

EDITED BY CATHERINE FAIRWEATHER

Escape

...to a world less ordinary

*Take a stroll along the world's
BEST BEACHES: discover ISLAND
LIFE on the shores off Kenya; enjoy the
PRISTINE WHITE SANDS of the
Maldives; and romp along Britain's most
SCENIC COASTAL WALKS*



For sunset walks along empty beaches under a huge African sky, make for Ras Kitau (pictured), a beach on Manda Island that looks westward across the water towards the village of Shela on the Kenyan island of Lamu. At the nearby Manda Bay resort on the north of Manda Island there are palm-fringed, sheltered waters guaranteeing privacy and peace; plus there's the best food in East Africa from the Italian-trained Swahili chef; soft sand underfoot; and excellent beach-combing at low tide, when the water retreats almost all the way to the neighbouring island.

Manda Bay (www.mandabay.com). Journeys by Design (01273 623790; www.journeysbydesign.co.uk) offers four nights from £1,143 a person full board, not including flights.

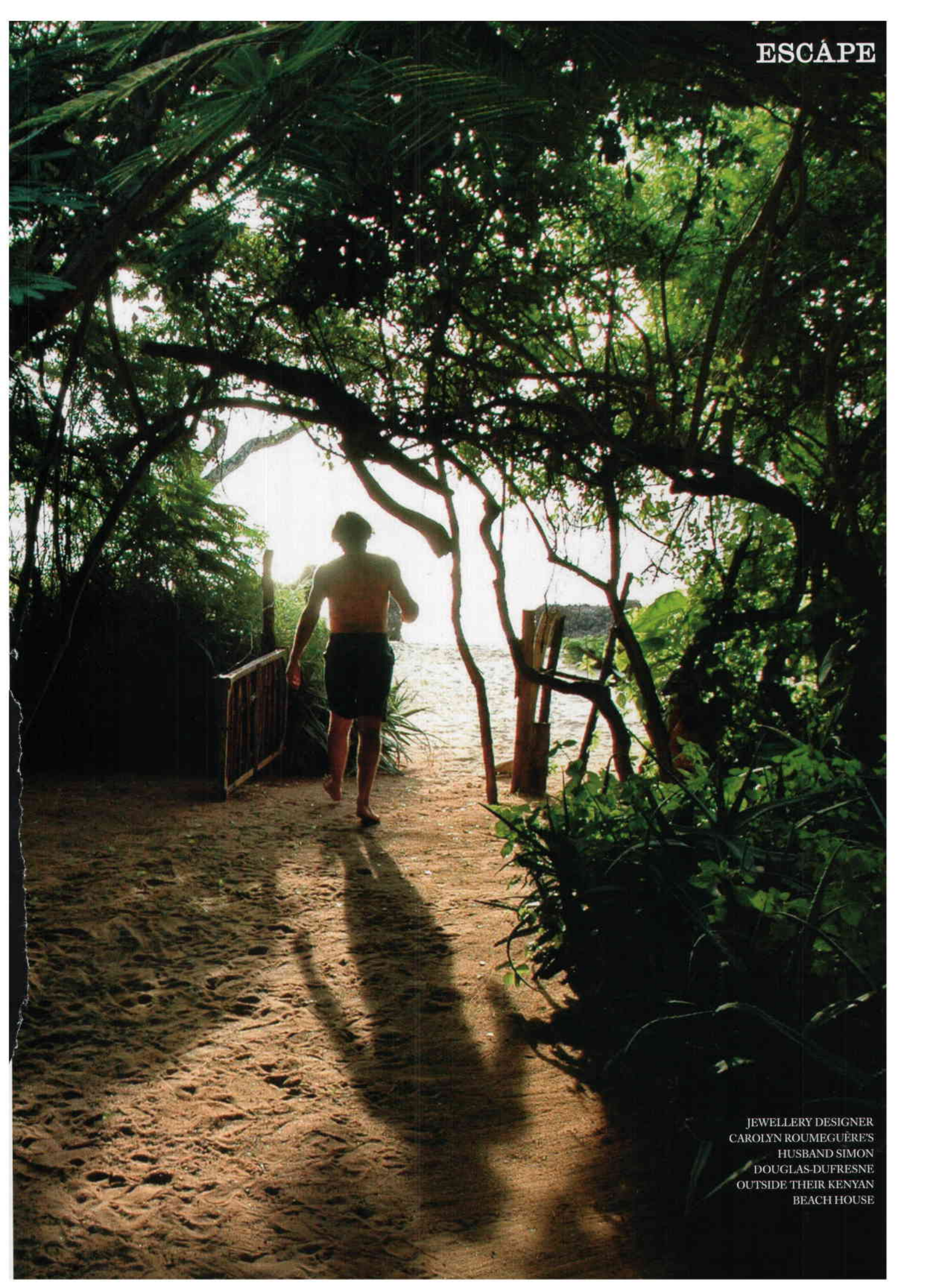
HARPERS OCT 2006
BAZAAR



Nature's bounty

Manda Island off Kenya sustains the life and work of jewellery designer Carolyn Roumiguère: her work is inspired by the treasures she finds on the shore; her children play in the shallows; and she eats freshly caught fish every day. ANN MARIE GARDNER visits her beach retreat. Photographs by CÉLIE-JANE BONN

ESCAPE



JEWELLERY DESIGNER
CAROLYN ROUMEGUÈRE'S
HUSBAND SIMON
DOUGLAS-DUFRESNE
OUTSIDE THEIR KENYAN
BEACH HOUSE

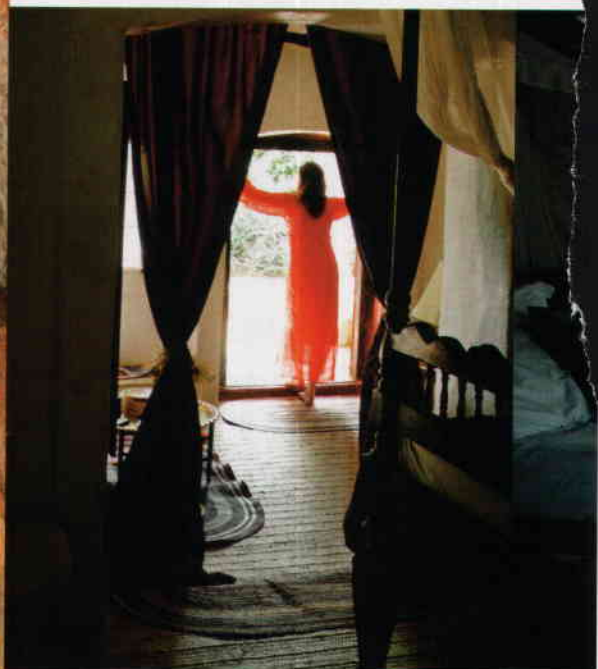
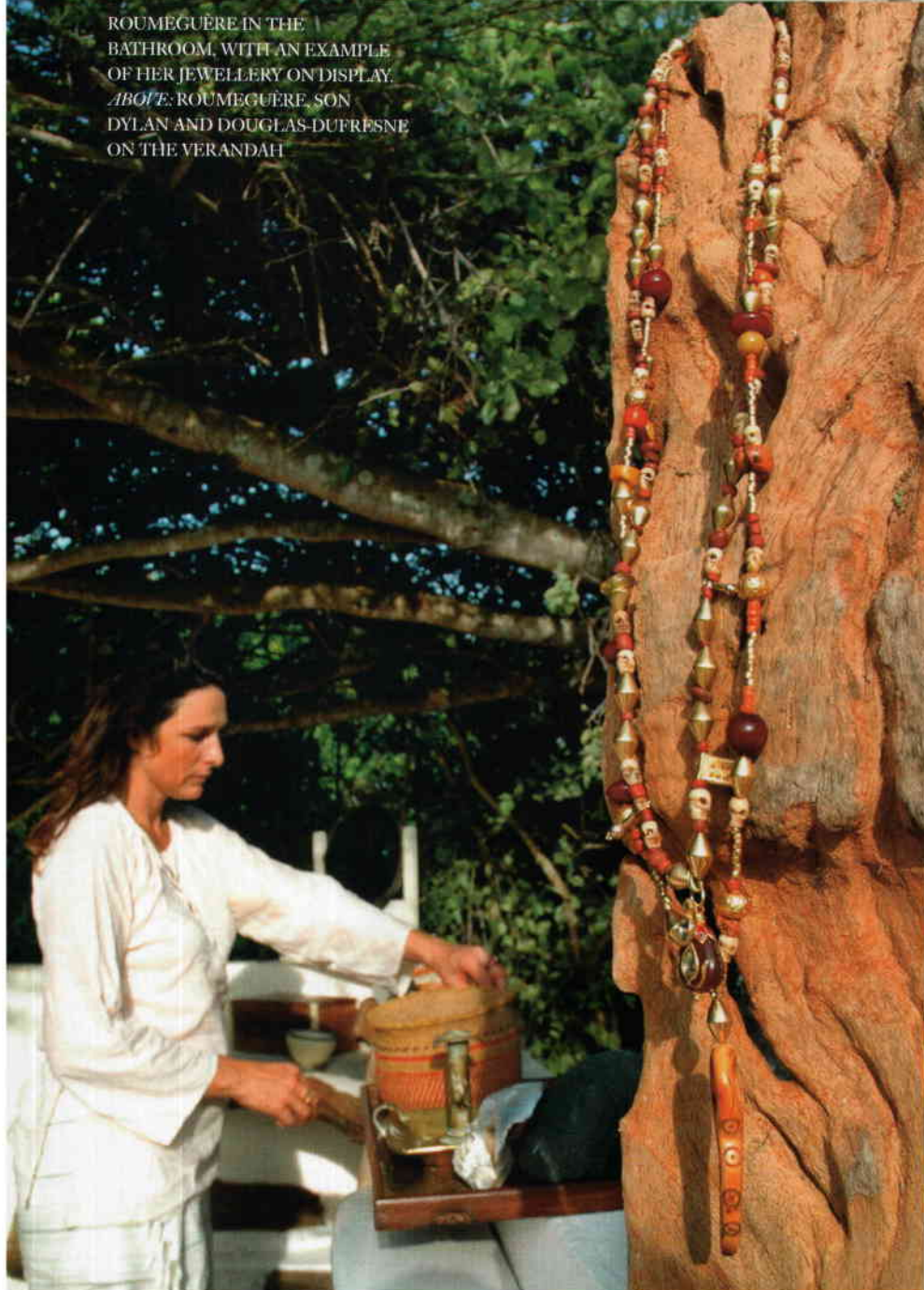
ESCAPE



