

DEPARTURES

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THE
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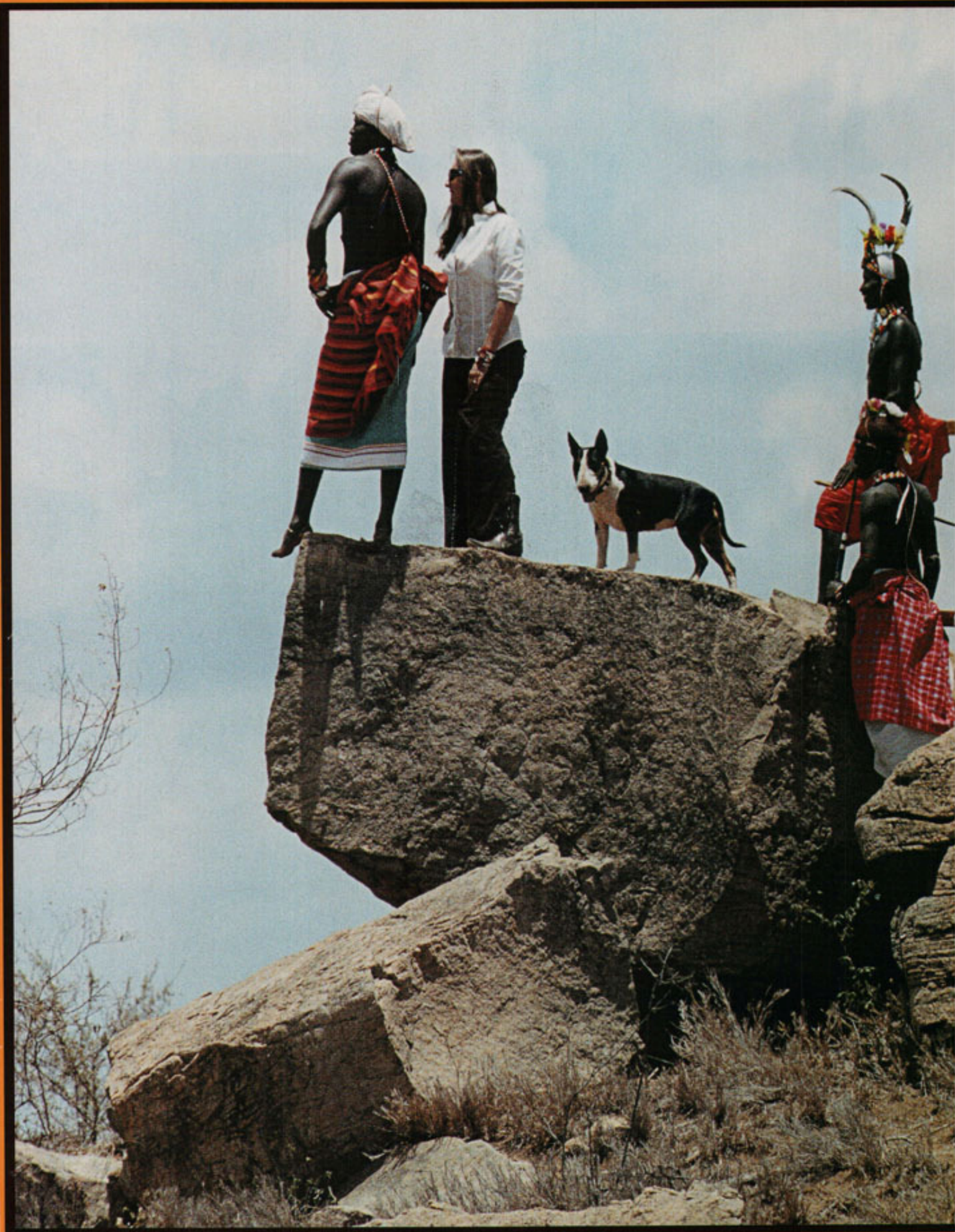
*A Photo Portfolio by Peter Beard
Written by Mark Shand*

