

SEPTEMBER 2018

DEPARTURES

THE
STYLE
ISSUE



Fall's
Luxe
Layered
Man

Dior cotton tulle dress, \$17,500.
Palladium canvas boots (worn throughout), \$70.
Opposite: **Chloé** crepe de chine top, \$1,495; and crepe de chine skirt, \$1,750.
For details, see page 152.



HEARTS CAN BE BROKEN

Tiffany & Co., *Departures*, and model and environmental activist Doutzen Kroes come together to shine a light on efforts to save Kenya's fragile elephant population.

THE FIRST TWO DAYS I was in Kenya earlier this year, papers reported the deaths of people at the jaws, necks, fangs, and hooves of, respectively, hyenas, a giraffe, a viper, and elephants. "Humans," the stories termed the victims. On the third day I encountered a puff adder, a highly poisonous snake, at the Samburu Reserve airport and nearly

stepped on the tail of a crocodile as I walked to my tent along the Ewaso Ng'iro River. "Watch your step," a guide said to me later, handing me a crime-scene blood-spatter flashlight used to spot scorpions. "No one dies in bed here, if you know what I mean." On the fourth day I watch as an elephant grabs a supermodel.

by Jason Sheeler. Photographs by Nadine Ijewere
Styled by Melissa Ventosa Martin

"If we're not careful, we may lose what sustains us, the land. And we all need space. We are the elephant."



This past May, Doutzen Kroes was among a small group invited by the jewelry house Tiffany & Co. to witness wildlife conservation efforts by a network of charities on the ground in Kenya. The company has donated more than \$2 million to the Elephant Crisis Fund, a joint initiative by Save the Elephants (a Kenya-based research collective) and the Wildlife Conservation Network. While visiting the Reteti Elephant Sanctuary in the Mathews Range Forest, a 40-minute prop plane and 20-minute helicopter ride away from Nairobi, we watch a few calves being fed extremely large baby bottles by park rangers. These animals were found alone in the vicinity (home to the second-largest group of elephants in Kenya), abandoned by mothers who were killed either by poachers or, as is increasingly the case in Kenya today, through retaliatory vengeance assassinations—paybacks for deaths of loved ones or something financially devastating: say, when a single elephant wipes out a 10-acre tomato crop in less than two hours. “This is not a petting zoo,” we are told. They don’t want elephants to get too comfortable with people, as they will one day be released and, hopefully, picked up by a herd.



Kepai, a female nine-month-old rescue, suddenly breaks from her handler, determining Kroes’s L’Oréal-endorsed face more delectable than her hand-prepared milk—a combination of human infant formula and plant and whey protein. In a matter of seconds, the 350-pound pachyderm charges 20 feet forward and snakes her trunk around the model’s head. At about four feet high, Kepai has a trunk, the color of No. 2 pencil lead, that easily wraps around Kroes’s skull. The thick, patchy follicles of hair on her trunk, whiskers really, mix with Kroes’s honey-wheat hair. Then the kissing starts. It is, to be more clear, less pecking and more smelling. No, sucking. *Pwwwwwahhp! Pwwwwahhp!* She releases a bit, the noose of her trunk gaining some slack, leaving a trail of snot. But Kepai isn’t done. She pulls Kroes toward her. Her trunk circles her neck. Kroes screams and laughs. I just scream.

Kepai relents. Kroes takes a deep breath. Kepai’s trunk is now a periscope bobbing up and down, twin nostrils seeming to stare Kroes directly in the eyes. She snorts. Kroes cries. “I’ve been coming here for years,” she says, out of breath. “I’ve been around so many elephants. No one has ever done that before. That was.... She was amazing.” She dabs her eyes with the back of her hand, and looks at Kepai. She turns to me, her blue eyes now wide. Her smile fades. “But, you know, she was so strong. She could have killed me.” It’s easy to forget they’re wild.

