

REALWEDDINGS

Butterflies & Bling



Claire and Ben's mix of glamour and romance in Italy



After a truly romantic proposal on a hill during a dog walk in the English countryside, Claire Warren and Ben Freeman from Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire chose a rustic Italian villa as the perfect setting for their vintage glamour wedding celebrations with a host of family and friends.

Finding 'the one'

Our wonderful friend Helen Foy set us up on a blind date. Helen and I worked together and she is the best friend of Ben's little sister Heidi. She texted me a photo of Ben and shortly after, Ben and I exchanged numbers. A few weeks later we had our first date. It was love at first sight! We just hit it off straightaway and have been inseparable ever since.

The proposal

We both love nothing more than walking our dogs, Molly and George. On Valentine's Day 2010, Ben suggested we walk to the top of the steep hill down the road from where we live to take in the fantastic views over the Waddesdon Estate, as we so often did. This day was drizzling with rain so I moaned all the way to the top.

My hair was wind swept and my make-up non-existent due to the rain. In the midst of my grumbling, I realised that Ben had dropped to one knee with a gorgeous ring and a mini bottle of Champagne in his pocket. It was totally unexpected and one of the best days of my life! Despite the rain, Ben managed to pick the best place in the world to pop the question!

Location, location

We always knew we wanted to get married abroad. I'd been to a few weddings in Italy and we had both attended a friend's wedding in France. We loved the informal feel and truly unique settings that weddings abroad offer. We came across an absolutely stunning villa called Villa Giona in a breathtaking location just 10 minutes from the city of love, Verona. Villa Giona's tranquil rural setting made a spectacular venue for our wedding reception and a perfect, secluded, intimate hub for our family and friends to stay and relax together.

The planning

Most of the arrangements were made via the talented Villa Giona team; Marion, Franco and Paolo. For us the biggest

concern with marrying abroad was the legal side of the wedding, however, this was all seamlessly taken care of by Marion. They also organised our catering, music and flowers.

The guests

Of course we had some loved ones that sadly couldn't make it due to being overseas, however, we were completely overwhelmed with the number of guests that could share our special day with us. We had about 55 family and friends join us for the celebrations in Italy. Some stayed at Villa Giona, whilst others stayed in local B&B's.

Getting the look

I really wanted an elegant, vintage lace dress with a touch of bling to add glamour. My dress was 'Venus' by the superb designer Sophia Tolli, which I purchased from Once in a Lifetime in Stony Stratford, Milton Keynes. The dress came with a bustle, which we attached a small crystal and pearl butterfly on, to give it more of a bespoke twist. I was very lucky to have amazing, talented friends at the wedding that helped me get ready for the big day. Katie Sellwood was my make-



up artist, and Kelly Fletcher did my hair (into not only one, but two styles – one for the day and one for the evening!). They were both brilliant and rushed around to get me ready as well as getting themselves stunning for the wedding too....

Groom, ushers & bridesmaids

The bling and glamour theme followed through to the bridesmaids who wore teal green Grecian-style dresses, which we customised by adding a row of Swarovski crystals to the shoulders to add sparkle. The guys wore black dinner jackets with matching teal green lining.

Something old, something new?

My fantastic bridesmaids provided me with my 'something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue', but the most special of all was a photograph of my Granddad Cherry who had passed away some years ago. I had always wanted him to sing Doris Day's *Once I had a Secret Love* at my wedding like he had done for my 21st birthday, but having his photo attached to the underneath of my dress was the nicest feeling to have him with me on my most magical day.

The details

The theme of the wedding was butterflies and bling. We picked the butterfly as it symbolises evolution and change, leaving one life behind to start a new journey. The bling was just a good excuse for lots and lots of glamour! The bridal bouquet had white vendela roses with diamantés in the centre of the roses. The table centres were filled with ortensias, gypsophila, vendela roses, and butterflies. We also had scatter crystals on the tables and butterfly lanterns around the villa. We printed 12 postcards with our address and a stamp and distributed them across the tables. At the top of the postcard we noted the month we wanted the postcard to be sent back to us. We then asked that people write their memories of the day on the postcard and post to us during the month requested. This ended up being a wonderful idea, as now every month we get a little surprise through the post box, and each time we receive our postcard, we get to relive our day again, and again. Cake-wise, we decided to have a cup cake tower in butterfly cases. These were lovingly made on the morning of the wedding by my cousin Maxine and her little helpers.

The ceremony

The ceremony itself was a civil ceremony at Malcesine castle in Lake Garda. It was outdoors on the castle terrace overlooking the lake, so the views were simply awesome.





My mum, Julie, is my best friend and rock, so it meant the absolute world to me that she was by my side to walk me down the aisle and give me away. We walked down the isle to Edwina Hayes *Feels like home*, which is featured in *My Sister's Keeper*. We signed the marriage certificate to *Kissing You* by Des'ree, the theme tune to *Romeo and Juliet*, which seemed very apt with Verona being the home of Romeo and Juliet's balcony. At the end of the ceremony, all of the guests walked out to Dean Martin's *That's Amore*.

The reception

The evening reception was held at Villa Giona. We had drinks and nibbles as soon as we arrived back from Lake Garda. The evening meal started with Tortellini di Valeggio with butter and sage dressing, for the main course we had Chateaubriand with fine herbs served with oven-baked potatoes, courgette towers and green bean parcels wrapped in bacon. For dessert, we had a trio of mousses. During the meal, a live guitarist played. Then, shortly after dinner we cut the cake whilst singing to *That's Amore* – everyone sang along at the top of their voices and the little ones waved sparklers

in their hands – it was one of my favourite memories! That song now makes me smile every time I think about it. Ben and I had our First Dance to Eva Cassidy's *Songbird*.

Photographic memories

Paul Toeman from Paul Toeman Photography was our truly fantastic and creative photographer. Paul was the photographer for one of our best friends, weddings and we always knew that if we were ever lucky enough to get married, Paul would be our number one choice. Paul met us in Italy before the wedding and took photos of a pizza/pasta night we had for all of the guests to kick start the celebrations. Considering Paul had never been to the venue before, he has a natural flair of finding the unique and quirky shots that make a simply remarkable photograph. We needed a very special photographer that we trusted fully and we can say, hand on heart, that picking Paul was the best decision we could have made.

The honeymoon

We decided to have a belated honeymoon in the January of the following year. I

would recommend it to any couple that gets married abroad, as it just gives you something else to look forward to, and most importantly, some quality time together.

Party back home

When Ben and I got back home, we arranged a big UK party for all of our family and friends – we are both massive Big Band and Rat Pack lovers, so the party kick started with a wonderfully talented jazz singer Adam Chandler, followed by lots of dancing – thanks to our brilliant DJ Dom Price!

Further information

Wedding planner:
Marion Hunter from Villa Giona

Venue: **Villa Giona and Malcesine Castle in Lake Garda**
www.villagionaweddings.com

Photographer: **Paul Toeman from Paul Toeman Photography**
www.paultoemanphotography.com