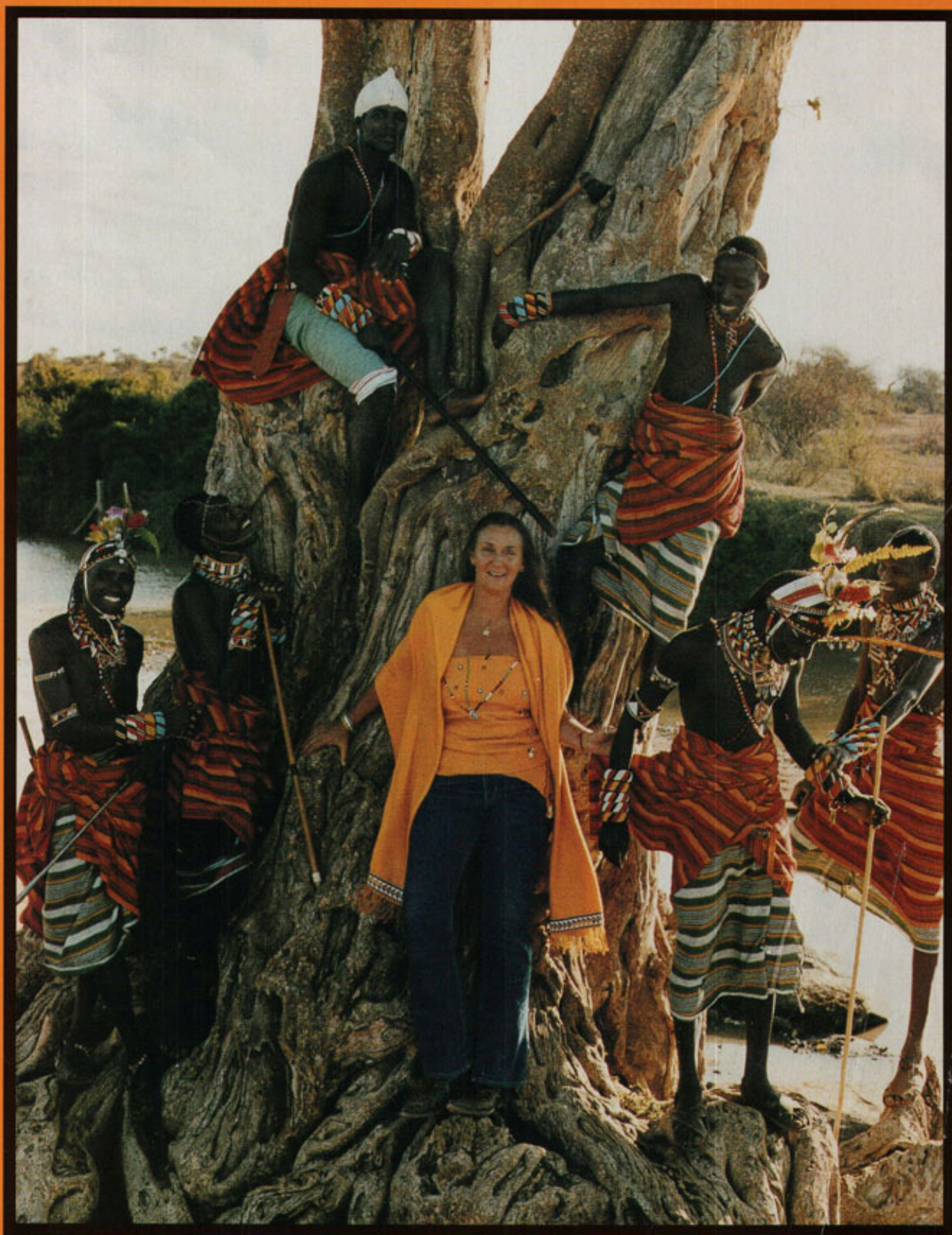
THE LADY OF NAIROBI



Anna Trzebinski was brought up in Kenya. Giraffes roamed in her garden and leopards drank from her swimming pool. Anna, as she tells it, spent all her time with nannies in the staff quarters, which is why she has such an affinity for Africa's indigenous people. Though I'd never met her before, I had heard about her. I knew of the clothes she designs, extraordinary tribal pieces inspired by the bush. I also knew about Tonio Trzebinski, her first husband, who was murdered in 2001. I knew how the tabloid press had supposed this was another *White Mischief*, with Anna the jealous wife. It was absurd. For Anna to go through it all when she was totally in love with Tonio. It must have been hell. Total hell.

Tonio was an artist of British and Polish descent, born and raised in Kenya. He was clearly a tortured genius, larger than life. You could see it in his paintings. The couple built a house and a life together in Nairobi. Anna still lives there. She tells the story of





From designing clothing and furniture to operating camps and an atelier, Anna Trzebinski has created her own Africa, one as unique as the giant fig tree she, her husband (sitting at top), and Samburu tribesmen hold sacred.

how they were at the beach one day. She was nine months pregnant with their daughter, Lana (their son, Stas, had been born the previous year). An old sailing dhow carrying tea had crashed on the reef, turning the ocean brown. All this amazing wood washed up onshore. Anna and Tonio thought it a God-sent message, and so they built their house from what they found.

