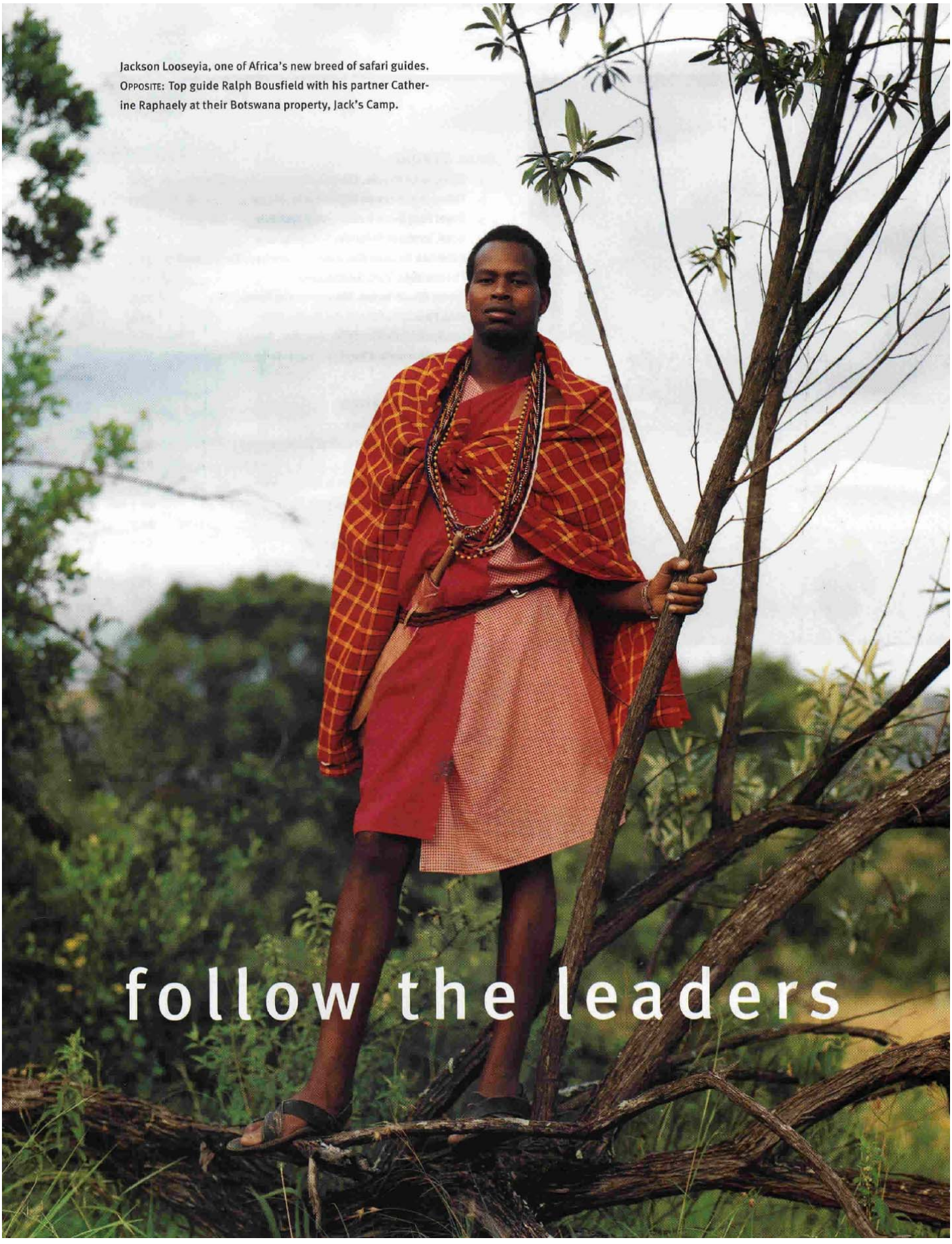
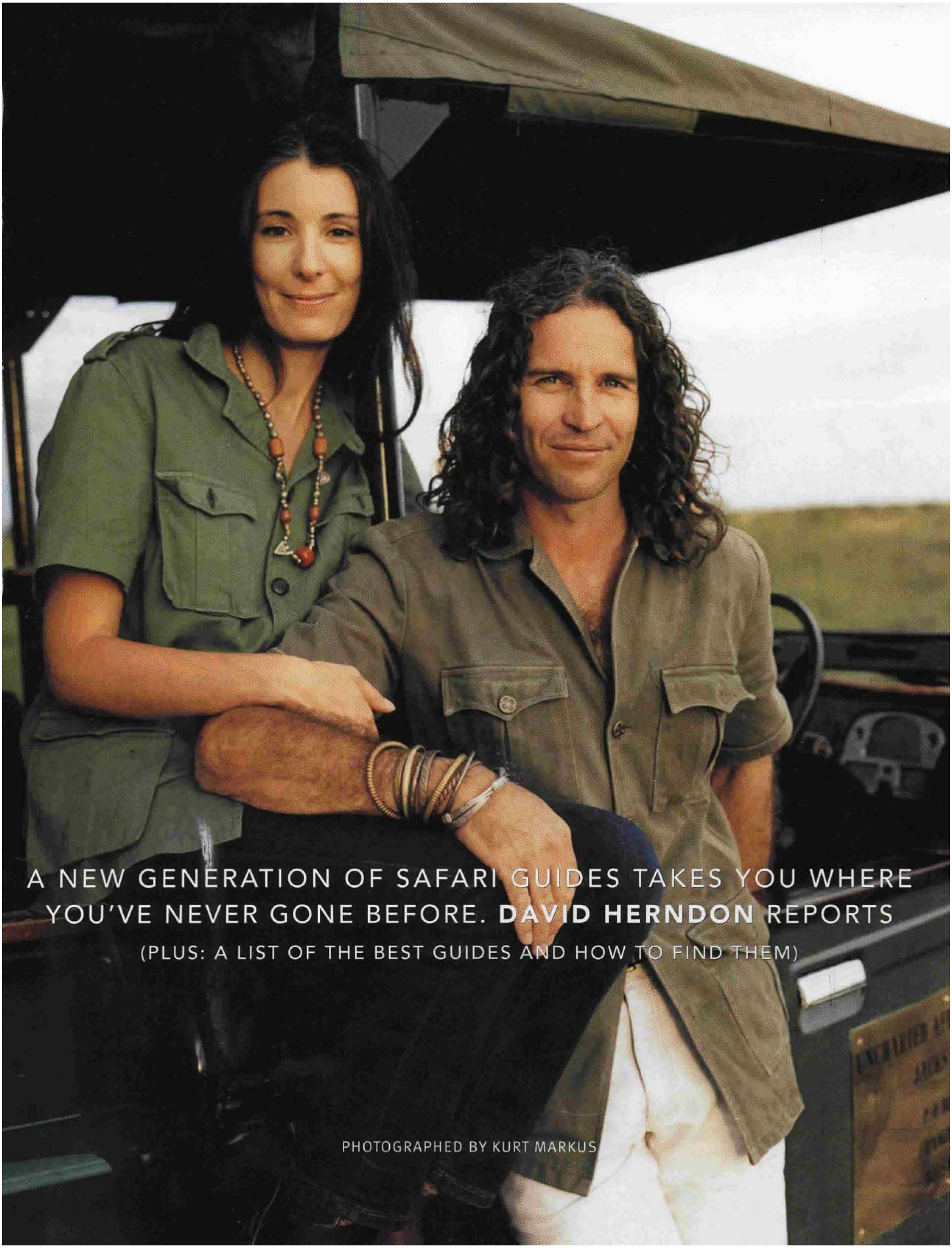


