

America's royal wedding

By Katie Connolly BBC News, Washington



Although she has not sought the spotlight, Chelsea Clinton is still a household name

For many Americans, the young Ms Clinton who married her long-time beau Marc Mezvinsky on Saturday is in no need of her famous surname. She's just Chelsea.

To her doting father, she's always been the centre of the universe. She ordered him to lose 15 pounds (7kg) before walking her down the aisle, and he unquestioningly complied.

Before the event, the former president told another first daughter, Jenna Bush, that he would be both proud and wistful at the wedding, thinking about the day Chelsea was born and her first day of school.

"I just hope I can keep it together," he said.

For the equally adoring MOTB - that's Mother of The Bride, in case you didn't realise, and it's the acronym the Secretary of State has adopted - dress fittings and cake tastings have taken priority on a calendar that included meetings on Mid-East peace.

But to the American public, Chelsea is the girl that grew up before their eyes, and they want a piece of the action.

America's girl

Ever since she appeared on the White House steps in 1993 as a typically gawky 12-year-old, Americans have eagerly dissected every small tidbit that managed to slip through her parentally constructed media shield.



Chelsea Clinton moved into the White House at age 12, slightly older than Malia, the eldest Obama daughter

Whether she likes it or not, the publicity-shy only child is a household name.

Carl Anthony, an author and historian at the National First Ladies Library, says that Americans have been interested in Chelsea's wedding because she is part of the national narrative.

"It's a reflection of ourselves I think. It's this sense of a public event and these public people that we have sense of familiarity with," Mr Anthony says.

"In Europe with its history of royal families, you've always had this. You've had national stories or national narratives."

For Americans, the Clintons fulfil that role.

A wedding is a turning point in a universally recognised life narrative, which is why Chelsea's nuptials have garnered more attention than her graduations from Stanford and Oxford or her post 9/11 essay in *Talk* magazine.

Chelsea's wedding has generated more interest than, for example, Jenna Bush's wedding in 2008, because she became part of the country's history at such a young age.

Moreover, the Clintons are icons of a different, seemingly more youthful time in America's history - a pre 9/11 era when the country wasn't weighed down with wars, bulging deficits and billowing oil leaks.



Chelsea and her husband Marc

Mezvinsky became friends as teenagers

Chelsea is a reminder of that time, and people feel invested in the life of that young girl who held her parents hands through their darkest personal days.

But, as Mr Anthony points out, despite her familiarity, people don't really know her.

"It's been 10 years since the Clintons left the White House and she's not in any way chosen or indicated a preference for a high-visibility public role. She's a grad school student," he told the BBC.

"It's not about her, it's about her parents."

And therein lies the problem with Chelsea's desire for nuptial privacy.

Leaked details

The Clintons and their personal lives have long been magnets for the media, and despite their efforts, details of the wedding set the blogosphere alight.

The 400 invitees were hosted at an estate in the Hudson River town of Rhinebeck, New York.

Rumours have abounded that the cost of the wedding was between \$3m and \$5m (£1.9m - £3.2m).

Aerial photographs which showed a large marquee being erected on the property of the Astor Courts Estate made their way onto gossip blogs.



A no-fly zone has been declared over the wedding site in Rhinebeck, New York

That of course raised the inevitable question: where would guests relieve themselves?

Apparently in classy porcelain portaloos, which cost around \$15,000 to rent. One New York website called the loos "nicer than your apartment".

For months, style watchers presumed that Chelsea would wear one of her mother's favourite designers, Oscar de la Renta.

But this week she was snapped entering a Vera Wang store in Manhattan, attempting to hide her face under an oversized floppy hat - and she wore a strapless white gown by the designer on the day.

The airspace over Rhinebeck was declared a "no-fly zone" on the afternoon of the wedding, further hampering the pesky paparazzi's ability to get that coveted shot.

But mostly, the wedding details were overshadowed by debates over the guest list - specifically which of Bill and Hillary's celebrity pals would make the cut.

Wedding politics

President Obama ended speculation that he would attend by telling the ladies of US talk show *The View* that he didn't receive an invitation.

Famous friends like Oprah Winfrey or Barbra Streisand were reported to be among those attending, but the Clintons had carefully clarified that each of the 400 guests must have a personal connection to the bride and groom.

In typical Washington fashion, that sensible decree did not prevent griping from political contacts hoping that campaign generosity also buys a ticket to the A-list.



The usual wedding politics take on a different hue when the bride is a Clinton

"I'm good enough to borrow a plane from, but not good enough to be invited to the wedding?" an anonymous political donor grumbled to the New York Times.

It's a quintessentially Washington mindset that conflates social and political power, access to which can often be bought.

That's a world that Chelsea has rejected. The politics of her wedding are the politics of any wedding writ large.

In the run-up, Chelsea had to grapple with questions that most brides do: how many people does the bride's family get to invite? What about the groom? How do I choose bridesmaids without causing hurt feelings? How big a secret do I keep the dress?

But when your parents are Bill and Hillary Clinton those questions take on a new level of meaning.

Chelsea didn't have a choice about that, or how many details of the wedding leaked. But these days, one thing she has control over is what people know about her.

"What we perceive as secrecy about the wedding is really just privacy," Mr Anthony says. "We forget that we don't know Chelsea. We think we do, but we don't."



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