

SA beauty back to launch her own perfume and spread the love around

Kashiefa Ajam

South African-born model Nicola Breytenbach believes Paris Hilton isn't as dumb as everyone thinks, names street magician David Blaine as one of her closest friends and she says she will never understand why her fiancé has a phobia for creams and lotions. But she loves him anyway.

She has done campaigns for Revlon, L'Oréal and Versace; mingled with the likes of Brad Pitt, Jennifer Lopez, Tom Cruise and Madonna; and worked alongside international supermodels Kate Moss, Cindy Crawford and Claudia Schiffer.

And even though Breytenbach isn't terribly well known in her home country, she has graced the covers of dozens of international magazines, strutted the fashion-show runways of Milan, Paris and London, and featured on a huge screen in New York's Times Square advertising L'Oréal hair products.

Breytenbach made headlines in South Africa a few years ago when her relationship with hunky swimmer Ryk Neethling – which lasted only a few months – had tongues wagging after it made headlines.

Born and raised in Durban and then Pretoria, she moved to Europe with her mother and started father shortly after her 16th birthday.

Her modelling career was launched when her mother's hairdresser spotted her and managed to convince her to see a modelling agent in Amsterdam.

She got her big break when she was appointed as Dior's in-house model, and it wasn't long before she became one of the hottest ramp models in Europe. A few years later she was approached by Trump Models in New York, and she moved to the Big Apple.

This week, during a short trip to South Africa, Breytenbach spoke of her upcoming projects, the biggest of which is her wedding to American businessman Ben Steiner. The couple met eight years ago when they were both about to turn 21.

"We grew up together – both as individuals and as a couple. He's wonderful, a gentleman," she says with a dreamy look in her beautiful green eyes. But, she adds, the relationship hit a rocky patch two years ago when Steiner broke up with her because of her modelling career.

"He said he wanted to be with me but I was never there."

It was during that period that she hooked up with Neethling.

"Do people still talk about that?" she wanted to know. "I am sure they don't! Do they?"

One of the main reasons for her current visit is to finalise details for the launch of her own fragrance, which will be released in SA in a few months.

"It has to be representative of me. I plan to market it to the younger crowd. It has to be a light fragrance – something you smell on someone when they walk past and you just catch a subtle waft of it."

Breytenbach says becoming a model and living in the US hasn't changed her personality and, in fact, she doesn't have any close friends who are celebrities, except famous magician Blaine.

"I do know a lot of well-known people but they are not my friends," she says.

"Take Leonardo DiCaprio, although I am good friends with Giselle Bündchen (the actor's former girlfriend), I wouldn't phone him up and say 'Let's go for lunch!'"

Breytenbach has no plans to turn her back on SA. "I will always be loyal to South Africa – it's my home. After I'm married I plan to do some projects here. I have to give something back," she says.



Nicola Breytenbach says Paris Hilton isn't stupid and calls David Blaine a mate.

Photographs: AP and Cara Viereck

