



The Album Design Process

Introduction

Our general album design process and policies have been in place for several years now. This process has proved to be by far the most satisfying to both our clients and our graphic designers. Anyone who designs an album needs to understand their part in what needs to be an efficient design process for us to offer truly custom album design at a reasonable price. Departures from this process raise the price to everyone else and lengthen the design process – even into more than a year. In fact, we recently had to raise album prices to accommodate those variances from the efficient design process that are inevitable, but these need to be minimized. Efficiency is an essential part of the creative process. For a work of art comprised of often over a hundred elements to blend together successfully as a whole it has to be created in an efficient manner – smoothly so to speak. Starts and stops of months in the process are the opposite of that. Some clients think they can wait three months to review a proposed design and get back to us and it won't affect the quality of their design otherwise – but we have found over many years experience that it does. Keep focused – be timely. Please read this carefully as you begin to design what should be a beautiful work of custom designed art.

Selecting images for your album

This advice assumes you are designing a 30 or 40 page coffee table book. Those are by far the most common number of pages in our albums. You should select around 60-65 images for a 30 page album and 80-85 images for a 40 page album. You should consider some images in addition as secondary alternative images, especially if you think you might need a horizontal instead of a vertical image, for example. But have a list of the primary images, and roughly in the order you would like them in the album and some idea of the priority you would like to give that image and any suggestions you may have about image manipulation – like if you want this image in B&W instead of color or selectively placed color on a B&W, or a special cropping, or even a little special touch up work like removing a car from the background. If you have a collection of 4x6 proofs, these should be already pulled from the books. If you have a catalog you should mark the images with post-its. Whatever proofing you have, you should type out a list in some way – handwriting makes for mistakes in interpreting the image numbers. The best way to do this is to actually take images from the Index CD we have given you and make a new folder on your computer with the images you want in the album and burn that collection onto a new CD and bring that CD to the planning. We sometimes have clients come to the design session and they have not looked at their images for a couple of months and spend the first 45 minutes of the session reacquainting themselves with the images and pulling what they need to get to work. That is very inefficient. Worse, clients have had us design an album for them from a poorly selected collection of images and then want to change out half the images and basically start over after we have created a complete design for them from the selection they gave us. Please have considered your images carefully before coming to the design session. Don't only consider what I call feature images – the main images that record the human activity of the day. You should also consider some of the nice detail shots we will have taken throughout the day – including flowers, place settings, programs, stained glass display, and etc. that can be used in some way as backgrounds or as design details to fill in blank space in a meaningful way. These are not usually counted as part of the 80 or so

images mentioned above. Again, please prioritize these images – let us know which ones are the most meaningful to you. There may be an image of a family heirloom we don't recognize the importance of, for example.

Conveying Artistic Style and Design Preferences

The next step in the process is scheduling the date to meet with your graphic designer and conveying to them your likes and dislikes in album design. This again is very important – this is a custom design process - take advantage of that. The way we do custom design is that we expect to be oriented/directed by the clients at the beginning of the process so we design an album that meets the client's personal preferences. Don't just give us the images and intentionally give us full rein to design anything and then start making innumerable changes in the design work after we have spent enormous amounts of time creating a complete design for you. Some couples seem to think that is how custom design works – but that is completely backwards. That only works if you are willing to accept virtually any design we come up with.

This design session with the graphic designer usually takes 1.5 – 2 hours. The couples often go over what they have seen in our previously completed demo albums – please see our website for various design examples at <http://www.journalisticstyle.com/album.html> and convey what you like and dislike about what you see. Some clients that have basically done their homework can convey these preferences very quickly. You may want to print out some like/dislike sample pages from our website. That really helps. But we usually go over sample work here at the office anyway. You don't want to get too carried away and tie the designer's hands too much, on the other hand. We have had clients tie our designer's hands so much they got a rather conservative design because that was all that could be designed given their instructions – and they were happy.

Presenting the design to clients and feedback/change options

Several weeks after the design session we create a private website of the proposed album design for the clients to consider. These are exactly like our demo album designs at <http://www.journalisticstyle.com/album.html> . We email a link to this site to the clients. We expect the clients to have comments. We are happy to make minor changes at no additional charge – switch out a photo here, resize an image there, move images, lighten or darken the background image etc. But at some point these may turn into major changes that require a serious amount of additional design time and we need to charge a small fee at that point – just to keep the system “honest”. If we don't do that, some clients will go on forever requesting small changes – we have had to take a year to design some albums for this reason. And we would have to raise album price to everyone to cover those clients who abuse the system. The charge is just \$10.00 per significant change – it is below the actual cost to us. A significant change is defined as one that requires significant graphic design time to accomplish. Changes that generally are not considered significant include changes in brightness or sizing of an image or just moving an image within a spread. And if the clients feel they need another in person design session with the graphic designer; that is an additional \$25.00 – again at cost. The vast majority of the time these additional charges do not apply, but the fact that they are there keeps the system “honest”. We know from experience that this system is fair and works out best for everyone. Our

designs are as beautiful as that of any studio in this city and way less expensive than those of comparable quality.

The clients are given two weeks to reply/comment on a proposed design – after that it is assumed the client has given a de facto OK to the design and we can proceed to print and bind the album.

Overall time frame for album design/creation

The overall time to design and create an album can vary from around 8 weeks to over 16 weeks. Generally, the “pure” coffee table albums take 4 weeks less time to design and create than the “flush mount” albums. From the time the clients meet with the designer, it may take an average of three weeks before a proposed design is created. Then it usually takes around two weeks before the design is finalized with the “blessing” of the clients and the printing/binding process starts. From this point it only takes around four weeks for the “pure” albums to get done and 9 weeks for the “flush” albums to get done. We cannot guarantee this time frame – particularly in the Fall.

A word on the Christmas Rush

We cannot guarantee albums for Christmas. Basically, the sooner you design your album, the better. One of our album printer/binders – the “pure” coffee table album creator, imposed an unexpected and incredibly early “drop dead” deadline on us last year. We had to have our designs completed and OK’d by the clients by November 1st to meet it. That is pretty much impossible unless the design process starts by the very beginning of September. We will try and take care of clients that try and offer albums for Christmas presents and the album isn’t quite ready for Christmas – like offering free prints with a nice letter about their getting the albums very soon. That happened in one case this year. But we can’t guarantee or “promise” that the album will be ready for Christmas. There are too many complications that can affect that, and especially during the Christmas rush. All we can do is do our best and help make the clients and their intended gift recipients have a most merry Christmas.

Thank you for reading this rather lengthy orientation to our design process.

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