

DEPARTURES

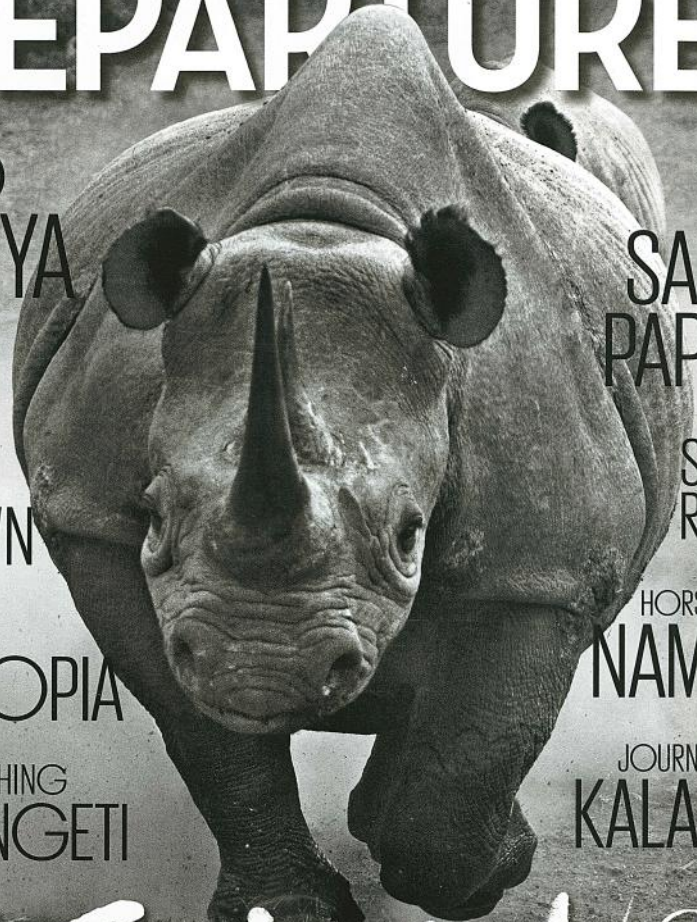
October 2013

WILD
KENYA

EAT
SLEEP
GOLF
CAPE
TOWN

HOLY
ETHIOPIA

THE VANISHING
SERENGETI



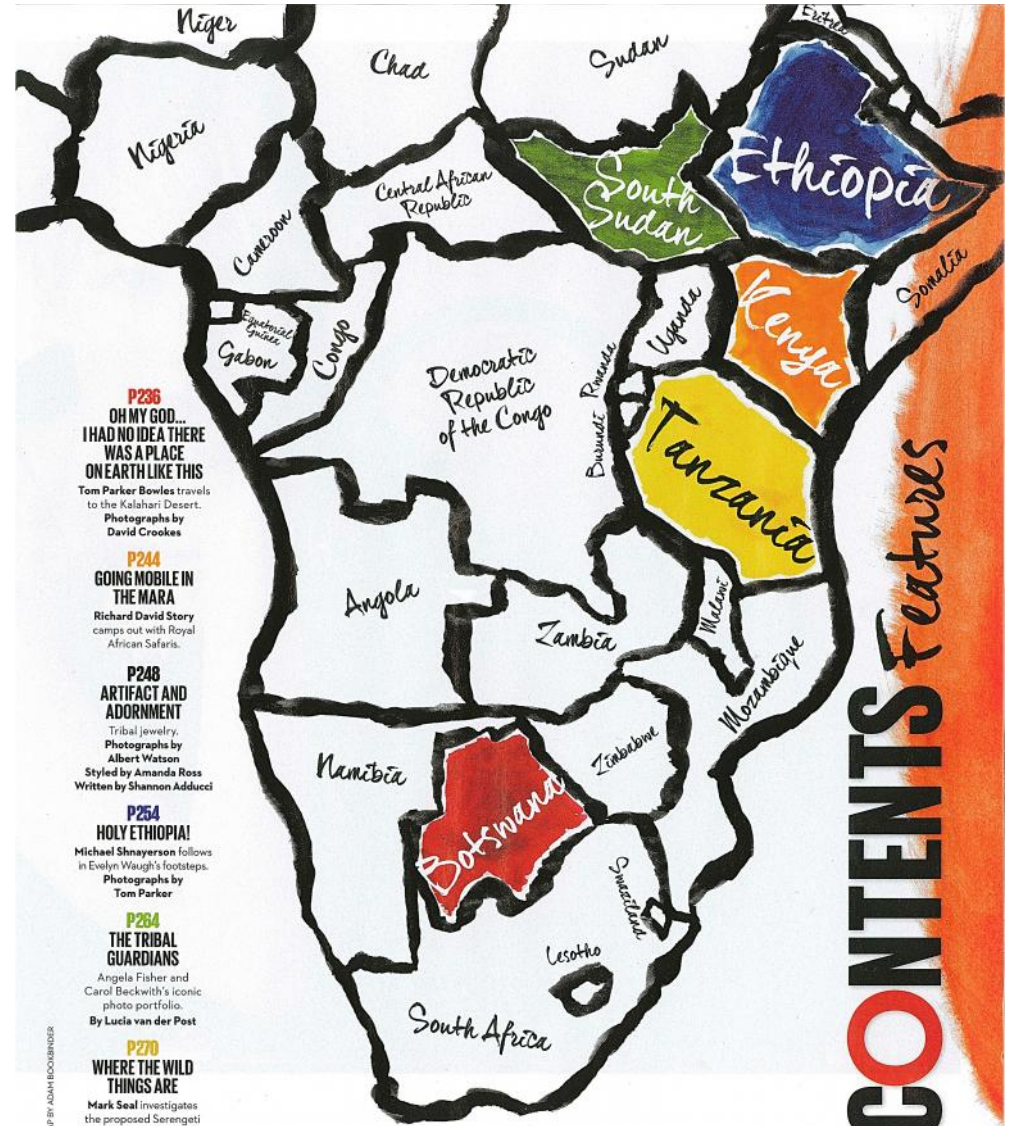
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SAFARI
PAPERS

