

BAZAAR

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ARABIA

BRIDE

JEWELS
to **CHERISH**
FROM HERE
TO ETERNITY

THE
MIDDLE EAST'S
BEST
DRESSED
BRIDES

368
BEAUTY
BUYS,
BAGS,
SHOES
& GOWNS

DESERT ROSE

BEAUTIFUL WEDDINGS FROM
THE MIDDLE EAST TO MARRAKECH



SPRING/SUMMER 2016
Dollars 25

Real WEDDINGS

SECRET GARDEN

From the Middle East to Marrakech and beyond, nine newlyweds open their photo albums for an intimate look at how Arabia's best dressed brides say 'I will'

*Compiled by EMILY BAXTER
Words by KERRIE SIMON-LAWRENCE*



SARA TOUMADJ

*A three-day extravaganza greeted guests at a secret location
for this meticulously planned wedding*

Photography by STUDIO 1208



Sara Toumadj and Alex Moniri Keya practise their dance routine in a quiet moment before the dinner reception



Sara amid Penha Longa's grounds in her Vera Wang rose-embellished veil



Precious pre-wedding moments with the mother of the bride and Sara's sister

Proud and defiant, the groom, with his mother and brothers, patiently waits for his bride



Sara and her sister Tanya cherish a moment before the ceremony



The couple's favourite photograph truly captures their spirit

BRIDE'S BLACK BOOK

DRESS: Vera Wang New York, Verawang.com

JEWELLERY: Cartier, +971 4 434 0434

MAKE-UP: Joana Moreira, Joanamoreira.com

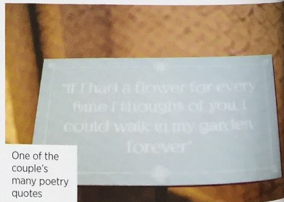
SOFREH AGHD VENUE: Monserrate Palace, Sintra, Parquesdesintra.pt

WEDDING VENUE: Penha Longa, Ritz-Carlton hotel, Ritzcarlton.com

WEDDING PLANNER: Jasmine Lazzari at The Wedding Company, Theweddingcompany.pt

PHOTOGRAPHERS: Maria Bentley at Studio 1208, Studio1208.com

VIDEOGRAPHER: Carlos Ferreira, Videart.com



One of the couple's many poetry quotes



Wedding shoes 'to dance from dusk 'til dawn'



Alex and his special ladies at Monserrate Palace



Sara dances with her friends to her favourite Persian song, *Bigharr* by Shahab Tiam



The bride, with Alex, and her newly-acquired brothers-in-law



Salmon ceviche and smoked salmon millefeuille canapés



Guests were welcomed by a string quartet

Given that 35-year-old private investor Alex Moniri Keya proposed to business intelligence expert Sara Toumadj on a surprise trip to London that involved a private harpist and a suite full of balloons and flowers, their wedding was never going to be anything short of spectacular.

Taking 17 months to pull together, the event took place in a palace in Sintra, Portugal, with guests not being told of the venue until they were shuttled to its impressive grounds. "We wanted them to be as blown away by it as we were the first time we saw it," British/Iranian Sara, 30, says of Monserrate Palace.

With 170 guests flying in from 22 countries, the couple knew they had to put on an event to remember. They settled on a three-day celebration, kicking off with a white party ("Alex and I wore blue") with cocktails and live food stations at sunset, followed the next day by the Sofreh Aghd at the palace, and then finally, the third day saw the reception take place in an outdoor atrium among the city's ruins.

"We constantly wanted our guests to be taken by surprise," Sara says. "We wanted them to be blown away by the scenery, the history, the cultures, the music and the entertainment. From the first night to the third, we whisked our friends and family

away to magical settings, from the ocean to the Sintra mountains."

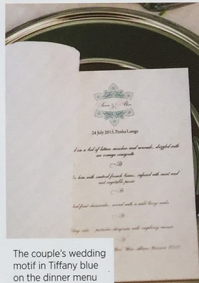
And to ensure guests truly felt spoilt, Sara and Alex didn't limit party favours to one simple gesture. "The favours began the moment guests arrived in the hotel. Each room had a customised tote bag waiting for them, filled with traditional Portuguese sweets, a re-cap of the schedule, a customised guide to Sintra, as well as a poetry book filled with 20 or so of our favourite poems." At the Sofreh, guests were given Iranian sugar ornaments, and on the wedding night, all the ladies were given flip-flops and pashmians.

For her part, Sara wowed her guests in a Vera Wang gown. "It was a romantic and ethereal wedding dress with an asymmetrical bodice and a stunning skirt of layers of tulle and organza," she says of the 'Katherine' gown.

Sara says that while it can be tempting to stay in the thick of the celebrations, it's important to steal some private moments for you and your groom. "Around 4am, when the party was still in full swing, Alex and I snuck away to a secret old stone staircase that takes you to the upper balcony of the atrium. We looked at each other, we looked down to the party below, we looked up to the stunning night sky and back at each other, no words were needed – we knew nothing would ever feel more right or more magical. It had been written in the stars for us!" ■



Pistachio dacquoise wedding cake with a cascade of fresh white roses



The couple's wedding motif in Tiffany blue on the dinner menu



Sara's father takes the last few steps with her before the wedding

The traditional Iranian Sofreh Aghd wedding ceremony in the magical Monserrate Palace

