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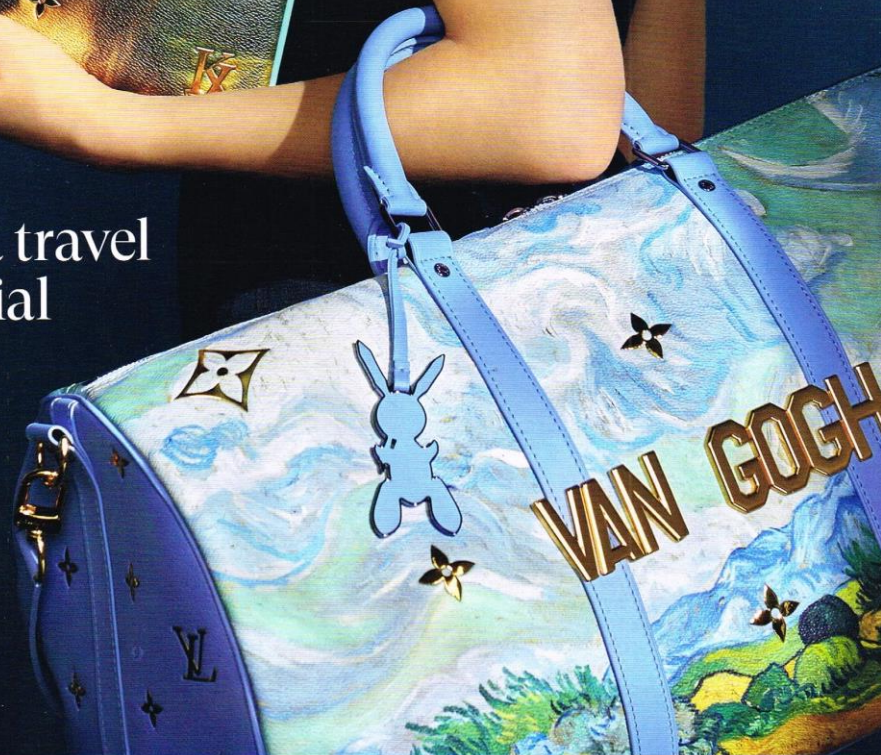
Coverage Highlights

THE  TIMES

# LUX



Design & travel  
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# Wild about it

A private Kenyan safari home with polished interiors, 35,000 acres and an owner who shares it to raise funds for conservation. By Lisa Grainger



NOT MANY WEALTHY CEOs' homes could be described as discreet. But then, there aren't many CEOs quite like the owner of Arijju in Kenya. The half-Nigerian, half-English former investment banker is not only a keen conservationist, he is also extremely private. Talk to anyone who knows him and his Norwegian wife – whether that's the well-known architects of the house, Alex Michaelis and Nick Plewman, the interior designer Maira Koutsoudakis or the 14 Kenyan staff who work on the property, and they all say the same thing. He's quiet. Gentlemanly. Down to earth. And a total stickler for detail.

So it's no surprise that when flying over the Laikipia valley in central Kenya, Arijju is hard to

spot from the air. It's as understated as its owners. Cut into the side of the gently sloping hill from which it takes its name, its walls are fashioned from golden Meru stone and its roof has been planted with the same creamy grass that characterises the plains below. If it weren't for a dark-blue infinity pool reflecting the expansive African skies and a bank of solar panels, the house would simply vanish into the hills.

Although Arijju looks as though it has been part of this landscape for centuries, it was finished only last year – one of five private homes on the 35,000-acre Borana ranch and wildlife reserve, which has been owned by the Dyer family for more than a century. In previous generations the Dyers

wouldn't have needed to encourage other families to build here. However, in the 21st century, in this politically volatile part of the world, conserving wildlife is an expensive business – particularly when you are protecting rhinos. Borana borders the well-known Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, and between them they have a number of these endangered creatures, which require 24-hour protection from a highly trained army of rangers.

When Michael Dyer offered the owner of Arijju the chance to build a property on Borana, in exchange for a substantial annual fee to help to fund their conservation efforts, the Londoner jumped at the chance. What took him longer – three years – was to find the perfect spot on Borana on →

LUX\* TRAVEL

## HILLSIDE RETREAT

Arijju's courtyard, planted with fragrant herbs and roses (below), and a bedroom with bush views (left)





which to build. "I needed to see what the views were like, what it smelt like, what the light was like," he says. "I knew what I wanted, which wasn't a king of the castle-type place at the top of a hill, as you get so often in Africa, or a typical A-framed thatched lodge. I wanted it to be tucked into the ground – a bit like one of those Ethiopian churches, but surrounded by bush, so that the trees, the birds and the animals were all around, while still getting those panoramic views."