SAVING
RHINO

HORSEBACK IN
NAMIBIA

JOURNEY TO THE
KALAHARI

AFRICA NOW



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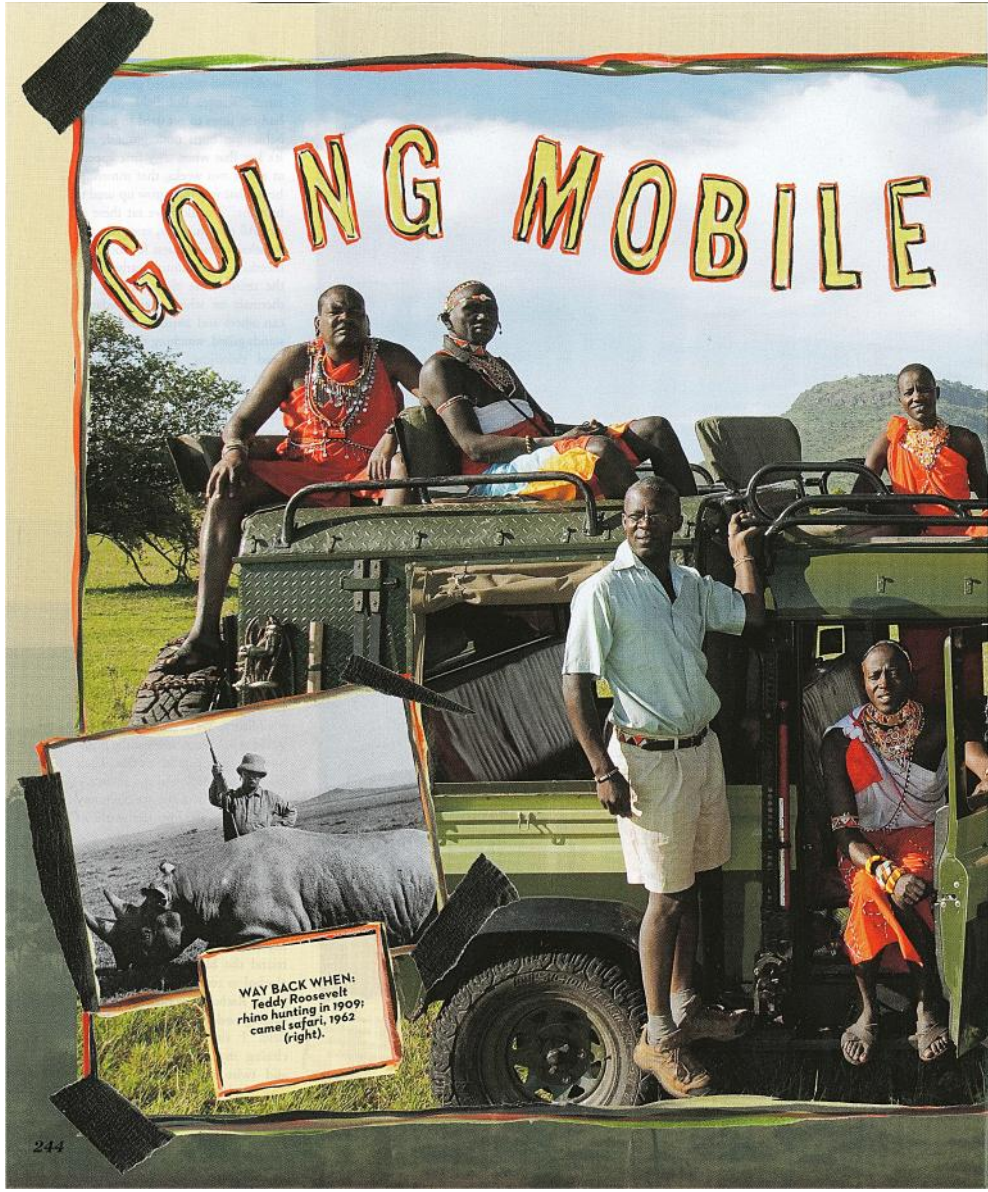
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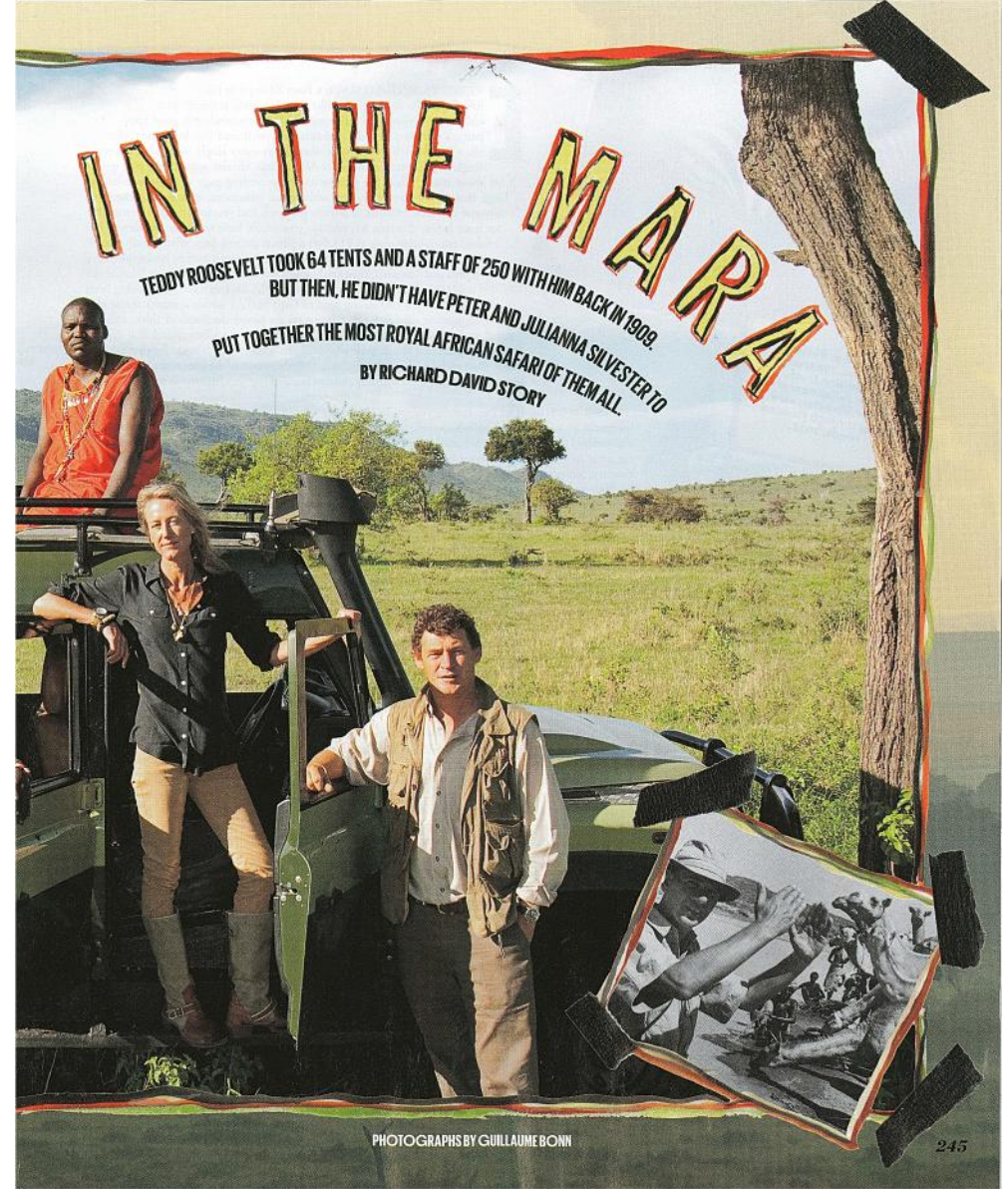
MAP BY ADAM BOONINER

