



Using a Silhouettist

An abridged extract from “Mastering Silhouettes”

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This guide was written primarily with weddings in mind, but many of the points raised can equally be applied to any event. "Mastering Silhouettes" was published in 2012 and is available direct from the author.

The Wedding Silhouettist

Weddings and silhouettes go well together. Whether making a portrait for the bride and groom or cutting profiles of the guests, the nostalgia and romance of the art blends well with the mood of the event. It may be an occasion to consider hiring a professional. This guide will help you get the best out of a professional silhouettist should you choose to hire one.

There are two ways you might like to use a professional artist. The first is to commission a portrait of the bride and groom. This can be done using photographs taken on the day, either by you or in consultation with the wedding photographer. The second is to ask the artist to appear at the wedding itself and create instant portraits for the guests, for this it's better to find an artist who specialises in rapid freehand cuttings. The artist will go around the room cutting silhouettes and giving them away as a souvenir of the day.



A hollow-cut silhouette of the bride and groom, made after the event from a photograph and lightly embellished with grey watercolour and a little gold paint.



A montage of all the silhouettes made at a wedding

Booking a professional

Booking an artist to attend a wedding requires a little thought. Find out how silhouettes are presented to guests on the day. The artist should provide smart printed backing cards to mount individual silhouettes as they are made, and there are bound to be other extras on offer.

For example, silhouettes of the bride and groom cut in advance can be scanned and used on invitations and other event stationary, as well as the silhouette mounting cards used on the day. You could make these silhouettes yourself (using any project in the book), or else send some photographs to the artist in advance. This will help create a theme for the event, meaning silhouettes start to seem a natural part of the proceedings.

A paper memento

The illustration shows a montage of silhouettes created after a wedding, which was made by scanning the duplicate copy, or “off-cut”, of each silhouette. Most of the guests are cut at bust length, while others are half length. The bride and groom - together with a bridesmaid and a pageboy - are cut in full length, while other guests have been cut as couples, either facing each other or side-by-side. Many of the silhouettes are plain shades, while others have restrained slash-cut embellishments to indicate collars and ties. One has been cut off at the neck, with just a tie to indicate the body. Although most are straight portraits, one or two have a noticeable degree of caricature.

Variety is part of the fun of freehand silhouette cutting; most of these cuttings were not planned or thought about for more than a few seconds. This level of spontaneity arises after years of determined practice and is an important part of the joy a professional artist can bring to an event.

Thinking about numbers

A professional silhouette cutter can cut even the most complicated of profiles within two minutes, sometimes less. Allowing time to stick silhouettes on card and exchange a few words with the guests, this means you can expect around 25 to 30 silhouettes per hour. This may seem like cold calculation but it's worth comparing this to the total number of guests at the wedding. If, for example, you are expecting 100 guests, it could take 4 hours of continuous cutting to silhouette everybody. Does the artist charge by the hour or a one-off fee? Allowing for a break, is this much time even available during the reception?

Consider, therefore, if it is really necessary for everybody to receive a silhouette, or simply to allow the silhouette cutting to be part of the fun on the day. A professional artist will be used to dealing with this situation and will know how to entertain everybody without necessarily cutting everybody out. A big part of the joy in silhouettes comes from watching them appear - as if by magic - in the hands of an expert.

Alternatively, if you have a large number of guests does the artist know another silhouettist who could help out on the day? Four hands can cut many more silhouettes than two, but of course there will be an extra fee to pay.

Giving all these questions some thought in advance will help ensure expectations are reasonable and everything goes well on the day.



A pair of full-length silhouettes cut freehand on the day