

# Capture the moment

Get your best-ever images of parties and events with our guide to the essential techniques for photographing fun

## Quick gear guide The kit you need to succeed

### Canon EOS 5D Mark III

**Price:** £2,400/\$3,499  
**Tel:** 01737 220000  
**Web:** www.canon.co.uk

#### Why is it good for parties and events?

The EOS 5D Mark III has a great autofocus system, with 61 AF-points, allowing you plenty of flexibility when it comes to creative composition. It's also sensitive down to -2EV, which is ideal for focusing in low-light conditions.



### AF-S Nikkor 35mm f1.4G lens

**Price:** £1,736/\$1,800  
**Tel:** 0330 123 0932  
**Web:** www.nikon.co.uk

#### Why is it good for parties and events?

Professional photographer Paul Underhill says that this is one of his favourite lenses for shooting parties and events. "It's a classic lens. It doesn't give too much distortion and allows you to capture most stuff that's going on."



### Nikon SB-910 speedlight flash

**Price:** £450/\$550  
**Tel:** 0330 123 0932  
**Web:** www.nikon.co.uk

#### Why is it good for parties and events?

Some event photographers favour flash, others don't. But wherever you stand on flash, it's a bad idea to not have one with you when photographing events, as you can't predict the kind of lighting that you will – or won't – be presented with.



**P**hotographing people when they are happy and having fun sounds like a recipe for great images, yet it can often be difficult to end up with the sort of photos you imagined you might get.

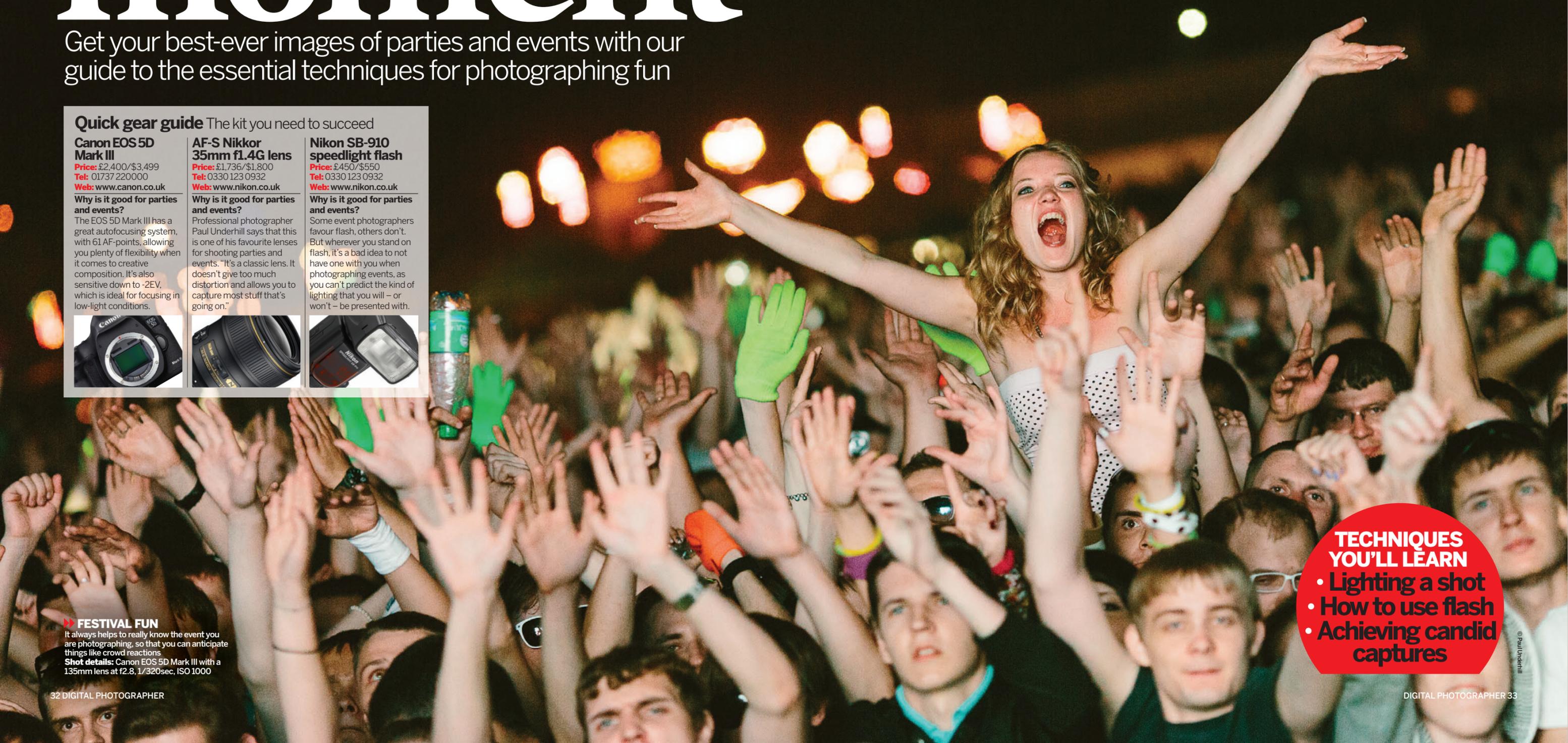
Parties and events place huge demands on you as a photographer. First, you have to be incredibly alert and observant if you don't want to find yourself missing many of the best moments. This isn't helped by the fact that, very often, the parties are at the end of a long, intense day of constant photography,

