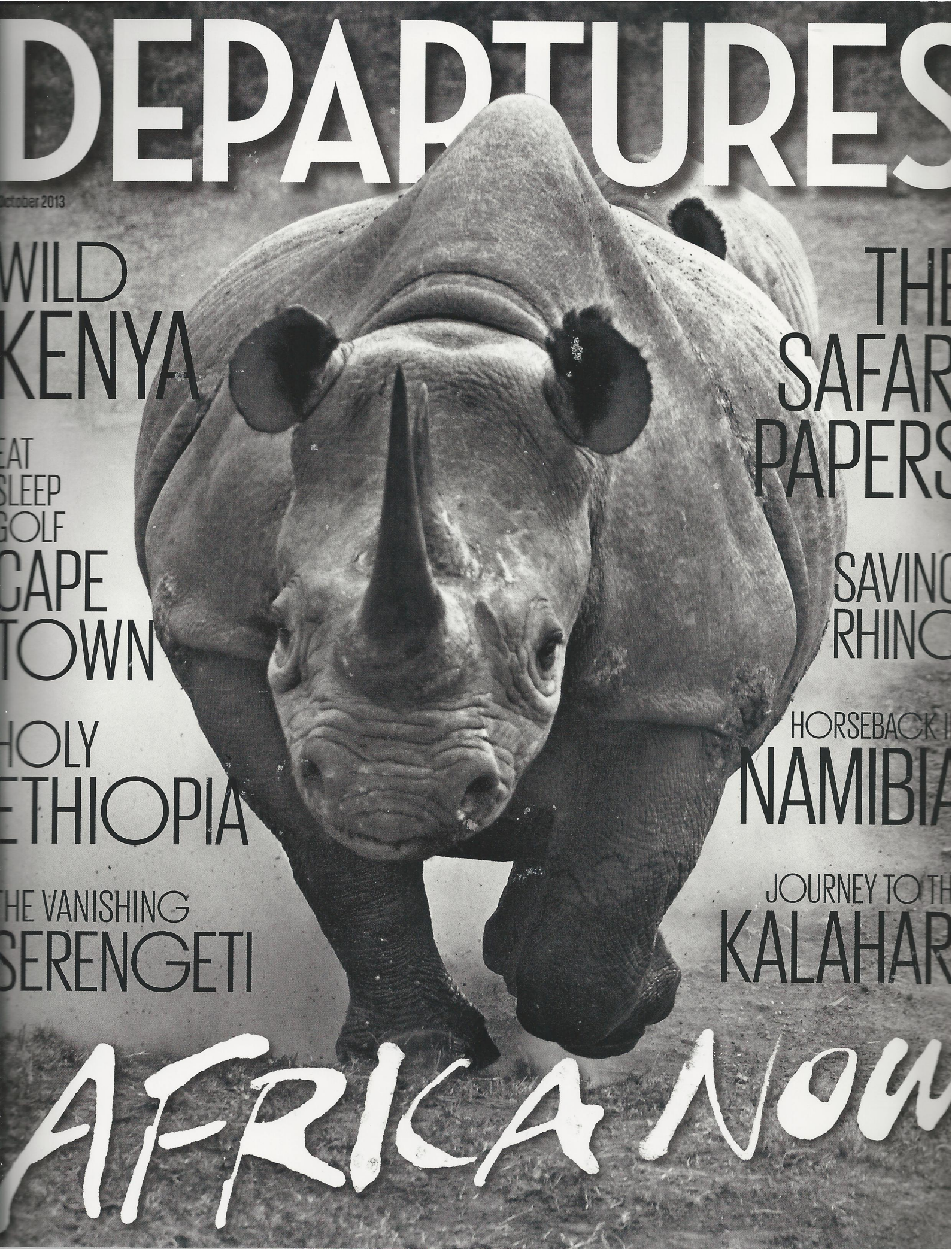
DEPARTURES

October 2013



WILD KENYA

EAT SLEEP GOLF CAPE TOWN

HOLY ETHIOPIA

THE VANISHING SERENGETI

THE SAFARI PAPERS

SAVING RHINO

HORSEBACK IN NAMIBIA

JOURNEY TO THE KALAHARI

AFRICA Now

SEE MORE AT DEPARTURES.COM
Log on for the new generation of conservationists.

SABINE PLATTNER
ODZALA WILDERNESS CAMPS
Republic of the Congo

German philanthropist Plattner grew up in Freiburg, Germany, exploring the Black Forest. She began visiting South Africa with her husband in 1978, ultimately making it a second home. In 2007 she traveled to the Congo to explore setting up an environmental education program for villagers living in Odzala-Kokoua National Park, a stretch of rainforest in the northern reaches of the country, bordering Gabon. Nearly the size of Connecticut, the park lies in the Congo River basin and is home to important populations of forest elephants and lowland gorillas.