The population of African elephants is well under 1 million, and is shrinking at an alarming rate. Poaching is still a crisis—some estimate that up to 30,000 elephants are killed for their tusks every year. A major factor is that Chinese consumers have rediscovered ivory, and their purchasing power continues to grow. The country recently outlawed its sale, but the distributors relocated across the border to Laos and Vietnam, and illegal



*His trunk unfurls and curls to the side,
four-foot tusks. His walk is somewhere*



Opposite, from top: Loewe cotton jacket, \$4,590; and cotton pants, \$1,890. Hermès wool sweater, \$1,650. Hair and makeup by Carolyn Gallyer.

sales continue. To add to this, elephants have increasingly been facing an even more potent predator: infrastructure. New roads, high-speed Internet cables, and a booming populace who live in Spanish-tile subdivisions are rerouting or obstructing elephant movements. Unbelievably, human-animal conflict, or HEC, now kills more elephants in some areas than poaching. For example, in 2017 in Samburu-Laikipia, Kenya, 63 elephants were judged to have been lost to HEC versus 46 to poaching.

Later that night, I sit down next to Iain Douglas-Hamilton. We are on a bright, sun-bleached sofa in the indoor-outdoor living room of his daughter Saba's hotel, a glamping version of the Chateau Marmont called Elephant Watch Camp, in the middle of the Samburu National Reserve. While Saba has developed some renown for her very immersive hospitality venture in the middle of a million unfenced acres in the African bush, it's the 76-year-old Iain who is the real star. He founded Save the Elephants in 1993 and is largely credited with putting a face—a trunk—on the issue back in 1975, with the book *Among the Elephants*. A Scotsman who married his Kenyan wife, Oria, in 1971, he has spent a lifetime with elephants,

furthering their heart-tugging cause as much as Dumbo or Babar. He is, as he will remind you, the Jane Goodall of elephants.

At the moment Iain is not saying anything. He's in the middle of a very pregnant pause, following a question I asked. I wanted to know—considering all that's going on in the world right now, even just in Kenya, where the most pressing humanitarian crisis is the childhood mortality rate—why should elephants be such a concern?

In the silence I listen to the nearby river and the frogs croaking. Iain grips his gin and tonic and looks down at his safari-tan Adidas Boost sneakers. A shiny beetle crawls up his shirtsleeve, slowly, creeping toward his neck. I start to instinctively flick it, cocking my middle finger and thumb. He stops me and swiftly grabs it and sets it on the floor, shooing the beetle on its way. Finally, he speaks. "Because we may lose what sustains us, the land. I am—humans, we are the elephant..." he trails off. "We all need space."

Elephants are a six-ton metaphor, he explains. "Right now, we have exponential use of the earth by one species. Alleviating human misery—progress, that is incredibly important. But why does it always have to be at the expense of the environment?" Elephants, he seems to say, are actually the six-ton canary in the coal mine. "If we lose the elephants, what else could we lose?" He runs his big hands through his long gray hair. "Tomorrow you'll see Edison," Iain says. "You'll feel very human, very small." He lumbers off into the pitch black. I hear a crash of brush and thorns, branches crunching and breaking and snapping.

THE NEXT MORNING, the thick smell of mint. A warm, 20-miles-per-hour wind. I'm in the back of an open-air Toyota

swinging, over and over again, wrapping around his
between a Wild West sheriff and Jay-Z taking the stage.



Derek Lam silk shirt, \$990; Elephant Watch Camp blanket worn as skirt. *Opposite:* **Hermès** wool sweater, \$1,650; Maasai fabric worn as skirt.

covered in a cracked, cooling mud, he's a mammoth-looking beast. And he's in full musth, a particularly Victorian-sounding, over-testosteroned, 'roid-rage condition. He's been eating for months and now just wants to mate. Edison has got some swagger, walking toward us, staring at me, showing no indication of slowing down. He may T-bone our jeep. His trunk unfurls and curls to the side, swinging, over and over again, wrapping around his four-foot tusks. His walk is somewhere between a Wild West sheriff's strut and Jay-Z's taking the stage. He wants to fight, Leserin tells us, actually sounding scared. When Edison gets close, about ten feet away, he stops and bows up, ready to charge. "He needs some space," Leserin whispers. We start to slowly roll away.

Edison seems to look me right in the eyes, daring me to run or move or blink. I start to unzip my bag to get my camera. "Don't, don't," Leserin says. "Just look. Respect him."

I feel small.