ROUMEGUÈRE IN THE BATHROOM, WITH AN EXAMPLE OF HER JEWELLERY ON DISPLAY. ABOVE: ROUMEGUÈRE, SON DYLAN AND DOUGLAS-DUPRESNE ON THE VERANDAH



THE EXTERIOR OF THE HOUSE. BELOW, FROM LEFT: ROUMEGUÈRE IN ONE OF THE BEDROOMS. THE MASTER BEDROOM





Carolyn Roumequère does not live like most people. The jewellery designer was born in Paris, raised in the Masai Mara by an anthropologist – who became the number-one wife to a Masai chief – and has spent a good part of her life in a truck following the nomadic tribe. Her beach house on Manda Island, across the channel from Lamu and Shela off the coast of Kenya, is one of three houses where she and her husband Simon Douglas-Dufresne live. ‘We fly between our home on the edge of the Great Rift Valley and the Nairobi base,’ says Roumequère. ‘But the beach house is where I go when I want to spend more than two nights in the same bed.’

She starts a typical day waterskiing across the channel (Douglas-Dufresne drives the boat) to buy mangoes. In town, she will inevitably pick up a friend or two and entice them back for lunch, which is most likely to be grilled fish, caught that morning by one of the local fishermen, who makes a point of passing her beach in his wooden dhow. Roumequère and her five-year-old daughter, Cassia-Peia, will wade out through the shallows to select the best of the catch.

Roumequère – dressed in an Eres swimsuit and kikoi – is never still, forever bustling about, even with eight-month-old son Dylan glued to her hip. She wears jewellery of her own design: chunky African-inspired beaded pendants or delicate layered chains, the inspiration for which comes from the natural world around her. (A popular necklace of hers is the delicate skeleton of one of the sea creatures found scattered across the beach at Manda, cast in gold.) Her jewellery has been snapped up by everyone from Princess Caroline of Monaco to Bill Clinton, Rachel Weisz to Donna Karan.

Even though it is still wildly inconvenient to travel from overseas to Lamu and Shela, laid-back beach spot attracts an international crowd that spends its winters in St Barths and summers in Saint-Tropez. Prince Ernst August of Hanover and his wife, Princess Caroline of Monaco, built a glorious beach house and renovated three villas in Shela; and the Peugeot family also has a home here.