From the minute you walk down the rocky path, through triple-height wooden doors and a fortress-like tunnelled entrance into a glass-fronted living space, it's the views that knock you out – of elephants walking among wild olive trees, of hundreds of miles of golden Laikipia wilderness dotted with buffaloes and, in the distance, the snow-capped, jagged peaks of Mount Kenya.

The house has been built as a quadrangle, its almost monastic, vaulted cloisters and rooms set around a pretty Provencal-style courtyard garden planted with herbs, white roses and lavender. From

#### NATURE'S WAY

The interiors of Arijju feature natural materials, from copper in the bathroom (right) to wooden ceilings in the living room (below)



almost every space you can see out into the bush. The bedrooms all face east, so guests can watch the sun rising from their beds. Dining tables on verandas face south, towards Mount Kenya, and from the rooftop one can look out over what feels like the entire country by day – and lie under a cosy duvet watching shooting stars while listening to lions roaring all around at night.

Although the house is surrounded by untamed nature, inside every detail has been considered, and then refined again. Maira Koutsoudakis – the South African designer best known for her rustic-chic villas on North Island in the Seychelles – has imbued the interiors with real soul, mixing the simple with the rich, the monastic with the decadent. Her mission, she says, was to try to create spaces that would become more beautiful as they aged, using mottled, muted colours that would fade gently in the sun, textures that would improve with weathering and old pieces that would reflect the influences of the cultures that had passed through Kenya.

"I wanted a house with so much character that a blind man could feel what it was like," she says. "Heavy Moroccan doors, weather-beaten Chinese

#### LIGHT AND SHADE

The pool (right) was built beside an old wild olive tree to shade loungers



tables and rough linen alongside polished tadelakt walls, super-smooth glass vases and sculptural Christian Lialgre lamps. Nothing built in, so that it felt like a beautiful clean box, filled with treasures."

When Koutsoudakis couldn't find old pieces to use, she had them made. For the bedrooms she had wardrobes handbuilt in India and covered with leather to look like old travelling trunks. For the bathrooms, basins were fashioned from old Indian temple bowls and placed on weathered Chinese workbenches. Drinks cabinets were made from cracked, carved armoires.

Then, to ensure that the house didn't feel overly ethnic, Koutsoudakis added slightly decadent European touches – oversized French-style mirrors leaning against the walls, crystal chandeliers hanging from rough wooden ceilings, a brass-topped bar with an Italian espresso machine and, in the bathroom, deep copper baths and white towelling chaises longues, "so that after a long bath you can lie in the sunlight, slowly getting dry".

Saying here it's clear that this house has been constructed so that its inhabitants could get the most out of life's simple pleasures, from bathing

under the stars, sleeping in the shade and swimming in cool well-water to eating fresh produce while admiring the views over virgin land.

When the owner isn't using the five-bedroom home it is rented out exclusively, with 14 staff, a safari guide and a charming general manager called Karina Jessop, who also happens to be a chef who can turn out Ottolenghi-style feasts. Breakfast might be a surprise bush picnic of warm frittata, raspberry muffins, green kale juice and espresso after a dawn horseride alongside giraffes. Lunch might be exotic salads and woodfired pizzas served in a shaded poolside gazebo after a morning's lion-tracking on golden plains or watching rhinos grazing in thickets. Dinner might be a hearty bush barbecue under the moon or a formal four-course feast in the chandelier-adorned dining room following a game of tennis or squash on the private courts, a heli-fishing excursion in the volcanic lake or a quad-biking safari across the plains.

Having said that, most guests seem to want to do nothing more than stay at the house and soak in its quiet beauty. To read safari books in the shade of a gnarled old olive tree. To have massages in the

African hammam. To swim in the Bisazza-tiled pool watching clouds skudding across the burning skies. To sit in the courtyard listening to frogs croaking while inhaling the scent of jasmine and rosemary. And then, at the end of the day, to wander into their rooms to discover a fire burning with aromatic cedar, candles twinkling in alcoves and a silver tray laid with an antique teapot, a fine white china cup and a glass bowl of Kenyan roses.

"What seems to strike the visitor to Arijju," says Koutsoudakis, "is the soulful serenity – as well as the feeling that everything belongs. People say that it feels as though it's been there for ever." ● *Journeys by Design* ([journeysbydesign.com](http://journeysbydesign.com); 01273 623790) can arrange a week's exclusive stay at Arijju from £6,046 per person based on a group of ten sharing. The price includes return air charters from Nairobi to Arijju, full-board accommodation, safari activities, the use of tennis and squash courts, a gym, mountain bikes, a yoga studio, a hammam and four hours of spa treatments between the group daily. Return flights with Kenya Airways ([kenyaairways.com](http://kenyaairways.com); 020 8283 1818) cost from £715pp in economy and £2,628pp in business



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## THE GOLD LIST 2017



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## IS THIS THE MOST BEAUTIFUL HOUSE IN AFRICA?