Jackson Looseyia, one of Africa's new breed of safari guides. OPPOSITE: Top guide Ralph Bousfield with his partner Catherine Raphaely at their Botswana property, Jack's Camp.

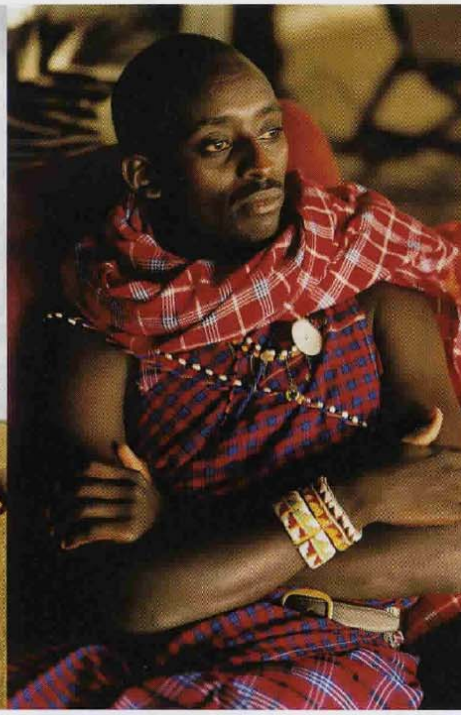
follow the leaders

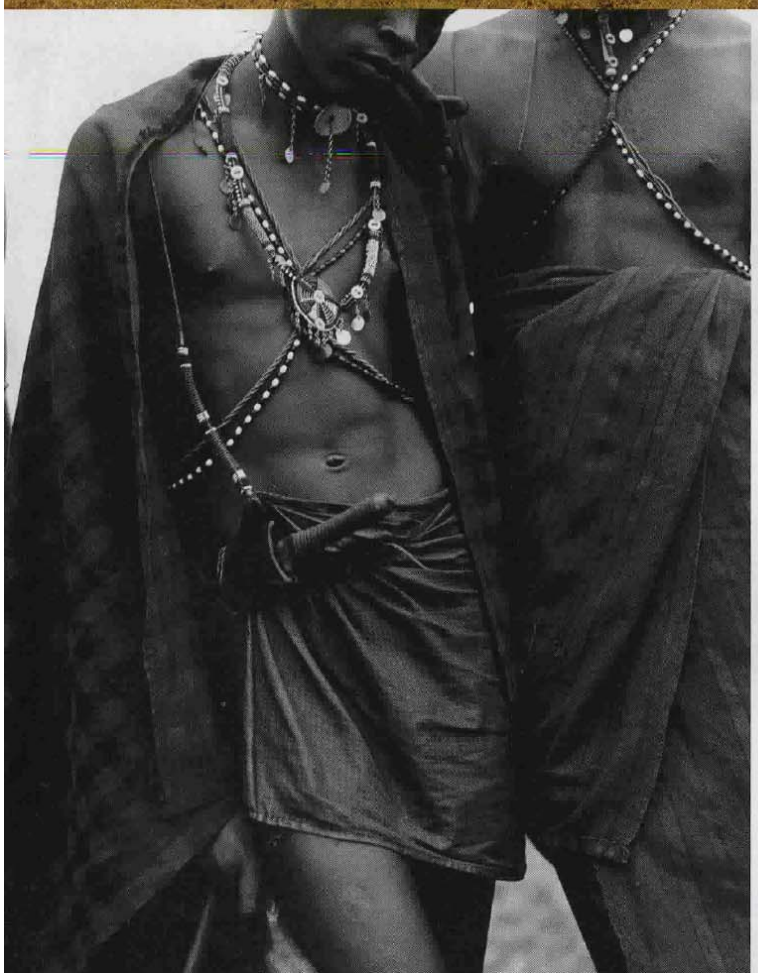


A NEW GENERATION OF SAFARI GUIDES TAKES YOU WHERE YOU'VE NEVER GONE BEFORE. **DAVID HERNDON** REPORTS

(PLUS: A LIST OF THE BEST GUIDES AND HOW TO FIND THEM)

