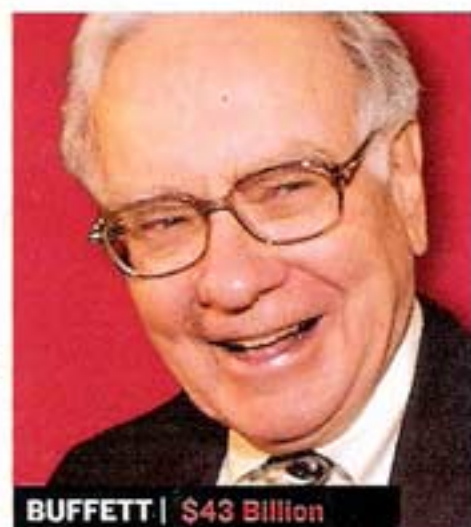


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Billionaires



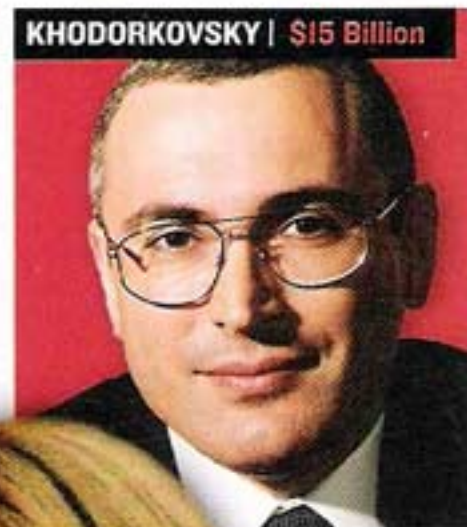
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TRUMP | \$2.5 Billion



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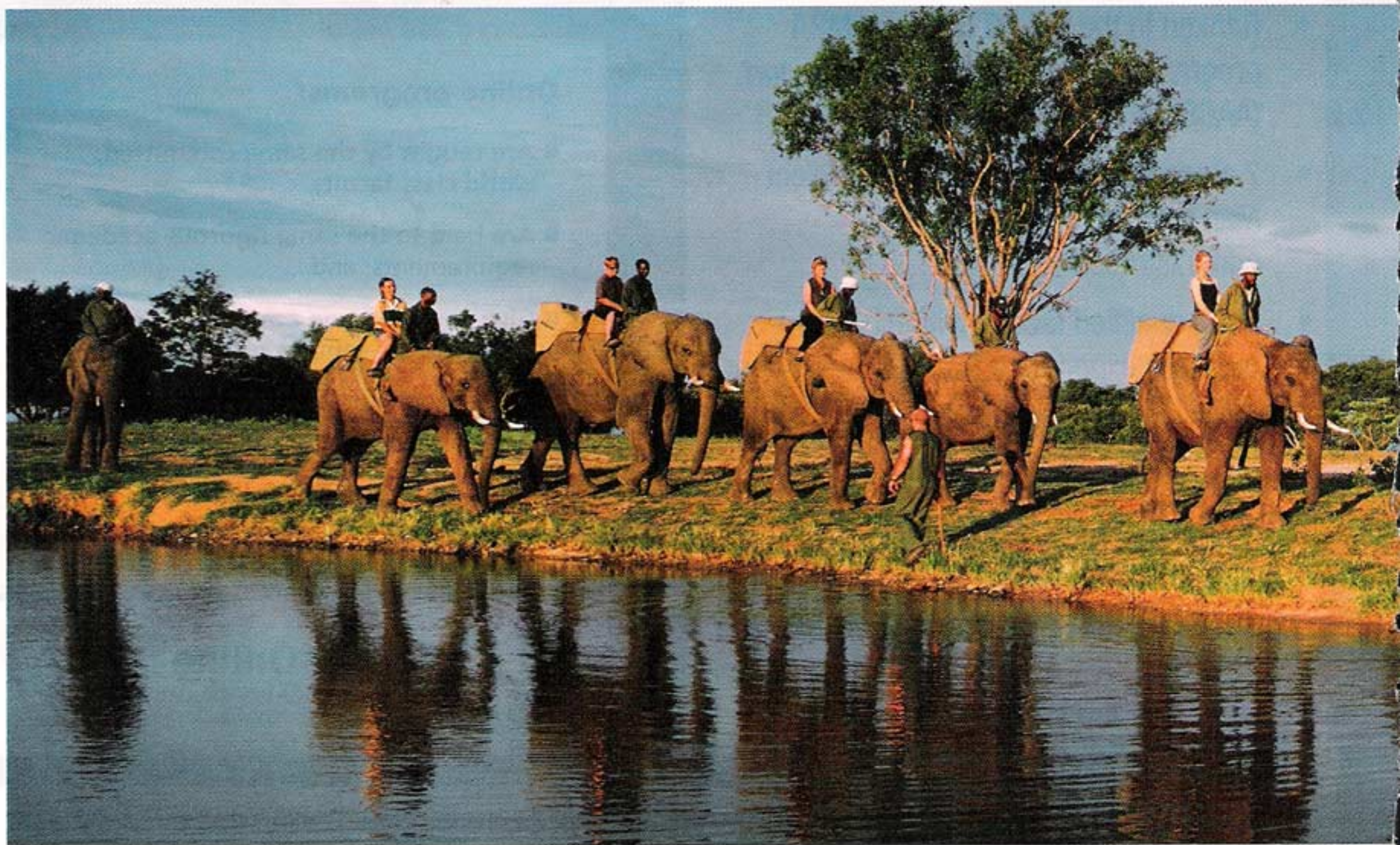
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MARCH 15, 2004