THE VISION OF ONE DETERMINED CHARACTER, ARIJUU IS QUITE UNLIKE ANY OTHER SAFARI LODGE. IT'S ALSO A SECRET WEAPON IN THE BATTLE TO SAVE RHINOS FROM EXTINCTION. PETER BROWNE GOES TO KENYA FOR A FIRST LOOK

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CROOKES & JACKSON





## THE OWNER WANTED PEACE AND PRIVACY, AND SO THE CONCEPT OF THIS HIGHLY

ALTHOUGH LAIKIPIA COUNTY in the Kenyan highlands is just a few miles north of the equator, the early-morning air is cool and tangy. When the sun reaches its zenith, shining brightly in arching, china-blue skies daubed with high, scudding clouds, there is a clarity to the light that makes it possible to see over great distances, and in incredible detail.

The views from here, on the western reaches of the 32,000-acre Borana Conservancy, are of seasonal river valleys coated in acacia and wild olive trees across naked savannah and rolling foothills to magnificent Mount Kenya, etched on the horizon like an engraving. The owner of this extraordinary house, who prefers to remain nameless, says he first came to Laikipia because the landscape reminded him of his childhood home in central Nigeria, where his English mother, a chemistry teacher, and Nigerian father, a lawyer, raised him and his two sisters.

His parents, who met and married in England, moved to Nigeria shortly after it gained independence from Britain in 1960. Later that decade, when the country was torn apart by the Biafra War, he and his mother and siblings were rescued by Swedish aid workers and flown to the volcanic island of São Tomé, and from there to Portugal before finally reaching England. His father stood his ground, and when the war ended the family were reunited in the peaceful highlands around the city of Jos. It was there, as a

young lad set free in the African bush, that the owner says he had 'the most idyllic childhood, running around with a catapult chasing guinea fowl. At that age – about 14 or so – all I wanted to be was a game ranger.'

Instead, he would go to Yale and then Harvard Law School, where he met the Norwegian woman who would become his wife. He got a job at McKinsey & Company in New York as a management consultant and, as a reward for his progress, was sent to Johannesburg to head up the company's strategy for the Standard Bank of South Africa after Mandela came to power. The posting re-ignited his love for Africa, and so he took leave of absence from McKinsey and went off in search of investment opportunities in Nigeria – which he found. Many years later, he is now the CEO of an ethical energy company dealing with solar, wind and gas projects in the country of his birth. But he's never forgotten his childhood dream of becoming a game ranger.

Arijju – the house takes its name from the Maasai word for the hill on which it was built – stands on the Borana Conservancy, owned by Michael Dyer, a third-generation Kenyan. Originally a cattle ranch, like much of the land around here, it shares a boundary with Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, which has been at the forefront of rhino conservation in Kenya for more than two decades. Borana operates both as a working cattle ranch,



## REDUCTIVE RETREAT, ALMOST SPIRITUAL IN ITS SIMPLICITY AND BEAUTY, TOOK SHAPE

traversed by the nomadic Maasai with their cows and goats, and as a wildlife sanctuary. It's a balancing act that's anathema to safari purists who prefer even the illusion of pristine wilderness, devoid of any sign of human habitation, but with the commitment and involvement of local communities it has proved a successful conservation model.

The property is well stocked with plains game – zebra, giraffe, Grant's gazelle, eland and hartebeest – as well as lion and enormous herds of elephant. But the big news is it recently became home to 22 black rhinos, translocated from Lake Nakuru National Park and neighbouring Lewa – which had reached its own carrying capacity of 70.

With rhinos constantly under threat from armed poachers, Borana has had to invest heavily in security to protect them, including an anti-poaching unit. To help raise the money, Dyer decided to lease three parcels of land to like-minded investors on which to build private homes, on the understanding that the houses would be made available to paying guests, the profits from which are fed back into conservation projects on the land.

The owner of this, the most beautiful house of all, had already been visiting Borana for 12 years when the opportunity to build his own home came up. He says he wanted his London-based children to know Africa, and to experience the joy and freedom



he himself felt as a child, and, with central Nigeria now too dangerous to return to, the highlands of Kenya have given the family a key to the continent. For the owner, the complex world of conservation is gradually taking precedence over high finance. 'I am finally starting to do what I always wanted to do,' he says.

SUNLIGHT HITS THE BEDROOMS at Arijju first and arrives at the cantilevered swimming pool and its reed-covered terrace in the afternoon.

It took the owner three years to settle on this precise spot. Before any building got underway, he tested for wind direction and watched how the light fell and cast shadows. He tells the story of how a group of chameleons under an old olive tree, sheltered from the prevailing wind and warmed by the afternoon sun, helped mark the position of one of the verandahs.