A year after Tonio's death, Anna was trekking through the Laikipia region. She went there to get her head together. As she came upon a group of Samburu tribesmen, Loyaban Lemarti immediately stood out. "In the beginning of her book, Karen Blixen says of Africa: 'It's got some unparalleled greatness, freedom, integrity,'" Anna explains. "To me, Lemarti is the personification of what she describes. He knows who he is." Anna wanted to be around this guy. He made her feel safe. She can always hear him, from the bells around his feet. When I met him, I understood what she meant. Anna now buys shipwrecked dhows from all along the Kenyan and Tanzanian coast. She makes beautiful furniture with it, knotted and heavy and marked by mollusks. The pieces have an amazing patina. She uses them to furnish three new camps she has set up with Lemarti, now her husband.

We flew from Nairobi to a tiny airstrip about an hour and a half north of the city where the camps are located. Ngabolo Namunyak is the base camp at Koiya, one of the local tribal communities, followed by the Nomadic Camp at Kirimom, another ranch community, and the Stargazing Camp, a mobile fly camp

on camels. Together they occupy more than 7,500 acres in Laikipia inhabited by Samburu and Masai. The elders make the rules. If they ever ask Anna to leave, all she will take with her is her wood.

Anna sold four of Tonio's paintings to build her camps. They're real, rustic, lived in—like someone's private home. You'll be sitting on the veranda at the base camp and the old elephant hunter, Shillingi, will stop and tell you stories—how he bit off a lion's ear or how he kills rhinoceroses. At night the warriors gather around the campfire, playing music on a guitar marked FOR WARRIORS.