PHOTOGRAPHED BY KURT MARKUS



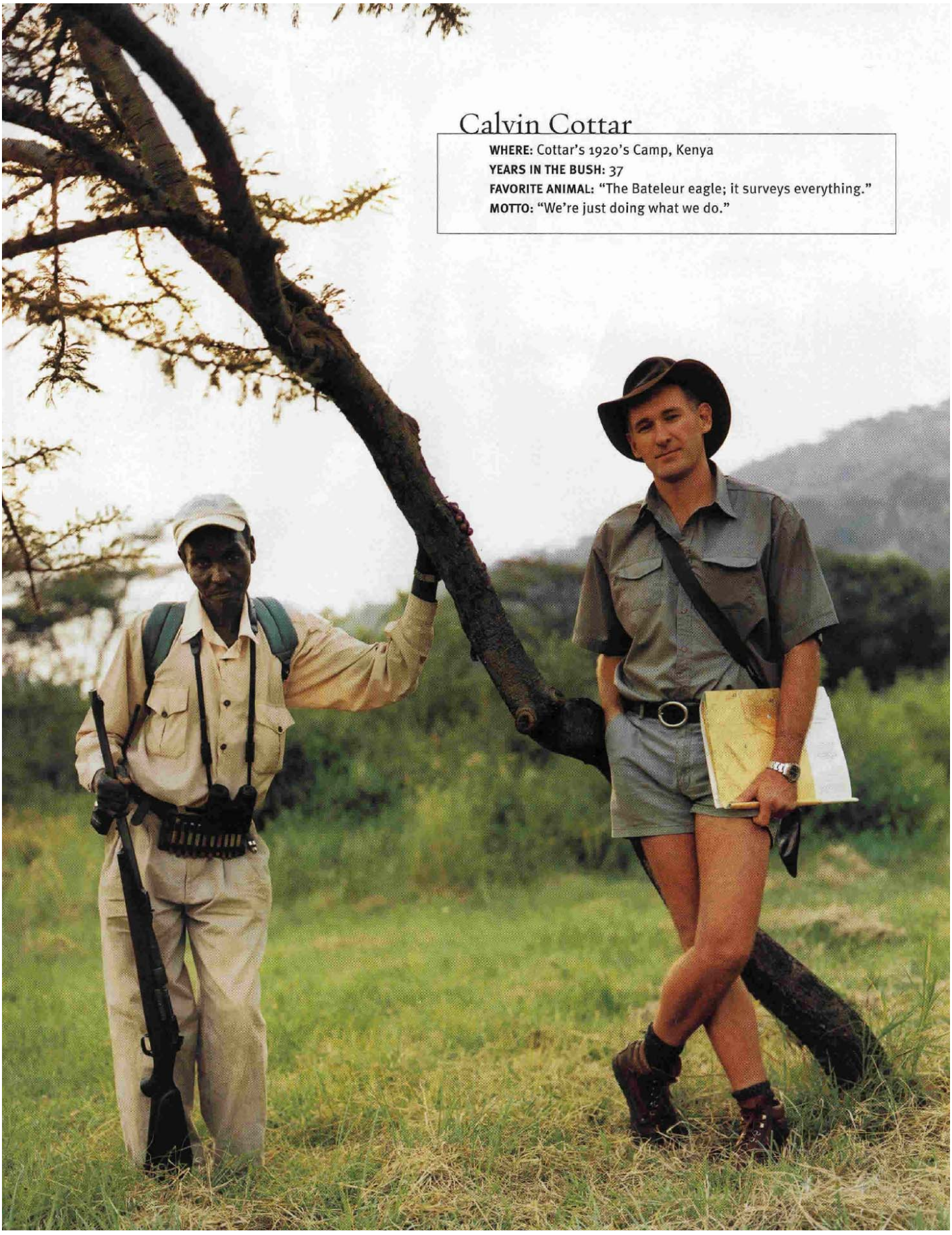


In 1992, Ralph Bousfield, his partner Catherine Raphaely, and his father, Jack, were scouting for places to set up a safari camp in the game-filled wetlands of Botswana's Okavango Delta. Their small plane crashed. Catherine emerged relatively unscathed. Ralph suffered burns over a third of his body while rescuing his father, who later died from smoke inhalation.

"When my father died, it was the end of an era," says Ralph of the life Jack spent soldiering and hunting and living in the remotest parts of Africa. But Bousfield, now the most prominent safari guide in Botswana, knows better than to fall into the nostalgia trap. "I'm proud of my family," says Ralph, who is descended on both sides from solid pioneer stock, "but I'm not proud of certain things that happened.

