



he burning sun is setting over Cartagena, the colonial jewel in Colombia's crown. In a scene worthy of Gabriel Garcia Márquez, the city's favorite son, families have crowded along the narrow Calle de Santa Teresa, leading to the sixteenth-century Iglesia de Santo Domingo, its lime-washed walls pink as a dusky sunset. The vallenato, the musicians who ramble day and night playing seductive paseo and merengue, are respectfully silent—at 7:30 p.m., Lauren Davis and Andrés Santo Domingo will be married. The crowd cheers the city's most beloved benefactors, Julio Mario and Beatrice Santo Domingo, the parents of the Brown University—educated groom, as they pass on their way to the church.

Meanwhile, in the entrance hall of the seventeenth-century Casa Conde de Pestagua, Lauren Davis clasps her great-grandmother's rosary—old, borrowed, blue stone—as Olivier Theyskens arranges her wedding dress. Fashioned from 60 meters of silk jacquard woven with peony blooms, its coat embroidered with tinsel paillettes, vintage lace, silver threads, and tufts of clipped white feathers, this is Theyskens's masterpiece. The dress took the workers in Nina Ricci's atelier a mere 1,200 hours to make (with an additional 800 hours from the legendary Lesage embroiderers).

Davis has spent the day sequestered here with her mother, the artist Judy Davis (now in a tulip-stem-green crepe by Carolina Herrera), and her nine bridesmaids. As Theyskens fixes the veil over her chignon—mindful of the pearl-and-diamond Buccellati earrings that belonged to Doña Beatrice (Mrs. Santo Domingo), her wedding gift to the bride—Lauren hears her carriage arrive on the cobblestones. A woman otherwise of many words and enthusiasms, she is now contemplative. With a touch of the rosary and a lift of her train, the heavy wooden doors creak open and the crowd cheers. The bride and her father get into their horsedrawn carriage, she whispers something in his ear, and down the narrow calle they go to arrive at the church on time.

But of course the story doesn't begin here. No wedding begins at the altar; it begins at the first date—or, better yet, the first kiss, and Lauren and Andrés's first was in Paris, atop the Eiffel Tower, just shy of ten years ago.

The daughter of Ronald Davis, a philanthropist and entrepreneur perhaps best known for helping to build the Poland





Spring brand, the bride was raised in Greenwich, Connecticut. Having attended the Kent School in Connecticut and the University of Southern California, Lauren was a recent college graduate starting her career in fashion. (She is now a Vogue Contributing Editor.) She worked briefly as a model and actress, just long enough to shoot a Japanese jeans commercial that primarily involved kissing Brad Pitt on and off for the better part of three days until the director yelled "Cut!" With the \$6,000 she was paid for this star turn, Lauren went to Paris. While she was at dinner one evening with a small group of friends from home, the topic turned to that old conversational chestnut "Who is your ideal man?" When it came time for Lauren to respond, she looked across the room just as Andrés was entering. Rich man, poor man, she had no idea who he was. "That man," Lauren said, and gestured toward this perfect stranger.

y today's standards, it was a long courtship—the first kiss at the Eiffel Tower happened two months later but they have been together ever since, now living in New York City. Their original plan to marry in Greenwich last April unraveled due to a combination of factors, not the least of which was having one venue

double-book. Lauren found a newly renovated watering hole on the Hudson River where, in the last century, people met before they sailed to Europe. Alas, upon further research, Lauren discovered the date the venue had available was also the ninety-fifth anniversary of the sinking of the *Titanic*. At which point the Santo Domingos proposed the idea of swapping roles with the Davis parents and having Andrés and Lauren marry in Cartagena, where they have owned a magnificent colonial house since the mid-seventies.

When Lauren first met with Olivier Theyskens more than a year ago at the Ritz in Paris to talk about her dress, she brought photographs of the church and the Santo Domingos' house, where the reception would be held, as well as shots of a seventeenth-century fort and its ramparts overlooking the sea, the location for the late-night after party. Several points were noted, among them: Due to the severe daytime heat and the cooler evening trade winds, the wedding would take place at night. And, forgive the cliché, but her favorite brides' dresses were Grace Kelly's and Carolyn Bessette's.

"Maybe a simple column, with a lace coat," she told Olivier. "I will think," he responded. "I will draw."

Since childhood, Olivier has dreamed of designing the perfect wedding dress, but, with the exception of something he had sewn himself by hand for a friend, he had never fulfilled his vision. According to fashion legend, when Madonna married Guy Ritchie in 2000, she asked Olivier to make her dress. Apparently even Madonna balked at the cost and summoned best friend Stella McCartney to design one instead. (Estimated cost of a Paris couture wedding dress comparable to Lauren's? Around \$200,000.)