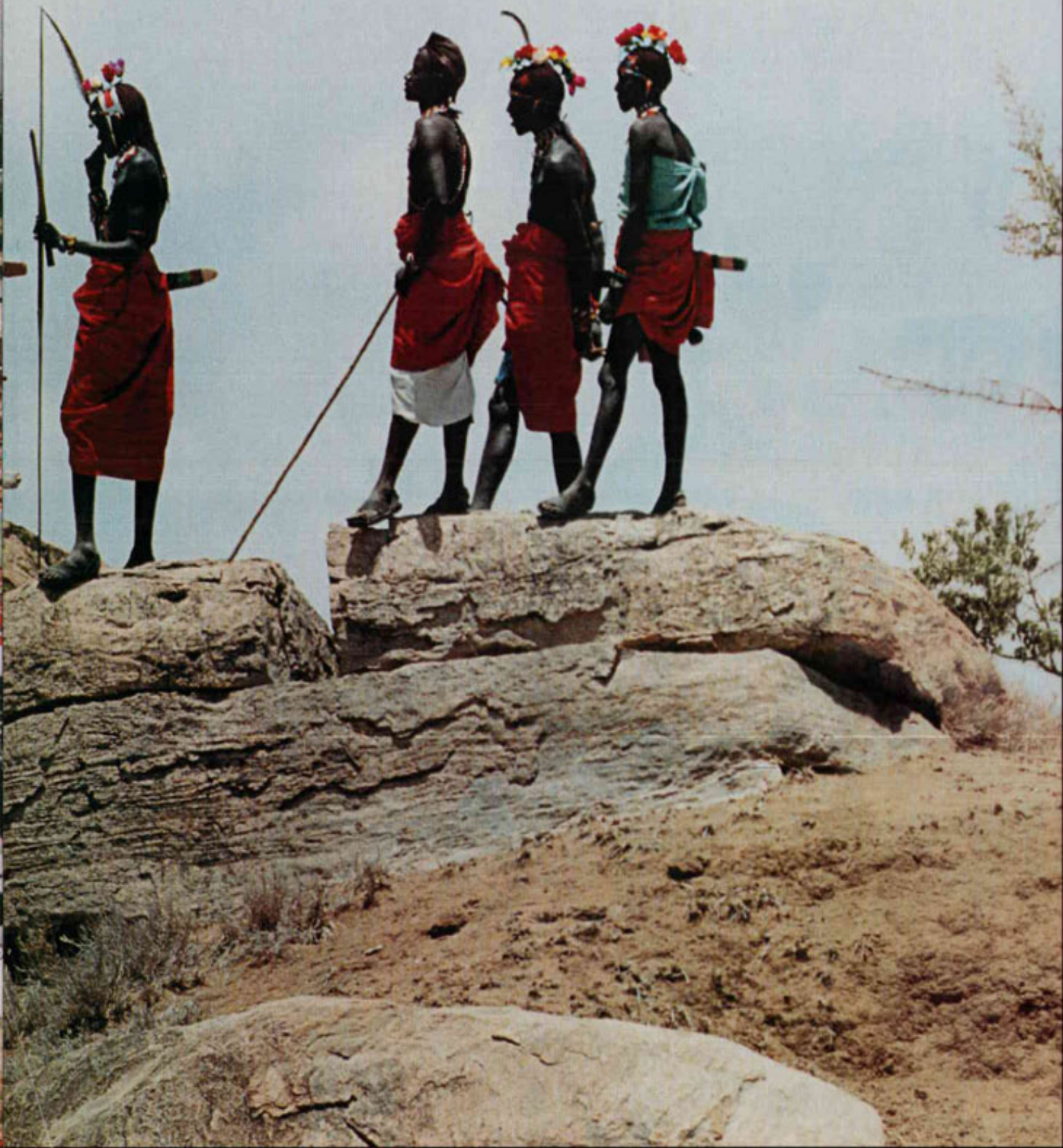
Ngabolo Namunyak sits on a riverbank amid total silence. It's built around a giant fig tree that spreads over the camp like an umbrella. Molded into the landscape, Ngabolo is unobtrusive, its decor simple with motifs from India, the Far East, and Africa. There are sheepskins and animal pelts. Hard and soft pillows covering great double beds. Bathrooms painted the color of bloodred earth with seats made from the lower jawbone of an elephant, reversed and set in concrete. The showers are primitive, old-fashioned buckets. Water comes from the Ewaso Ng'iro, or Brown River, which flows from the Aberdare Mountains. There's no electricity, just candles everywhere. And only five rooms, each made from cedar and canvas, each with a different river view. The furniture is extraordinary, designed by Anna using shells, ostrich eggs, and iridescent butterflies.

