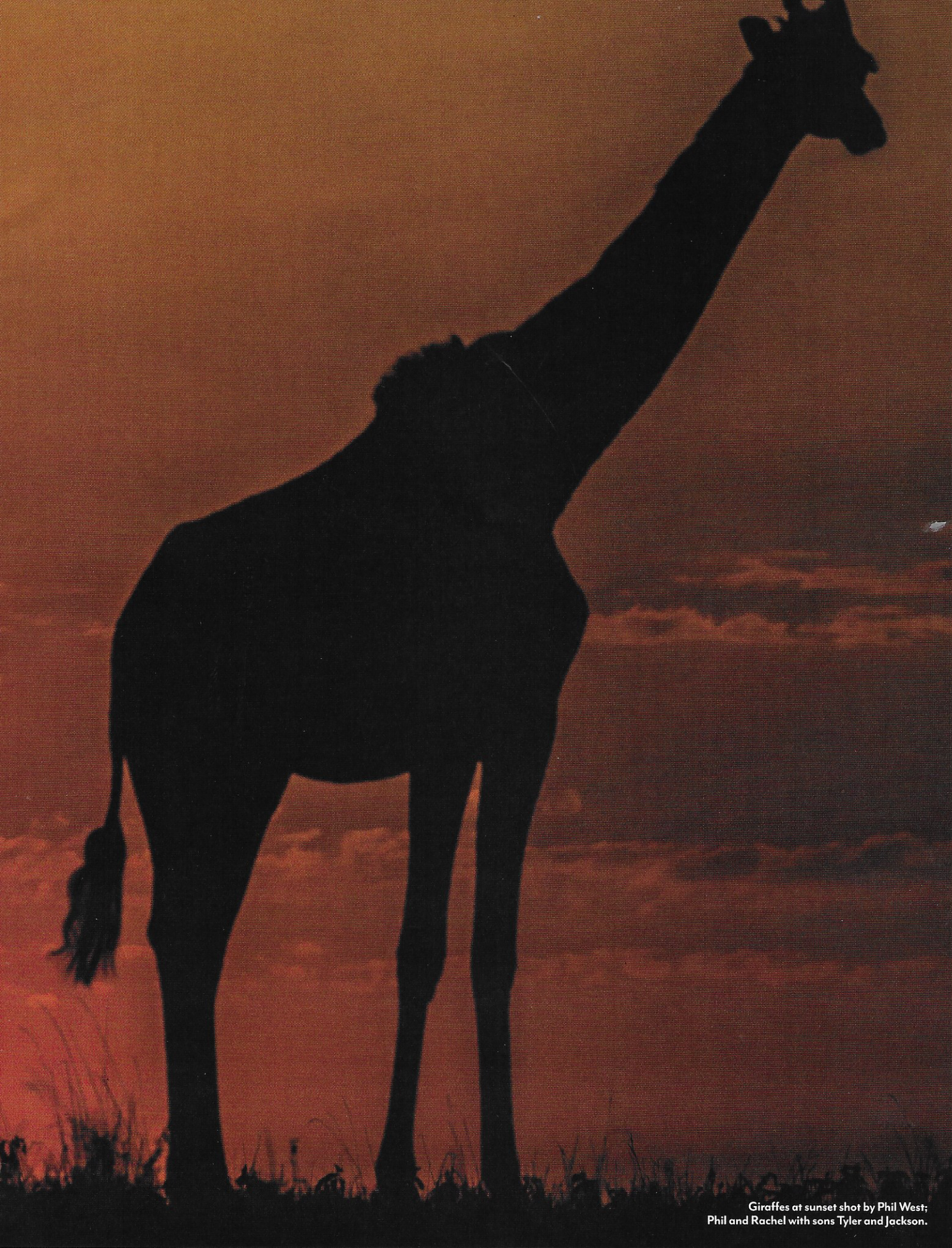


A Wild Ride

A whirlwind romance during a weeklong African safari brought Rachel and Phil West together. Now their global adventure has led them to Jupiter.