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GOING MOBILE

WAY BACK WHEN:
Teddy Roosevelt
rhino hunting in 1909;
camel safari, 1962
(right).



IN THE MARA

TEDDY ROOSEVELT TOOK 64 TENTS AND A STAFF OF 250 WITH HIM BACK IN 1909.
BUT THEN, HE DIDN'T HAVE PETER AND JULIANNA SILVESTER TO
PUT TOGETHER THE MOST ROYAL AFRICAN SAFARI OF THEM ALL.
BY RICHARD DAVID STORY



From top: Riding a zebra, 1923; an expedition truck, 1929; Julianna and Peter Silvester; slow going through flooded roads, 2013.

EVERYONE SHOULD HAVE a Peter Silvester in his life. Especially at a moment like this. Not only is the 49-year-old Kenyan-born safari guide and outfitter tremendously good company, a serious oenophile and extremely well-read (his father was, after all, a Rhodes scholar), but he also knows every single thing about every single living creature under the African sun. He also appears to know quite a bit about mud. While the picture on the preceding page of a made-to-order Land Rover Defender, complete with Masai tribesmen, big-game tracker and Silvester and wife Julianna, is artfully propped, had you seen this same ensemble an hour before (bottom left photo), you would have seriously wondered, Is a mobile safari, beginning at \$14,000 a person for ten days, what I really want? Here, in the middle of the Mara-Serengeti, that huge, ancient landscape shared by Kenya and Tanzania, torrential rains from the night before have flooded the dirt roads on which we've been traveling for the last two days. After having been in the middle of a 100-strong herd of Cape buffalo, within a stone's throw of a cheetah nursing cubs and a lone hyena on the prowl, the floods at Talek, a funky tribal trading post on the Mara's edge, seem rather anticlimactic. A few drivers strip some gears and churn their wheels in the mud. Silvester waits for that perfect opening, then glides us through the chaos. "Mother Nature," he later notes, watching a lioness devour the last of a baby warthog right in front of us, "can be a real bitch."