Bush Baby

What is this, a Disney movie? A cute little elephant inspires the creation of a safari lodge.

BY SUSAN ADAMS



PEARL EARRINGS GLEAMING, red lipstick perfectly applied, Lente Roode is feeding her cheetahs. The year-and-a-half-old beasts, nearly as big as the petite 56-year-old, paw raw meat onto her tasseled loafer. Roode, who grew up on a nearby farm, is relaxed—completely in her element. “My problem,” she says, “is humans.”

Her immediate challenge: taming the wild tourist. In August 2002 her industrialist husband, Johann, died. Chairman of the South African milling company Gen-

eral Food Industries (now Johannesburg-based Premier Foods), Johann for two decades had owned and managed Kapama, a 32,000-acre game reserve in South Africa. Now Lente’s running the operation herself.

Until recently the reserve, 280 miles north of Johannesburg, pumped out enough revenue from its admission fees, wildlife-viewing drives, curio sales and guest lodges to maintain not only itself but also Lente’s pet projects. These include the Hoedspruit Endangered Species Center, which cares for and breeds cheetahs and other rare and endangered animals. Six

years ago she added a baby elephant named Jabulani to this menagerie.

In 2001 Lente took on an added financial and zoological challenge: She paid \$400,000 for a dozen Zimbabwean elephants to keep Jabulani company. The animals were refugees from a farm plundered by land invaders backed by the Mugabe government. Keeping elephants is expensive—these cost \$20,000 a month in feed, plus room and board for 20 Zimbabwean grooms. To meet the added costs, the Roodes decided to build Camp Jabulani, a luxurious lodge

HENRICH VAN DEN BERG; CLIVE HELFET (RIGHT)

that sleeps 12 and charges \$1,500 a night for a double room.

Safari lodges in South Africa run a wide gamut. At the budget end, guests pay as little as \$15 per person per night to stay in a tent, with a communal bathroom. They cook their own meals and drive their own vehicles. This level of service obtains at Kruger National Park (near Kapama) and at Kapama's own eight-bed Safari Camp. At the opposite extreme are lodges such as Singita Lebombo and Londolozi Bateleur, where daily tariffs

Kapama's assets. But her 29-year-old daughter, Adine van Eeden, a tall, slender blonde who shares her mother's love for animals, disagreed. The question facing the family, she insisted, was: "How are we going to support Kapama?"