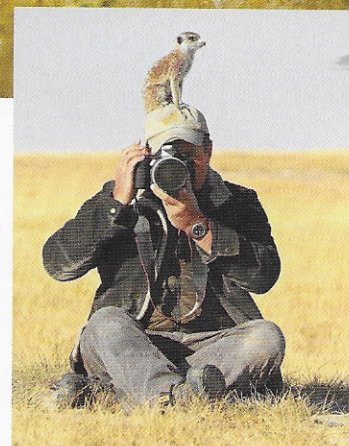
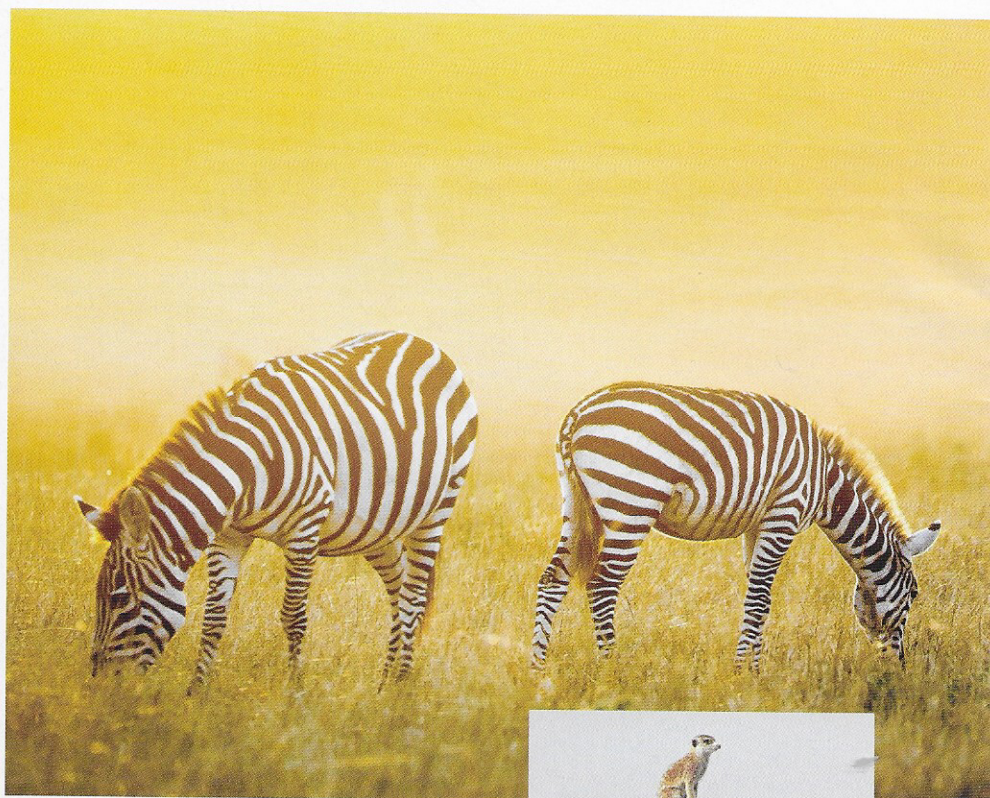
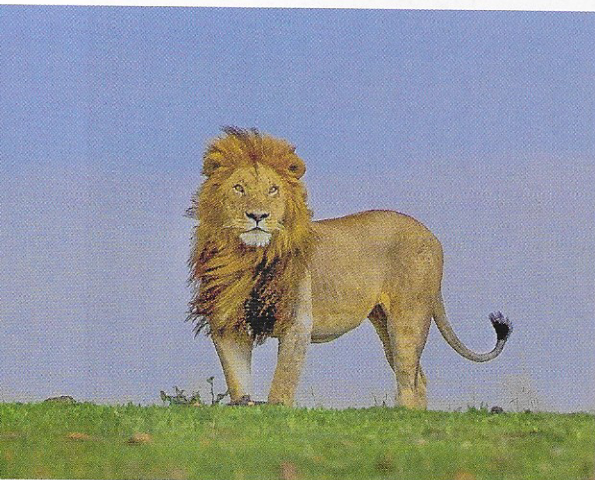
by MICHELE MEYER





Giraffes at sunset shot by Phil West;
Phil and Rachel with sons Tyler and Jackson.

