

exclusive

BY LIESL ROBERTSON

playing for keeps

Springbok rugby player JP Pietersen and Megan Weir-Smith tied the knot in his hometown of Stellenbosch recently. We got an exclusive behind-the-scenes peek at the star-studded black tie event.

Megan first met her longtime beau JP Pietersen 10 years ago. Back in 2005, Megan's sister Cara introduced her boyfriend (now husband) Dusty [Noble] and his cousin to her family, and younger sis Megan took an instant liking to the tall, soft-spoken cousin. 'He is the kindest, most relaxed person I have ever met,' she says. 'He does so much for his family and those around him; it drew me to him instantly.' The feeling, says JP, was mutual. 'It was love at first sight for sure. I knew very early on she was going to be my wife.' The two stayed good friends for a few years and 'the rest, as they say, is history,' laughs Megan. Since JP plays for both the Sharks and the Panasonic Wild Knights, they are currently splitting their time between KZN and Japan. Although it has been tough being away from home, the time away has ultimately



JP AND MEGAN WALKING ACROSS THE LAWN AT LOURENSFORD TO JOIN THEIR GUESTS



FAIRY LIGHTS LIT UP THE VERANDAH AND THE TREES OUTSIDE



MEGAN AND HER DAD ROLAND WALKING DOWN THE AISLE

helped them realise what they have in each other. 'We are just such good friends,' says Megan. 'I think being in Japan made us realise that we are meant to be. We just work. Even though we live in a foreign place with no family, just a few friends and hardly any English, we manage to have the best time and laugh at ourselves a lot.' JP couldn't agree more. 'My career isn't easy and there are a lot of lows, but Megan keeps me positive when things aren't going well. I couldn't ask for a more beautiful woman with such a big heart.'

JP popped the question in Cape Town a year ago. 'He surprised me with two nights at the Twelve Apostles Hotel,' says Megan. 'I had no idea where we were going and he downplayed the whole thing, saying a sponsor had given all the Springboks a night away somewhere. He knew I wanted to go there – we always drive past and it looks so



MEGAN AND HER MOM, COLETTE

beautiful!' After a romantic dinner, JP surprised her with some bubbly back in their room. 'He was playing our song while I was unpacking my bag, and then he called me over and proposed right then and there! I was so surprised. It was such an amazing moment and very private – just perfect for us.'

Planning a wedding from Japan was no mean feat. 'It's especially hard with the time difference between Japan and SA!' says Megan. 'Our planner (also called Megan, from Wedding Concepts) was amazing; we managed to do most of it via Skype, email and Whatsapp. Planning it with JP was fun – it's like a little project you have for a few months, and you learn a lot about each other and what you both think is important. We've



FAR LEFT: THE NEWLYWEDS
LEFT: MEGAN AND JP WITH (FROM LEFT) JP'S SISTER JOHNELENE, HIS MOM RYNETT WITH HIS NIECE CAMERON, HIS SISTER TERRY-JILL AND DAD JOHN

Stellenbosch and Somerset West is relatively close, with a lot of accommodation nearby.' And, as they had chosen a date that usually spells rain and

dresses and boning. The one I chose, by British designer Jenny Packham, easily beat all the others – it had the most beautiful detailing I've ever seen and I felt special the moment I put it on. I didn't want to take it off! I got Chanelle Botha, a designer friend of mine in Durban, to make a three-layered tulle cathedral-length veil and she found a vintage ivory fur bolero for when it got chilly.'

The bridesmaids' embellished ivory dresses were bought online and delivered to Japan. 'I was so nervous ordering them online but they arrived a few days later and were perfect,' she says. 'They were flattering on all of my beautiful bridesmaids and complemented my dress. I wanted them to look like goddesses and they did.'

For the venue, they had some very specific requirements. 'We chose Lourensford for a number of reasons. We love the winelands, but didn't want it to be too far away from the airport. Also, JP's family lives in

wind in Cape Town, they needed a venue that could provide shelter. 'They have the most beautiful glass doors at the venue that showcase the stunning view, which we loved.'

