

AHEAD OF HER WEDDING TO SINGER
AND SONGWRITER JACK McMANUS

MARTINE McCUTCHEON

PAINTS PARIS RED ON HER
TRES CHIC HEN WEEKEND



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Bride-to-be Martine by the Seine with (from left) Mandy Ivanovitch, bridesmaids Chloe Moss, Carrie King and Kim Crawford, Shelina Lewis, who will read at the wedding, and maid of honour Hayley Smith

Click-clacking through the streets of Paris in their designer heels, seven stylish ladies on a mission to have fun are causing mayhem.

Expertly groomed and dressed to impress in matching black tuxedos, crisp white shirts and bow ties, they giggle as passing drivers beep their horns in approval and crowds of tourists stop in their tracks to see what on earth is going on.

It's not your average attire for a sightseeing tour of the City of Love. But then singer, actress and stylish bride-to-be Martine McCutcheon – in whose honour this *très chic*

hen weekend has been arranged – doesn't really do average.

"My friends all know I don't like to do things by half and that with me it's glamour, glamour, glamour all the way," laughs the 35-year-old star.

SUITS YOU, LADIES

"The idea of us all wearing tuxedos stemmed from the fact that, ever since I was a little girl, my bible has been the movie *Flashdance*.

"I used to rave to my friends about the scene where Jennifer Beals's character takes off her tuxedo jacket and she's just wearing the white bib and cuffs of a dinner shirt.

"I think tuxes on women are so sexy and, being in Paris, it's also very Yves Saint Laurent."

Martine, who got engaged to musician and

songwriter Jack McManus in December 2010, was joined on the trip by six of her closest friends.

Company director Mandy Ivanovitch was introduced to Martine around six years ago through a mutual friend and the pair got on like a house on fire. Stylist and dancer Shelina Lewis met Martine around ten years ago when she performed in one of her videos; she'll be giving a reading at the wedding as well as styling the bride for her big day.

Martine's maid of honour will be City worker Hayley Smith, a close family friend for 16 years. Designer Chloe Moss, creator of ChloBo Jewellery, met Martine through friends eight years ago and will be a bridesmaid. "She's the naughty little sister I never had," says Martine. Another bridesmaid will be mum-of-three Carrie King,

the partner of one of Jack's good friends. Kim Crawford, who worked as Martine's assistant around 14 years ago and became one of her dearest confidantes, will be chief bridesmaid. She flew all the way from Australia to join the hen party.

"We all kept saying to one another, 'She won't come, it's too far.' Then I got a phone call and it was Kim screaming, 'I've booked my ticket! I was over the moon,'" says Martine, with a smile.

"It's so hard for us to all get together because our lives are so busy and we're all travelling all over the place, doing different things. But when we do meet up, we have such a ball."

The ladies stayed at Paris's luxurious Hôtel Plaza Athénée, located between the Avenue des Champs-Élysées and the Eiffel Tower, where they kicked off their weekend with champagne. ▶

'It was all very *Sex and the City*. I think tuxes on women are so sexy and, being in Paris, it's also very Yves Saint Laurent'

"We had a few toasts, to the weekend and to me being a bride," says Martine. "They are all very excited about the wedding and so happy for me and Jack."

Later, the group got ready for their first evening on the town at the very cool, very chic Hôtel Costes, starting out with cocktails.

"It was all very *Sex and the City*," says Martine. "We got all glammed up in our finery. On the way, the taxi driver had laughed his head off at how much luggage we'd brought with us. Especially me – I had the biggest case of the lot. But it's Paris! You have to go for it, don't you?"

The next day, **HELLO!** joined the magnificent seven for an exclusive photoshoot as they toured some of the French capital's most famous attractions.

"We had photographs taken by the River Seine and at the Louvre. We actually got kicked out of the Louvre because we were literally stopping traffic. We were told that had never happened before," says Martine.

That night, they headed for the Moulin Rouge – winding up the celebrations at 7am the next morning. "On the way home we were all saying, 'Ooh, my voice sounds really croaky.' It was because we literally hadn't stopped talking and laughing from the moment we met up to the moment we said our goodbyes.

"There were some tears, too, because we do really miss one another. The weekend flew by so fast, but at least we have the wedding to look forward to."

WEDDING BELLE

Though she's keeping the details of her big day a closely guarded secret, glamour-loving Martine's marriage to 27-year-old Jack will be a classy and elegant affair.

Due to take place later this year at a location that holds special significance for the couple, it will put the seal on a romance that has brought the former *EastEnders* star a deep contentment and sense of security she despaired of ever finding.

