

NINA WADIA: I'M SO HAPPY IN MY HOME

WHEN BBC SKETCH SHOW *GOODNESS GRACIOUS ME* HIT OUR SCREENS IN 1998, LITTLE DID THEN NEWCOMER NINA WADIA REALISE IT WOULD PROPEL HER AS ONE OF THE COUNTRY'S MOST DIVERSE BRITISH ASIAN ACTRESSES, WRITES **AFSHEEN SHAIKH**

From her illustrious portfolio spanning radio, theatre, stand-up, television and film, 38-year-old Nina's notched up a part in Brit flick *Code 46*, appeared in the West End production *The Vagina Monologues*, starred opposite Bollywood legend Rishi Kapoor in *Namastey London* and most recently arrived in Albert Square in prime-time soap *Eastenders* as feisty business woman, Zainab Masood.

Opening the doors to her beautiful bungalow in Surrey, petite Nina beams, "You're the first magazine ever to be allowed into our home because my husband is such a private person." Upon first glance, it's hard not to notice the spacious hallway absorbed by the sunlight pouring through. On one side an impressive scalpel oil painting dominates the wall and adjacent to it, is a comfy sofa to slouch on. Barefoot and barefaced with a flawless complexion, Nina scurries after her three-year-old daughter, Tia who is curious by the arrival of Asian Woman.

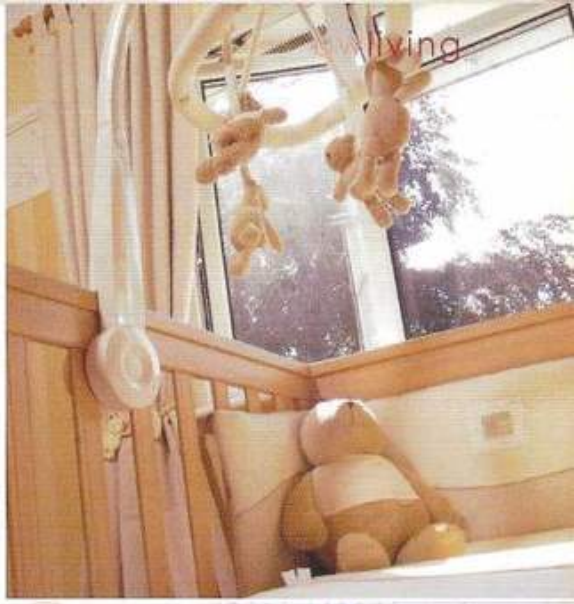
The Bombay-born actress who's of Parsi descent and is a follower of the Zoroastrian faith, had little time to rest after the birth of her second child, son Aidan (now four months old) when she was cast as Zainab Masood. "If it weren't for Eastenders, I would have taken a year out for Aidan but I couldn't say no. It's too large a show plus I've always wanted to do a soap opera," she excitedly reveals. "I play a Pakistani woman, who left Karachi in her late teens because she fell in love with a British Asian man. She's very forceful and protective of her family and frustrated with her husband, but she's in a tough place. England right now is a tough place to live in."

Closer to home, the mother of two was rocked by personal heartache last year with the death of her father from a stroke, losing a baby and her best friend to breast cancer. "We went to a total of nine funerals last year and work, apart from *Namastey London*, was pretty bad. People go through good years and bad years and I count my blessings but dad dying was the harshest thing ever. I was seven months pregnant when he died in Kuala Lumpur and I couldn't fly out to see him – I was absolutely gutted."

The following year after she wed composer Raiomond Mirza in 1998, Nina lost her mother to renal failure, a cause she fervently campaigns for in pleading for the Asian community to come forward as organ donors. "Kidney failure is so prominent in our culture, it's not funny and it's because of the food that we eat. Either change your lifestyle and diet earlier on in life or be ready to be tested and make sure you're

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The Mamas & Papas team hard at work

There is something very special about Mamas & Papas mattresses. He loves the mobile too . . .

on that register." Since moving to this home three years ago, the three-bedroom bungalow which she has lovingly done up with Raiomond, modestly houses a recording studio, an office, a conservatory, a garden and an open-plan kitchen-cum-living-room (by far her favourite part of the house), finally feels like home for Nina. "I came from a very poor background in which my mum, dad, brother, sister and myself slept in one bedroom in a flat in Dardar, a Parsi colony in Bombay," she recalls. "We moved to Hong Kong when I was 10 where we had a nice flat but I still had to share with my brother and sister. Then I had my own flat with my husband and finally I had enough money to buy my first house so this is very special."

The couple also run their own production company Oh My! Productions making short films and composing music. "It's called Oh My! because it was modelled on my mum's name which is Humai. Aidan's middle name Minoo is my dad's first name. We wanted something of my mum and dad to do with our lives so that's how we did it." A born traveller, Nina has collected memories of her journeys along the way. "I like so many different things from so many different cultures; I wanted a bit of everything," she says. Among the items include a tapestry from Dubai and the scalpel oil painting from Paris but the most extravagant purchase is her bed, which she guiltily admits burnt a huge hole in the pocket.

"When we went on our honeymoon to Kuda Hura in the Maldives we fell in love with the bed there so we rang the Four Seasons hotel and asked where the bed was from," she laughs. "It was seriously stupid money but it's the nicest bed I've ever slept in. It's a temple mattress and once you've slept in that, you don't want to sleep in anything else." Although her own room is far from being finished, Nina has chosen to turn her attention to her children's rooms first. "I had a big talk with my hubby about how I would like our kids to have their own rooms because it's something I never had but believe me they know it's a luxury. I am trying to teach Tia not to take things for granted. Work hard at something, you will get rewards."

"Tia's room is very princess like and pink with rainbows, which is great for her because she loves that. We actually let her choose her own stuff so her room is the least coordinated!" But it's Aidan's newly decorated nursery kitted out by Mamas & Papas, which Nina is most thrilled to talk about. "I wanted a space for Aidan where I'd like to be alone with him." "What's nice is that now everything is organised. I can sit down and read him a story and when I put him to sleep in the cot he loves it; there is something very special about Mamas & Papas mattresses. He loves the mobile too and that's something I didn't have for Tia when she was a baby. I know people will say, 'You don't need a nappy stand' but actually it really helps. If I want to change Aidan, I don't have to come to the bathroom – it's all in one place and I also think it will help calm him down."

Years of hard work and patience have paid off for Nina as she looks around her cosy nest. "This is my space. I'm so happy in my home; it's not grand but it's definitely comfortable," she says with a smile before adding, "but I haven't finished yet. The house will never be finished. I might have to call you back for a follow-up!"

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