

SA's lovely Revlon girl takes a break from the catwalks and cameras of Paris and New York

SHE'S seen herself larger than life on a giant TV screen in New York's Times Square, strolled the most celebrated fashion catwalks in Paris in creations by Dior, Versace and Yves St Laurent, and in London her home is a luxury flat next door to Kensington Palace where Princess Diana used to live.

But for summer Nicola Breytenbach (26) came home to South Africa. In flipflops and a miniskirt she gave us an interview in the Cape Town holiday house she's renting with her dad, brother and boyfriend.

The long, blonde mane that advertised American beauty house Revlon's hair products for two years is now honey brown and although Cape Town's notorious Southeaster has tousled it she makes no attempt to comb it into submission.

"The weather here is still better than in London," she says unfazed.

Nicola was born in Durban, attended primary school in Pretoria and spent family summer holidays in Cape Town. She was 13 when she, her mom and stepdad moved to Switzerland. But she's remained a South African to the core.

despite the five languages she now speaks – Afrikaans, English, French, Dutch and Italian.

She speaks Afrikaans to mom Rina Rautenbach, who lives in Vienna, and her brother Björn (24), an electrical engineer working in The Hague in the Netherlands. And she's introduced her American boyfriend Ben Steiner (25) to the pleasure of biltong.

BEN in his shorts and T-shirt and Nicola in her bikini beside the pool look like any young couple in love enjoying a seaside holiday. Ben is camera-shy but his lovely bronzed girlfriend is the opposite – over the past seven years she's earned millions being photographed.

Not that they're eager to talk about their financial success. Only long after meeting Ben through friends in Paris did she discover in a roundabout way he comes from a well-to-do family.

His dad Jeffrey Steiner is a wealthy New York businessman with investments in Europe. One of his six homes around the world is in St Tropez on the French Riviera, playground of the rich and famous.

This is where Nicola met Ivana



Trump, ex-wife of American hotel magnate Donald. Nicola says Ivana is a good friend of the Steiner family.

"Ivana came on to my dad," she says with a laugh, indicating Richard, a Durban attorney. "She said he was such a big, strong South African man."

Joan Collins, veteran actress of Dynasty fame, is another of the rich and famous brigade that's visited the Steiner house in St Tropez. "She made a big impression on me because as a kid I knew her on TV. She's larger than life," Nicola says.

Ask her what most attracts her to

Ben and her answer has nothing to do with his wealth or looks. "I can take him anywhere in the world and introduce him to anyone and he'll be comfortable with it. And he never says anything mean about anyone."

Ben, an attractive, dark-haired investment banker, says of Nicola: "She's a nice, normal person – not affected by her success in any way." When they met it wasn't love at first sight. Their relationship blossomed slowly as they got to know each other better in New York. When Ben moved to London 18 months ago she accompanied him.

After five years together they sometimes talk about getting married – but they're in no hurry. "We're both still very young, we're quite happy the way we are now," Nicola says.

She regards Ben as her good-luck charm because since meeting him her career has taken off.

DURING Nicola's last year of school in The Hague her mom's hairdresser asked whether she was interested in modelling.

"I was unsure what I wanted to do after school and thought I would try it out for a year," she says.

But success didn't come overnight. "Modelling isn't as glamorous as it seems. Sometimes you have to walk around for nine hours a day showing your portfolio to people – and you don't even have money to buy a cup of coffee."

After three years of battling to survive on occasional catalogue work her agent sent her to see Dior designer John Galiano.

Dior used her in their next fashion show and she worked for them as a house model.

Before long she was also modelling for other big names.

"When I did my first Versace show I was surrounded by celebrities."

Liz Hurley was one of the models there. Nicola has also shared the catwalk with Kate Moss, Cindy Crawford,

Claudia Schiffer and Britney Spears. Then came the coveted R4-million Revlon contract. For two years she was their hair girl and for a year she advertised their make-up as one of the four faces of Revlon.

Today, wearing hardly any make-up, she looks as naturally lovely as the girl next door. But her green eyes are as remarkable as they are in the glamour pics.

"I love my eyes," Nicola answers spontaneously when asked what she regards as her best feature. But she's no show-off and puts her success down to good luck.

"You don't have anything to do with it – it's up to other people if they like the way you look."

Of course being the ideal model height of 1,78 m is also a great help.

She plans to continue modelling "until they don't want me any more". She's also completed a design course in London and wants to market her own range of swimwear and lingerie.

Like any fashion-conscious woman she spends her money on clothing, shoes and handbags. "And I've spent a lot of it on air tickets," she says.

She and Ben share a passion for travel; he says they've visited more than 20 countries together.

How does she see herself in 10 years?

"Married with three kids," she says, ticking off the years on her fingers. "I'd be doing what I love – designing clothes."

The two will soon soon be moving back to the Big Apple but one day when their children are "grown up she'd like to come

MAIN PICTURE: Nicola Breytenbach in Cape Town. **TOP LEFT:** Nicola (second from left) as one of the four faces of Revlon. **CENTRE LEFT:** Modelling overseas. **BOTTOM:** With brother Björn (left) and dad Richard.

By Elretha Louw

back to South Africa. "When I'm old and grey I'd like to live my last days here."

Until then she'll have to be content with a summer holiday in Cape Town once a year.

And what does she do when in South Africa?

"Well, the first thing I do when I land at the airport is buy a copy of your magazine." □

Sun and Southeaster – I'm home!

She's constantly globe-trotting but beautiful model Nicola Breytenbach chose Cape Town for her summer holiday