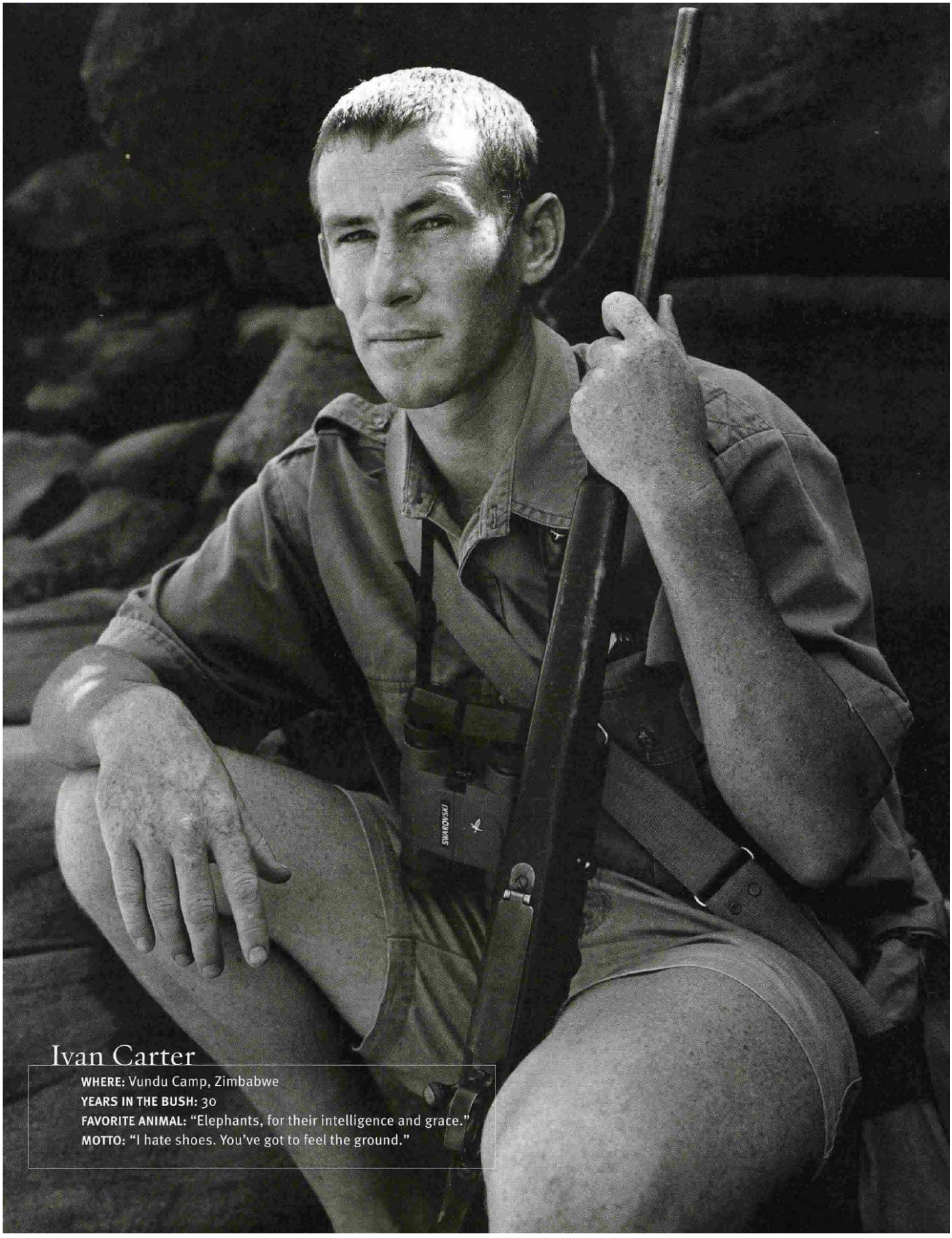
"Colonial style was beautiful; the colonial way was not," he continues. There was, of course, racial injustice; there was also "a huge cost to the environment." His father earned a spot in *The Guinness Book of Animal Records* for killing some 53,000 crocodiles. Ralph last wrestled a crocodile so he could bring it to the animal orphanage on the grounds of his house in Francistown, where the city's schoolchildren come to learn about wildlife.

Into the bush. CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: **Masai warriors wearing necklaces of beads, shells, and bone; a herd of topi on the Masai Mara; John Sampeke, a Masai guide at Cottar's 1920's Camp.** OPPOSITE: **Calvin Cottar (*right*) and tracker Nyami Koso.**



Calvin Cottar

WHERE: Cottar's 1920's Camp, Kenya
YEARS IN THE BUSH: 37
FAVORITE ANIMAL: "The Bateleur eagle; it surveys everything."
MOTTO: "We're just doing what we do."



Ivan Carter

WHERE: Vundu Camp, Zimbabwe
YEARS IN THE BUSH: 30
FAVORITE ANIMAL: "Elephants, for their intelligence and grace."
MOTTO: "I hate shoes. You've got to feel the ground."

Jack's demise was the fiery denouement of an age of wild-white-man individualism; it also marked the beginning of Ralph's era, one characterized by a profound sense of responsibility. Ralph's success with Jack's Camp—built on the Makgadikgadi Pans, where he grew up, and named after his father—places him among an elite group of safari guides. They are steeped in a rich tradition, yet have come of age in a post–white hunter, postcolonial environment.