As for the structure, the owner knew what he didn't want – an old-fashioned, A-frame, thatch-and-brick safari house – but other than that, little came to mind. Working with two architects Nick Plewman from Johannesburg and Alex Michaelis from London – ideas were teased out, discussed, ruminated on. If an A-frame roof was out of the question, then it should be flat, but that ended up looking too modern; the owner was keen to create something unobtrusive and embedded in the landscape, so the

Above, from left: exploring the wildly diverse Borana Conservancy on horseback; rustic and elegant design in a bathroom at Arijju; the living and

dining room opens onto a veranda with views of Mount Kenya. Previous pages, the master suite, one of three bedrooms in the main house





Clockwise from top far left: the entrance to Arijju; the pool; picnic on the Ewaso Nyiro River; an Indian Campaign desk in one of the cottages; lunch on the pool terrace; a bedroom in a cottage









## A GROUP OF CHAMELEONS UNDER AN OLD OLIVE TREE, SHELTERED FROM THE WIND

flat roof was topped with turf, creating something more nuanced. Gradually, other ideas and influences began to emerge. Michaelis had always been inspired by Le Thoronet Abbey, a Cistercian monastery built in Provence in the 12th century, distinctive for its lack of embellishment. References to the buried, rock-hewn churches of Lalibela in Ethiopia came out to play; the owner's need for peace and privacy were noted. And so the concept of this highly reductive retreat, almost spiritual in its simplicity and beauty, took shape.

For five years he says he spent every free waking hour thinking about, or working on, the house. During its construction, he was on site every six weeks. 'Yes, he was very hands-on,' says Plewman. 'He has real vision and was the driving force behind everything. It turned out to be an amazing collaboration, with a big team of creatives and craftsmen all working together.' Both architects credit local contractor Ben Jackson with delivering something which has far exceeded their expectations: a 21st-century house built with 12th-century craftsmanship – all the quarried Meru stone was hand-chiselled by local masons – that feels ancient and wise, honest and elemental, but also very contemporary.

It is truly remarkable how well Arijju sits in its landscape. Literally cut into the bedrock, it is reached down a winding path created by the British garden designer Jinny Blom; the

heavy, studded front door is triple height, arched and reticent; the entrance hall like a tunnel into an ancient fortress. Within, the intense, equatorial light cascades into a cloistered courtyard, illuminating the living rooms and bedrooms that lie easily around it; above it, to one side, is a roof terrace reached by a hidden stairway. Outside, smooth-cobbled verandahs lead off all the rooms; the pool terrace fans out at the base of a flight of wide stairs, and beyond that, obscured from view, is the gym, a traditional hamman and spa. Two exquisite guest cottages set discreetly apart from the main house.

The interior design is by Johannesburg-based Maira Koutsoudakis, who also created the smart-but-relaxed look at North Island in the Seychelles – considered by many the benchmark for all private-island hideaways – and Segera Retreat, also in Laikipia and owned by the conservationist Jochen Zeitz, former CEO of Puma. Where the internal walls have been left bare, all polished concrete or exposed rock, Koutsoudakis has introduced opulence in the form of large-scale chandeliers (even in the smallest rooms in the house and cottages), enormous French mirrors, limited-edition bronze tables from Cape Town, leather-and-raffia carpets from Morocco and outsize leather Campaign wardrobes and desks from India. 'Nothing shouts, but everything carries enormous weight, or is richly textured, or has a smooth lustre that is

## AND WARMED BY THE AFTERNOON SUN, HELPED MARK THE POSITION OF A VERANDA

restful on the eye,' she says. 'Because the owner has roots on both continents, and is a very elegant man himself, it felt right to fuse the finesse of Europe with the rusticity of Africa.'

A KEEN RUNNER AND SPORTSMAN, the owner sent his regular masseuse (the best in London, he says) to train an already-brilliant therapist he found by chance in the nearby market town of Nanyuki. He made sure the gym equipment was up to his exacting standards, and the house has both tennis and squash courts. Beyond that, there are also traditional morning and evening game drives, guided walks, mountain biking on well-established trails, and horseback safaris across Borana and beyond.

The owner is keen for Arijju to be used as a base for exploration rather than a static safari lodge ('A bit like a Colorado dude ranch with wildlife,' he says). Each year he and his family have discovered new adventures on Borana. One of their favourites is a day out at Ngare Ndare Forest, on the south-eastern boundary of Borana, where a tree-top-canopy walkway meanders through towering red cedars and deep swimming holes are the colour of Tanzanian, edged with emerald ferns fed by rumbling waterfalls.

But perhaps the best way to absorb the immensity of Laikipia County and the diverse East African landscape is to take a helicopter expedition with one of the scions of a well-known Kenyan family,

Jamie Roberts (his brother Willie has Sirikoi camp on Lewa; one of his other brothers owns Richard's Camp in the Maasai Mara). In a Roberts helicopter it is possible to explore the snow-covered Batian and Nelion peaks of Mount Kenya and go fly-fishing on the mountain's almost inaccessible Lake Michaelson, or follow the Ewaso Nyiro River north over Samburu County, landing on Ol Lolokwe mountain – which rises suddenly from the volcanic plains that surround it – with its primordial cycad forests and astonishing views north to Lake Turkana and Ethiopia.

