PORTER

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FASHION to LOVE
70s Chic
Dark Florals
Cowgirl Cool
Faux Fur

Julianne
Smart, strong
and sexy...
Hell yes!

bold &
bright &
beautiful

CELEBRATING THE INCREDIBLE WOMEN of 2018
Emma González, Meryl Streep, Beyoncé, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Meghan Markle...
Majestic horizons

It was on a trip with film director Wes Anderson that actor Waris Ahluwalia was first introduced to Ruth Gunesh, a trustee of the Elephant Family charity who shares his passion for conservation. Here, they take PORTER to KENYA’s latest philanthropic projects and grass-roots initiatives, which aim to preserve, protect and celebrate some of the world’s most incredible wildlife.

Photographer Michael Turek
out of this world
My personal relationship with conservation started just over 10 years ago with a request from film director Wes Anderson. We were in pre-production of The Darjeeling Limited and Wes asked me to make a pin for my costume. As we were filming in India, it seemed only right to make an elephant, which in a roundabout way was how I came to be introduced to the late, great Mark Sheld, and Ruth Ganesh of Elephant Family (elephant-family.org) – upholding the tradition of protection among the mahouts. What started by chance ignited a committed lifelong passion. I made a promise to myself then that I would do my part to protect these majestic animals.

Over the years, Ruth, the tireless former CEO and now a trustee of Elephant Family, and I have worked on a number of projects and conservation operations together. Next summer we’re planning one of our dream initiatives, the Animal Ball – what could be better than bringing friends, family and supporters together to drink and dance in support of a world where humans and wildlife can live in synergistic embrace?

DAY 1
The night before my flight to Nairobi I’m in Victoria Park in London listening to Tami Smith’s cover of Midnight Oil’s Beds Are Burning: “The time has come, a fact I’ve been telling them, let’s give it back, how can we dance, when our earth is turning, how do we sleep, while our teeth are burning?”

It is a protest song about giving Australian Aboriginals, the Pitjantjatjara’s, their land back. But, in so many ways, this feels like a hymn for the human race right now. In our constant pursuit for answers through countless meditation apps, tartan-infused tarts or ayahuasca ceremonies, one fact remains: we struggle. As an ever-expanding invasive species requiring endless amounts of land and resources, we threaten our very existence and that of other species.

So, it is with a sense of urgency that Ruth and I set out to meet Space for Giants and Lion Guardians – grass-roots conservation projects offering an alternative model for living in parts of the world where creatures still roam wild.

They have always sounded like superheroes to me, but Lion Guardians headquarters (where guests can follow their conservation work), is a modest array of large canvas tents and buildings camouflaged to blend into the surroundings.

Under a blazing African sun, giving a brief respite from all the unreasonable rain, I join Louis, Maasai, the program manager, and two Maasai warriors for a walk—a petrol, really, of the big cats. Kuku is one of the fiercest warriors and a local legend who is notorious for killing five lions. Our host, killing a lion is like a rite of passage for a young man. It’s how he gets his lion name and establishes his perceived worth in society. It’s how he attracts a partner to marry. But after the killing of his fifth lion, Kuku began to question his ways: what had he gained from killing the lions? It was then when he met Dr. Leela Hazzah, the group’s director, that he started to understand the work of Lion Guardians. Kuku then took on the responsibility of teaching younger warriors, such as Sanupan, the local hearthlord, how protecting wildlife actually creates enduring benefits for the individual and the community, ones that outlive the tradition of lion killings.

Every morning, the Lion Guardians set off to walk through their assigned areas to track the movements of the big cats.

Along the way, they meet with the villagers and make sure the community and livestock are safe. They are tasked with the extraordinary purpose of creating a world where lions live in harmony with the people who share their land.

