

DEPARTURES

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WILD
KENYA

EAT
SLEEP
GOLF
CAPE
TOWN

HOLY
ETHIOPIA

THE VANISHING
SERENGETI

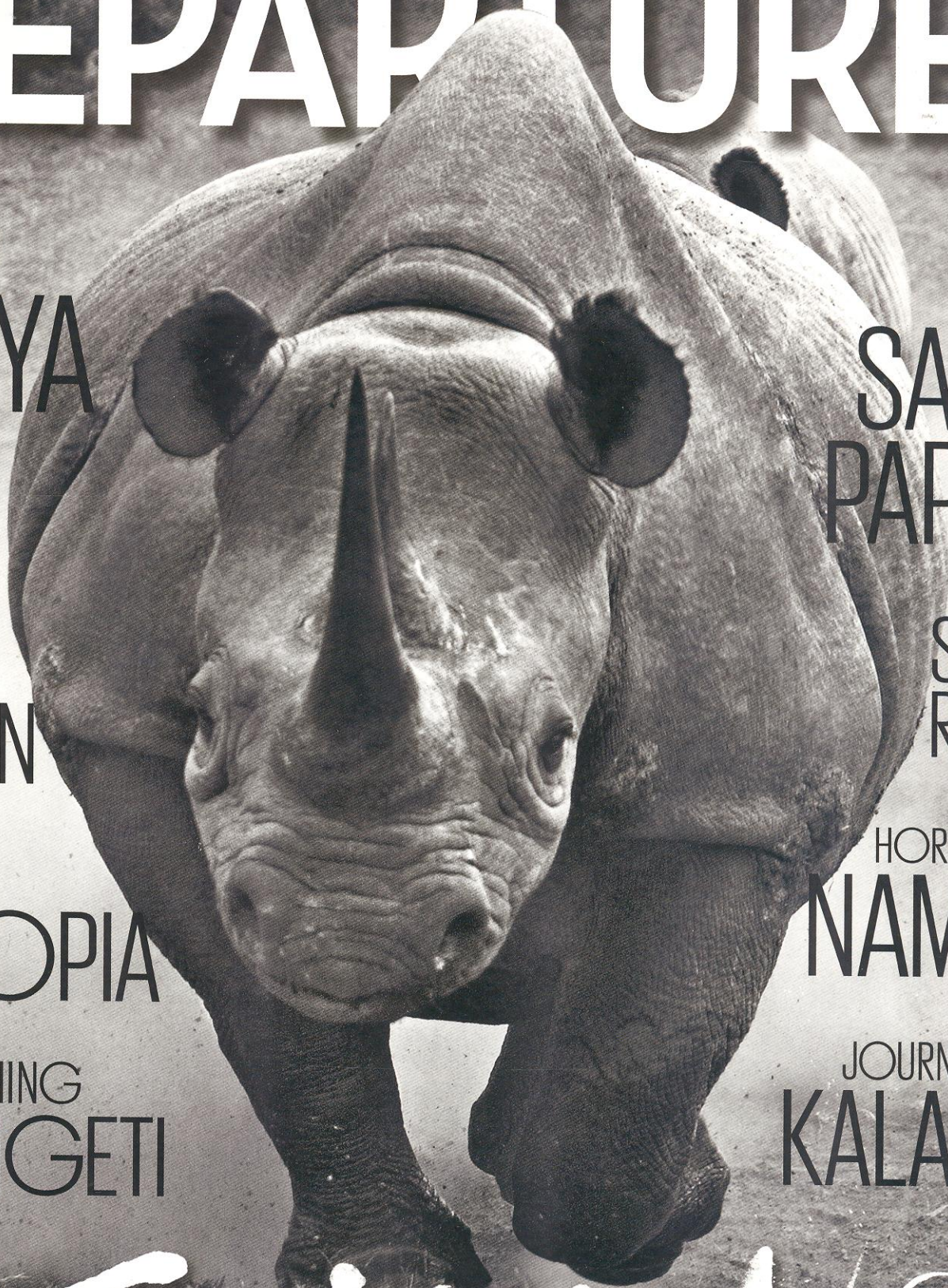
THE
SAFARI