Lion, zebras, and lioness shot by Phil West;
a meerkat sits atop Phil's head.

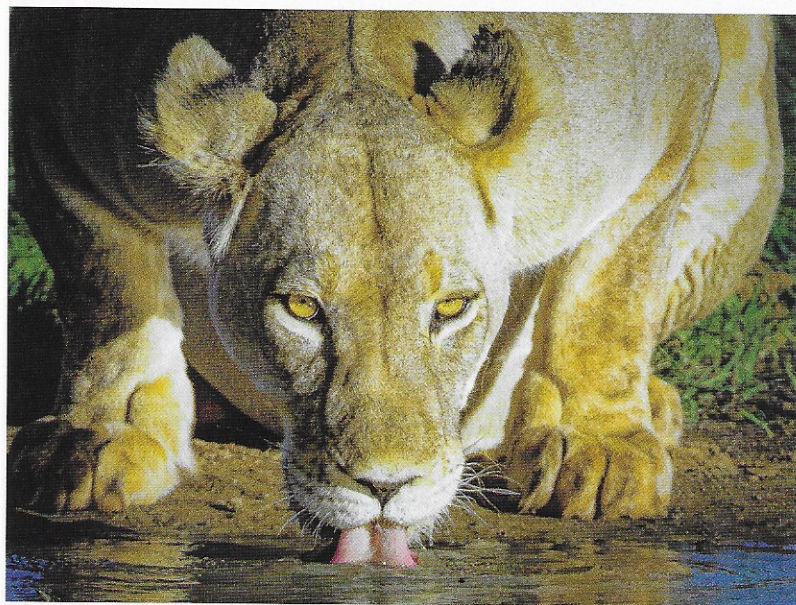


On a Friday in October 2010, Rachel Shapiro was invited on an African safari—that was heading out in 72 hours. “A couple on the trip had broken up, leaving a vacancy,” she says. By Monday, the New York real estate broker was on her way. By Tuesday, she had gorged on passion fruit and gotten ill on the small bush plane. When she landed in the Maasai Mara of Kenya, she met her safari guide, Phil West. “He was the most handsome guy I’d ever seen,” she remembers thinking. “And I looked my worst!” As Phil recalls it: “Her face was pale, and she was covered with passion fruit pits.”

During the weeklong safari through the Mara, Rachel says Phil often enchanted the group by day with “beautiful, compelling” tales of the lions, cheetahs, and tigers they saw. Nights ended around a campfire, Phil and Rachel talking “about anything and everything,” says Phil. “We had a real connection.” On the last night, he kissed her for the first time and asked, “Why don’t you stay?” And she did.

