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SCENES FROM A DESTINATION

Toronto, Hawaii, Los Cabos, Vail, Napa Valley. Five couples throw weddings far from home—and close to perfection.

TEXT BY Jennifer Miranda, Cara Sullivan, AND Fan Winston

TORONTO, ONTARIO

SOMINA MADAN & GAURAV SETH, APRIL 11, 2009

IT'S TRUE THAT sometimes pictures are worth a thousand words. But in the case of Somina and Gaurav's love story, it's numbers that do the talking. Relaying how they met and fell in love simply can't be done without a nod to some meaningful digits. The first: 40. "Gaurav had seen my profile picture on an online-dating site, but he wasn't able to contact me until he paid a \$40 membership fee," Somina says. Just 3 months later, he asked for her hand in marriage. And

ONE THING I LEARNED

"The sounds are as important as the scene. Two priests blew conch shells as I entered—it was so peaceful and beautiful."

8 months after that, in front of 360 guests, many of whom had traveled from India and Singapore, they tied the knot in spectacular fashion at a Hindu celebration in Toronto that involved 1 horse (more on that later), 1 acrobat, and hundreds and hundreds of flowers. Neither is from Toronto—Somina, an insurance broker, is from London, Ontario; Gaurav, who works in pharmaceuticals, is from Long Island, New York—but they decided to throw a wedding there because they liked its cosmopolitan feel. Besides, the venue they chose, Liberty Grand, came with an extraordinary chef from India, an advantage that simply can't be overstated given that many of their wedding guests are

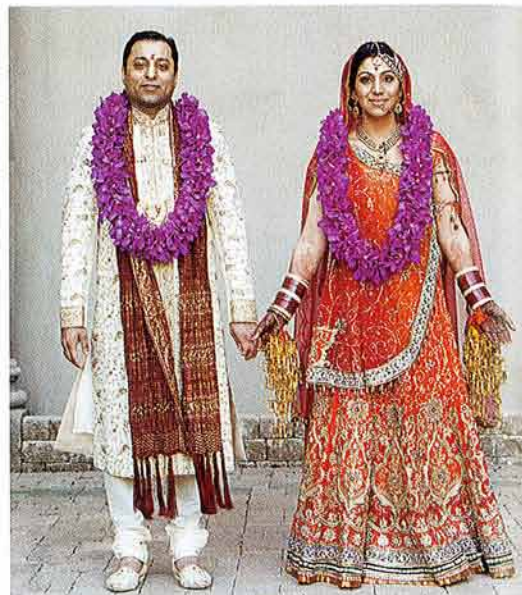
of South Asian descent. Now about that horse: According to tradition, the groom, accompanied by his wedding party, is supposed to make his grand entrance on either an elephant or a horse, but as Somina laughingly notes, Gaurav is "afraid of heights, so a horse it was." Gaurav wasn't the only one who was making sacrifices in the name of tradition. Somina sat patiently for 4½ hours as a henna artist decorated her hands with intricate designs. For good luck, she slipped 42 bangles on each wrist the morning of the wedding—and kept them on for 40 days. And shortly before her big entrance, she donned a traditional *lehnga*, a 4-piece outfit of silk and velvet weighing close to 20 pounds. In the end, numbers don't lie, and what they add up to in this story is 2 people who love each other in uncountable, immeasurable ways.