GOING MOBILE HAS become the voyage du jour among those seeking the ultimate safari. If done properly, it's an intimate and comfortable, albeit pricey, way to safari. It means you travel in a vehicle customized for every emergency and/or luxury. It also means should you discover in the morning that the great migration of wildebeest has headed that way instead of this, you're not bound by any fixed itinerary. Silvester founded Royal African Safaris in 1985 and operates what many consider the very best high-end mobile experience in Kenya, Botswana and Tanzania. Back in January, I met with him and Julianna at Borana game lodge in the Kenyan savannah—he usually likes to sit down beforehand with a potential client, like the one he flew out from Nairobi to see in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Our trip covered the central and southern Mara and involved painstaking planning, meticulous attention to details and a staff of 14 for me, my wife and son. "A three-to-one ratio of staff to client is pretty much the norm," Silvester says. What you give up in air-conditioning and marble bathrooms, you vastly make up for in tents beautifully set up by the time you arrive each evening. And yes, there are flush toilets (a deal breaker for many). Alfresco lunches and candlelit dinners are immaculately orchestrated by Julianna, who grew up in Kenya (her father founded the venerable Governors' Camp there; see "How to Do the Mara-Serengeti," page 117), was educated in Switzerland and speaks five languages.

"The spontaneity of this sort of travel is irresistible," says Silvester. On the five-day mobile I did, we flew in the morning to Kora National Park for a visit with Tony Fitzjohn (see "The Big Business of Conservation," page 165), the conservationist-cum-lion whisperer. That evening at dinner we were joined by the most famous living paleoanthropologist in the world, Richard Leakey (see "The Big Business of Conservation"), who was chopped in from his farm at the edge of the Great Rift Valley.