such as a wedding or bar mitzvah. No matter how exhausted you may be feeling, you have to summon all the reserves of energy that you can. Being able to watch out for and anticipate golden moments is a key element of photographing parties and events.

Second, because of the fast and unpredictable nature of events, you need to know your camera and flash like the back of your hand. There's no time to hesitate, no time to stop and flick through the settings and menus – at least not if you don't want to miss some of the best moments.

You also need a keen eye for creative composition and finely tuned exposure technique to elevate your shots above those of the average snapper. Your camera's meter may well struggle to interpret the scene in the way that you'd like it to, so you'll need to have the skill and confidence to take full control.

Over the next few pages, we'll show you the techniques you need to master in order to shoot parties and events the professional way. Before we start, take a look at the Quick Gear Guide on page 32 to see some of the gear that the pros favour. ▶▶



### ▶▶ FESTIVAL FUN

It always helps to really know the event you are photographing, so that you can anticipate things like crowd reactions.

**Shot details:** Canon EOS 5D Mark III with a 135mm lens at f2.8, 1/320sec, ISO 1000

## TECHNIQUES YOU'LL LEARN

- Lighting a shot
- How to use flash
- Achieving candid captures

▼ CROWD CONTROL

Using flash can have the effect of ruining the atmosphere created by the ambient lighting, so be prepared to shoot without it

**Shot details:** Canon EOS 5D Mark III with a 16-35mm lens at 16mm and f2.8, 1/125sec, ISO 800

© Paul Underhill



▶ **Work with available light**

Photographing parties and events isn't all about flash – you can get brilliant images using the available light

Some events and situations dictate the use of flash in some form or another, but you run the risk of destroying the atmosphere of a scene if you use your flash when it's not really required. There are two situations in which using flash can have a detrimental effect on the images that you capture at a party or event.

If there's one thing that's guaranteed to make a photographer stick out like a sore thumb and lose all hope of being discreet and unobtrusive, it has to be flash. Even the built-in flash on an ordinary compact camera can be difficult to ignore, so it's no surprise that the light emitted by a professional external flash unit, such as the Nikon SB-910 Speedlight or the Canon Speedlite 600EX-RT Flashgun, is very unlikely to go unnoticed.

One burst of flash and, all of a sudden, everyone in the room is conscious of the presence of a photographer, and it's not unusual for people to become less relaxed and at ease as a result. All those

fly-on-the-wall, photojournalistic shots you were hoping to capture are instantly much harder to get. Not only that, many people simply find a powerful flash firing uncomfortable and even irritating, especially if it's fired directly at them or near them. During a wedding or bar mitzvah ceremony, not only would you run the risk of capturing less natural and emotive images, you may also find yourself offending people who, quite understandably, consider a photographer flooding the room with light every five seconds during such a sensitive moment rather rude.

