

Caught on Camera

It seems the whole world is going green nowadays ... Heidi Green, that is. Heidi Green is New York City's most beloved and sought-after family photographer, known around town for magically capturing kids' birthday parties and for her unique, fun family portraits.

Green's photography career began in a classroom. Not a photography classroom—a preschool classroom, as a teacher. It was her 15 years as an early-childhood teacher that she says sparked her passion for photographing children.

After hearing parents complain year after year about their children's stale, cookie-cutter school portraits, Green was inspired to create a more natural approach to children's photography. "I began bringing my camera to class to take candid shots of the kids, and soon all the parents wanted to buy them. I thought, 'Maybe I'm onto something here.'" Within a few months, she had so much photo business that she resigned from her teaching job, launched Heidi Green Photography and quickly became a household name among knowledgeable New York City moms and top kids' party venues.

With a B.A. in communications from the University of Michigan, a Masters in education from the University of California, Los Angeles, and additional training from the International

Center for Photography in New York, Green has both the technical skills and the most unteachable one—a natural ability to relate to kids. Whether it's a shot of your daughter eagerly blowing out the candles on her fifth birthday cake; your 1-year-old son taking his first, unsteady steps; or your family's annual holiday card portraits in Central Park, Green approaches each assignment as if it were a giant playdate.

On the technical side, Heidi forgoes the use of backdrops, artificial lighting or props. Instead, she has pioneered her own technique, which she calls "staged candid."

"Sometimes it's necessary to help create that 'perfect' moment, so we set up role-playing exercises that allow kids to be creative," Green explains. "I originated this method to counter the 'say cheese and snap' approach that too many photographers still utilize. I found that when you actually connect with the child, it makes a world of difference in the final product."

This is why Jeff Zucker, CEO of NBC Universal Television and proud father of four, insists that Heidi document all of his family's

special occasions. "Heidi's professionalism, unique charm and rapport with children are why she's a staple at all of our family functions. Photographing children is truly her niche."

In addition to photographing her young clients' most important milestones, Green is also a popular expert and speaker, instructing others on how to take great family photos.

Her cardinal piece of advice on this topic: "Try to relax and have fun with the moment. You'll see better results, and rediscover your own childhood in the process."



Heidi Green's Top 10 Tips on Photographing Children

1. Know your subject. Choose a location where your child feels comfortable and at ease so that they'll be themselves. If your child loves to run, photograph them in the park. If they love to curl up at home and read their favorite book, there's your perfect setting.

2. Use natural (sun) light as much as possible. A flash can frighten babies and young kids; add harsh shadows; and produce red eye.

3. Focus on their eyes. A sharp, tight shot of your child's eyes is like looking into their soul.

4. Get down low so that you're eye to eye with your subject. The shots taken from a child's perspective will be more unique and personal than those taken from above.

5. Don't be afraid to get close to the subject and fill the whole frame. With more active kids, this won't be easy; as an alternative, keep your distance and use a zoom lens for the same effect.

6. Have fun and experiment with various compositions and angles. You can get a little artsy by focusing in on different body parts: hands, ears, lips, belly buttons, etc.

7. Take tons of photos. Don't be too concerned about getting the "perfect shot." If you're patient and relaxed, there will always be some great ones in the end.

8. Include other people and family pets in the photos. This is a great way to capture memories of your family and pets together. I'm not a fan of props, but it's a good idea to include your

child's favorite doll, ball or toy—something you'll associate with them when you look back on the photos.

9. Choose non-distracting backgrounds. Some of the most picturesque settings are wide, green fields and well-lit rooms with simple walls and floors. If something in the background doesn't add to the photo, remove it so that the subject remains the focus.

10. Be playful so that your child has fun. Make sure to capture them doing what they love most, whether it's running, jumping, swimming, laughing or playing with their favorite toys. Even simple activities like coloring, watching TV, eating and sleeping can produce beautiful, intimate photos.

11. If all else fails ... you know where to find me. :-)