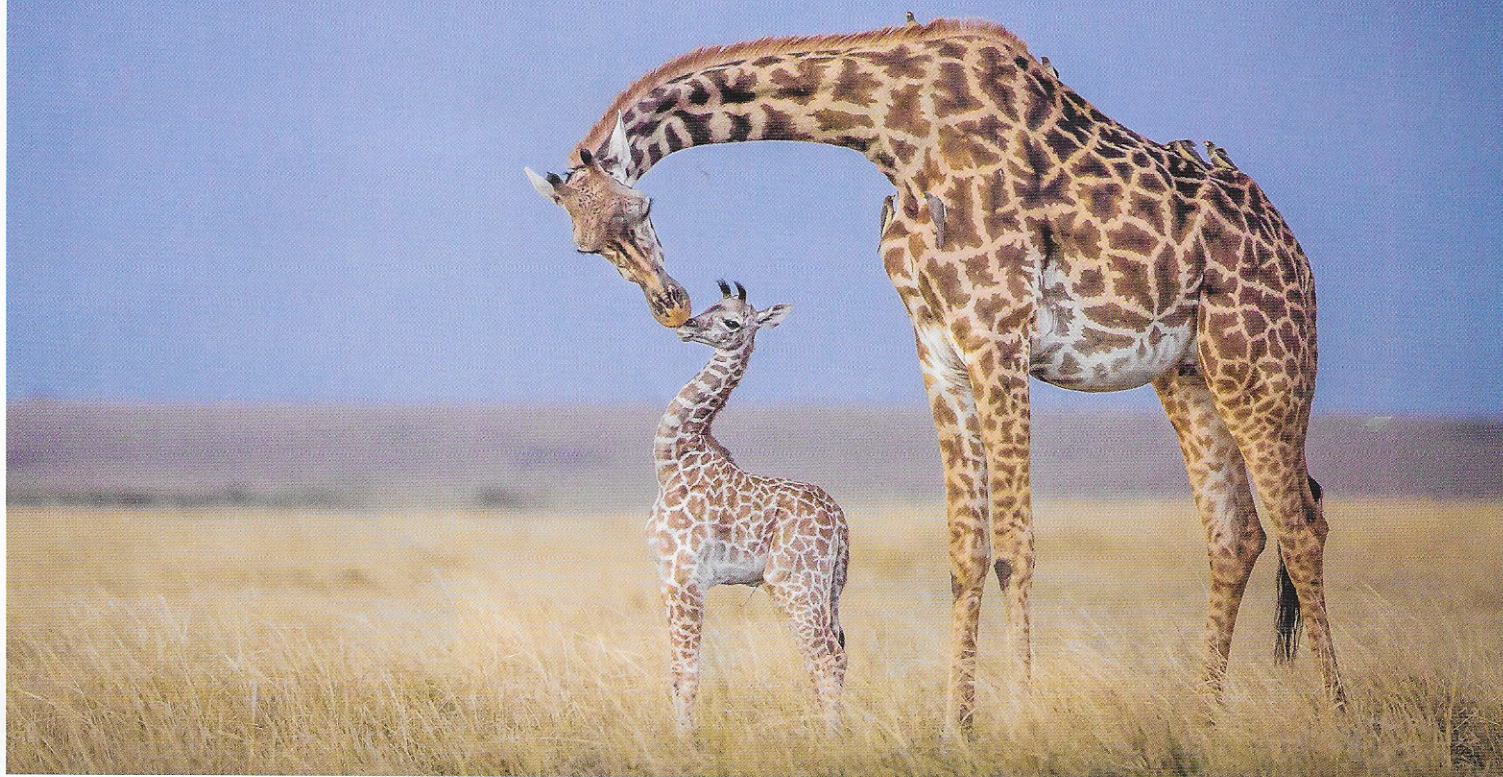
By month’s end, “we decided I’d pack up my apartment in Brooklyn and move to Nairobi with him,” Rachel says. They got engaged in Peru in May 2012 on a mountain overlooking Machu Picchu, and a fellow guide married them nine months later. They built a house in the bush near Nairobi, living for some time without running water or electricity. Their son Jackson went on his first safari a month after being born that November; son Tyler followed in May 2016. As Rachel describes her new life in Africa: “Suddenly, I had two kids and a rhino under my window.” Hippos, lions, and buffalo regularly roamed their front yard, and at night, baboons would sneak into their kitchen and steal food. “I’d be drinking my morning coffee watching what most people paid me to take them into the bush to see,” says Phil.

They loved their life in Africa, but with two young children, they began to think about logistics. “By



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I knew I wanted to spend my life with wildlife—photographing big game and getting to know the animals.”



Adult and baby giraffes shot by Phil West; the Wests' son Jackson spying elephants and more in Africa.

