

By Jared Orlin  
Pictures: Dan Stevens

**T**HE gathering storm over Saint-Tropez on the French Riviera is just one of the things threatening to disrupt Nicola Breytenbach's special day.

The wedding, due to start at six in the evening, is already running an hour late. The rabbi who was due to marry her and American businessman Ben Steiner has missed his connecting flight from Paris to the town famed as a playground for the rich and royal. Guests are also delayed – there have been problems transporting the 500 people to the Steiner estate from the parking area on the beachfront. And it turns out the band doesn't know the song with which the couple want to open the dancefloor.

Now to top it all it looks as if the heavens are about to open.

But instead of getting frazzled Nicola and Ben show that together they're more than qualified to deal with a crisis. They quickly switch from Love Is All Around by Wet Wet Wet to Bryan Adams' Everything I Do for their opening dance. And they rope in Arnold Epstein, a Hebrew expert who helped Nicola (30) convert to Judaism last year, to conduct the ceremony.

"Arnold was amazing, especially considering he stepped in at the last minute," a grateful Ben (also 30) said afterwards.

As for the rain, they could only hold their breath. Nicola  
**(Turn over)**



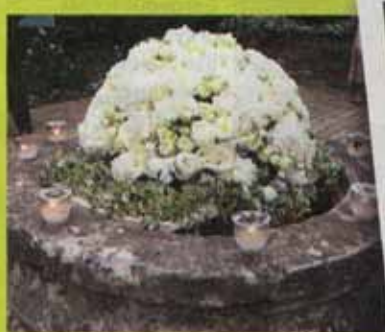
# MARRIED – IN MY R1-MILLION VERSACE

SA MODEL NICOLA BREYTENBACH'S GRAND GARDEN WEDDING AMID RAINDROPS AND ROSE PETALS

**MAIN PICTURE:** Gorgeous Nicola Breytenbach and Ben Steiner on their wedding day in Saint-Tropez, France. **FAR LEFT:** Ben and Nicola are flanked by his parents (far left), Jeffrey Steiner and Linda Steiner Schaller, and Nicola's dad, Richard Breytenbach (right of bride), mom Rina Rautenbach and stepdad Johan Rautenbach (far right). **LEFT:** Ben and Nicola's relatives flew from all over the world to join the celebration.







ABOVE (from top): The lush gardens of the Steiner estate where the couple said their vows; guests file onto the property; the aisle is strewn with thousands of rose petals; spectacular floral displays of white roses, orchids and peonies decorate the garden. RIGHT: The four poles of the *chuppah* (wedding canopy) were also adorned with white roses.



## 'It's a dress for a princess!'

(From previous page) told us days before the wedding (YOU, 19 June), "I'm not going to stress about the weather. It's not exactly something I can control!"

But then even the weather came to the party. The rain held off until all the guests had made their way to the crystal tent in the garden. "It was magical, like the weather was somehow waiting for us," Nicola said later.

**T**RADITIONAL Jewish music echoes across the lawns of the family estate as the entourage moves down the aisle strewn with thousands of white rose petals. Ben and his parents, Jeffrey Steiner and Linda Steiner Schaller, are followed by Ben's brothers, Erik and Thierry, and

Nicola's brothers, Bjorn and Ian. Then Nicola appears, breathtaking in a strapless white Versace gown. Accompanied by her parents, Richard Breytenbach and Rina Rautenbach, she walks towards Ben.

He lifts her veil and takes a peek at her face. "Yes, it's her," he says as the crowd erupts with laughter. In Jewish tradition the groom confirms the woman under the veil is indeed his bride. Maid of honour Tanya Lazarus (née Hayman), a model and ex-South African, holds Nicola's long train as she follows another tradition by circling her new husband seven times.

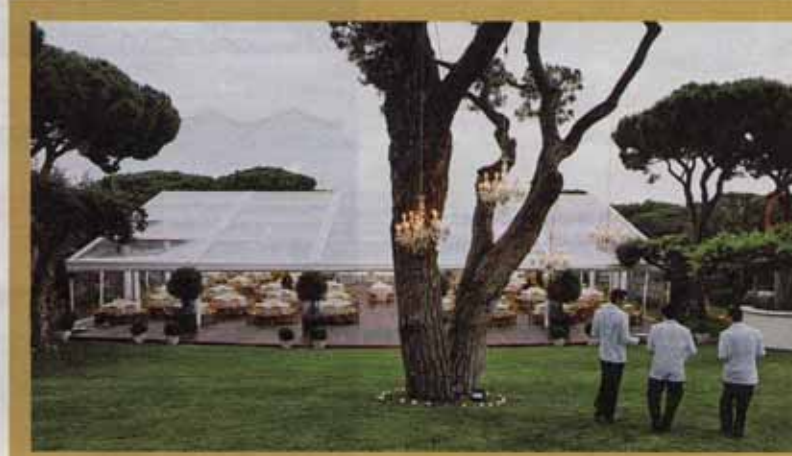
"It symbolises creation, both the seven days of creation in the Bible and also the fact we're creating a new home and life together," Nicola tells us later.