Days are what you make of them. I take off with Lemarti for a walk. We just walk and walk and walk, traveling with the camels. The next day I have a mud bath then lie out to dry on Henry Moore-esque rocks. Another day the warriors

CONTINUED ON PAGE 249 »



To walk with Lemarti
and Anna on one of
their safaris in the
Laikipia region is to
experience Kenya raw
and uninhibited.





opening (April 11, 2006)

Lamonyas

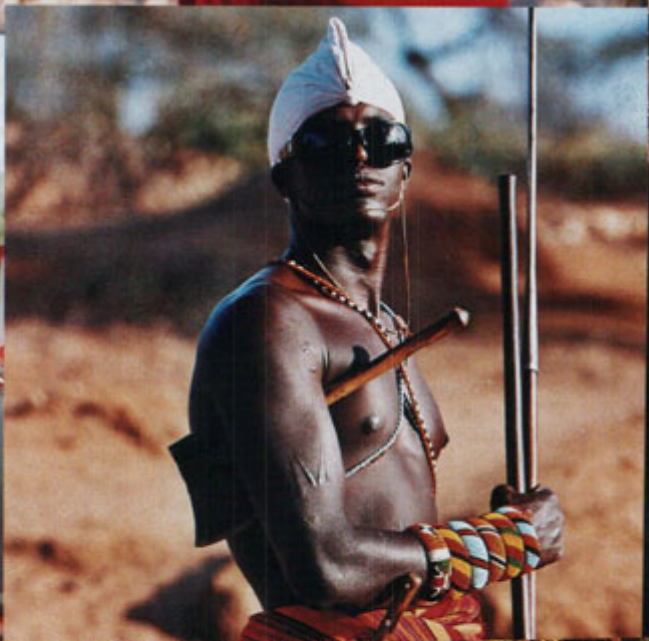
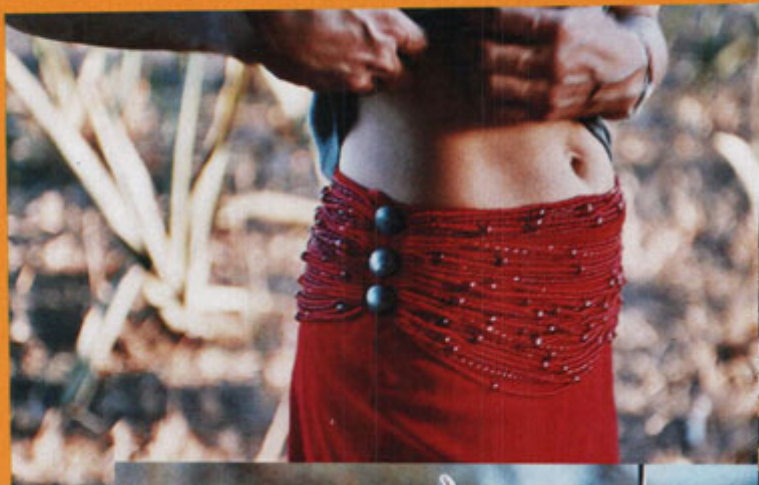
Lamonyas on the top of the mountain

Lamonyas fashion on the Use Hair

on the Use Hair







Anna's clothing and accessories are tribal inspired, using African beads, flamingo feathers, and rich hues to produce ornate details on everything from skirts to pashmina scarves. She sells these original creations at her atelier and furniture workshop (annatrzebinski.com) in Langata, on the outskirts of Nairobi. Her authentic designs are echoed in the motifs of her three camps, such as the tented Nomadic Camp at Kirimom (shown here). Staying with Anna and Lemarti (center) means living among the locals—giraffes included, as photographer Peter Beard's young niece Amal could tell you.



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sacrifice a cow for us—the one that has been tethered outside my room. It has a black tail. The men pull down the beast, stretch it out, and very carefully slit its gullet so the blood gathers in the dewlap. They then drink the blood. The girls do a strange shuffle and *whumpf!* The men slash their decorated hair in the girls' faces. It's astonishingly beautiful. Raw. What this place is all about.