"My intention was to get involved in community work and education," Plattner, 64, says, thinking back on her days as a schoolteacher. "But conservation doesn't work in a sustainable way without commerce. And commerce means building a lodge." She had no interest in tourism but was convinced that her goals would never be met without it. Talks began with local elders. "They said, 'We don't trust until we see,' so it took a few years," she says. "They had been promised so many things that never happened. I said I would try my best, but I do not promise a thing. That was how we started." This year two lodges, built and staffed with local labor, finally opened, offering five-star accommodations in vast, unspoiled rainforest—a very rare thing. (See "Rumble in the Jungle," page 148.) This fall, in nearby M'boko, Plattner will open a community center to host conservation researchers along with education programs, including a mobile theater. "It must be fun. It's how you motivate a child. While you're playing, you learn." *odzala-kokoua.com.*

IAN PLAYER
WILDERNESS LEADERSHIP SCHOOL
South Africa

My most vivid memory was all these dead bones, these carcasses." That's what Player, 86, says today, reflecting on the rhino-poaching massacres that gripped Africa in the '50s and '60s. Player's rhino conservation work began in 1952, when he joined the South African park service. Soon he was spearheading an effort that protected the rhino habitat at home while relocating scores of the animals to zoos worldwide. He also credits hunters—by 1970 the white rhino population had recovered enough that South Africa placed it back on the legal hunting list, and game reserves charged up to $20,000 to shoot one. "The hunting industry exploded," says Player, who was born in Johannesburg. "And with it came the explosion of the white rhino numbers." Money and resources poured in, and by 2007 the population had crested at 17,000. (With renewed poaching sending those numbers tumbling again, the idea that hunting still plays a positive role is "increasingly difficult," he says.)

But to have any long-term hope of true conservation, Player says, the most important thing is to expose as many people as possible to true wilderness, something he considers a highly spiritual experience. In 1957 he founded the Wilderness Leadership School, one of several foundations he's created, and it has led some 60,000 people on walks through the wilds of Africa. "You're walking in the areas where early man walked," he says. "Sleeping on the red earth of Africa." No cell phones, no liquor are allowed. "In wildness lies the preservation of mankind," Player says, paraphrasing Henry Thoreau. "I have certainly come to see that." *wild.org.*

SVEIN WILHELMSEN
BASECAMP EXPLORER, MARA NABOISHO CONSERVANCY
Kenya

The Masai Mara National Reserve, in southwestern Kenya, runs to the border of Tanzania, where it gives way to the Serengeti plains. It holds one of Africa's most renowned concentrations of wildlife and is home to the great migration—the seasonal movement of millions of wildebeest, zebra and other grazing animals that flood into the Masai Mara every year. (See "How to Do the Mara-Serengeti," page 117.) When Wilhelmsen, 59, visited in 1996, he sat down with a Masai chief who spoke of his worry that the local ecosystem and way of life were under threat. "If you destroy the Masai Mara, you destroy something that is irreplaceable," Wilhelmsen, a Norwegian, says.

And so he and the chief joined forces. Two years later Basecamp Masai Mara opened, the first of three safari lodges Wilhelmsen would build there. **He leases the land from the Masai, and the locals make up 95 percent of his workforce. In 2010 Wilhelmsen worked with community leaders to form the Mara Naboisho Conservancy, pulling together 500 landowners to create 50,000 acres of newly protected land north of the Masai Mara.** He credits the success to the Masai's interest in finding sustainable ways to use tourism to balance their culture with wildlife preservation. His affiliated foundation has teamed with locals to fund schools, create fair-trade handicraft workshops and fight deforestation by planting 70,000 trees. In 2011 he flew five Masai grandmothers to India for a six-month training program to become solar engineers. Today 300 of the community's households have solar power—they call the grandmothers their Solar Mamas. *basecampexplorer.com.*

JOCHEN ZEITZ
SEGERA, ZEITZ FOUNDATION
Kenya

Zeitz bought Segera, a 50,000-acre ranch northwest of Mount Kenya, in 2006 and promptly removed 300 miles of fences to let wildlife move freely. Now he has opened a luxury safari lodge on the property (see "Sexy, Cool Kenya," page 50) and is running the place according to the "4 C's," his operational philosophy that calls for equal focus on conservation, community, culture and commerce. **This way of working guides the lodge and his associated nonprofit foundation and has led to numerous projects geared for good, including the restoration of endangered cheetah and wild dog populations, improved health care for 23,000 locals and support for small-scale, sustainable income-generating projects like beading, beekeeping and briquette-making.**

The method was born of his early days in the business world—in 1993, at age 30, he was named CEO of Puma, becoming the youngest person in German history to head a public company. He brought Africa into Puma's DNA, having fallen in love with the continent on a trip in 1989, and the company now dominates the soccer apparel market there. Today Zeitz, 50, uses soccer as a vehicle for change. In a community near Segera, he created a tournament for kids that calls for more than playing games—for a team to advance, contributions to the 4 C's are also required. "We have to find a holistic way of looking at conservation and community development," Zeitz says. "With sustainability as the ultimate goal, philanthropy is a good kick-starter, but a project needs to be viable. It can't always be built on aid." *segera.com; zeitzfoundation.org.*