What started as a project in a small area in Amboseli and Tsavo in 2007 with five Lion Guardians has expanded to almost one million acres over Kenya and Tanzania. Working alongside the community, Leela and the group’s director of science, Dr. Stephanie Dolan, have established a huge amount of trust, which has allowed them to create conservation programs based on science and indigenous knowledge. Their methods have been rather successful. Outside of the protected area, this is the only growing lion population in the world. Everywhere else, it’s on the decline.

DAY 2
At Tortillas Camp, our home for the few days we spend with Lion Guardians, we have a dining table with the best view of the local watering hole. As if stage-directed, this morning we see a zebra silently pace by, followed by a small herd of elephants and, snaking around in the tall grass, we quickly make out the silhouette of a hyena.

DAY 3
Today, Mingai, a village elder, takes us on a tour of his homa.

“I will be sad to leave my new friends, but we part with a small shift of perspective on both sides”
a small fortified village with enclosures for livestock. We speak with Minga’s two wives over sweet tea about the value of the land, tradition and the lions, which help to preserve their culture as the modern world encroaches. They support each other in ways that we can only learn from. One of my favorite concepts is that of ‘co-fathers’. When villagers have children here, they can turn to a group of co-fathers made up of village elders for advice and guidance. The conversation naturally leads to my non-marital status and age. I am thrilled when they have me down as 29 and too young for marriage. Kimura said if he was in New York, he would gather everyone I knew and have an intervention. Now imagine having to explain to men younger than me, who protect lions, raise livestock, and are long married with children, about my fear of commitment.

I am sad to leave my new friends, but we part with a small shift in perspective and understanding on both sides.

DAY 4

Our Little Cessna heads north to Loisaba in Laikipia county, a 56,000-acre wildlife conservancy and working ranch, to meet with Dr Max Graham, CEO of Space for Giants, which protects the land that elephants require to thrive. The elephant is a keystone species. If removed, it would have a drastic, negative impact on the world’s ecosystems. With The Nature Conservancy, Space for Giants helps secure the habitat, directing funds from ecotourism to protect wildlife and bring benefits to local tribes.

Then, there’s the constant threat to the African elephant: poachers. We spend an afternoon walking with a unit from the National Police Reserve (NPR) and their rather lovable dogs – Machine and Warrior. Space for Giants also helps to fund training for frontline rangers and specialist mobile units that patrol Loisaba, but the whole area. But it’s not enough to just catch a poacher. The cases have to result in convictions to deter other poachers, so Space for Giants trains investigators, prosecutors and magistrates to increase convictions.

DAY 5

Just before sunrise on our last day, we head out for a morning drive. We come across a goliath fowl perched atop an acacia tree. Then, just a few feet down the road, we hit safari gold. Through the bushes, gazing at us intently, is a leopard. We sit and watch until she darts across the road right in front of us. We might have waited a long time, but were distracted by a lunch set for us and the glory of the expansive earth, underneath a grey-headed social weaver tree. “I think I could live here forever,” I muse aloud.

Ruth reminds me that this is all very well but we have a ball to organize in June. There are animal masks to be made, dresses to be sewn, suits to be stitched, and habitats to be saved. So we pile into the Cessna and wave our friends goodbye until they are tiny specks in the unfathomable savannah.

“It belongs to them” – Pattie Smith’s song rings in my ears above the sound of the engine: “Let’s give it back.”

NEED TO KNOW: Natural World Safaris offers safaris from £2,500 per person full board, including one night in Nairobi, three nights at Elewana Tortilis Camp, three nights at Elewana Loisaba Camp, internal flights and transfers, naturalworldsafaris.com. Access to Lion Guardians and Space for Giants can be organized by special arrangement.
out of this world

NEED TO KNOW Natural World Safaris works closely with the three conservation foundations and can arrange stays at the lodges from £9,950 per person full board. Price includes one night in Naboisho, plus three nights each at Ol Donyo, Richard’s Camp and Sireko, internal flights and transfers. Natural World Safaris will make a charitable donation of £300 to each of the three projects if you quote PORTER while booking. For more information, visit naturalsafaris.com