



ENGAGEMENT SESSION STYLE GUIDE

# What to *Wear*

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Colors, outfit pairings & styling tips  
for photos that feel timeless and completely you

*Emmy Kienast Photography*

# Let's get you dressed.

*Your engagement session is about the two of you — how you laugh, lean in and move together. The right outfits simply help that shine.*

The number one question I get before a session is “*What should we wear?*” This guide is my answer. It's built from the looks I love most and pin again and again: soft neutrals and warm earth tones, flowy dresses that catch the breeze, easy denim-and-linen pairings, and one polished, formal look for a little drama. These photograph beautifully in Charleston's golden light and still feel timeless years from now.

You don't need to buy a whole new wardrobe. Start with what you already love and feel great in, then use the palettes and pairings here to pull it together.

## The short version

- **Stick to neutrals and earth tones.** They flatter every skin tone and never look dated.
- **Coordinate, don't match.** Share two or three colors between you rather than wearing the same thing.
- **Choose fabric with movement and texture** — flowy skirts, linen, knits, soft denim.
- **Plan two looks:** one relaxed, one elevated. It doubles the variety in your gallery.
- **Comfort shows on camera.** If you're tugging at it, it's not the one.

### *Why neutrals work so well*

Warm, muted colors let your faces, your connection and the scenery do the talking. They blend with live oaks, marsh grass, brick and cobblestone instead of competing with them — and they won't clash with your home décor when your favorite print ends up on the wall.

# Your color palette

*Pick two or three shades from these families and build your outfits around them.*

## Light neutrals



Ivory



Cream



Oatmeal



Sand



Soft taupe

## Earth tones



Camel



Terracotta



Rust



Olive



Sage

## Deep anchors



Chocolate



Espresso



Denim blue



Charcoal



Black (formal)

| If you love...     | Try pairing it with                          |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| Cream or ivory     | Camel, chocolate, denim blue, or olive       |
| Terracotta or rust | Cream, sand, chocolate, or medium-wash denim |
| Sage or olive      | Oatmeal, tan, white linen, or chocolate      |
| Denim blue         | White or cream linen, camel, rust            |
| Black (formal)     | Black, charcoal, or champagne and ivory      |

## What to skip

*A few things tend to distract in photos. None are hard rules, but they're worth knowing.*

- **Neon and very saturated brights.** They reflect color onto skin and pull the eye away from your faces.
- **Small, busy patterns** like tiny checks, thin stripes and houndstooth can flicker on camera. Larger, soft florals or subtle textures are fine for one of you.
- **Logos, graphics and words.** They date photos quickly and draw attention.
- **Identical outfits.** Matching head-to-toe feels staged; complementary looks feel natural.
- **Head-to-toe stark white** on both of you, especially in bright sun. Mix in cream, oatmeal or a darker piece.
- **Anything too short, tight or stiff** for sitting in the grass, walking, or being picked up and twirled.

## Coordinate, don't match

The easiest way to look cohesive is to balance light and dark between you. If one of you wears a light, flowy piece, the other can ground it with a deeper tone. Then tie the two together with one shared color — a camel belt and camel trousers, a rust dress and a rust-toned shirt under a jacket.

- **Share a color family**, not an exact shade.
- **Match formality level.** A gown with shorts, or a suit with a sundress, reads as mismatched.
- **Mix textures** — linen, knit, suede, silk, denim. Texture adds depth, especially in neutral palettes.
- **Lay your outfits side by side** on the bed and snap a photo. If one pulls your eye first, adjust.

### *Send me a sneak peek*

Not sure? Text or email me photos of your options a week or so before your session. I'm always happy to help you choose — it's one of my favorite parts of the process.

# Flowy & romantic

*Soft, airy and full of movement — made for walking through tall grass, twirling on the beach and wind-swept, golden-hour moments.*

## One of you

- A flowy maxi or midi dress in cream, sand, sage, terracotta or rust
- Fabrics that move: chiffon, crepe, gauzy cotton, linen or soft satin
- Tiered, wrap or open-back styles; a subtle floral works too
- Flat sandals or bare feet at the beach; strappy block heels downtown

## The other

- A linen or cotton button-down in white, oatmeal or a soft earth tone
- Tailored chinos or relaxed trousers in tan, olive or chocolate
- Sleeves rolled, top button open for an easy, relaxed feel
- Leather loafers, suede chukkas or clean minimalist sneakers

## Why it works

The movement in a flowing skirt adds life to every frame, and soft, warm tones glow in late-day light. Grounding it with a structured, deeper neutral keeps the pairing balanced.

### Styling tips

- Choose a skirt with some length and fullness — it's what creates those dreamy motion shots.
- Try a twirl at home in front of a mirror; if it lifts too much in a breeze, bring a slip or shorts.
- Beach session? Pick a dress you won't mind getting a little sandy or wet at the hem.