A few months later, again in Paris, Olivier presented Lauren with his ideas. Unaccustomed to wearing a dress with an

underskirt made with 120 meters of gauze and 120 meters more of silk tulle, she expressed some reservations. "You go to many black-tie parties, and you can wear that column anytime," Olivier

## STREET FARE

Horse-drawn carriages in historic Cartagena. ABOVE: Hope Atherton and Elise Øverland (both wearing Øverland's designs).







reasoned in his defense. "But for your wedding, you want to be respectful of the occasion and the historic church. This is a special day. You need a special dress." Though not entirely convinced, she left Paris having agreed to Olivier's designs for the church and for the feather-tufted sheath she would change into after the ceremony. "I thought, OK, let's do it, and if I get to Paris for the fitting and try on the muslin I could always say, 'Fine, do it small.'"

About seven weeks before the January 19 wedding, Lauren's fitting became a de facto fashion summit at the Nina Ricci atelier in Paris. Not only would the bride see the muslin for the first time—and love it—even M. Lesage was present to make sure that the embroidery "did not look like a Christmas tree but like

something washed away, swept away, in the detail of the dress." Calculating how many hours his people would need, he turned to Lauren. "Can you change your wedding date?"

On the Tuesday before the great Saturday, Beatrice Santo Domingo receives a visitor in the calm of the air-conditioned library, where, as in so much of the rest of the house, the walls have been painted under the instruction of a master fresco plasterer from Venice. She has arranged the house's impeccably elegant appointments-its Portuguese and colonial antiques and its inviting, soft furnishings-with the distinguished French decorator François Catroux. (The presence of Catroux's wife, the legendary style icon and Saint Laurent muse Betty, at the festivities throws the young fashionistas into paroxysms of excitement.) The Santo Domingos' ravishing villa unfurls along a city block around a series of courtyards shaded by towering palms and mango trees. In its pool the admirably svelte lady of the house swims some 100 laps a day. Beyond the

pool is the tennis court, its 62-foot-by-110-foot floor currently being raised two inches so it can be carpeted with an indigenous sisal by

the party designer Raúl Avila for the wedding dinner and dance.

Although they are fixtures in international society, maintaining residences in Paris, New York, and Bogotá, the Santo Domingos have avoided all close-ups until now. (Andrés's older brother Alejandro is his father's chosen successor to the family's vast interests in the beverage business. Last year, Forbes magazine estimated their worth at \$5.7 billion.)

"Is this the beginning of an annual Santo Domingo ball?" I ask Doña Beatrice, who is wearing a blue cotton shirt and white Emporio Armani jeans. (For the wedding she has chosen a long, midnight-colored Armani Privé evening dress.) She laughs, but the answer is a firm no. "Though it would be good to get more of our friends here. Lauren is like a daughter to me," Mrs. Santo Domingo says. "It was Julio Mario's idea to have the wedding here when she began having so much trouble finding the right venue in New York. We also hope it helps attract tourists to Cartagena, which we so love."

The newspapers today are filled with stories of political kidnappings and Hugo Chávez's role in the hostages' release. But the typical American tourists "walking in the streets," Mrs. Santo Domingo says, "are not the people the narco guerrillas are interested in." She pauses. "But, yes, as long as there are drugs in Colombia, and as long as the world uses them, parts of Colombia will be dangerous."

Almost on cue, helicopters buzz overhead. The local papers are right when they report that First Daughter Barbara Bush will be one of the wedding guests, wrong that Chelsea Clinton is waiting to decide at the last minute (she is not coming). The buildup to the arrival of the hundreds of guests begins. The overseas guests who are not flying privately arrive by charter on

Thursday, when Andrés and Lauren host a welcoming dinner at the Casa Conde de Pestagua. On Friday, those who have survived the pulsing salsa bar are swept up in brilliantly colored open chiva buses to a dock where boats transport them to the Santo Domingos' place on the nearby Isla Barú (where, alas, one of the groomsmen breaks his toe playing football). This is quite simply paradise—pelicans swoop into lucid waters that are bathwater warm. The party then continues with the rehearsal dinner, which the Davis parents host that night at the Hotel Santa Clara, converted from a majestic colonial-era convent.

After the rehearsal dinner, guests repair to the fascinatingly labyrinthine home of Cartagena's most intoxicating hostess, Chiqui de Echavarria, to dance the night away or lounge on a series of terraces cooled by sea breezes. (What happens at Cartagena's after parties stays in Cartagena, except to say it isn't until around 10:00 A.M. that Chiqui announces, "OK, let's go to my island!"—and why not?)

Miraculously, by Saturday afternoon the bridesmaids manage to assemble to dress for their portraits by Arthur Elgort and the ceremony to follow. The nine wom-

en are dressed by nine different designers working in a palette dictated by the colors of the church: its harebell-blue ceiling, its soft apricot-pink distempered walls, its gray stone floors. Juliet Rogulewski Angus wears J. Mendel, Fabiola Beracasa is in Vera Wang, Coco Brandolini in Alberta Ferretti, Cecilia de Sola in Phillip Lim, Amy Greenspon in Proenza Schouler, Tinsley Mortimer in Giambattista Valli, Allison O'Malley in Michael Kors, Tatiana Santo Domingo in Derek Lam, and Chanel Scott in Carolina Herrera.