We eat the meat, every bit of it—steaks better than you'd find in Argentina—and have plenty to drink. Peter Beard is here, sharing Africa with his teenage daughter. He is so excited. He hasn't been on safari since his accident with an elephant in 1996. The tusk went through his thigh, just missing the artery. The animal sat on him, then left him for dead. "I was unlucky," Peter says. "I had a grouchy elephant." I watch him give his daughter a tattoo with a pair of blunt scissors—a "Z" for Zara.

One morning we cheat and take a helicopter to see the animals that would normally gather at Anna's camp. The drought has dispersed them. We fly up past Mount Nyiru north of the Kirisia Hills. It's like flying over a petrified forest, the trees all burned in the sun. We journey to the very edge of the Rift Valley and set down on Lesio peak. Three klipspringers, goatlike antelopes, are hanging out on its tip. We get out and drink ice-cold Bellinis. The klipspringers watch us with a look of bewilderment. When we take off again, the pilot drops the chopper to the sound of "Sympathy for the Devil." We circle a volcanic crater—black, bereft of vegetation, and ripped up as if a giant had walked across the land—then retrace our route over reserves where we see zebras, warthogs, and rhinos.

Anna's second camp—about two hours away by road—is more a Bedouin encampment. She calls it the Nomadic Camp. The cushions, Hindu Kush kilims, and candlelit braziers stand out against the vast savanna landscape. I am reminded of a painting by the orientalist John Frederick Lewis; the scene is of the Earl of So-and-So, and all the Bedouin chiefs are coming to trade their camels and silks for his Purdey guns. It's that kind of scene, and totally authentic. We eat unbelievable Moroccan food, dining under an acacia. At night the fireflies descend and light it up like a Christmas tree. I want to strip my tent of its outer shell and sleep just with the mosquito net.

Yes, it's not for everybody, but the attention to detail is exquisite—like the freshly made elephant-shaped cookies the cook produces on one of my walks. He's also made ginger biscuits in the shape of stars for our final descent from the plateau to the third, Stargazing Camp.

We walk through scrub—the paths bashed by elephants—dropping some 1,000 feet back toward the riverbed. When we arrive, the scene is almost biblical. Camels stand amid a backdrop of colors diffused by dust. With nightfall, the mica-filled sand glitters in the moonlight. Fires are started and men dressed like peacocks kill a goat, their knives flashing in the dark. I eat fried testicles, which are delicious. Young Zara, Peter's daughter, drinks the blood. Africa is working her magic. I'm an Asia man who wants to return, not to one of the luxe camps Kenya is known for but to this, to be among the indigenous people. You learn. You connect. You spend time with friends. Like Lemarti, it makes you smile. While they kill the goat, I ask him how long it takes to smother it to death. "Until it's dead," he says, rolling about laughing. I want to come back here, to walk with him again. ■

Notes on Nairobi

Flights from the States are available via **Maxjet** (New York-London, maxjet.com) and **Kenya Airways** (London-Nairobi, kenya-airways.com).

To travel with Anna Trzebinski and Loyaban Lemarti, call their sole agent at 212-568-7639 or 44-1273/623-790. The couple's safari operation, **Rites of Passage**, requires a minimum eight-night stay and incorporates all three camps. It costs \$550 per person a day (minimum daily charge, \$2,220). Children under 12 years old are charged half the quoted price. Rates include full board, house wines, and guides. In addition, each guest is charged a per-day cultural conservation fee of \$25, which goes directly to the local Samburu and Masai communities. Helicopters and internal flights are additional.

Anna's **atelier and furniture workshop** in Langata is open weekdays from 8 A.M. to 5 P.M. and weekends by appointment only. Contact 254-20/891-325, 254-720/766-877, or atrzebinski@wananchi.com. Visit her Web site at annatrzebinski.com.

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