# Denim & linen

*Relaxed, effortless and very “you two on a Saturday.” This pairing is perfect for a first look of the session, a downtown stroll, or a dockside sunset.*

## One of you

- A linen dress, linen set, or wide-leg linen pants with a simple top
- Or: well-fitted jeans with a cream linen blouse, knit tank or bodysuit
- Colors: white, cream, oatmeal, sage or rust against the blue
- Sandals, espadrilles, low mules or white sneakers

## The other

- Medium- or dark-wash jeans with a clean, tailored fit
- A linen or cotton shirt in white, cream, sand or olive
- Optional: a light denim or chore jacket slung over the shoulder
- Leather boots, loafers or simple sneakers

## Why it works

Denim is a neutral in its own right, and linen's natural texture keeps it from feeling flat. The combination reads casual but intentional, and it's the easiest look to pull straight from your closet.

### Styling tips

- If you both wear denim, keep it to one piece each and vary the washes.
- Avoid double-denim on one person unless the washes clearly contrast.
- Skip heavily distressed or ripped jeans — they tend to read messy in portraits.
- Linen wrinkles. In Charleston, lean in — it's part of the charm. A quick steam before you leave is plenty.

# The formal look

*Your chance to dress up. One polished, elevated look adds a whole new mood to your gallery — think downtown streets, a historic doorway, a rooftop at sunset, or a candlelit restaurant.*

## One of you

- A floor-length gown, slip dress or elegant midi
- Colors: black, chocolate, champagne, ivory or a deep olive or rust
- Satin, silk, crepe or velvet in cooler months
- Heels you can walk on cobblestone in, or a flat for walking between spots

## The other

- A tailored suit in charcoal, navy, chocolate or black — or a tuxedo
- Crisp white or black shirt; tie optional, or an open collar for a modern feel
- Swap the jacket for a sweater or vest for a softer take
- Polished dress shoes or loafers

## Why it works

The contrast between an earthy, relaxed first look and a sleek formal second look is what makes a gallery feel complete. Black-tie energy against Charleston's brick and ironwork is timeless.

### Styling tips

- Save the formal look for last, when the light is softest and you're most comfortable in front of the camera.
- Make sure everything fits well through the shoulders and waist — tailoring shows most in formal wear.
- A statement earring, a sleek watch or a bold lip is plenty. Let the silhouette do the work.
- Bring a pop of champagne and two glasses if you'd like a toast shot!

# Dressing for Charleston

*Our weather and terrain are part of what makes photos here so beautiful — plan for them.*

| Season | What to wear                                                                                                                                                              |
|--------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Spring | Light layers. Linen, cotton and flowy dresses. A light jacket or knit for cooler evenings.                                                                                |
| Summer | The most breathable fabrics you own — linen, cotton, gauze. Avoid silk and fitted synthetics, which show sweat. Sessions are scheduled near sunset for comfort and light. |
| Fall   | Earth tones shine. Add texture with suede, light knits and fuller sleeves as it cools.                                                                                    |
| Winter | Chunky knits, wool coats, turtlenecks and long sleeves. Layers look rich in neutrals.                                                                                     |

## Footwear by location

- **Downtown:** cobblestones and uneven brick sidewalks eat thin heels. Choose block heels, or bring flats to walk in.
- **Beach:** barefoot is best. Bring slip-on sandals for the walk to and from the sand.
- **Marsh, fields and gardens:** soft ground and tall grass. Avoid stilettos; flats, boots or loafers work well.

## Humidity & hair

Humidity is real here, especially May through September. Soft, undone hairstyles hold up best, and a little texture spray goes a long way. If you're booking hair and makeup, ask for looks designed for humidity, and bring blotting papers and a small hair tie.

### *Bug season*

No-see-ums love the marsh at dusk. Longer hemlines and light layers help, and I always keep bug spray in my bag — just let me know if you have a preference or sensitivity.

# The finishing touches

*The little things you'll notice when you see your photos up close.*

- **Your ring:** give it a good clean the night before. Ring close-ups are a session favorite.
- **Nails:** clean and neat, in a neutral or soft tone. No chipped polish.
- **Accessories:** simple and meaningful — delicate jewelry, a watch, a hat, a belt. Remove fitness trackers and hair ties from wrists.
- **Glasses:** wear them if you usually do! Anti-glare lenses help.
- **Fit:** steam or iron everything, check hems, and remove tags and stickers.
- **Pockets:** empty them — phones, keys and wallets create lumps.
- **Layers:** a denim jacket, blazer, knit or wrap adds instant variety.
- **Props (optional):** a picnic blanket, a bottle of champagne, your dog, a vintage car — things that mean something to you.

## What to bring

- |                                                                    |                                                                  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Both outfits, steamed and on hangers      | <input type="checkbox"/> Comfortable shoes for walking           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accessories and a backup pair of earrings | <input type="checkbox"/> Water and a small snack                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lint roller and safety pins               | <input type="checkbox"/> Blotting papers, lip color and a brush  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hair ties and bobby pins                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Bug spray and sunscreen (applied early) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A small towel for beach sessions          | <input type="checkbox"/> Any props you'd like to use             |

### *Most of all*

Wear something that feels like the best version of you. When you're comfortable, you relax — and that's when the real, in-between moments happen.

SEE YOU SOON

# *Can't wait to photograph you two.*

Have questions about outfits, locations or timing? Send me your ideas anytime — I'm happy to help you plan every detail of your session.

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