These are phenomenally high-octane, adrenalin-pumping safaris and easily completed in a day if you wish. So it's good to know that beautiful Arijju stands waiting, candles lit, logs crackling in the baronial fireplaces, the bar open for pre-supper drinks on the roof terrace under the stars. There can surely be few sights more serene, or welcoming, in all of Africa.

A one-week stay at Arijju for up to 10 people can be organised by Africa specialist Journeys by Design (+44 1273 623790; [journeysbydesign.com](http://journeysbydesign.com)). Prices start from £6,930 per person and includes all local game activities and four hours of spa treatments daily, excluding international flights and off-ranch activities. A full-day helicopter safari into the northern deserts costs from £1,900 per person. Accessed by helicopter, a lightweight fly-camp is also available.

Above, from left: the cloistered courtyard, inspired by a French abbey; a copper bathtub and steel-and-glass shower in a guest room; a giraffe, one

of the many animals that can be seen around the house. Previous pages, the candlelit roof terrace, where barbecues are often held





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By LILI ANOLIK  
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JOSEPH LEOMBRUNO AND JACK BODI/CONDÉ NAST ARCHIVE

# THE WORLD IS YOUR CLOISTER

Enveloped by bush magic, ALICE B-B revels in the most chic of game lodges





Let's buzz the house?" I ask the pilot as we near the end of a short hop from Nairobi to Borana, a 32,000-acre estate in Laikipia, Kenya. "Sure—is that the one?" he asks, pointing at a grand, pillared collection of buildings on the top of a hill.

"No, apparently it has a green roof." We do several more loops but, despite being the newest kid on the Borana block, no one can spot Arijju.

I'm picked up from the airstrip in a long-wheelbase Land Rover with roll bars clad in top-stitched leather, piles of blankets and a leather-covered water bottle tagged with my name. This is chic from the off. And then that first drive, when Africa envelops you: bumping along dirt tracks past masticating giraffe, ruminating zebra and buffalo grazing from blade to blade. It's the pinch-me thrill that never fails to feel less than a scene from *Jurassic Park* or *Born Free*.

Strangely, there's nothing epic about the arrival at Arijju. Halfway up a hill, we halt beneath a clump of African oaks. "Is this really it?" I wonder. A meandering path through grasses and acacia trees, down steps hewn into the burnt-umber bedrock and through a fortified door at the back of the house, down a long, dark corridor, and then... The sensory genius of Arijju hits me, as the most unlikely open-air courtyard is revealed. Flanked on all sides by stone

vaulted cloisters, the tree-filled space is an Eden of scented roses, lavender and lemon verbena, designed by British landscape designer Jinny Blom. Beside the pond are chairs and a reclaimed table, a peaceful spot to take tea and listen to croaking frogs and tinkling fountains.

Like all the best presents, Arijju is wrapped in brown paper. "The unexpected was intentional," explains architect Alex Michaelis of Michaelis Boyd, whose work includes Soho House in Berlin and The Groucho Club in London. "The idea was to create a 'refuge', and I kept thinking about Le Thoronet near Toulon in France. It's a 12th-century Cistercian abbey, a very simple, peaceful place." The monastic cloisters certainly tick the unexpected box for a property in Kenya. Yet they make total sense as a tranquil space in contrast to what lies beyond; out on the plain where the animal kingdom constantly fights for survival.

The owners are as discreet as their house. They'd been visiting the estate for 18 years when Michael Dyer—who runs the Borana

Conservancy and whose family has owned the estate for three generations—offered them a chance to build their own home. There are five private houses on the estate, each contributing £77,000 of conservancy fees a year. Borana is one of the few places where both black and white rhino can be seen living side by side; an impressive 85 and 76 respectively. Protecting them is expensive. Rhino horn is simply keratin (*i.e.* hair), but on the Chinese medicine market, it's worth about £60,000 a kilo. Alongside neighbouring Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, Borana has an army of 27 rangers working day and night to protect these magnificent, prehistoric-looking beasts from poachers.