Adine, who lives on the reserve with her dentist husband and two small children, is worldly in ways her mother is not. While Lente has only the vaguest idea of how much her beloved cheetahs cost to maintain, Adine, bolstered by an undergraduate degree in accounting, tracks over-

derms, trained to respond to 80 voice commands ("Back up," "Pick it up"), can unexpectedly wreak havoc. In late December a handler approached an 18-year-old elephant named Jimmy the wrong way (head-on, rather than from the side) and was gored as a result.

Human workers pose different problems. When Lente bought the Zimbabwean elephants, Johann hired their former owner, Rory Hensman, to look after them. In July 2003, just before Camp Jabulani was set to open (with cheetah fan Prince Michael of



Lente Roode (inset) transports guests by pachyderm. That's Jabulani under the tree.

approach \$1,000 per person and include health spas, private pools, gourmet cuisine and guided tours by Land Rover through the veldt. Camp Jabulani would aim at this same market, adding elephants to its fleet of vehicles.

Ground had barely been broken when Johann, 55, succumbed to an embolism while hospitalized with pneumonia. "For two months I could do nothing," Lente recalls. Her son, Bernard, 31, an executive at privately held Premier Foods (the Roodes own one-fourth of the company), thought the family should sell off some of

head to the nearest rand. (Recently \$7,000 was spent, for example, to fix a cheetah's inflamed gums.) Brother Bernard now says Adine was right about keeping Kapama intact. He, too, helps oversee finances, but spends only a few days a month at the reserve. (Cheetahs aggravate his asthma.)

The Roodes know that caring for wild animals will be ever an unpredictable business. Even the intelligent and placid pachy-



Kent—Queen Elizabeth's cousin—in attendance), Hensman quit, and planned to take the Zimbabwean grooms with him.

Given the elephants' attachment to their handlers, this could have spelled disaster. Adine persuaded most of

the grooms to stay. Despite the defections, Adine expects Camp Jabulani to be in the black within a year, although the lodge has had only a 10% occupancy rate since it opened in September 2003. The Roodes

must boost that number to 40% to realize their financial goal of supporting the elephants' upkeep.

Camp Jabulani has been an intensely personal effort for Lente, who chose not to use an architect but instead collaborated with a local decorator and a builder. The brown, rough-textured walls of the grand open-air lounge and dining area contain built-in shelves that display sculpture, porcelains, paintings and other art objects. A heavy wood writing desk, which used to sit in Johann's office, anchors the lounge. Chairs and sofas upholstered in kudu and zebra are comfortably arranged before a huge fireplace. The dining area, which looks onto a watering hole frequented by lions, is backed by another ample hearth.

To reach the sleeping quarters—six secluded tents—guests must traverse a sus-



The desk of the late Johann Roode anchors Camp Jabulani's lounge.

pension bridge from which they see, below, animals roaming along a riverbed. These "tents" are tents only in the sense that Newport's "cottages" are cottages. They have soaring roofs and polished cement floors inlaid with wood. Walls made from canvas and mosquito netting give onto the bush and onto a private deck furnished with chaise lounges and a small private pool. Each tent has a fireplace, oversize bathtub

(behind a wooden screen) and glass-encased shower stall. The attentive staff includes game rangers who can spot a lion and take a guest out for a quick look-see, before cocktail time.

Service at competing high-end camps can likewise be impeccable. What sets Jabulani head, shoulders and trunk above are its elephants. Seated atop one of these giants, in a comfortable saddle right behind the trainer, you see and feel Africa in a way you never could from a mechanized conveyance. Despite their size, elephants negotiate narrow paths no Land Rover ever could. Lulled by the swaying of your wrinkly steed, you suddenly emerge from thick brush onto the savannah, catching sight of a herd of impala. Rather than experiencing the animal kingdom from outside, you feel you now have entered into it. **F**

HEINRICH VAN DEN BERG

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