Second, if the available light has an interesting character and mood of its own, you'll want to capture this in your images, and unless used carefully flash will overwhelm the ambient light completely. If you

are capturing a singer on stage illuminated by an atmospheric spotlight, firing your flash will neutralise the contrast and drama that the spotlight is seeking to create. Very often, the shadows are as interesting as the highlights, but flash will indiscriminately illuminate the entire scene, creating an image that looks flatter and less atmospheric. Many events and parties have unique and carefully planned lighting of some kind, and your images should record that.

When you are trying to capture the feel and mood of the ambient light, it's not always possible to trust what your camera is telling you. If you're using Evaluative or Multi-matrix metering and you set your camera to Aperture or Shutter Priority mode, you may well find that the camera either overexposes to lift the shadows up to something more like a midtone or, if there is a bright light or object somewhere in the scene, will underexpose to try to retain the highlight detail.

To overcome this, you can try using your camera's Spot metering mode, which allows you to base your exposure on an area equating to just one or two per cent of the overall scene. Better still, you can

“Unless used carefully flash will overwhelm the ambient light completely”

**Top five tips for available light**

**01 MANUAL WORKS**

Consider using manual exposure to ensure that you record the true atmosphere of the available light, as your camera's Evaluative or Multi-matrix metering may get it wrong.

**02 WIDE OPEN**

If possible, use prime lenses with ultra-wide apertures like f1.8, f1.4 or even f1.2 to give you the maximum light-gathering potential and ultimate sharpness.

**03 RAW POWER**

Shoot in RAW format to record

the maximum tonal range in your images and to allow you to adjust the white balance in post-production.

**04 AF-ASSISTANCE**

If your camera has an AF-assist beam, turn it on to help your camera to autofocus in low light. Alternatively, attach a flash and use its infrared AF-assist.

**05 QUICK CHECK**

Use your LCD and histogram to help you to assess exposure, but resist the temptation to check every single image, as you will miss key moments!

© Ron and Gabrielle Levy



© Paul Underhill

▲ **CAPTURING ATMOSPHERE**

Vibrant images like this can be easily attained using something as simple as an on-camera flash bounced up to the ceiling  
**Shot details:** Canon EOS 5D with a 16-35mm lens at 16mm and f3.5, 1/60sec, ISO 800

◀ **QUICK RESPONSE**

Fast reactions are required if you are going to capture spontaneous moments like this at parties and events  
**Shot details:** Canon EOS-1D X with a 35mm lens at f2.8, 1/1000sec, ISO 200

try shooting using full Manual mode. This method allows you to set the ISO, Aperture and Shutter Speed values, and check the results quickly using the LCD screen on the back of the camera, giving you full creative control over how the scene is exposed.

Not only does this allow you to dictate how the camera responds, rather than the camera making the critical decisions, it has another key advantage, allowing you to shoot exposures that are consistent and uniform. This has an enormous impact on post-

production – remember that at an event or party you might well shoot hundreds of images, and being able to batch-adjust files that you know were shot with the exact same settings can save vast amounts of time.

Finally, RAW files contain more information than JPEGs, due to the lack of compression. Shooting RAW allows you to capture the most shadow and highlight detail possible in each file, and also gives you the flexibility to tweak the white balance for the best possible colours and skin tones. ▶

**Q&A** Lighting it up

Pro Paul Underhill gives us his tips for using available light

[www.paulunderhill.com](http://www.paulunderhill.com)



**What kit do you recommend for shooting parties and events using available light?**

Invest in wide aperture lenses. That makes a big difference. Most of my kit is made up of prime lenses, like the Canon 35mm f1.4 L USM and the Canon 50mm f1.2 L USM. The main

challenges of using available light are darkness, uneven lighting and the resultant different colour balances. By using cameras like the Canon EOS-1D X and the Canon EOS 5D Mark III and shooting in RAW, the amount of stops that I can recover is absolutely fantastic. Even the prosumer cameras now have great sensors in this respect.