Finding the perfect spot for the house took three years. "It was either higher with a view of the world or lower and connecting with the forest and the *lugga* [a seasonal river]," says Michaelis. The final position is the antithesis of where most chest-beating, fortune-flaunting folk would choose to build a meretricious pad. But Arijju is the ultimate in stealth wealth; a place where

## A SCUFFLE IN THE TREES, FOLLOWED BY A TRUNK TENDERLY EXPLORING THE OLIVE TREE, AND A CRINKLY SKINNED ELEPHANT WALTZES INTO VIEW

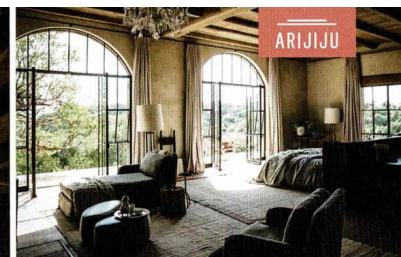
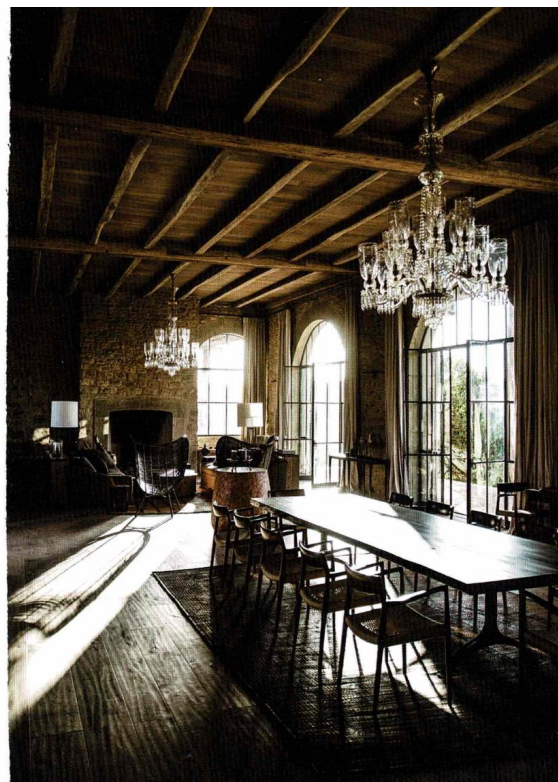


chic is dialed up and ego is dialed down.

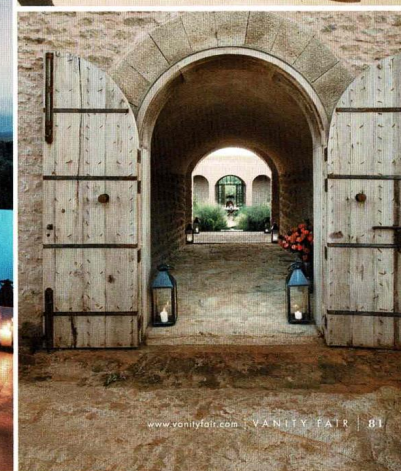
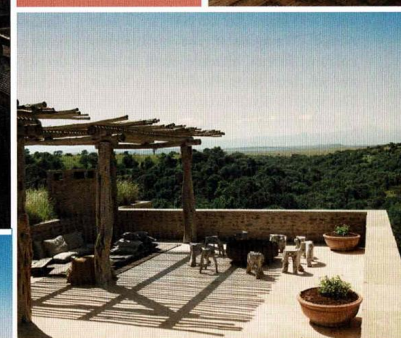
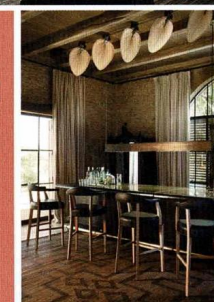
British-born builder Ben Jackson oversaw 400 workmen at the house over 21 months. "The owners wanted the structure to organically evolve from the ground," he explains of the references to the undercut churches of Lalibela in Ethiopia, "so we carved out the bedrock by hand. That was the hardest thing."

Johannesburg-based designer Maira Koutsoudakis, known for creating laid-back luxury including the ultimate beach hideaway of North Island in the Seychelles, was employed to design and style the interiors. She leads us through the cobbled courtyard out onto the wide verandah, where a table is laid with the prettiest looking breakfast as we gaze out across the *lugga* below and to the snow-capped peak of Mount Kenya in the distance.

"For me, this house was very much about living in the mid-zone," Maira explains. As if on cue, there's a scuffle in the trees, followed by a trunk tenderly exploring the



**SAVANNAH FROM HEAVEN**  
Clockwise from left: the living and dining room opens onto a verandah with views of Mount Kenya; one of Arijju's five spacious bedrooms; the bar area cooled by traditional punkah fans which waft in unison; views across the forest and the *lugga*; the main entrance leads into the cloistered courtyard; the Bisazza-tiled infinity pool which overlooks a watering hole used by elephants and giraffes





## ARIJJU

wild olive tree below, before a crinkly skinned elephant waltzes into full view. The clever design is in full effect; she's only five metres away, but the human-animal border is delineated by the long drop from the verandah to the valley below.

