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## SA model Nicola Breytenbach weds in Saint-Tropez - in a Versace gown *nogal!*

**I**T'S not easy to pin down Nicola Breytenbach. In a normal week the SA-born model might be spotted brunching with covergirl friends at New York's chic eateries or jetting around Europe on modelling assignments.

But this is no ordinary week - when we spoke to her Nicola (30) was days away from exchanging vows with her fiancé of two years, Ben Steiner (also 30) on 15 June.

"It's so important to us that our guests feel special. We want them to feel welcome. After all they're travelling a long way to get here," says Nicola when we reach her at the Steiner family estate in Saint-Tropez in the south of France, the venue for the glamorous wedding.

The 30-ha property is the largest privately owned estate in the popular resort town and the Steiners have been holidaying there for 30 years. After Nicola started dating Ben in 1999 she also spent breaks in the seaside town which in peak summer becomes the playground of the rich and famous.

This year's rush has yet to descend on Saint-Tropez but all systems go. "Ben and I were in Cape Town on holiday in December and January and when we said goodbye to everyone they were like, 'See you in six months'. All of a sudden I realised I hadn't done anything yet. It hadn't sunk in until then."

Fast-forward a few months

and Nicola is watching her dream wedding unfurl before her eyes - and without the aid of a wedding planner. "We're in the home-straight now and all I want to do is finish the seating plan. It has kept me up at night I'm so worried about it," Nicola says.

In the background is the low buzz of a chainsaw. "Sorry about the noise but they're chopping down trees to make way for the crystal tent in the garden." Not that the tent is made of crystal - it's a special type of plastic. "It will be transparent though," Nicola says. "If it rains we'll close the sides but hopefully it won't. I'm not going to stress about the weather. It's not exactly something I can control. But we won't get wet."

SOME 450 guests were invited from America, South Africa, Switzerland, France, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Austria, Holland, Italy, Israel, Turkey, Russia, Thailand and Brazil.

"It's hard co-ordinating the politics of seating almost 500 guests without offending anyone. I bought a huge piece of cardboard, drew tables on it and we have stickers representing the guests. We're trying to be conscious of everyone but you know large families - there's always politics."

Most of the guests are from



By Jared Orlin

ABOVE: SA-born Nicola Breytenbach converted to Judaism to marry American businessman Ben Steiner. FAR LEFT: A story published in YOU in August 2007.

Ben's side so Nicola has left it to him to sort out the final seating.

"From a wedding perspective I'm not nervous," Ben adds. "But from a planning perspective I am. It's the biggest day of my life and I just hope everything goes according to plan. I hope the food is good. I hope the DJ is good and I hope we haven't forgotten anyone."

They originally planned to invite 1 000 guests but soon realised that many people wouldn't be appropriate for the intimate affair they had in mind. "Really, 450 is small for us," Nicola says.

If more than 500 guests arrive she has a back-up plan - overflow tables. "I must say Ben and I worked well together on the seating plan. That's a good sign of things to come!"

Not many South Africans were invited to see Nicola wed her

man. "Just a small handful of family and friends, although a lot of family live in Europe now." Gal pals and fellow SA models Minki Visser and Michelle McLean are among those invited who couldn't make it.

"I completely understand," Nicola says. "I know it's very far and very expensive for South Africans to travel." But her dad, Richard Breytenbach, plus maid of honour Tanya Lazarus travelled from SA along with 20 other friends and relatives including aunts, uncles and cousins.

Like most brides Nicola spent months paging through glossy wedding magazines. But when she arrived in France she realised she'd left her wedding scrapbook at their Manhattan penthouse.

"I was cross with myself. I already had a picture of the



# MY BIG fab Jewish WEDDING

perfect cake all picked out but of course it was back in New York. So I ended up spending seven hours on the internet going through pictures of wedding cakes so I could show the chef exactly what I wanted. Needless to say I couldn't find it so I gathered together a bunch of different designs to mix and match the look I want."

Food connoisseur Ben was put in charge of the menu and Nicola looked after the décor. Luckily she had plenty of help in that department thanks to pal Alan Rohrer who does all Versace's events. Alan put her in touch with a woman who handcrafted the invitations from paper resembling python skin.

"It's my way of bringing a little bit of Africa to the wedding," Nicola says.

The invitation followed the couple's all-white theme and

looked like a small flip-up book. Inside are invitations to the wedding and the Friday night *shabbes* beach barbecue (Ben's family is Jewish), parking instructions and a RSVP envelope. A white satin ribbon holds everything together.

Nicola, who was born into a Christian family, converted to Judaism last year. The process took almost a year and involved classes three to four times a week, lasting three hours each.

"It was so intense," she laughs. "But I had an amazing teacher who really inspired, plus one-on-one classes really helped. I can't read and write Hebrew well but I know all the important prayers and what they mean."

Legally the couple are already married. "We had a small court ceremony in New York just to make it legal but the big celebration is in Saint-Tropez." They

will be married by a rabbi, under a chuppa (the four-sided canopy traditionally used in Jewish weddings).

"Converting to Judaism was a big move for me," Nicola says. "But my family has been very supportive. I sent my parents a book called *This is My God* by Herman Wouk which explains all the festivals and what the religion is all about. They're doing an amazing job. I got SMSes on Passover from them."

ONE thing Nicola is relaxed about is her dress, a Versace gown. "The dress has been the easier part of this wedding. I didn't have to try on 20 dresses or go to 20 stores. I just tried on one dress and that was that."

She's reluctant to reveal the price but says it was discounted because of her friendship with Donatella Versace. "When Donatella heard I was getting married she offered to do the dress and you don't say no to Versace."

In keeping with the tradition that the groom isn't to see the bride's gown before the ceremony Nicola planned to keep it in her maid of honour's wardrobe. But first the gown had to get to Saint-Tropez and Versace insisted it should be transported in

a climate-controlled truck. "It can't be folded," Nicola explains.

In February she flew thousands of kilometres to Versace's head office in Milan, Italy, to select the dress. "They showed me four huge books of dresses but they were too bridal for what I wanted. We're having a garden wedding so I didn't want anything too big or puffy."

Looking through the couture catalogue she soon found what she wanted.

A month later she returned to Milan for her first fitting - this time with her mom, Rina, in tow. Rina now lives in Austria.

"I arrived expecting to see a completed dress and all there was was the corset and veil," Nicola says. "Putting on the veil was when it really hit home I would soon be a bride. I looked at my mom who was starting to get emotional and said, 'Mommy don't cry,' but of course the tears started and then I started weeping too."

So will she blubber on the big day? "Oh probably. Ben and I have been together on and off for nine years. We can't wait to grow old together."

"This wedding has taken lots of work but it's my big dream come true." □

RIGHT: Nicola looks at photographs of wedding gowns at the Versace head office in Italy. CENTRE: A Versace seamstress looks on during the first fitting. FAR RIGHT: Nicola tries on the veil for the first time.