The ceremony is conducted





**ABOVE:** Guests ooh and aah as the bride is escorted up the aisle by her parents. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The impressive crystal tent seated the more than 500 guests at 50 tables. **BELOW:** Nicola with her parents, Richard Breytenbach and Rina Rautenbach. **BELOW RIGHT (from left):** Bridesmaids Filipa Hamilton, Candice Levy and Inga Hanon with maid of honour Tanya Lazarus (right) and flowergirl Emma Steiner.



almost entirely in Hebrew and ends with Ben breaking a glass underfoot – another Jewish wedding tradition. Then carefully concealed “cannons” in the garden go off and in seconds the lawns are covered in soft white petals. While the last of the petals float down the guests rush over to say *mazel tov*, Hebrew for good fortune or congratulations.

“I felt as if I was being mobbed. Everyone just wanted to kiss me,” a laughing Nicola says when we track her down a few days later on a yacht off the Italian Riviera near Portofino.

**T**HE ceremony over, the couple pose for photographs while the guests sip cocktails on the lawn

and tuck into an array of mouth-watering snacks. There’s a sushi bar made entirely of ice and elsewhere delicacies such as truffles, foie gras (duck liver) and cold soups are served.

Huge crystal chandeliers suspended from the trees and thousands of candles around the garden give a magical air to the occasion.

Nicola, radiant in her pure white gown, looks lovingly at Ben, handsome in a midnight-blue three-piece tuxedo with a white bowtie. The gown made of ruffled chiffon and satin cost a whopping €80 000 (nearly R1 million) and sparkles in the romantic glow created by the chandeliers and candlelight.

“It’s a dress for a princess and fits like a glove,” Nicola says. “It’s my dream come true to get married in a Versace dress. I was speechless when I put it on. It was like something I’d only ever dreamt about. I know it sounds like a cliché but that’s how I feel.”

The dress is her “something new” and it’s perfectly complemented by “something old” – an antique diamond bracelet which was an engagement gift from father-in-law Jeffrey.

The “something borrowed” is a pair of pearl drop earrings that belong to her friend Candice Levy, a teacher who’s one of her three bridesmaids. As for her “something blue”, there’s a tiny blue ribbon on her underwear.

After cocktails the party moves into the huge crystal tent which has a glass top and plastic sides to keep the heat in and weather out. Nicola and Ben are seated on their own at the main table.

“The idea is for us to have 20 or 30 minutes alone to digest what’s happening,” Nicola says.

**(Turn over)**





(From previous page)

"All these people have come here for us. Also our parents are divorced and we didn't want to offend anyone with who sits with us and who doesn't."

Dozens of waiters dressed in smart black trousers and white jackets usher guests to their tables, making sure everyone's glasses are charged with champagne. Among the guests seated on gilded chairs at the 50 tables are famous personalities such as magician David Blaine and Donald Trump's ex-wife, Ivana.

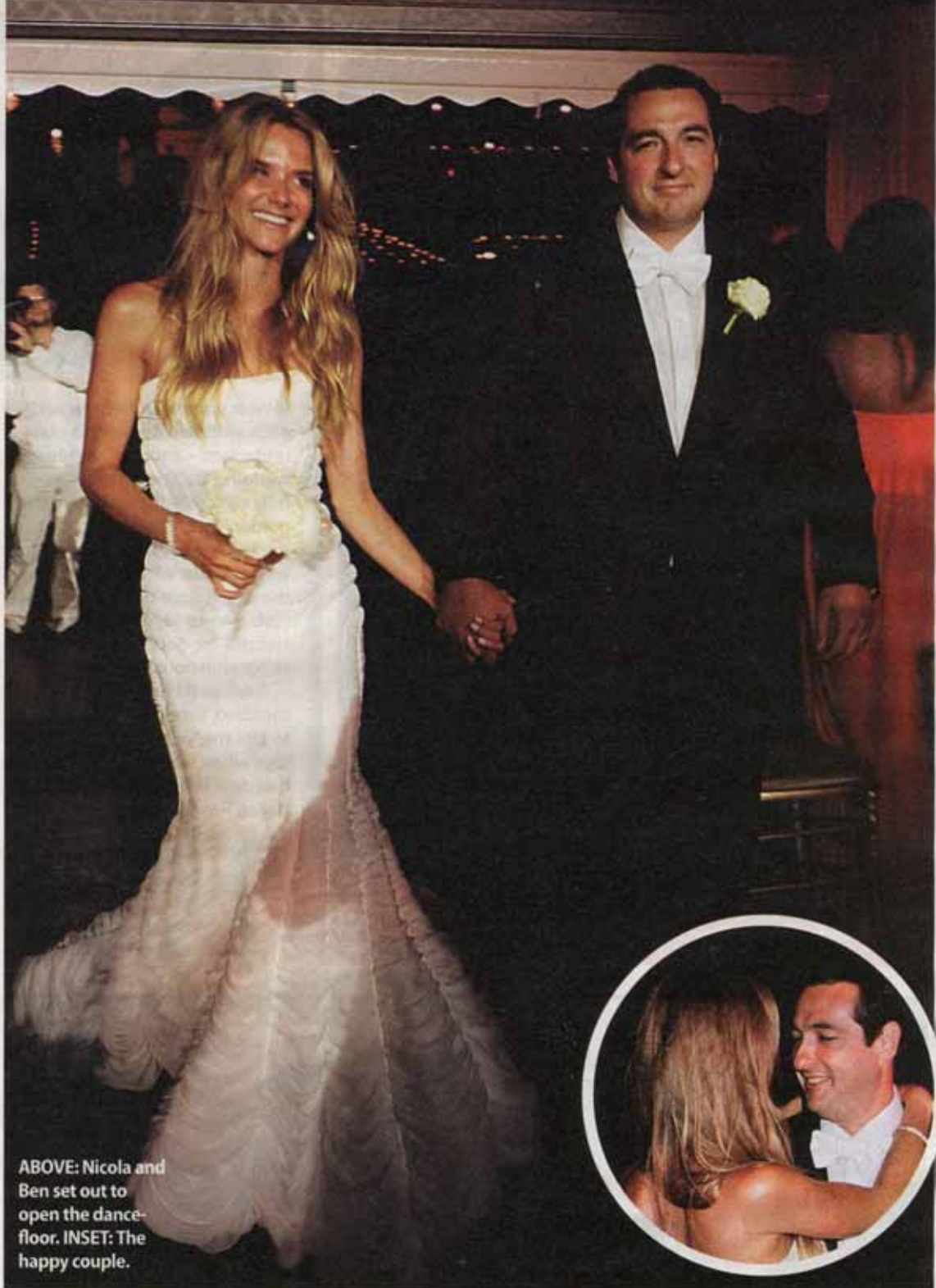
In keeping with the cream, white and champagne theme the tablecloths are white and the tables have centrepieces of white roses, orchids and peonies. Hanging from the ceiling are more crystal chandeliers.