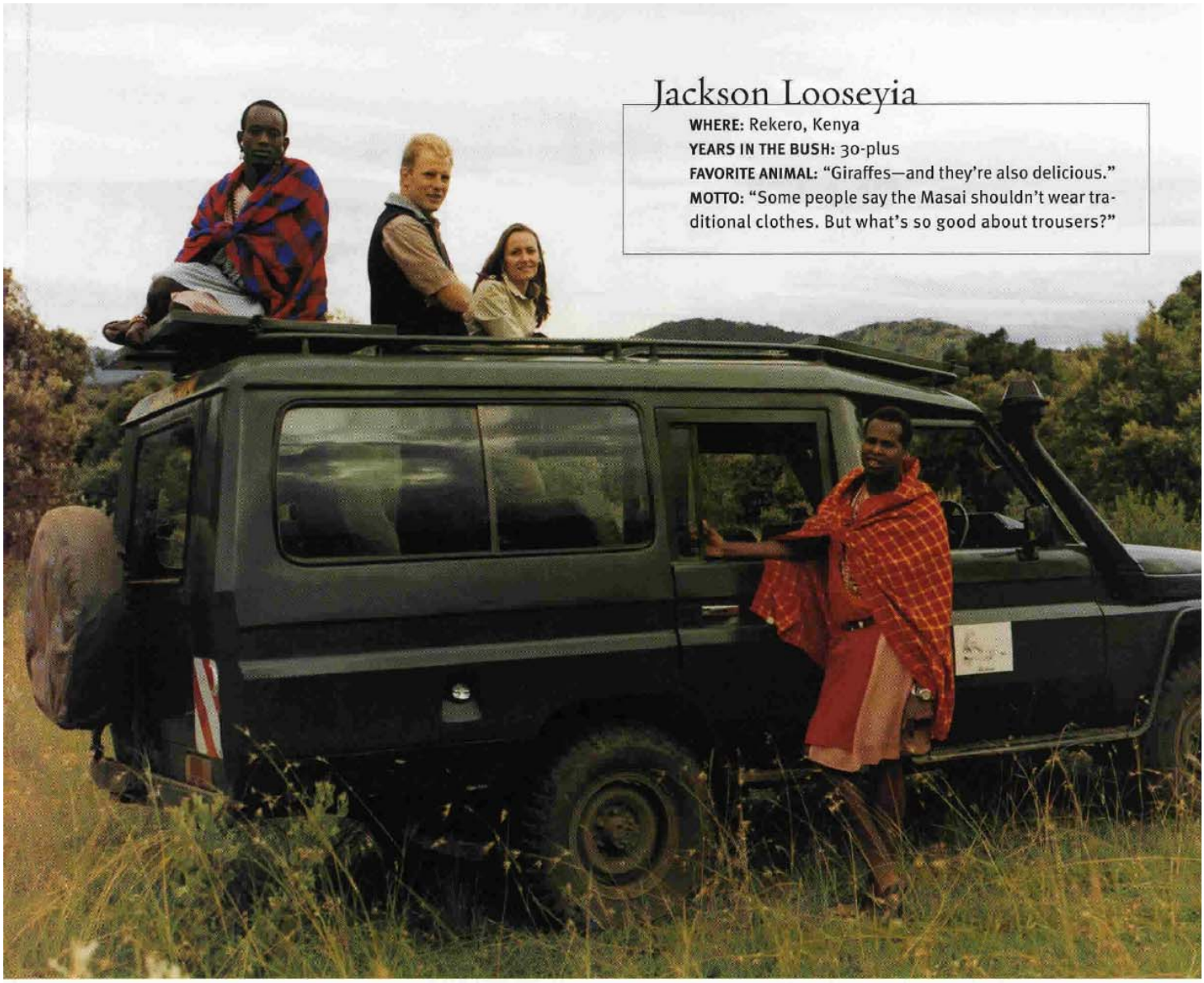
Together, the four guides introduced here map the safari's new terrain. Calvin Cottar, whose camp is in Kenya, is, like Bousfield, one of a long line of adventurers; if the Cottars are the Kennedys of the East African safari industry, Calvin is Bobby Jr., embracing his background as a tool, not a birthright. Ivan Carter is the brightest new safari star in Zimbabwe, a country known for its excellent guides, who are subjected to the most rigorous licensing exams on the continent. Jackson Looseyia, part owner and senior guide of a game lodge in the Masai Mara, is nothing less than the embodiment of a historical transition: a Masai, he's the point man for a nascent conservation movement that also aims to support indigenous culture by giving tribal people a stake in the safari industry.

While politics, poverty, and corruption have taken their toll on the wilderness experience, guides like these remain optimistic, committed to preserving wildlife and culture. Thanks to the best of the new generation, the safari is far from over.

Ralph Bousfield

At Jack's Camp, the element of surprise is a big part of the show. Ralph and I have spent the afternoon tracking cheetahs across the salt-and-algae crust of Botswana's

The shores of Zimbabwe's Lake Kariba, ABOVE LEFT, where Ivan Carter leads mobile safaris. ABOVE RIGHT: The outlines of Carter's foot inside a print left by a passing elephant.



Jackson Looseyia

WHERE: Rekero, Kenya
YEARS IN THE BUSH: 30-plus
FAVORITE ANIMAL: "Giraffes—and they're also delicious."
MOTTO: "Some people say the Masai shouldn't wear traditional clothes. But what's so good about trousers?"

Makgadikgadi Pans. Now, just in time for sunset, an aide-de-camp has surreptitiously set up a makeshift bar beside a water hole where a flock of migratory flamingos has also stopped for a drink. Ralph—who at 38 looks remarkably like Daniel Day-Lewis cast as a rock god—lights a small campfire, anchors a map of Botswana to the ground with a quartet of liquor bottles, and sketches an outline of Africa in the dust. He's preparing to tell me how we came to be in this strange and peaceful place in the southern part of the continent. He goes back to the very beginning—the formation of the landmass, the arrival of man, the superlake that dried up aeons ago and created the geographic anomaly that is the pan.

Just as I'm thinking this could be a long, long story, Ralph fast-forwards to the 19th century. He traces the progress of his maternal great-grandfather, an ivory hunter and explorer who was the right hand of legendary pioneer Frederick Selous; in the 1870's he and Selous bivouacked not 10 miles from here while searching for a fabled city in the Kalahari. For most of the 20th century, the vast Pans remained a no-man's-land.