As the couple live in Ota (an hour outside of Tokyo) for six months of the year, they wanted to bring a bit of Japanese flavour to the day as well. 'We brought 1000 off-white paper cranes, traditionally good luck for Japanese weddings, and the décor team put them up to symbolise our new home,' says Megan.

The two chose what turned out to be a perfectly sunny day in the dead of winter. 'JP had two Saturdays off in 2015 so we didn't have much of a choice in terms of dates!' laughs Megan. 'But winter was perfect for our décor preferences and dress code, so it all worked out perfectly.' While the couple went off to take pictures, the 140-odd guests played lawn games and mingled. 'Good music was important for us, so we had entertainers for pre-drinks, a reception DJ and a late-night party DJ. Lots of delicious food was also

both always said we wanted a black tie wedding – we love to dress up and so do our guests. JP was very involved with the décor and look and feel of the day, but his schedule is so crazy that he only managed to see the venue at the rehearsal the day before!

For her dream dress, Megan went all the way to London. 'Giorgia, one of my bridesmaids, booked a few dress appointments in London when I went for the Springboks' end-of-year tour in 2014. I tried on so many different dresses. I wanted something comfortable that would skim my body, as I'm not a fan of super-structured

CHEESE, COFFEE AND CHARCUTERIE STATIONS, AS WELL AS HEATERS, BLANKETS, LIVE MUSIC AND A GIN BAR KEPT THE GUESTS HAPPY



FLOWER ARRANGEMENTS IN GREEN AND WHITE WERE SUSPENDED ABOVE THE TABLES

TOP RIGHT: ESCORT CARDS HELPED GUESTS FIND THEIR SEATS
RIGHT: CHEERING THE NEW COUPLE



ENJOYING THE SPEECHES



FELLOW RUGBY PLAYERS JEAN DE VILLIERS (RIGHT) AND TENDAI MTAWARIRA (THIS PIC) WERE AMONG THE GUESTS



JP WITH HIS GROOMSMEN: COUSINS DUSTY AND HOWARD, FRIENDS KIRWIN AND FREDDIE, AND PAGEBOY HUGO. MEGAN WITH HER BRIDESMAIDS: HER SISTER CARA AND BEST FRIENDS GIORGIA, ROSALYN AND KENDALL, WITH FLOWERGIRL CAMERON



crucial, as we are foodies and our guests were big eaters!' With a three-course meal and a late-night snack station, that was no problem!

Many of JP's fellow rugby players were there, among them Frédéric Michalak, Bismarck du Plessis, Scarra Ntubeni, Tendai Mtawarira, brother-in-law Dusty Noble, Lwazi Mvovo, Schalk Burger and Jean de Villiers.

'Seeing my handsome groom's face at the end of the aisle brought tears to my eyes,' says Megan. She also recalls a moment after the ceremony which she'll never forget: 'As we were walking over the lawn with the sun setting over the mountains, we looked up and saw all our favourite people under the fairy lights having a ball and waiting to embrace us. It was surreal!' Although he admits to being so nervous he couldn't sleep the night before, JP has a hard time choosing just one highlight. 'When

Meg walked down the aisle, I was so happy and excited, I couldn't wait.' He loved their first kiss as man and wife, 'and our first dance was also super special. I was on cloud nine!'

JP and Megan opened the dance floor to the sound of 'Lay me down' by John Legend and Sam Smith. 'It's just a beautiful song that says no matter where you are, as long as you

are together, that's all you need. We have spent a lot of time apart over the years so it means a lot to us.'

JP and Megan are off on honeymoon later this year. 'We're excited to start our new adventure as husband and wife, and live a life of travels and fun together,' says JP. As for starting a family – 'that will have to wait until we live on one continent per year!' ❖

PHOTOGRAPHS: CHRISTINE MEINTJES. COORDINATION & DESIGN: MEGAN KENNEY FROM WEDDING CONCEPTS. FLOWERS: OKASIE. HAIR: RETO STYLE LOUNGE. MAKEUP: DYLLAN MORRAS. ACCOMMODATION: WWW.LEKESLAAP.CO.ZA