Designers like Gilman recognize that over-designing their books is an occupational hazard that can sap productivity and profitability. They also know that the keys to designing best-selling albums are: understanding the client’s objectives, knowing their own strengths and limitations, and drawing on proven tools and techniques.

Those who stay focused not only deliver a better product, but they also save valuable time that can be better spent creating more business.

### KNOW YOUR CLIENT

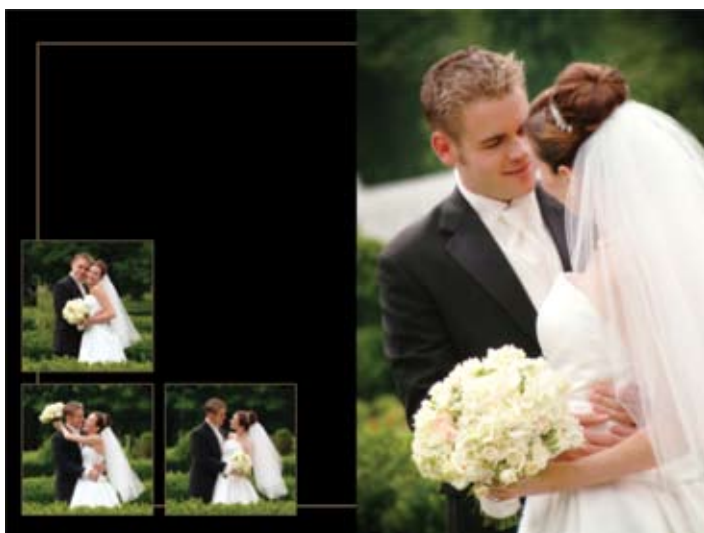
By the time you sit down to design an album, you should have a pretty good idea of who your client is and what your client likes. You’ve spent hours working closely together at the wedding, during pre-wedding consultations, and possibly at an engagement session, as well.

“Be observant,” says Gilman. “Pick up clues from their personalities, the event they planned, their behavior, and mannerisms. All the information you want is right in front of you, without having to ask a single question.”

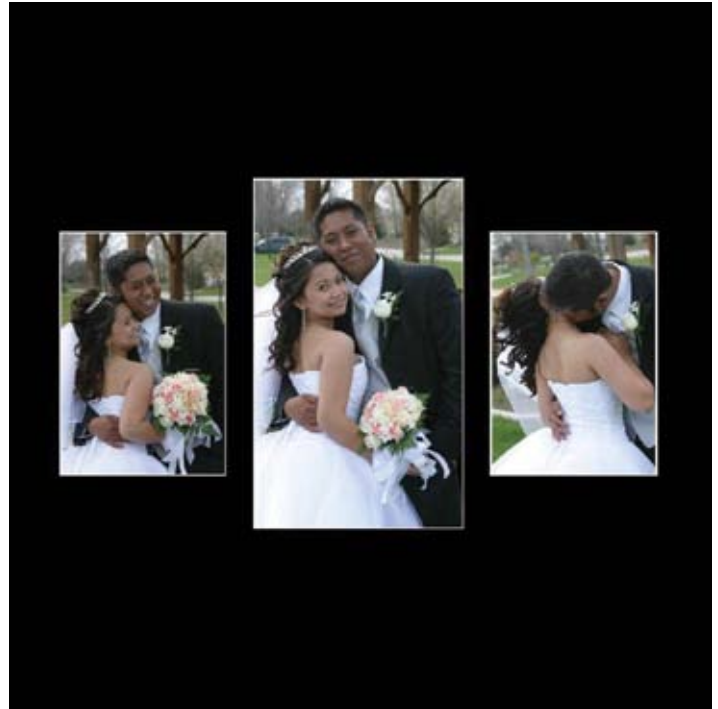
During your time with the client, you’ll also get a good sense of their budget and the level of sophistication they will require for their albums.

What I call “Level 1” design, incorporates standard out-of-

the-box templates, including Zookbinders’ Digi-matZ, which give the digitally designed album the look of a matted album. “Level 2” design is a more costly, customized approach that requires proficiency with tools like Adobe Photoshop and involves additional design time. This level includes either a free-form approach (without templates) or enhancing templates with special effects,



“Where photographers typically go wrong is being too attached to their images,” says album designer Jennifer Gilman, of Mark Garber Photography. “Less is truly more, so a heavy edit is a must.” Photographed by Mark Garber & Jennifer Gilman, this album won 1st Place in Zookbinders’ 2005 Zook Awards Digital Album Contest.



Rhonda Socha, of Key Light Photography, charges a premium for clients who design their own albums. "Whenever I design the album per the client's requests, I have to redesign it for style and flow," she explains.

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such as drop shadows and reduced opacity backgrounds.

As for the client who wants a seat at the design table, proceed with caution. "We actually charge a premium for clients who design their own albums," says Rhonda Socha, of Kenosha-Wisconsin-based Key Light Photography ([www.keylightphotography.com](http://www.keylightphotography.com)). "In every instance when I have designed the album per the client's requests, I have had to redesign it for style and flow."

#### KNOW YOUR STRENGTHS

Gilman and Socha partner with their photographer husbands to provide the full range of services, from event photography and image editing to album design and production management. Not all photographers have the skills, time, and in-house resources to self-design attractively and profitably, however. Some of the most talented photographers don't possess the restraint required to be good editors or designers.

"Where photographers typically go wrong is being too attached to their images," says Gilman. "Less is truly more, so a heavy edit is a must. Once you have done your edit, let the images speak for themselves. Overly worked images dilute the storyline, and diminish the quality of the photographs."

If you produce your own albums, consider if it's the best use of your time. If editing or designing eats up too much of your productivity, you might be able to delegate the functions to your own creative team or outsource the project altogether.

One-stop design houses like Zoho Design ([www.zohodesign.com](http://www.zohodesign.com)) offer turnkey solutions whereby they design the album, print the images, and send everything to the album company for completion.

#### WORK SMARTER

A photographer's time is best spent creating images and marketing his or her studio and photography to current and prospective clients. To minimize the hours you spend in front of the computer and maximize your time behind the camera, it's essential to keep up with the latest tools and techniques.

"Whatever program or templates you work with, start with the understanding that none of them are perfect," says Socha. "They all have their good and bad points and you have to be flexible and patient to find the combination that works best for you. With several software programs on my desktop, I switch between them to keep the design time down and the creativity up."

Once the album layout is complete, don't let your work suffer by selecting mediocre printing or album production. Use the highest quality lab and album company you can to ensure the best possible results.

#### RESIST TEMPTATION

In most cases, the "over-design phase" kicks in after four hours. If a design takes 12 hours to complete, any value added in the last eight hours is barely perceptible to the average client. So why spend the extra time and incur the additional cost?

Remember that simplicity is an art form, as well as the way to make your albums best sellers. ◆

MARK ZUCKER is founder and president of Zookbinders, Inc. ([www.zookbinders.com](http://www.zookbinders.com)), a Chicago-based photo album company that manufactures mounted albums and image display boxes.

BUSINESS TIPS

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KEYS TO A SUCCESSFUL ALBUM

WHEN DESIGNING AN ALBUM . . .

1. Keep in mind that the goal is to tell the story of the day.
2. Choose a style that best showcases the images and stick with it.
3. Keep backgrounds similar for different parts of the wedding.
4. Portraits are elegant and simple; they don't need bells and whistles.
5. Print a color proof of the layout with facing pages side by side.
6. Use high-speed processors, extra memory, and high-capacity storage to minimize your time and frustration.