PAPERS

SAVING
RHINO

HORSEBACK IN
NAMIBIA

JOURNEY TO THE
KALAHARI

AFRICA NOW



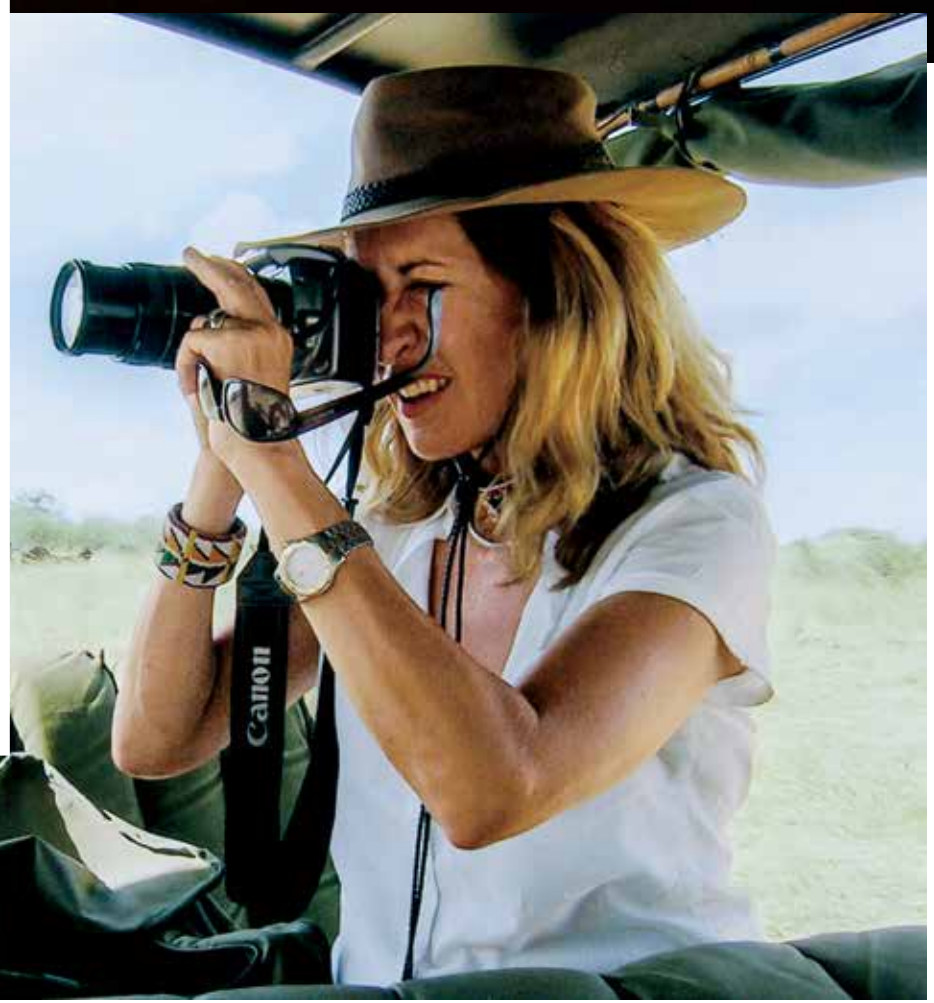
#21

WHO IS CHERRI BRIGGS?

A cross between Goldie Hawn and Beryl Markham.