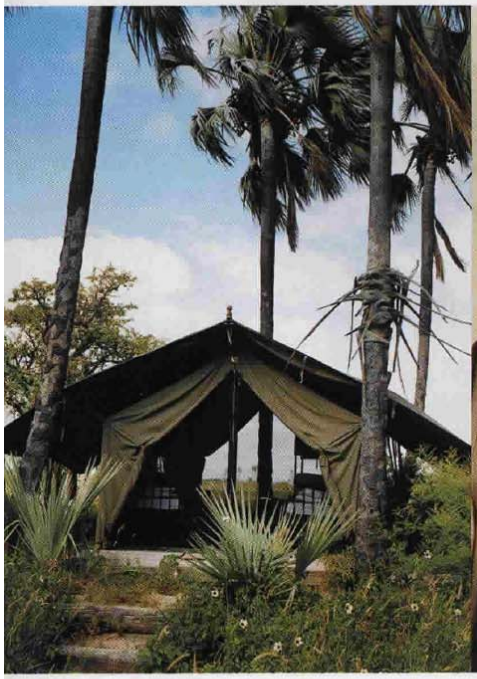
Meanwhile, in East Africa, the Bousfield clan established itself in the wilds of Tanganyika (now Tanzania). When the country won independence in 1961, just before Ralph was born, his father began to feel that the region was becoming inhospitable to whites. He consulted maps of Bechuanaland (the former British protectorate, which became Botswana in 1966) that had been drawn up during the previous century's expeditions. He liked the blank spaces and wound up building the desert camp where Ralph has spent much of his life, and where he would found his own safari camp.

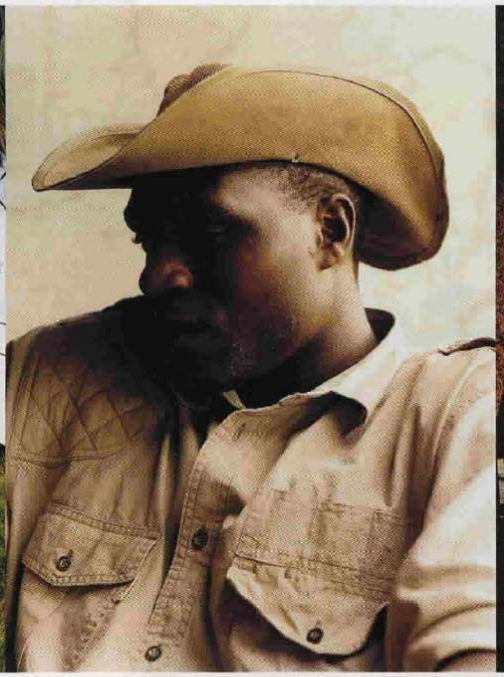
After the plane crash, Ralph and Catherine abandoned the idea of building a camp in the Okavango Delta, erecting Jack's Camp on the Pans instead. The Pans were still considered by most to be a marginal area with little to recommend it to tourists. According to Ralph, the 100-mile-long Ntwetwe Pan, one of two that make up the Makgadikgadi Pans, is "one of the longest open areas of nothing on earth." Yet, he adds, "there's so much going on, you don't know where to start." Desert-adapted animals such as cheetahs, elephants, giraffes, oryx, and the rare brown hyena inhabit the pan, but they are not plentiful; an evening game drive might consist of little more than observing the pups at the hyena den.

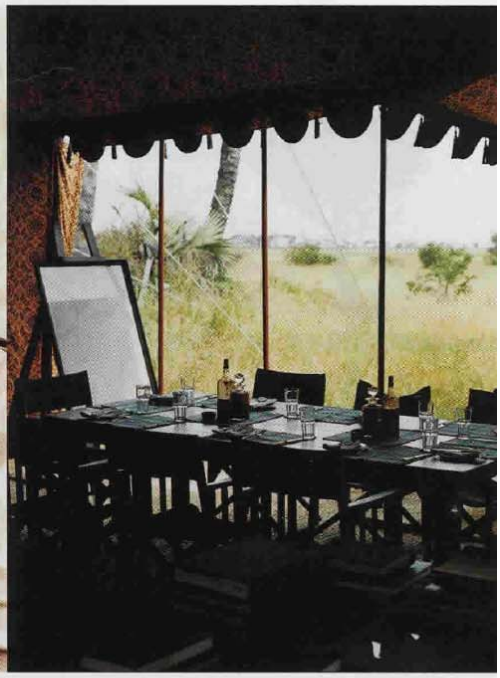
"Jack always said, 'Whatever you do, just be different,'" says Catherine, "and that's absolutely what we've done. We've tried to maintain that 'out there' thing." And they have. Jack's Camp is less about the Big Five than about the power of a silent, nearly barren landscape. At night Ralph likes to drive guests out to a dead zone—no vegetation, no animals. He'll tell you to walk away from the jeep alone, lie down on your back, and contemplate the heavens for a half-hour or so. The next morning you might be taken to collect stone artifacts and speculate about who made them and what they were used for. That afternoon you'll go walking with a diminutive Bushman guide named Dabe Sebitola, who will give you the recipe for a local heart-attack remedy: Mix the root of a feather asparagus with the nest of a mud wasp; boil; and drink. One night you'll be taken to . . . it's a secret. I'll simply note that I watched as an uptight German septuagenarian was moved to tears by the experience.

Set on islands of bush in a desert sea, Jack's and its sister camp, San Camp, combine Saharan exoticism with Cape Town cool. Jack's is the more traditional, with eight luxurious private guest tents. Its decoration was inspired by Jack's old gear—collapsible furniture made from a teaklike wood called *mukwa*—brightened with colorful textiles. San Camp consists of six white canvas tents, each of which is sheltered by palm trees. It's airy, soft, fantastical; a deliberate departure from the macho safari ethos.