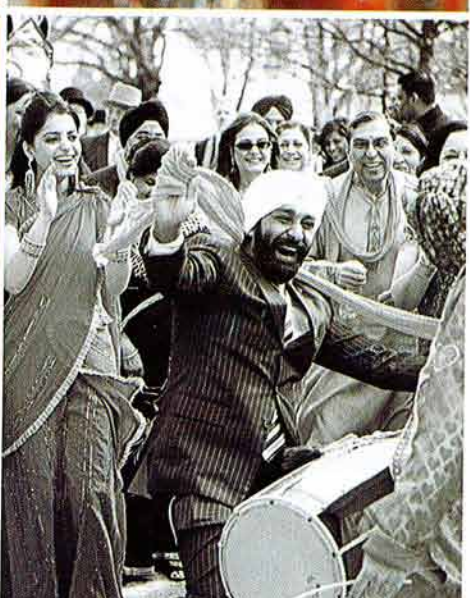
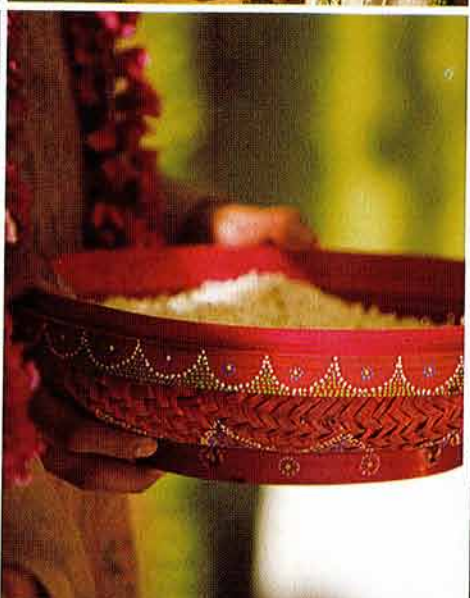
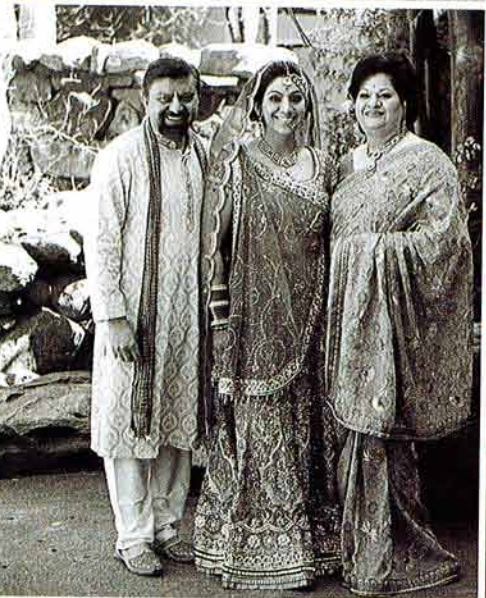
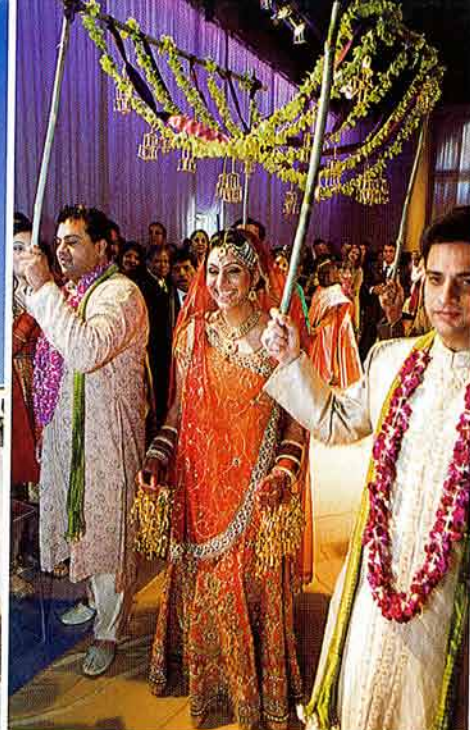
HONEYMOON

The newlyweds chose to hit two vacation spots for their honeymoon: "something action-packed and something relaxing," says Somina. First was vibrant Sydney, Australia, followed by an easy-beachy six days in Fiji at the Qamea Resort & Spa. Her favorite part? "I love pearls, so it would definitely be snorkeling at a pearl farm and bringing up pearl-filled oysters."

SOURCES

- LOCATION AND CATERING** Liberty Grand
- EVENT PLANNING** Melissa Samborski of One Fine Day Event Planning and Design
- FLOWERS** Stenz
- MUSIC** DJ Jiten





Left to right, top to bottom: The bride and groom exchange garlands of hot-pink aranda orchids during the ceremony, hanging from her bangles are gold ornaments (*kalira*) tied on by family members for good luck. The Liberty Grand was just what the couple was looking for—elegant and, more important, large enough to accommodate their guests. Somina's brother and three cousins carry a canopy of green dendrobium orchids as she walks down the aisle. Bangles in traditional red and white hues adorn her

wrists; the henna artwork was applied two days before the wedding. Gaurav arrives by horse. Somina with her parents, Ashok and Neelam Madan. Rice is tossed into a fire during the ceremony for good luck. A guest dances to the beat of a drummer heralding the arrival of the groom. Three long tables anchor the reception: one for the couple, and one for each side of the families. Tall vases topped with bangles hold chains of yellow rose petals. Somina, seated with Gaurav, bought all her wedding jewelry and saris in India.

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