**she is the go-to gal for the most familiar
as well as the most out-there safari.**

She loves Dolce & Gabbana, counts feminist Gloria Steinem among her best friends and started out as a kick-ass ad sales-girl at *GQ* magazine. But then again, those roads less traveled were always what got her where she wanted to be. Take, for example, this fact: Growing up in rural Nevada and Idaho, Cherri Briggs much preferred playing with spiders and scorpions than...dolls! And don't even get her started on snakes! But like all little girls, Briggs did have her own Barbie and Ken. "They were *soooo* boring," says the queen of African safaris. "I used to dress them up in leaves, build little tree houses for them in the lilac bushes and tell everyone they were Tarzan and Jane." When someone smiled and told her lovingly, after her little brother was born, that she too would be a mom one day, she said, "No way, I'm going to be an explorer in Africa." "Who knows where we get these ideas from?" says Briggs. Married



CHERRI BRIGGS, EXPLORE (2)



From top: Rhinos and crew at &Beyond's Xaranna Okavango Delta Camp in Botswana; Briggs and her husband, Richard Wilson, with Bushmen; en route to Botswana; Briggs and Wilson at their 2003 wedding in the Kalahari Desert.



in 2003 to conservationist Richard Wilson, Briggs is now one of the most creative and adventurous Africa agents out there.

I've known Briggs for 13 years, ever since I came to this magazine. Whenever she came to New York, we'd sit down and talk Africa—where she had been, where I wanted to go. But until this past May, we never traveled together. When I told her I was thinking about an issue devoted to Africa, she said, "Okay, now's our chance. Where do we want to go?" I had heard about the time she flew a group from *National Geographic* into the Sudan ("Now, that was one crazy trip. We were served dinner by a bunch of guys dressed in military camouflage with AK-47s"), and I've been obsessed with the Tuareg "Blue People" of Niger ever since she showed me pictures ("Uh, I don't think so. Not right now...let's wait on that trip till things settle down"). Instead, the itinerary she and her team created was along two of Africa's most important waterways—Botswana's Okavango Delta and the Zambezi River (see "Water, Water, Everywhere," page 62), but it began at Xaranna Okavango Delta Camp with the release of six endangered white rhinos, driven by caravan from South Africa. Here-with, a brief Q&A with the woman herself.

What was the reason behind transporting these rhinos a thousand miles to Botswana?

To create a safe haven for them and protect them from poachers in South Africa.

Why Botswana?

Because the government there has a history of always protecting its resources, including its wild areas and its wildlife. It is the only country in Africa where the anti-poaching effort is controlled by the army, and Botswana has one of the most protective armies on the continent. So poachers know Botswana is really a very high-risk place...for poachers! If anybody is where they're not supposed to be and has a gun, he's a target. The government's policy is shoot first, ask questions later.

What are your own favorite trips?

Off the top of my head, Botswana, Zambia,

the Okavango Delta and the Kalahari, which is where we got married. I love the extreme contrast of the Kalahari Desert and the delta waterways. You have the huge openness and expanse of the desert, which is like a moon-scape, and then the watery terroir of the delta, which is always referred to as earth's last Eden. And Zambia, which is where we now live, because the people are so fantastic. Fantastic.

Where would you like to go that you haven't yet been?

I really want to go down the Congo River. It's not possible at the moment, but it's been a lifelong dream of mine, a fantasy to buy one of those old freighters, fix it up and do Congo cruises. I'd also like to go to Angola, which is where the waters of the Okavango Delta begin. There are beautiful beaches, and parts of Angola look like England. Who knew?

How many trips a year do you personally go on; i.e., in the way you traveled with me for seven days and seven nights?

It's totally random. If we're taking people to a place where there's a good chance they'd be shot at, I'm there with them.

Excuse me..."shot at"?

Yeah, like in Niger, Sudan, northern Mali and parts of Cameroon.

So that's one way you ensure that Cherri Briggs and Richard Wilson will be with you. But if I say I want you to be on my trip?

That, and if you're really interested in community development and conservation. To be honest, you don't need us at your side to have a great experience on safari. We have the coolest guides anywhere.

What shocks you about Africa?

I'm appalled by the idea of a highway through the Serengeti [see "Where the Wild Things Are," page 270]. Disgusting.

What excites you?

The depth and commitment to wildlife and conservation are amazing. Particularly in Zambia. And I think a lot of good is going on in South Africa.

You split your time between Zambia and... why Steamboat Springs, Colorado?

Hmm...that part I'm still trying to figure out. If you have a better idea, let me know. —R.D.S.

Cherri Briggs is the founder of Explore. She can be reached at 888-596-6377; exploreafrika.net.