Three of Arijju's bedrooms are directly off the courtyard while a further two individual guesthouses are nestled further up the hill. Each has vast beds made up with rumpled Belgian linen, sofas to curl up in and a campaign-style desk. The chandelier-lit bathrooms have a copper tub, a towelling-covered chaise longue, indoor and outdoor showers, and a loo with a view over the fever trees. At 7,000ft above sea level, Arijju is chilly in the morning and evening; so cosy details include wood-burning stoves in the bathroom and log fires in the bedroom. A hot water bottle is popped in your bed at night and there are cashmere socks in the wardrobe.

Nothing jars. The walls are either putty-coloured tadelakt or built from Meru stone, quarried from behind Mount Kenya, while soft linens and curtains are equally muted. "Imagine if you took strong coloured fabrics, chucked earth at them and left them out in the sun," says Maira. The level of detail is astonishing: ceiling punkah fans in the study are made from

the bush for more action in the afternoon.

One morning I visit Borana's stables, where piebald horses cast long shadows in the early light. I hop on a chestnut called Bullet and ride across the dusty plains, often within stroking distance of giraffe and zebra who feel no fear because they recognize my steed as one of their own. After two hours exploring the land, we arrive at a watering hole where beneath the trees a beautiful picnic breakfast has been set up.

Nothing at Arijju is run of the mill. Every experience is sprinkled with magic. So the prandial scene is part 1910s *Out of Africa*, part 2017 insta-wellness—white tablecloths, roses in vases and a washstand to freshen up. A smorgasbord groans with home-made croissants on a silver platter decorated with lavender, mango and pineapple pieces skewered with rosemary, while glass bottles are filled with fresh smoothies and chia-seed pudding.

The following day we head to the Ngare Ndare Forest to walk a series of tree-top platforms, binoculars at the ready to spot the Hartlaub's touraco bird with its carmine-red breast in flight amongst the canopy. We head deeper into the forest to swim in icy freshwater pools, ducking beneath waterfalls.

Heading back to Arijju and the promise of a hot bath followed by a *dawa* cocktail

watch spellbound, all thoughts of Pride Rock forgotten as we've found our very own Simba right here on the plain. All the guides at Borana are discreetly in touch with each other via WhatsApp, so we have this golden mess of lion all to ourselves.

After an hour of watching them chase, cuff and check out the local herd of Grant's gazelles, the feline gang disappears into a copse. Gone. In that moment the ethos of Arijju becomes clear. Out in the bush, survival relies on the ability to vanish. And like a lion out on the plain, a camouflaged house is exactly what the owners wanted.

Staying here delivers the best of both worlds. The house is run like the most sophisticated hotel—but at heart, it's a family home. "And it's still in process," says Maira, pointing at empty glass cases in the study. "If you go for a walk and pick up a skull or a beautiful rock, you can put it in one of these boxes. It's an overlay of narrative.

"Arijju is a new property with an old soul, based on ancient principles and aesthetics," she adds. It's an equation that will only become more beautiful as the years go by, as the trees in the courtyard grow taller, as the glass boxes are filled and the landscape of Laikipia wraps its dusty arms even tighter around what is possibly the most elegant house in Africa. Or maybe even the world. □

## WE WATCH THE CUBS SPELLBOUND, ALL THOUGHTS OF PRIDE ROCK FORGOTTEN AS WE HAVE FOUND OUR VERY OWN SIMBA RIGHT HERE ON THE PLAIN

palm leaves that waft in unison, and there's no excuse for not working out—in the open-air Technogym or playing on the squash and tennis courts—as the boot room is filled with trainers in every size. Next to the games room is a cinema where daybeds scattered with cashmere throws are begging for popcorn and TV suppers.

Days are filled mirroring the rhythm of the game. Bursts of early morning activity include mountain biking, buzzing about on a quad or taking a helicopter up to Lake Michaelson on Mount Kenya for a spot of trout fishing. As the game disappears at the hottest time of day, we pause for lunch beneath a canopy overlooking the Bisazza-tiled infinity pool before heading back into

("medicine" in Swahili) on the fortress-style roof, we pass a familiar-looking rock that juts out over the valley. "It's Pride Rock," confirms our guide Amory McLeod, indicating probably the most famous promontory in Africa, chiseled into our subconscious thanks to *The Lion King*.