The overflow of guests – 450 were expected but the final tally is a mind-boggling 580 – are seated in the lounge area outside the tent.

Nicola and Ben aren't keen to reveal what the wedding cost. "It was big and beautiful. And very over-the-top in terms of cost but we were happy to pay for everything," Ben says.

In his speech he slipped in a *baie dankie* for the South African guests. Although Nicola left SA as a child with her mom and grew up in Holland and Switzerland she still speaks Afrikaans fluently. Ben has also joined her on several trips to SA.

**I**N THE end the heavens do open and it rains throughout the speeches and dinner. For starters there's a truffle ravioli in truffle



ABOVE: Nicola and Ben set out to open the dance-floor. INSET: The happy couple.

**RIGHT:** Huge crystal chandeliers in the trees and hundreds of candles lend a fairytale atmosphere to the glam garden wedding. **MIDDLE:** The chic table settings in white, cream and champagne have centrepieces of roses, orchids and peonies. **FAR RIGHT:** After the ceremony guests tucked into a variety of tasty snacks including sushi.







BELOW: Guests cheer as Nicola hits the dancefloor for lively traditional Jewish dancing. LEFT: The four-tiered wedding cake is carried into the tent.



sauce, followed by a main course of sea bass with caviar and baby potatoes. Dessert is even more decadent – macarons, traditional French pastry made from egg whites, powdered almonds and sugar, topped with raspberry sorbet. Coffee is served with chocolate spring rolls dipped in hot caramel sauce.

The couple decided to forgo a buffet-style dinner despite the huge number of guests. "Buffets are too impersonal. We wanted to keep people seated," Ben says.

After coffee four waiters carry in a table holding the magnificent four-tiered sponge cake. The bottom layer is 1,4 metres in diameter and the creation is decorated with peonies, orchids and roses.

And outside the rain continues to pour. "A few people got soaked trying to go to the bathroom," Nicola says. She had to wait until it stopped raining before slipping into a shorter, more comfortable cocktail dress, also by Versace.



"I love dancing and couldn't wait to get on the dancefloor," she says. The 12-piece band kicked off proceedings and later two DJs took over until the early hours of the morning.

The couple finally headed to the luxury five-star hotel Château de la Messardière at five in the morning. "Apparently the last guests left around six when the sun was up," Nicola says.

She and Ben were married in a civil ceremony in New York in March but waited to exchange rings in Saint-Tropez.

"Now I definitely feel more married. Having a ring on your

finger makes all the difference. I love being Mrs Steiner," she adds.

After a short honeymoon off the Italian Riviera on their 35-metre yacht the couple head home to New York where Ben works as an investor; he recently completed an MBA.

Nicola will be in SA later this year to launch her own perfume.

"We're planning to have kids right away," she says. "Probably two or three, depending on how it goes."

No doubt they'll tell them stories about the wedding and how a rainy day turned into their brightest moment. □

LEFT: Nicola tosses her bouquet. BELOW: In keeping with Jewish wedding tradition guests hoist the bride and groom on chairs and dance with them.