Land Cruiser. A clear blue sky cooks the savanna to 90 degrees. Zebras gallop past, swerving in unison, zigzagging left and right like schools of damselfish. The only sound: The pleasant clinking of the metal paillettes on our driver's traditional Samburu tribal headdress—a plastic-flower Mohawk—as he struggles to get reception on his iPhone. Bernard Leserin, a 36-year-old conservation grad student who has worked for the Elephant Watch Camp for ten years, squints and points to the horizon. There, in the distance, elephants—little gray-brown dots that blend into tortilis trees, known as umbrellas. Leserin explains that the Samburu National Reserve is one of the last stretches of land on earth where man is not on top of the food pyramid. As if on cue, a leopard darts from the brush.

We are in search of a male elephant named Edison, who is tagged with a GPS collar to help monitor his movements. The 33-year-old bull has a personal history with Iain, as Edison attacked him (and punctured the radiator of his jeep with his tusks) in 1998. When the yellow finger grass turns an orangey red with the sunset we find him. At more than four tons and

AS THE TOWN of Austin, Texas, deals with overpopulation courtesy of tech-sector yuppies, there is a contingency of locals who scream, via bumper stickers, "Keep Austin Weird." For Africa, the slogan could be Keep Africa Wild. Africa's population has increased from 480 million in 1980 to more than 1.2 billion last year, adding about 30 million people to the continent per year. "They have to go somewhere!" Saba tells me. It's my last night at the Elephant Watch Camp, and we are hiking to an overlook for a dinner with the Samburu tribe. We've been walking for about 45 minutes, chatting about her childhood here among elephants and the Samburu.

Change, activists implore us today, starts at home, in our backyards. As we

Tiffany & Co. donates 100 percent of the profits from its Save the Wild jewelry collection to the Elephant Crisis Fund to support antipoaching, antitrafficking, and ivory-demand-reduction projects around the world. The new collection of rose-gold and sterling-silver pendants and brooches (from \$250; in stores now) includes an elephant, a rhino, and a lion.



crest a hill, Saba says, “This is my backyard.” The African bush is where the 48-year-old and her husband, Frank Pope, the CEO of Save the Elephants, are raising their three daughters. Before us are about 40 members of the local Samburu tribe, a fire, a braying goat, and a view of Sacred Mountain. Soon, the Samburu will slaughter the goat, drink its blood, and dance around the fire in gratitude. They will paint my face, and we’ll pass around goat kebabs and chat under the stars. In the distance at the moment: giraffes and buffalo.

“Yes, we still have wildlife,” Saba says, taking off my Yankees cap and wrapping me in a traditional plaid cloak for the ceremony. “But every year another species becomes more endangered. Growing up here, there

were lots of animals. Now when I drive through this park, I see a zebra, but it’s a grubby zebra, and it’s endangered. I see reticulated giraffes. They are endangered. I see lions. A rhino. They are endangered. And yes, the elephants, which are my cause.” (Elephants are doing better than the rhinos, which have no Disney allegory to cling to.)

Only half-jokingly, Saba will tell you that she and her husband are really in the espionage business: “We are an undercover recruitment agency.” They bet that by bringing fairly wealthy tourists to their camp (nightly rates start around \$1,000) that guests will see, and feel firsthand, how interconnected the land, the animals, and, yes, we human beings are. They are working with the Kenyan government to plan roads, overpasses, and other critical infrastructure around wildlife, which would benefit Kenyans, tourists, and the animals. “We want Kenya to be a paradigm for how interconnectivity can work,” says Pope.

The next day a Samburu warrior drives me to the airport. We stop along the way to look for elephants. Approaching us are two hyenas, slowly, languidly stalking up the road, as if two cats decided to put on dog suits. A giraffe appears, watching the hyenas. “Where are you from?” the driver wants to know. When he hears New York City, he frowns. He was recently there, for the first time. “It was very frightening,” he tells me. “All the humans! And the terrorism. I have never been so scared in my entire life.”

Then, suddenly, as they always seem to do, four elephants appear. At this point, it is as it perhaps should be: refreshingly, reassuringly normal. Almost like squirrels.

Huh. How nice. Elephants. ☺

Soon the Samburu will slaughter the goat, drink its blood, and dance around the fire in gratitude.

