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IN LIVING COLOR

NEHA BATAVIA & MANISH AGRAWAL

August 11, 2012 Houston, Texas | Photographed by Tomas Ramos Photographers

Neha Batavia and Manish Agrawal's love story began at the tender age of 13, but as fate would have it, the pair lost touch once they went off to college in different states. Yet, destiny eventually stepped in: At a mutual friend's engagement party seven years later, Neha and Manish reconnected – this time for good. In a hot air balloon high above the storybook landscape of Cappadocia, Turkey, their fate was sealed when Manish asked Neha to marry him. She said yes.

The first order of wedding planning was finding a venue to

accommodate the pair's 800-person celebration. They decided upon a handsome hotel in their hometown of Houston, which provided a generously sized ballroom to bring their dream wedding to fruition. And, it was of utmost importance to the groom not only to have the festivities reflect his and Neha's personalities, but to have family involved in all aspects of the grand affair. "I have a very large family who I am very close to," explains Manish, "and having them be not only a part of the celebration but also part of the planning was very important to me."

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“Coming to the decision to propose was the easy part; I woke up one morning and decided that there was no one in the world that I would rather be with than Neha.”

The bride and groom also sought to mix traditional Indian wedding traditions with Western elements. The combination provided for many fabulous outfit changes and memorable moments including a *baraat*, in which the groom arrived on an elephant.

The couple opted for a customary Indian ceremony performed by a priest, and culminated with the couple walking around a small, enclosed fire referred to as the *agni*. A magnificent stage was decorated with floral arches that framed additional arrangements of plum-hued flowers. Sumptuous scarlet and golden fabrics cloaked

the walls, and violet lighting cast a gorgeous glow. The aisle was lined with crimson petals, candlelight, and translucent vases overflowing with ruby-red floral arrangements. Bronze *chiavari* chairs were tied with spritely red sashes.

The bride was radiant in a lehenga of red and gold with floral appliqué embellishments. The groom sported a traditional *sherwani* in matching hues. The couple’s hands were festooned with intricate henna artwork. “I will always remember holding Neha’s hands and looking into her eyes,” says Manish of the nuptials.



Following the ceremony, the couple held a Champagne toast with their bridesmaids and groomsmen. “It was a fun and relaxing way to celebrate our relationship with close friends before the craziness of our reception,” recalls the bride.

The bride changed into a dazzling white floor-length gown while the groom sported a classic black tuxedo post-ceremony.

The pair sought to incorporate their proposal story into the reception and, as such, a sweet and whimsical hot air-balloon motif was utilized throughout, from the cake to the seating cards.

Miniature hot air balloons affixed to an enlarged photo of a cerulean sky displayed the names of guests and their corresponding table numbers. “It was as if everyone was taking a hot air balloon journey with us,” remembers the groom of his favorite décor detail of the night.

The ballroom was completely transformed into a joyful explosion of fiery hues. Milky white cylindrical vases featuring beautiful floral arrangements of roses in red, orange, and marigold tones. Tables were draped with white-and-gold chevron linens.







An elaborate buffet-style dinner featured both traditional Indian cuisine and the couple's favorite foods from around the world. For dessert, an elaborate confection featuring differently shaped tiers swathed in robin's egg blue, white, and gold icing was sliced and offered to guests. "The wedding cake was beautiful," says the bride, "and the cake topper was my favorite."

"It was amazing to have everyone I care about in a room together," remembers Neha. "I had all my closest friends from high school, college, and graduate school in one room, which will probably only happen once in my lifetime," she says.

Both Neha and Manish wouldn't change a thing about their wedding. "I was marrying the woman of my dreams," says the groom, "and I was surrounded by genuine love from my friends and family... what more could anyone ask for?"

KELLY GOLIGHTLY