**What techniques do you use to shoot available light at parties and events?**

I shoot and expose for the lighting that's there. If there's one light shining on someone on stage, I expose for that light source and not for the entire scene. This way you can capture the atmosphere. Generally, I shoot in manual rather than trusting the camera, especially when it's dark. That's a classic mistake – overexposing a dark scene. If it is dark, it's meant to be dark. That sort of atmosphere is there for a reason, so if it's atmosphere that you want to capture, don't overexpose to bring up the shadows.

**What other tips do you have for using the available light?**

Take a test shot and look. Technology has changed – you've now got feedback on the back of the camera.

**What are the advantages of using available light at parties and events?**

Available light doesn't disturb the scene. It's unobtrusive. You record the atmosphere whereas flash can destroy it and make it very flat – especially on-camera flash when not used correctly. Flash also draws attention to you, and you can't necessarily take as many pictures using flash as the flash might actually miss on certain frames.



© Paul Underhill

▲ **PEOPLE POWER**

Capturing happy expressions is a huge part of creating great images of parties and events  
**Shot details:** Canon EOS 5D Mark III with a 16-35mm lens at 16mm and f4, 1/800sec, ISO 200

## ▶ Working with flash

Sometimes, getting the best images will require you to use flash. We show you how to get the best results at parties

Using flash at parties and events can be something of a double-edged sword. On the one hand, flash renders your chances of remaining inconspicuous considerably lower, and people are much more likely to grow tired of a flash firing constantly than they are of the comparatively benign sound of a camera's shutter. However, at some parties and events, flash may be unavoidable, as the available light will be either be too uninteresting and dull to use or there may simply not be enough of it, resulting in nothing but very dark frames – even at a high ISO, slow shutter speed and wide aperture. Let's not forget also that your flash has plenty of creative potential, particularly when used off-camera or in combination with slower shutter speeds, so using flash can be about much more than simply coping with bad light.

The first secret to success with flash at parties and events is to avoid using your flash on-camera, fired directly at the subject without modification and at normal shutter speeds. If all these three boxes are ticked at any one time, then you're likely to find that your images look rather flat and unexciting. Basically, the fact that you have used flash will be all too obvious, and you run the risk of your images looking like little more than well-composed snaps.

Using your flash off-camera is a fantastic way of avoiding many of the problems that normally result

### ▶▶ FLASH DANCE

Getting in close and using a wide-angle lens while people are dancing is a great way to capture dynamic images, especially when combined with slow-sync flash  
**Shot details:** Canon EOS 5D Mark II with 16-35mm lens at 16mm and f5, 1/15sec, ISO 2000



© Ron and Gabrielle Levy

## Slow-sync flash

Here's how to combine flash with a slow shutter speed for creative effects at parties and events

In manual or shutter priority modes, you simply set a slow shutter speed in order to use slow-sync flash. If you favour shooting using aperture priority mode, many cameras allow you to set your flash controls to slow-sync flash mode. Your camera will therefore select an aperture that facilitates a slower shutter speed. You should also set your flash controls to rear-curtain sync mode. This means that your flash will fire just before the shutter curtains in your camera close, rather than just after they open. This allows any motion blur that you record to trail behind the subject, which generally looks more appealing and natural.



**1 Slow it down** If you are shooting in manual mode or shutter priority then simply dial your camera to a slow shutter speed.



**2 Slow-sync** If you prefer to shoot in aperture priority mode, you can set your camera to slow-sync flash mode via a button or menu option.



**3 Rear-curtain** Set your camera to rear-curtain sync mode. This ensures that the ambient light will trail behind your subjects as they move.