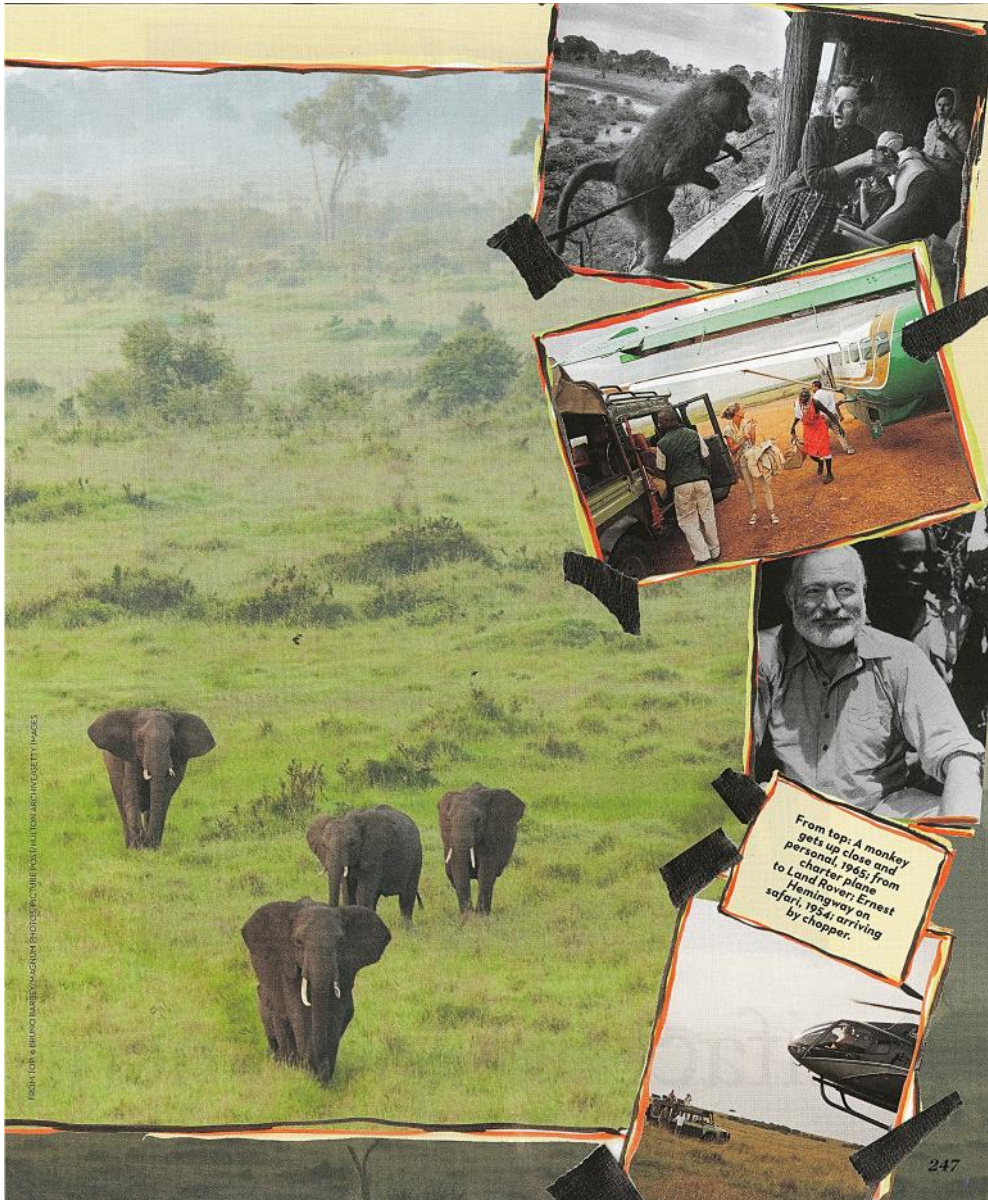
LEST ALL THIS SOUND terribly over the top, it isn't—or rather, it doesn't have to be, despite trips like a first-time safari Silvester arranged for two American families with an unlimited budget. That one included lunch with Nelson Mandela and ended 21 days later with a rock concert for 1,500 Masai. It involved five countries, elephant rides in the Okavango, white-water rafting at Victoria Falls, 300 employees, 75 tons of equipment, seven helicopters, two private jets and a seven-figure price tag.

Silvester very much models his mobile business (with its customized everything and expansive staff) after those grand turn-of-the-century safaris of, say, the Prince of Wales or Teddy Roosevelt, who, in 1909, had turned down a third presidential campaign to go on safari, planning it himself with meticulous care, including 64 tents, 250 porters.

But logistics and engineering aside—not to mention afternoon tea cakes and wines to raise the eyebrow of the most knowing Parisian sommelier—going mobile with Royal African Safaris is about being with people you trust. People you feel understand this world like no other, who could sit with you and watch the comings and goings of a family of dwarf mongooses as though they, too, were seeing it not for the umpteenth but for the very first time. ♦

A ten-day safari starts at \$14,000 a person and includes exclusive access to two mobile camps and one lodge in between, three professional guides, three vehicles and private charter flights via a 12-seat Cessna Caravan. There is no maximum or minimum party size. This year Royal African took a multigenerational family of 28 on its signature mobile safari; last year it hosted 60 CEOs. It has yet to take a lone traveler, though it's done parties of two. Average group size is eight; royalafricansafaris.com. For further details, contact outfitter Will Jones of Journeys by Design. (See "Guide to the Superguides," page 92.)

PHOTO TOP LEFT: BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES; HAWK VALLEY/THE LIFE PICTURE CO.; GETTY IMAGES; THE PAGE FROM TOP: BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES



From top: A monkey gets up close and charter plane, 1965; from to Land Rover; Ernest Hemingway on safari, 1954; arriving by chopper.

PHOTO TOP: ARIANO BALESTRACCHINI/PHOTO DISCOVERY; GETTY IMAGES