

yourwedding



The ideal setting

A pretty marquee in South Africa's winelands was just the look for Alexis and Philip's 1930s-style wedding

How we met: Alexis Sparling and Philip Stier met when Alexis was taking a break from working in fashion in New York to volunteer for the Cheetah Conservation Fund in Namibia. "Philip had just returned to Namibia after spending 13 years in Cape Town and, through a random series of connections, I happened to meet his boss, who gave me Philip's phone number as he thought we'd be the perfect match!" says Alexis. "He picked me up once my volunteer programme had finished and we went back to his nearby farm, where I ended up inadvertently staying for a week as I had accidentally missed my flight the next day! Afterwards, I left for two and a half months of travelling, but a few months later I packed my bags and moved to Namibia."

His proposal: Philip proposed after six months, while the couple were on safari together. "The Caprivi strip is in the very north of Namibia, bordered by several other African countries, and it's very wild and untouched," says Alexis. "Philip proposed while we were bouncing down an earth road on our tour enjoying a beer! It was a complete surprise, and I immediately said yes before finishing my beer in celebration!"

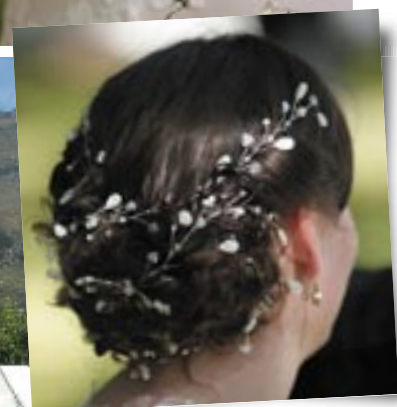
Vineyards and venues: "We married at the beautiful Lanzerac Manor (lanzerac.co.za), a 300-year-old country estate in the Cape Dutch-style, based in the Cape Winelands," says Alexis. "The venue was the perfect place to have friends and family share our wedding day. I'm from the States and Philip's Namibian, but with German heritage, so we had quite a few friends coming from the USA and Europe, and many decided to make a longer holiday of the trip. The estate is close to the town of Stellenbosch and also offers tours, spa

treatments and activities like wine tasting and horse riding to keep guests entertained. All our American guests went on a safari after the wedding."

Thirties theme: "From the start, I wanted to have a Great Gatsby feel to the day, and a look of 1930s elegance but not too lavish or overdone," says Alexis. "I chose a very vintage pastel colour palette and a mix of roses, peonies and soft-looking flowers. We kept the lighting dim and flattering and the dress code was black tie as I love giving people the chance to dress up. My wedding planner, Christina Holt at Wedding Concepts (weddingconcepts.co.za) helped me source all the suppliers who could create my specific look."

What we wore: Alexis wore a backless lace gown by Monique Lhuillier (moniquelhuillier.com), that was cut on the bias to give it a very 1930s feel. "My mother and I both loved it as soon as I tried it on. My earrings were vintage diamond drops from a boutique in Santa Fe, New Mexico and my hairclip was from Tacori (tacori.com)." Philip and his groomsmen all wore black tuxedos hired from The Dress Suit in Cape Town (dresssuit.co.za) and their metallic yellow silk waistcoats were made by a local tailor from a fabric chosen by Alexis. "I had six bridesmaids and two maids of honour," says Alexis. "They all wore mocha-coloured dresses with a pastel pink sash by Texan designer Lela Rose (lelarose.com). All the flowers, including mine and the bridesmaids' bouquets, were in vintage-style dusty pastel colours and we had lots of roses and peonies, packed out with foliage."

Tying the knot: Philip and Alexis exchanged their vows in front of the manor house under a flower-adorned gazebo, serenaded by a ▶



The chill-out tents on the lawn with their billowing white drapes made the perfect place for guests to relax in the shade and enjoy a chilled glass of wine

four-piece classical group. Each side of the aisle was lined by pretty flower arrangements of more peonies and roses. "Just before I walked up the aisle, a children's choir sang the African Bridal Welcome Song," says Alexis. "When I first saw my husband at the ceremony, I thought how handsome he looked! It wasn't a very formal service and we wrote our own vows, which I said in English and Philip said in German. One of my bridesmaids read *How do I Love Thee?* by Elizabeth Barrett Browning and my mother and maid of honour both read short blessings. I felt pretty relaxed and happy during the whole thing as I was surrounded by my family and best friends."

Warm reception After the ceremony, a three-piece jazz band played as drinks and canapés were served on the manor house's lawns. The main reception was held in a pale ivory marquee in the grounds. Tables were decorated with subtly-coloured floral centrepieces and pretty 1930s-style lamps and there were delicate chandeliers hanging from the ceiling. "There was a selection of menus and our guests chose their main courses when they

sent back their reply cards," says Alexis. "We started with a summer salad of strawberries and asparagus on a bed of rocket and cheddar cheese shavings and topped with pine nuts. The choices of main course included African-spiced linefish, cherry-crust springbok loin or an artichoke and soft herb risotto. The pudding was individual dark chocolate tarts with cinnamon ice cream. Our vanilla wedding cake was by Wades Cakes (wadescakes.co.za) but I only got to taste a small sample when my new husband smeared some on my face when we were messing around!" A six-piece band played during the meal and in the evening there was a DJ, when the newlyweds kicked off the dancing with *Two of a Kind* by Bobby Darin and Johnny Mercer. Even though the music stopped at midnight, the guests moved on to the bar and partied till 4am!

At the end of the day...

"We had some hilarious speeches – they were definitely my favourite part of the day," says Alexis. "And there was lots of traditional African dancing at the reception, which was amazing. My advice to

other brides is just to try and relax. There are things that will definitely not go to plan – my cake was supposed to be ivory rather than the pink it turned up as – but the odd slip-up is inevitable so just make sure you have a nice time!"

Photography: Gisela Harck (weddingconcepts.co.za)

Tips from the top

Christina Holt at Wedding Concepts shares her secrets for perfectly-styled wedding day:

- Go back in time and think of a style that represents you as a couple. For example, Alexis and Philip's Great Gatsby look was partly inspired by their love of swing music.
- If you can't find the perfect location, set up a marquee. It'll allow you to start with a blank canvas and design every detail.
- Research the era and choose authentic décor to support it. For the 1930s look we used crystal glassware and vases, sumptuous chandeliers and soft colours and shades.



The pretty pink fabric chair-back decorations also doubled as place names



British brides can find Alexis' Monique Lhuillier dress in Browns Bride showrooms in the UK



The vanilla wedding cake was covered in pastel pink icing sugar and decorated with little sugar icing strawberries



A row of glass vases filled with pastel-coloured roses and peonies decorated the top table