Lauren's gift to each of her bridesmaids is a gold chain necklace inscribed with their initials. She makes thoughtful, specific hair and makeup suggestions, for a balance of hair up and hair down, and then announces, "Don't listen to what I am saying. At the end of the day, we're not 21 anymore and we all have our individual styles, so do what you want to do."

Lazaro Hernandez stops by for a viewing of the wedding dress and coat, which is being held in one of the air-conditioned



ISLE OF JOY

The bride (in vintage YSL) and
Caroline Sieber (in Roberto Cavalli)
on the deck of the beach pavilion.



bedrooms. "Amazing," he says. "Olivier makes the most beautiful evening dresses." Then the groomsmen arrive to escort the bridesmaids to the church, where the groom is waiting.

As requested, all the men are wearing white jackets (the groom's is custom-made by Tom Ford) and black tie, and the

QUICK CHANGE

shears the skirt

of the bride's

dress for the

after party.

At 2:00 A.M.,

Theyskens

feathered

women, despite the heat, have not let their fashion slide. "I am looking for the man of my dreams," Jessica Joffe in purple satin Thakoon says, laughing.

"How is it going?" asks her friend Justinian Kfoury.

"Well, I've narrowed the search down-to a man in a white dinner jacket."

Every guest is given a fan, a mercy in the suffocating heat that rises up to the vaulted ceiling and through the fronds of the towering palm trees that are the sole floral decoration. The bell tower of the Iglesia de Santo Domingo is picturesquely crooked, according to legend, because the Devil is always knocking.

Swaying in the heat, waiting with great anticipation for the reveal of the bride and her dress, the South American grandees, the New York fashionistas, the Paris aristocrats, and the London bankers sit in the pews talking softly. Many others line the entrance of the church chatting and fanning and gossiping, while pigeons from the piazza fly inside and perch above the altar.

The guests turn to hear the sound of Lauren's carriage approach; the church doors are shut lest the groom see her. Mendelssohn's "Wedding March" begins, ends, and begins again (Theyskens is arranging the train on the church's steps). The crowd in the piazza is cheering, chanting, "Lauren, Lauren, Lau-

ren!" The veiled bride enters on the arm of her beaming father. The guests part as if they were a sea. Fans stop. People stand. Even the most sophisticated sigh over the bride and her heavenly dress: a dress for the ages. In this moment, every other piece of couture could be sackcloth.

The ceremony includes Franz Schubert's Mass in G Major and two sermons. The first, in Spanish, preaches against the pleasures of the flesh. The second, in English, describes for the groom's behalf the pleasures of fidelity. This is followed by Communion, and, as if suddenly "El Jet Set Internacional" has found religion, a great many take it. (Minnie Mortimer explains, "I took Communion just to get a closer look at the embroidery" on the bride's coat.)

Staring at Lauren's dress in wonder, the flower girl, Daniela Pérez, asks, "Is it heavy to wear?"

"No," Lauren answers. "In fact, it is amazingly light. The only thing I feel is the corset, the bustier; the entire dress is constructed from there. It is amazing."

> Once the ceremony has finished, the more than 500 guests walk the cobblestone streets to the Santo Domingos' house for cocktails under the mango trees. While Marielle Safra and Mica Ertegün catch up on a few details of the apartment in New York Mica is decorating for Marielle and her husband, the father of the bride and the daughter of the president of the United States are talking. Mr. Davis says he has given his best advice to the groom, three lines to repeat over and over: "I was wrong, you are right, and I love you." He sighs. He misses Lauren already.

The First Daughter puts her arm consolingly

around his shoulders. Since she was spotted on a 6:30 A.M. commercial flight out of New York City on Thursday morning, sitting in coach chatting up her seat partners on either side, her Secret Service agents discreetly in tow, as they are tonight, Barbara Bush has been earning high marks for being down-to-earth and approachable.



"When we got into the carriage, Lauren whispered something in my ear," Mr. Davis says.

"What did she whisper?" Barbara Bush asks.

"She told me, 'Dad, don't cry when you walk me down the aisle. Don't cry, because if you do,' "he says, laughing, "'everyone will be looking at you instead of at me!""

At dinner, on the tennis court transformed by bougainvillea, there is salsa music by the Latin Brothers band from Bogotá, and more exquisite dancing. At 1:30 in the morning, Lauren finds Olivier Theyskens. They leave the dance floor and head upstairs to Lauren's room, where Theyskens brandishes the dressmaking shears he has in his pocket.

At approximately 2:00 A.M., with such precision that it could be reattached at a moment's notice, Olivier cuts most of the skirt off Lauren's second dress, leaving her feathery finery in a heap on the bed.

Thus transformed, the new Mrs. Santo Domingo leads the guests up a ramp lined with ceremonial dancers to the seventeenth-century fortress for disco and live-orchestra dancing overlooking the sea. At 5:00 A.M. London's Izzy Winkler exclaims, "I told all my friends, Thank God you're already married. Because I don't know what anyone could do to top Lauren and Andrés's wedding-except, I suppose, get married on the moon."