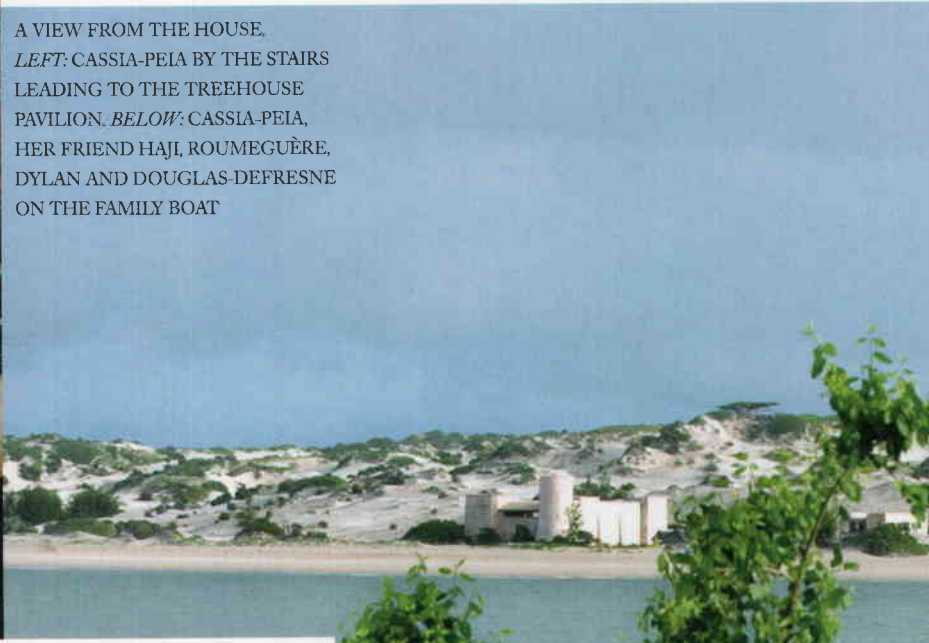


ESCAPE

DOUGLAS DEFRESNE
AND DAUGHTER
CASSIA-PEIA ON
THE BEACH



A VIEW FROM THE HOUSE.
 LEFT: CASSIA-PEIA BY THE STAIRS
 LEADING TO THE TREEHOUSE
 PAVILION. BELOW: CASSIA-PEIA,
 HER FRIEND HAJI, ROUMEGUÈRE,
 DYLAN AND DOUGLAS-DEFRESNE
 ON THE FAMILY BOAT



There are no cars on the island, and you have to sidestep the donkeys and chickens that live on the dirt alleyways – the atmosphere is truly dramatic, and the beaches are unlike any in the Caribbean, Mediterranean or Atlantic. The typical Swahili architecture – pointed arches and filigree decorative motifs with secret courtyard gardens and rooftop terraces – has grown up before a backdrop of empty, unspoiled white-sand beaches where dhows float past, their sails ripped and faded, looking for all the world like battle-worn pirate ships.

Douglas-Dufresne's 99-year-old grandmother and her husband Denys Allen originally bought the land on Manda from the Sultan of Zanzibar in the 1960s. At the time, there was no fresh water on the island and Allen had to collect rainwater to survive; living here still requires imagination and ingenuity. Douglas-Dufresne recently added an outdoor treehouse pavilion to their beach house, which has become a temple for entertaining. It sits on pink pillars with a wooden spiral staircase leading to the treetop level. It feels African, Balinese and Indian all at once. The dark-wood dining-room table and benches were made locally by Lamu carpenters, who also made the sturdy soapstone lamps. The shades were sewn in Nairobi from antique saris, and Roumeguère's silver serving pieces and cutlery were found during trips to Paris flea markets, where she also buys antique linens.

After long lunches of grilled fish and several bottles of rosé under the

bamboo awning of the open-air den, siestas are taken in the high Rajasthanian four-poster bed or on one of several Balinese daybeds. The cashmere blankets, made for Roumeguère in Nepal, are sold at Donna Karan's Urban Zen store in New York.

In the evening, she and her husband visit the tiny bar in Lamu's Peponi Hotel with the children, where they order 'Old Pals' cocktails, and hold court. 'I like that Lamu attracts an international crowd,' says Roumeguère. 'There are all kinds of interesting people, but it is still has a village feel because they come back year after year. The simplicity of the place also attracts me. Waking up at dawn with the birds chirping in my bedroom, and then walking down the beach without another soul in sight, just Simon carrying Dylan on his shoulder and Cassia-Peia, who is fascinated by all the sea creatures, chasing the tide.' □

NEED TO KNOW

CAROLYN ROUMEGUÈRE
 JEWELLERY is available at
 Henry Beguelin stores (www.henrybeguelin.com) in the US.
 PEPONI HOTEL in Shela on the
 island of Lamu (+254 42 633 421)
 has 24 lovely, simple rooms, and

is the epicentre of local social life.
 CEDRIC REVERSADE (020 7788
 7815; www.cedricreversade.com)
 handles exclusive rentals in Lamu,
 including Princess Caroline's villas.
 WHEN TO GO Visit from December
 to January and in August. Avoid
 the rains from April to June.