## Removing red-eye

Nothing looks quite as unappealing as glowing red eyes, so we show you how to get rid of them in Photoshop

Many cameras now come with a red-eye reduction setting, in which pre-flashes are emitted that cause the pupils of the eyes to contract, therefore reducing or eliminating the problem. However, it's good to be able to call on Photoshop to get rid of problems with red-eye as well. Fortunately, since Photoshop CS2, we've had access to the Red Eye tool, which makes incredibly light work of removing red eye. Here's how it works...



Before



**1 Red Eye Tool** The Red Eye tool is nestled in the same menu as the Healing Brush. You can hold the Shift key and press the J key until it appears.



**2 Duplicate layer** It's a good idea to create a duplicate layer before you continue working, as this allows you to quickly and easily correct any mistakes you may make.



**3 Red removal** The default settings for the Red Eye Tool work well. Simply click and drag over the offending pupils and watch the red disappear!

from using flash, as it allows you to change the angle at which your flash hits the subject and you can also attach modifiers like softboxes and umbrellas. However, it takes a little extra confidence, time and space to do so.

The chances are that you'll need to switch your flash into manual mode if you plan to use it on a stand, which means that you may not obtain the correct power level for a good exposure straightaway unless you are very experienced. You'll also need to be prepared to tinker with the flash if the light levels in the room change at any point, so using your flash off-camera isn't the quickest method of working at a party or event. Portable flash stands also require space that may not be readily available at many parties and events, and there's a risk that they could get knocked over. These factors need to be taken into account when using an off-camera flash at a party or event.

However, some photographers find that they are able to use their flash off-camera by holding it in one hand while operating their camera with the other. This requires the use of a flash sync cord or a trigger like Nikon's Creative Lighting System. The big advantages with this method are that you can use TTL-flash, rather than having to rely on manual

mode, and you don't have to worry about your flash getting knocked flying by a partygoer.

This can obviously be awkward, so a great alternative is to actually keep your flash on-camera and tilt the flash head so that you can bounce it off the ceiling or a nearby wall. This results in a much more diffuse and natural-looking result and is very often the best, quickest, easiest and most effective flash solution. Just be aware that your flash has to travel further to illuminate your subject, which

requires slightly more power and can therefore cause your flash to take a little longer to recycle between shots. There are also modifiers available that can be used when your flash is on-camera, like the Stofen Omni-Bounce.

Last, you can try using a slow shutter

speed and firing your flash – using rear-curtain sync – to capture motion and a glow of ambient light. Slow-sync flash can work particularly well when people are dancing, but it's a technique that has to be well-executed as it can easily end up looking a little untidy and clichéd if not. This is a good example of where your camera's LCD really comes into its own, allowing you to check the results to ensure that you have the correct combination of shutter speed, flash output and composition.

“The first secret to success with flash is to avoid using your flash on-camera, fired directly at the subject”

## Five tips for great results from flash

### 01 TAKE IT OFF

Avoid using your flash on-camera, pointed directly at your subject – particularly without any form of modification. This will create flat, lifeless lighting.

### 02 BOUNCING BACK

Look for a reflective surface, like a white ceiling or wall, to bounce your flash from, thus creating soft, diffuse light.

### 03 BALANCING ACT

Try thinking of the light from your flash and the ambient light as two separate entities and try to balance them.

### 04 HOLD ON

Try handholding your flash off-camera. This can be tricky but is a great way of getting better results from your flash without the need for portable stands, which can slow you down and get in the way.

### 05 SPEED CONTROL

Consider using your flash at slow shutter speeds. Slow-sync flash can create some interesting creative effects when combined with rear-curtain flash sync.



© Ron and Gabrielle Levy

## Candid captures

Photographing events requires excellent management skills – here are our dos and don'ts!

At parties and events you will be called on to capture huge groups of people, most of whom you will never meet before and will never meet again.

Depending on the type of event, these people may be serious and emotional, or inebriated and rowdy. Your ability to cope with a range of scenarios with tact and sensitivity will either make or break the success of your photos.