Catherine, a 37-year-old former model with more than a passing resemblance to Cher, is in charge of the look of the camps and planning the menus. Her style-consciousness is as much a function of her background as Ralph's bush savvy is of his. Her mother, Jane Raphaely, is a leading figure in South Africa's women's magazine industry. The recipes at both camps are all derived from the Cape Malay cuisine of Catherine's grandmother's *(Continued on page 162; see page TK for the Guide to the Guides; see page TK for The Facts)*



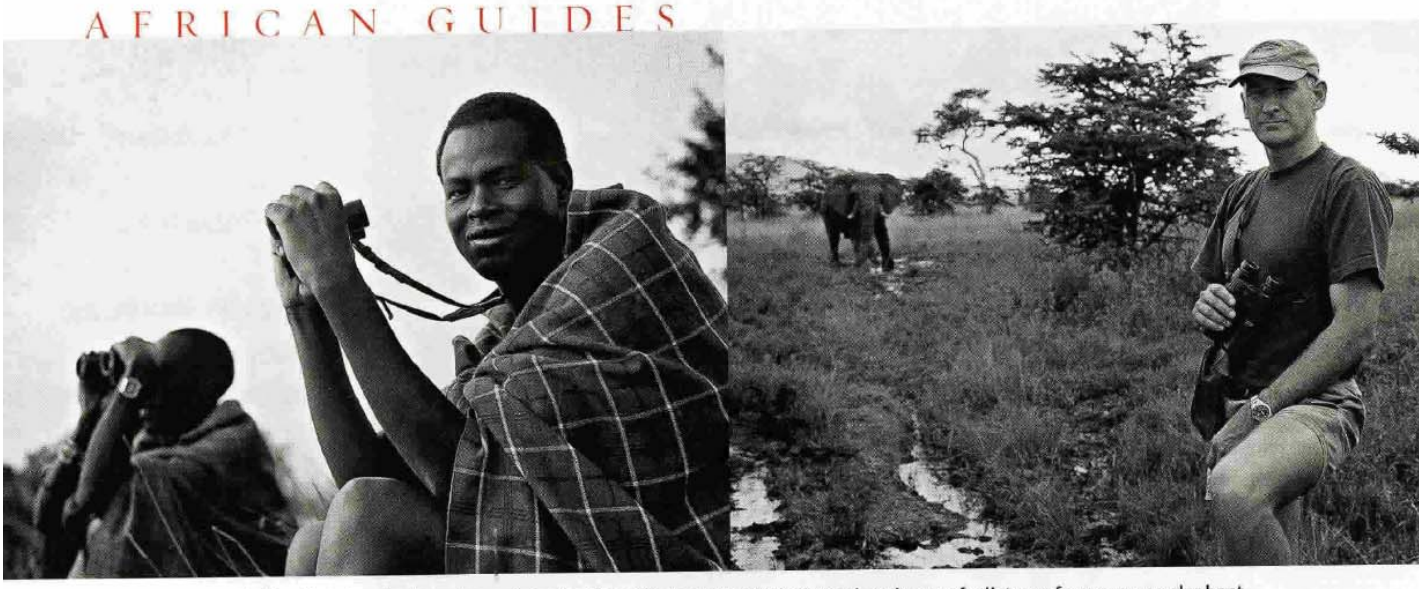




At Jack's Camp. FROM LEFT: A guest tent; guide Super Sande; the dining room.

Ralph Bousfield

WHERE: Jack's Camp and San Camp, Botswana
YEARS IN THE BUSH: 38
FAVORITE ANIMAL: "Brown hyenas—they're desert specialists."
MOTTO: "We don't know what's out there. To me, that's freedom."



Field guides. LEFT: Jackson Looseyia in the Masai Mara. RIGHT: Calvin Cottar keeping a safe distance from a young elephant.

(Continued from page 140) cook. "Everything we do is an extension of who we are," says Catherine. "It's not a movie set."

Jackson Looseyia

In a valley in the communal Masai land on the north side of the Masai Mara, Saigilu Ole "Jackson" Looseyia gets a whiff of familiar territory and heads up the hillside. It's not long before he finds what he's looking for, a ledge under an overhang where rocks have been arranged in a campfire circle. "This is where my father brought me seventeen years ago on a four-month hunting trip," he announces. He turns over a flat stone to show the underside, stained from crushing seeds for poisonous arrowheads. Then he looks down the valley. "Fantastic—you can see the animals you're hunting," he says.

During that trip Jackson's father passed on what he'd learned as a member of the Ndorobo, an aboriginal, nomadic tribe that has been virtually assimilated into Masai society over time. Jackson proudly wears the bright orange-and-red tartan *shuka* of the Masai, but he doesn't share their lean bone structure. He's a tall, somewhat baby-faced man in his mid thirties who has become famous in Kenyan safari circles for his ability to bridge tribal and tourist cultures. "I've had to learn about Western culture," says Jackson, "but I love traditional life."

It's one thing to ride around in a Land Rover with a rifle-toting driver; quite another to set out on foot in buffalo-lion-elephant country accompanied by men armed only with spears, clubs, bows, and arrows. It's one thing to retire after a full-course supper to the comforts of a bed in your own tent; quite another to witness the killing, skinning, gutting, and grilling of a lamb, then spend the night on a cowhide-covered pallet surrounded by livestock in a Masai boma, with predatory hyenas just outside. Jackson can guide you either way.

Jackson's father, a recidivist poacher, was hired as a ranger for the game department in South Masai land and later recruited as a tracker for Ron Beaton, a professional hunter who opened an eco-lodge called Rekero in the mid 1980's. (Rekero consists of four cottages on a water hole in the hills and a mobile tented camp currently located in the Masai Mara Game Reserve.) One day Beaton brought guests to the Looseyia household, and Jackson so impressed them with his stories of local life, delivered in halting English, that Beaton decided to take him on as a game spotter. Jackson's English improved, he learned the Latin and common names of local plants, he studied some anthropology, and in 1995 he was promoted to senior guide. He later became a 20-percent partner in Rekero, which he co-manages with Beaton's 28-year-old son, Gerard.

Jackson is keenly aware that, for the most part, the Masai have suffered from discrimination and lack of opportunity. Five years ago he started a scholarship program for Masai girls and became head guide at Olonana Cultural Center, where tourists can learn about tribal customs. He's also helping the Beatons launch a school to train local guides. "The more guides who are Masai, the better the Mara," says Jackson. All the Rekero guides are members of the tribe.