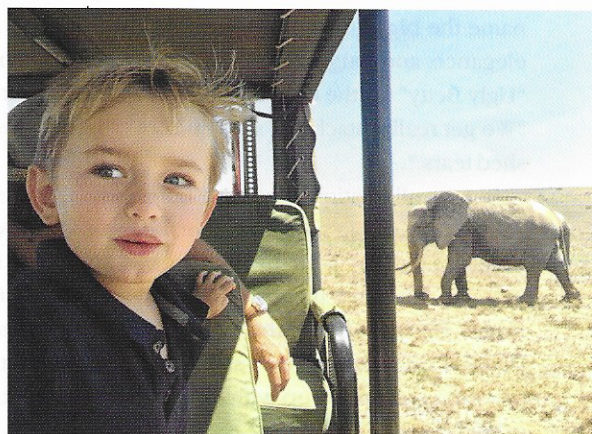
2018, we realized the boys needed pre-schools and playdates rather than lions and leopards,” says Rachel. “I wanted my kids to grow up riding bikes in a neighborhood. But I knew I couldn’t convince Phil to move to New York.” She had relatives in the West Palm Beach area, so she sold her husband on South Florida. The Wests chose Jupiter for its family-oriented, outdoor lifestyle and now live in Abacoa. Last November, they welcomed their third child, a daughter named Maya.

Phil’s feet remain planted in two worlds, thanks to the custom-travel business he started in 2001, Phil West Safaris. “Africa is who he is,” says Rachel, who has handled bookings for the company since 2011. “He’s there half the year, so it’s a nice balance for him.”

Born in Nairobi, Phil grew up in the

bush, raised on the tales of his grandfather, a charter pilot. “I knew I wanted to spend my life with wildlife—photographing big game and getting to know the animals,” he says. Phil started as a tracker, studying the animals’ footprints, movement, and behavior. His patience—waiting for the perfect moment when a lion would, say, yawn—also helped make him a fine photographer, as he honed his craft alongside noted wildlife photographer Daryl Balfour (much of Phil’s photography is pictured here). He transitioned to a safari guide, working for Royal African Safaris and Walking Wild before launching his own company with just two

clients. “You start with one guest who wants to go on safari with you, and over time it snowballs,” he explains of the gig. “I’ve had guests with me on 15 or 16 safaris.” He has also appeared in wildlife documentaries on PBS and Discovery Channel.