The following morning we wake before birdsong for a sunrise breakfast at this very spot. The air is gin-clear as the horizon begins to burn orange when suddenly Amory spots something in the distance. We veer off track and drive across thirsty grasses until a magnificent male lion appears. We follow beside him as he pads purposefully towards his brood; a total of 13 lionesses, young males and playful cubs. We

### VANITY FAIR TRAVELS TO...

## ARIJJU

### WAY TO GO

*Kenya Airways flies direct from Heathrow to Nairobi. Business class treats include paw-print flight socks.*

### NEED TO KNOW

*Arijju is suited to multi-generational families or groups of three to five couples.*

*Four hours of daily spa treatments, all safari activities, full board and private air charter from Nairobi are included in the price of £6,046 per person for a week's stay based on 10 people sharing.*

*Other treats include tennis, squash, gym, yoga studio and hammam. Quad bikes and horse riding can be arranged at extra cost.*

### DON'T MISS

*Chartering a helicopter for epic morning flights up to Mount Kenya and sundowners on lofty peaks in Samburu country.*

*For more information, please visit [journeysbydesign.com](http://journeysbydesign.com) or call +44 (0) 1273 623 790*



# TRAVEL+ LEISURE

THE STYLE & DESIGN ISSUE

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T•L'S GUIDE TO

# SAFARI

It's a staple of bucket lists everywhere, the vacation all adventure-loving travelers dream of. But when it comes to booking an African safari—whether it's your first or your fifteenth—some smart guidance can make all the difference. With an array of showstopping lodges, immersive game-watching experiences, and hands-on conservation programs, there are more ways than ever to plan your perfect safari now.

photograph by GRANT CORNETT

## SAFARI



### EXPERT TIP

Coveted safari camps sell out up to a year in advance, so plan ahead. Give your travel consultant a clear budget, and be open-minded: you could end up loving a trip you hadn't originally imagined.

—Kota Tabuchi  
of luxury  
safari agency  
Travel Beyond  
(traveltobeyond.com)

## Above and Beyond

A remarkable private villa rental in the Kenyan bush raises the bar for safari stays. **BY LILA BATTIS**

**Y**ou won't know you're nearing Arijiju until you have already arrived. The house is built into the Laikipia foothills north of Mount Kenya, its grass-covered roof and rough stone walls making it appear, from afar, like part of the landscape. The effect is one of inevitability—as if the property were always meant to be there.

Most visitors come to Kenya for the wildlife, and the 32,000-acre Borana Conservancy surrounding Arijiju teems with all manner of creatures. But, unlike most safari properties, this lodge feels like a destination in itself. Built as a vacation retreat by a Londoner with African roots, it's now available for exclusive-use rental. The 14-person staff, which includes butlers, chefs, and a masseuse, is warm and attentive, lighting crackling fires at bedtime and delivering coffee to your room when you wake. That human touch gives the five-bedroom property an intimate, homey feel, like a fabulous friend's personal retreat.

Beyond the occasional campaign-style piece, Arijiju has none of the typical safari-lodge trappings—no Masai prints or mosquito-netted beds, and the only thatched roofs are those of the outbuildings. Instead, relaxed luxury reigns: rugs are layered on the hardwood floors, and linen sofas are draped with rabbit-fur throws guests can use to ward off the evening chill. The décor takes more inspiration from India and Morocco than from Kenya, yet everything about the house is in keeping with the spirit of Laikipia. That's in large part because Arijiju puts all eyes on the landscape that surrounds it. Massive glass doors overlook a forest of acacia and African olive trees, and beyond the elevated terrace, the grounds are open to the wilds. Baboons scratch at the earth a few yards from the breakfast table. In dry stretches, giraffes and elephants come to drink from the pool.

There are game drives, of course, and you can see it all—even rarer animals like Grevy's zebras and both black and white rhinos are flourishing in Borana and neighboring Lewa. But on the slim chance your favorite animal should elude you, any disappointment will be quelled the moment Arijiju's flickering lanterns announce your arrival home. [arijiju.com](http://arijiju.com); from \$7,500.



The view of Mount Kenya from Arijiju's master suite.

### LODGES TO LOOK OUT FOR

More Instagram-worthy properties launching in Africa this season.

#### 1 MIAVANA, MADAGASCAR

From the people behind the Seychelles' North Island, this ultramodern 14-villa lodge on a private island off Madagascar combines beaches and wildlife in one luxe package. [timeandtideafrica.com](http://timeandtideafrica.com); from \$2,500.\*

#### 2 DUBA PLAINS CAMP, BOTSWANA

Spot hippos from your private plunge pool at this plush new Great Plains Conservation property in the quieter northern reaches of the Okavango Delta. [greatplainsconservation.com](http://greatplainsconservation.com); from \$2,480.

#### 3 CHOBE WATER VILLAS, NAMIBIA

These 16 eco-chic villas on the northern bank of the Chobe River are Africa's answer to the over-water bungalow, with each offering 180-degree river views. [chobewater villas.com](http://chobewater villas.com); from \$990.

#### 4 ASILIA JABALI RIDGE, TANZANIA

Deft use of organic forms and materials gives this eight-suite lodge in Ruaha National Park the look of having emerged from the landscape. [asiliaafrica.com](http://asiliaafrica.com); from \$850.—L.B.

BOOK: BULL ICON BY OKSANA LATYSHEVA FROM THE NGUNI PROJECT

\*Prices quoted are the high-season rate per person and include meals and activities.