If you are going to be photographing the event in a professional capacity, it's important not to leave everything to chance on the day, but to begin working with your clients well in advance to develop a dialogue with them about how the event or party is scheduled to proceed. This gives you the opportunity to ensure that you understand the nature of the event fully, which improves your ability to anticipate key moments on the day. It may also provide you, as the photographer for the event, with an opportunity to give the clients some of your own ideas as to what you think will work, and what will help you to get better images. "We try to educate our clients so that

their expectations can be met," explains Gabrielle Levy. "As the photographer, you have to understand the event. We see videographers who don't really know what a bar mitzvah is and so they have no idea what to capture."

On the day, good interpersonal skills really are important. As professional shooter Paul Underhill says, "You need to be aware of etiquette and basic manners", but it's not merely a matter of ensuring that you don't offend anyone along the way. It's vital that you hone your ability to read people and respond to their emotions so that you are able to capture the very best shots.

Paul believes that being attentive is key. "You need to be observant," he says. "It's about observing how people are and then interacting with them

accordingly. To capture a moment, you need to be in the right place at the right time – that comes from anticipation of the moment through observation."

This holds true no matter what kind of event you are photographing. "At a music event, you get dead spaces in crowds. You get people who don't really do much and you get groups of people who are really mad for it," explains Paul. "Observation of that

allows you to get in the right positions and get the right composition. It's the same for a wedding. You'll get people who are extrovert and you'll get people who are really quiet, people who stand in very small groups and look bored. It's about observing how people are and then interacting with them."

One technique that photographers who capture parties and events use a lot is what psychologists refer to as 'mirroring'.

This means responding to people's emotions by mirroring them but also exhibiting certain behaviour in the hope that other people will 'mirror' this back to you. Photographers can utilise this so that they are not relying purely on things happening spontaneously and to build a rapport with the people they are capturing.

### Adapt to the occasion for super shots

Getting great people shots depends on your ability to notice what's going on around you and respond to it appropriately. If it's a quiet and sensitive moment, then you need to be quiet and sensitive too!

#### BE FLASH

Using a slow shutter speed, combined with handheld flash, can allow you to capture great images of people dancing at parties  
**Shot details:** Canon EOS 5D Mark II with a 16–35mm lens at 16mm and f4, 1/10sec, ISO 640

#### SECRET SNAP

By kneeling down, remaining unobtrusive and keeping a careful eye on proceedings, you can capture moments like this  
**Shot details:** Canon EOS 5D Mark III with a 35mm lens at f2.8, 1/200sec, ISO 5000

## Q&A Fearless flash

Ron and Gabrielle Levy are experts at capturing bar mitzvahs and weddings. They spoke to us about using flash successfully



[www.ronlevyphotography.com](http://www.ronlevyphotography.com)

#### What advice do you have for using flash at parties and events?

Even though low lighting during a wedding ceremony or a bar mitzvah in the synagogue is a challenge, you cannot distract people with flash. But I love flash; if I want to 'turn off' the ambient light and get a moodier picture then I can do that. I love dragging the shutter and using rear-curtain flash sync, and we try to use flash modifiers to spread the light and make it softer. You have to know your flash and be able to put it in the right modes. A lot of people have a hard time controlling their flash because they over-power it.

#### What kinds of lighting challenges do you encounter when you are capturing parties and events?

DJs sometimes bring lots of lights that are really cool and we actually like to shoot towards those lights, but sometimes they bring lasers and you get all these spots on people's faces!

#### What tips do you have for anyone wanting to photograph parties and events?

You'd better be quick on changing settings and thinking fast. It's really important. You have to be able to handle that pressure and be able to change your settings quickly as things unfold.

At events, you never know what's going to be thrown your way and you always have to be on your toes, always looking over your shoulder and always ready for the next thing. If you're not the type of person who is able to do that then I don't think you'll do well in an event setting.

You're always given less time than what you need so you have to just try to get whatever you can as fast as you can and the best way that you can. Your camera settings need to be second nature so you are not worrying about them. Moments will be long gone while you are trying to remember what a button on your camera does!