"Old-school Caucasian guides in Africa ran a good show in the past, but young tourists from the U.S. want insight into the new Africans," says Ron Beaton. "The future of the country is people like Jackson."

Calvin Cottar

Take *White Hunters* from the bookcase in the lounge of Cottar's 1920's Camp and open it to the chapter "Trailblazers of the Twenties." There you'll find a photo of a hunting party, among whom is Calvin Cottar's grandfather Mike. The hat he is wearing now sits on top of the bookcase. The Cottar clan is referred to in the book as the First Family of the

safari business. If you want to track the safari bloodline, you go to Cottar's.

Charles Cottar was not British, but an American inspired by Teddy Roosevelt's hunting exploits. He moved to Kenya in 1911 and established Cottar's Safari Service in 1919. A pioneering wildlife cinematographer, he was killed while filming rhinos. The Cottars were among the first to import safari cars to Kenya, and Calvin's father, Glen, established the first fixed camps in the country. Calvin himself, now 38, is said to be one of the models for the safari-god love interest in Francesca Marciano's *Rules of the Wild*, a 1999 roman à clef about Nairobi's expat scene.

Today, Cottar's camp is situated on the lower slopes of a heavily forested hillside, overlooking the green-blond Masai Mara plains and Tanzania's Serengeti beyond. It's such a classic vista that you expect the title *Out of Africa* to scroll across it.

"My father hunted here, and I used to ride in the back of the vehicle," says Calvin, piloting his Land Cruiser through a creek bed.

When his father passed away, in 1996, Calvin set up shop on 250,000 acres held by a community of 3,000 Masai on the fringes of the game reserve. He scoured the family storerooms for the furnishings that give Cottar's its Finch-Hatton feel. Victrolas, silver flasks, ostrich feathers and eggs, tapestry cushions, and North African rugs are strewed about the common areas and half-dozen guest tents. At Cottar's, tea is poured from silver into china by a waiter kitted out in a crimson fez and vest over a kanzu, a full-length Swahili tunic. The guest suites are composed of two adjoining white canvas tents—one for sleeping, one for sitting. Lit with candles and lanterns, the camp glows from within, becoming ever more magically luminous as night falls.

"I'd be happy with a little green pup tent," says Calvin, who suspects that his father would have been a bit suspicious of all the "frills." (It's safe to assume the hard-hunting Cottars never envisioned a camp masseuse.)

Calvin admits he'd rather still be hunting ("Best days of my life"), but that practice was outlawed in Kenya in 1977. Now he goes walking in the bush with his tracker, Nyami, who is able to reconstruct the drama of an unsuccessful leopard hunt simply from broken twigs and scratches in the dirt.

Calvin recognizes that recalling the glory days of the white tribe might raise a few eyebrows: "People ask whether staff members mind wearing uniforms from the colonial past. No—they realize it's theater."

But the trappings aren't all that Cottar aims to maintain. Calvin has two sons and a daughter, and he knows that as bush skills become less and less a part of modern life, his children will be well positioned to be successful safari operators. "I want the wildlife and the natural Masai to be here in twenty years." This is his way of guaranteeing it.

'Old-school Caucasian guides in Africa ran a good show in the past, but young tourists want insight into the new Africans,' says safari camp operator Ron Beaton

Ivan Carter

The brightest star to emerge from the Zimbabwe Professional Guides Association in the last decade is Ivan Carter. The association has some of the most rigorous licensing qualifications on the continent, and, at 20, Ivan became the youngest candidate ever to pass the guides exam. Now 30, he operates the six-tent Vundu Camp on the Zambezi River in Zimbabwe's Mana Pools National Park. Like other top Zimbabwe guides, he has recently branched out to countries such as Tanzania and Zambia, because of the farm takeovers and political violence at home.

As a teenager, Ivan apprenticed himself to John Stevens, one of the country's premier guides. But whereas Stevens epitomizes the formal, "socks-pulled-up" style, Ivan wears no socks at all—and only reluctantly straps on rafting sandals. "I hate shoes," he says. "You've got to feel the ground."

Ivan has spoken at Stanford University on animal adaptations and conservation. Though his personal style may tend toward grunge, it's a point of pride for him that his vehicles are polished to a shine, the cooler is always full, the showers are hot, and the beds are comfortable. Vundu is decidedly no-frills, maintaining the low profile of the traditional tented camp to minimize the impact on the environment. Running water and electricity are concessions, but concrete is out of the question. This is a camp, not a lodge: meals and drinks are served under the trees and skies, on the banks of the glorious Zambezi, against a backdrop of incomparable sunsets. "The bush is the décor," he says. "You can't compete with that."

Scanning the floodplain through binoculars, Ivan points out buffalo, elephants, waterbucks, eland, impala, baboons, and zebras. Our early morning efforts to track a pack of wild dogs prove futile, so we leave the Land Cruiser and set off on foot. Ivan likes to take his guests close to the elephants. We approach slowly, letting the huge beasts hear and smell us. He recognizes some members of the herd. Pointing to a young male, he says, "If he rushes up to kick dust on us, don't worry. Just keep taking photos." As if on cue, the male makes a brief charge, but it's all bluster.

The elephants are hoovering fallen acacia pods like potato chips. Carter picks out a lone male for us to follow; the 4½-ton tusker doesn't mind our presence one bit. We sit near a tree that's dropping plenty of pods, and Ivan rattles a hatful of the snacks he's collected. Within minutes, the elephant's trunk is five feet from me. My initial apprehension soon gives way to trust. "You'll get emotional," Ivan had promised as we set out. He was right. ■

(Turn page for The Facts)