"I have been engaged before. I won't name names – that's my past, it's history," says Martine. "But I guess in the past I've been a bit of a runaway bride."

"Things had ended before, once I'd got engaged. I realised that by marrying I was trying to fix something that wasn't working. But when Jack and I got engaged, I didn't feel pressured or nervous, I felt peaceful.

"Life will throw surprises at us – it always does – but the obstacles aren't my feelings for Jack, who I love with all my heart."

Jack, who has written songs for a host of top stars, including The Wanted, popped the question on the fourth anniversary of the night they met at the gig of a mutual musician friend.

"It was December 21st and I was getting the flat ready for Christmas," Martine recalls. "Jack came in and announced, 'Get your gladrags on, I'm taking you out



Martine with singer and songwriter Jack McManus, "who I love with all my heart"

'We got kicked out of the Louvre because we were literally stopping traffic. We were told that had never happened before'



The girls on the town – a double celebration as they toast not only Martine's big day, but the fact they are all in the same place. "It's so hard for us to all get together because our lives are so busy and we're travelling all over the place," Martine says. "But when we do meet up, we have such a ball!"



'The taxi driver laughed his head off at how much luggage I'd brought. But it's Paris! You have to go for it, don't you?'

somewhere special.' So I whipped off my Marigolds and got ready.

"There was a blizzard that night, but Jack was adamant. He said to me, 'Bring your heels, but wear your snow boots.' So there I was, all glammed up with these thick, chunky boots on.

"We were driving along slowly and suddenly, he stopped just around the corner from Battersea Park and announced we were going for a walk along the river.

I thought, 'You're mad... but also so romantic and I love you for it!' So out I hopped.

"London's Embankment is one of my favourite places in the world and because it was snowing and there wasn't another soul around, there was something truly magical about it. And it was there, by Albert Bridge, that Jack got down on one knee and asked me to marry him."

Did she cry? "Yes! It was so emotional. Then we ran back to the car laughing and squealing like kids as we were so excited.

"I called my mum and she was over the moon. She already knew it was coming because Jack had asked her permission. She'd told

Martine's diamond and ruby engagement ring perfectly matches her radiant smile. "I feel completely loved," she says



'We literally didn't stop talking and laughing from the moment we met up to the moment we said our goodbyes'

him, 'About time too. Now get on with it!'

"She adores Jack. She knows in the past I've been quite scared of commitment. If you've been abandoned by a parent or brought up by a single parent as I was, deep down, you feel that's going to happen again.

"Because my natural father was so interested in my mum but not in me, my stepdad took me on, and was very kind to me. But I knew my mum was the one he was truly in love with and I just came along with it, so I unconsciously had this belief that it wasn't going to happen for me.

"Now, with Jack, I feel completely loved. In other relationships I've had to apologise for elements of who I am - 'Sorry about the press,' or, 'Sorry it's not glamorous 24/7.' With Jack, there's no need for me to apologise or compromise. As much as I can be a pain in the a*** to live with, he loves me for me."

POPPING LA QUESTION

The proposal was to have taken place in Paris. Jack had booked first class Eurostar tickets and a room at the same hotel she stayed in with for her hen weekend.

"But he'd had to cancel because of the snow," says Martine. As she speaks, the exquisite Edwardian-style diamond and ruby engagement ring Jack presented her with catches the sunlight.

"As it was, the way it happened could not have been more perfect - and I still got my Paris trip. All the girls said it was the most magical and glamorous girly weekend away ever," she smiles, adding: "I feel so safe with Jack. We've taken our time to let what we have grow naturally and because of that, we have a really solid and secure base on which to build our future.

"Whenever I see Jack for the first time, be it that he's been upstairs in his studio for a few hours, or been away for three weeks, my heart flips over, and I go, 'Oh my God, he's mine.'

"But most importantly we are the very best of friends and I trust him with my life. That's why he's going to make the most wonderful husband and I can't wait to be his wife." **H**

INTERVIEW: BELINDA ROBEY
PHOTOS:
ONEANDONLYPARISPHOTOGRAPHY

HAIR: SONJA STEIN AND HAROLD JAMES
ASSISTED BY KIM JUDEAUX
MAKE-UP: SANNI SORMA AT MISS MAI'S
MAKE-UP AND HAROLD JAMES ASSISTED
BY KIM JUDEAUX, USING ARMANI, YVES
SAINT LAURENT AND CHANEL



The bride-to-be outside her hen hotel, the Plaza-Athénée, with stylist and dancer Shelina, who will style Martine for her big day. The actress says all the girls had a blast. "The weekend flew by so fast," she says. "But at least we have the wedding to look forward to"