© Paul Underhill

Paul says that he uses this mirroring technique frequently when capturing events such as music gigs and parties like wedding receptions. "I'm often trying to entice a moment to happen. I'll get excited and share that excitement through my body language and how I vocalise – and I get a reaction from it. But you have to be adaptive. When it's a really sensitive moment, it's about being unobtrusive; it's about the right body language. I might kneel a lot

and I might hold my camera differently." Ron Levy echoes this: "Making things fun is a huge part of what we do."

One of the key elements of party and event photography is persistence, coupled with a certain amount of fearlessness. Paul says that to capture great images, "You need to get involved. It's about being fluid and going with it – and not being afraid. People are looking for you to capture the essence of

the atmosphere, so it's about knowing your subject and pursuing 'the moment'."

Ron and Gabrielle both agree with Paul that people are looking for images that portray the feeling of the event or party. "They are looking for you to capture the emotion of the day, and the unique personalities of their family. They want you to really tell a story and encapsulate the spirit of the day," explains Gabrielle. ▶

# Q&A Bespoke booth

We speak to Adam Richardson of The Photo Lounge about a bespoke service and the benefits it offers party guests and organisers



[www.the-photo-lounge.co.uk](http://www.the-photo-lounge.co.uk)

**What kind of photography service do you offer?**

We provide an event photography service that takes a creative and bespoke twist on the old-school photo booth concept. From weddings and birthdays to corporate shindigs, The Photo Lounge offers 'photo entertainment' to guests, creating an atmosphere that encourages

silliness and spontaneity. The Photo Lounge system allows guests to smile and pose as it automatically counts down through a photo sequence in order to produce instant photographic prints for the guests to take away.

**What do you feel that people are looking for in photographs of events and parties?**

As nearly everybody now carries a camera or smartphone and with the recent boom in instant photo sharing, I feel people now expect more from event photography than receiving just a disc of images in the days following an event. I feel that people are looking for an event photography service that ticks more boxes and produces results that cannot be replicated by the guests – in an amateur fashion –

themselves. The Photo Lounge not only produces digital photos that capture guests having a good time, but also serves as an entertainment centrepiece.

**As a photographer or business owner, what kind of person do you need to be to offer this service?**

The Photo Lounge is fully bespoke, therefore it is important to be a creative thinker to ensure every event is different to the last and new ideas are constantly being introduced to ensure we don't fall into trap of becoming a generic "photo booth". It is also crucial to be a people person, to be able to connect and interact with guests of all ages and to keep high levels of energy and enthusiasm at all times until late into the night. I feel this is just as important, if not more so than the set-up itself. At events, it can sometimes be more about crowd control than anything else, whether it is groups of teenagers at a prom or partygoers under the influence of alcohol at a festival. It is all part and parcel of offering an event photography service.

**What are the common mistakes or misconceptions people make about party or event photography?**

I think the biggest misconception people make about event photography is the amount of time that is invested before and after the events themselves. From the hours of preparation to the hours spent getting to and from a venue, to the setting-up and de-rigging time. People only consider the event coverage time and do not factor in the bigger picture.



© The Photo Lounge

**▶ MORE ON OFFER**  
The Photo Lounge offers a service that provides something extra at parties and events

**◀◀ GROUP SHOT**  
Fun group shots can be hard to get at parties and events but The Photo Lounge is a great solution



© The Photo Lounge



© The Photo Lounge

**◀◀ YOUNG AND OLD**  
Getting great images of all age groups isn't easy but the right kind of setup can make all the difference

**▶ PROP DEPARTMENT**  
A few well-chosen, bespoke props are an ideal way of getting party images that stand out from the pack



“I feel that people are looking for an event photography service that ticks more boxes and produces results that cannot be replicated by the guests – in an amateur fashion – themselves”

**NEXT MONTH ASTRO PHOTOS**  
Shoot the skies in style with our guide

**SHOW US YOUR SHOTS:** If you've got some fantastic and fun-filled event or party photographs that you'd like to show to the world, sign up for a free gallery on our website at [www.dphotographer.co.uk](http://www.dphotographer.co.uk) and upload them today