

SHE'S tall, beautiful and very successful – and she's officially one of SA's hottest models. Nicola Breytenbach has made a name for herself all around the world, giving us more than enough reason to be proudly South African! People caught up with Nicola, and here's what she had to say.

You started modelling by chance. Tell us a bit about how you were discovered?

I was living in Holland with my family and was in my last year of high school. One day, I went with my mother to her hairdresser. He said he knew an agent in Amsterdam and that I should give modelling a try. Not being too sure about what I wanted to do after school, I decided to give it

a try for a year – and here I am!

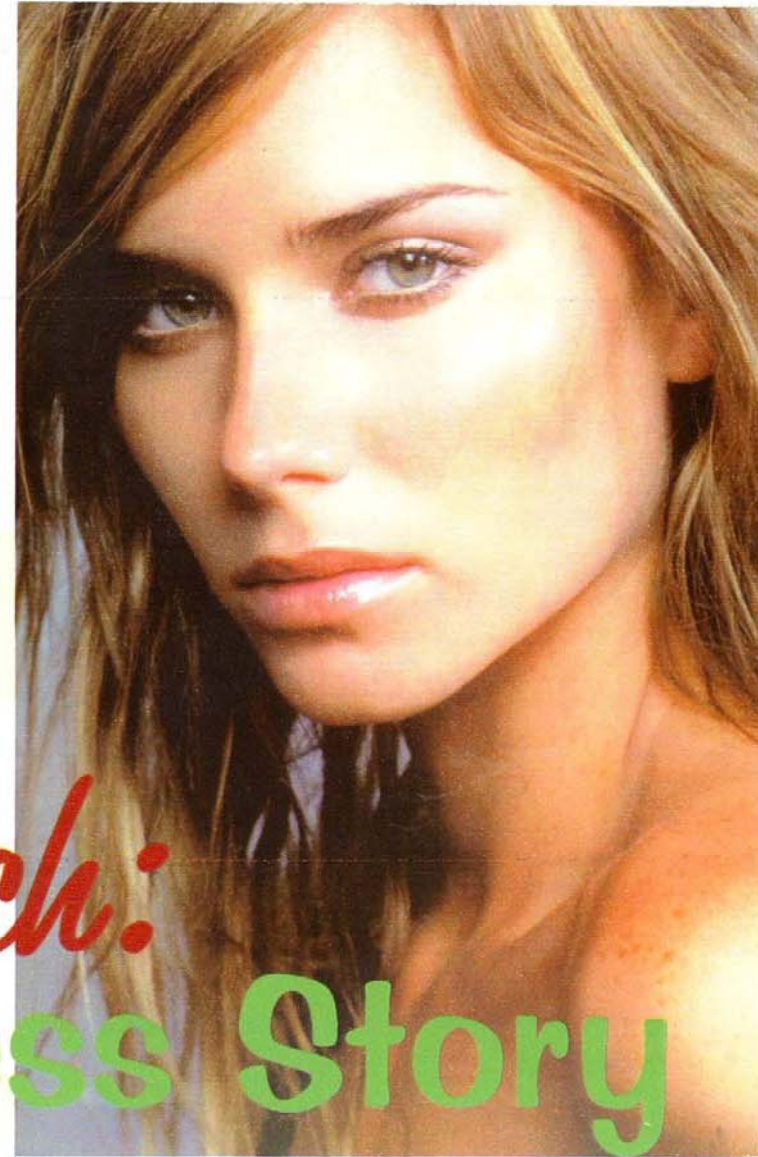
You got your big break when you were appointed as Christian Dior's house model. After that, you became a sought-after model for other major fashion houses. What was that like?

It was quite surreal and unexpected. It had been one of my goals to work for them since I started, so it was a dream come true!

Did you ever think that you would come so far, so quickly?

Honestly no! It wasn't always so easy and there were many times when I wasn't working that I wanted to quit. Once John (Galliano) started using me for Dior, I still didn't think it would spiral up at that rate. But it was an incredible journey and I owe everything to him.

Nicola Breytenbach: SA's Sexy Success Story





How does it feel to be one of South Africa's top supermodels?

There is no place in the world where I would rather be considered a supermodel. This is my home and I want to represent it in any way I can! It's an amazing feeling.

After being approached by Trump Models, the agency owned by business magnate Donald Trump, you moved to New York. What was that like?

New York was everything and more than I had expected! Apart from SA, New York is closest to me. I have had the best experiences of my life there. It's so energetic and alive, where you get and do anything you want, at any time of day.

Getting a contract with Revlon was probably one of your biggest achievements so far. Tell us about that.

Getting a cosmetics contract in this industry is the highest you can achieve, and the fact that it was Revlon, and stepping into Cindy Crawford and Halle Berry's shoes, is quite a big achievement for anyone. I had a make-up contract along with Liya Kebede, who is now the face of Estée Lauder, and American model Rhea Durham. A month later, I also signed an exclusive contract with them for hair products. That year was probably the busiest in my life. You are no longer a model but a spokesperson, so it involves a lot of other work.

You've been in the same room as Madonna, Brad Pitt, Jennifer Lopez, Tom Cruise and Orlando Bloom. How did you react when you saw them?

Obviously, I couldn't help being in awe of them when I met them, (how can you not stare at Brad Pitt the whole night?). But at the same time, when you are in that environment you are all in the same 'group' and they are still just normal people and they treat you that way, too – well, most of them anyway!

Who do you admire the most?

My parents, for where they are in their lives now and how through anything, they always remain

strong. They are the most prominent and important people in my life. I would never have been able to achieve this without them. I learn from them every day and want and hope to be the same for my children one day.

How do you maintain a balance between your career and personal life?

That has been very difficult with the amount of travelling and the lack of time I've had to spend with those closest to me. After five years of a hectic schedule, I started taking time out to go home and no matter what came up, it was understood that that is my time, for my friends, my family and me.

How do you keep in shape?

I started kickboxing recently and also gym training. Otherwise, I eat everything, but in moderation. I also drink a lot of water and get lots of rest.

Do you ever fear that it will all end as quickly as it began?

I believe that you have some control on when it ends, as long as people know that you want to keep going and you choose your career as a priority in your life. Of course, people can also get sick of you and over that you have no control, which is why it is important to be professional and choose the right type of work.

Rumour has it that you are dating South African swimmer Ryk Neethling. Is it true?

No, Ryk and I are not dating. We were seeing each other for a little while, but with me being in Europe and New York and him living in South Africa, it just doesn't work. He is a great guy, though.

What advice would you give to a teenage girl who would like to become a model?

Don't start too young, it can be very tough out there. Never take any rejection personally, and believe in yourself and have fun with it.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years from now?

Married with kids and working on my swimwear line. And back in South Africa!