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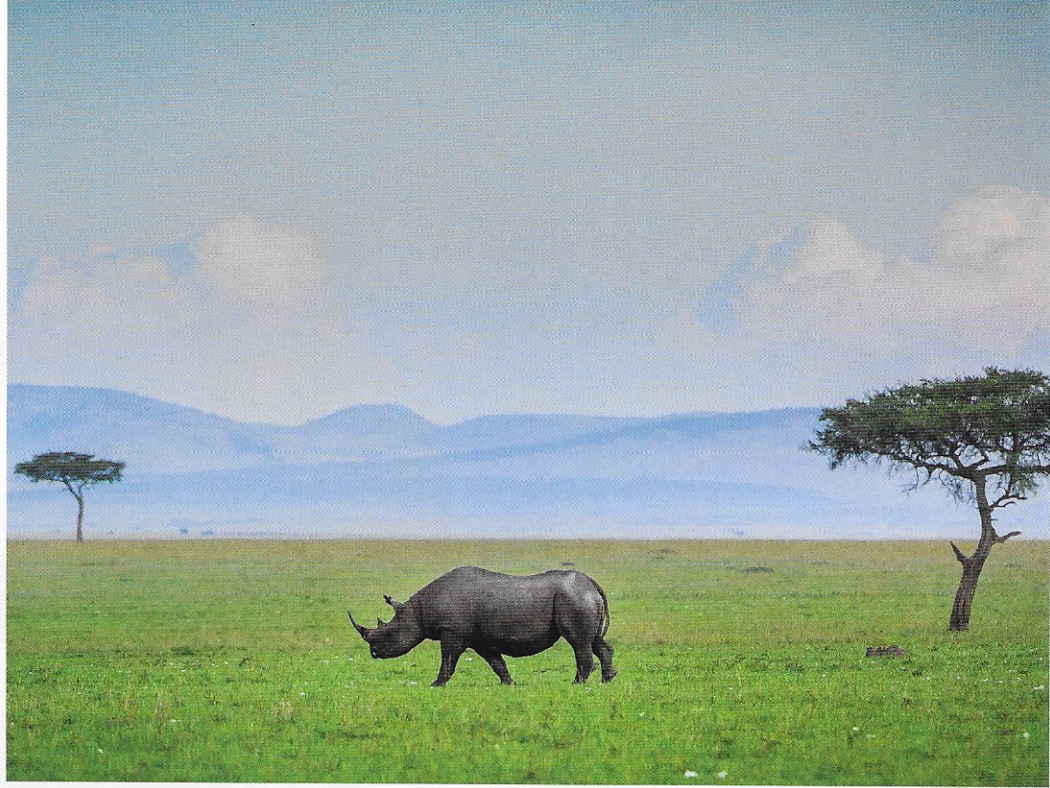
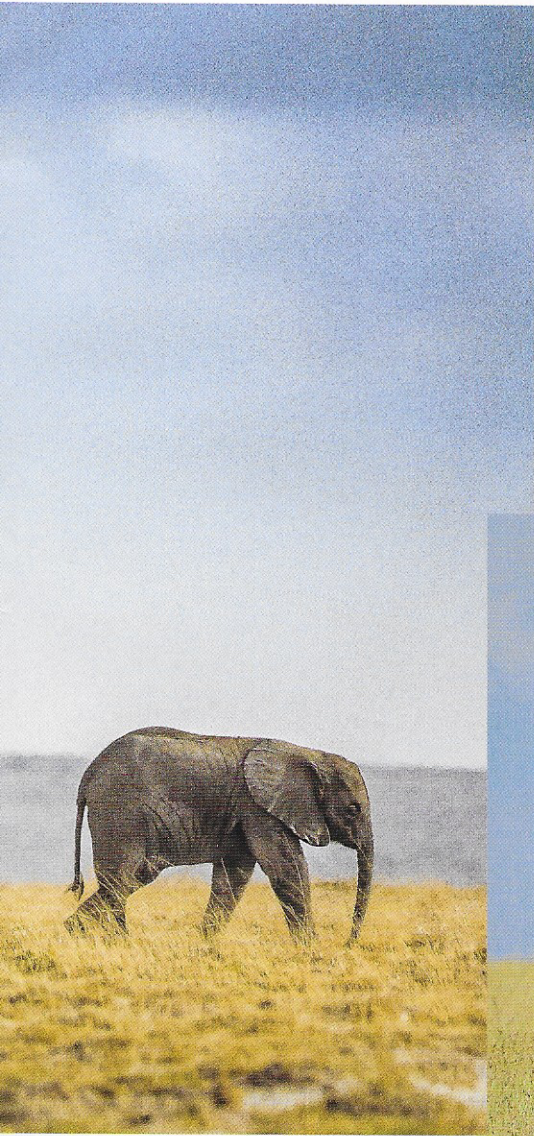
He loves the life—and the wildlife. Phil and the other guides name the big cats they encounter: “Angelina” for her beauty, elegance, and toughness; “Notch” for the scar on his face; and “Ugly Betty” for the eye she lost in a fight with another lioness. “We get really attached,” says Phil. “When they pass away, we shed tears.”

But not all relationships have been mutually affectionate. In 2009, on a Kenyan nature reserve, Phil was attacked by a crocodile. He recalls: “It bit my right arm, so I punched it in the eye with my left hand. [Fellow guide] Johann kicked it, and I got away.” He came out of the incident with five holes in his arm. He used one of the guest’s sarongs as a tourniquet to stop the bleeding and ended up with 500 stitches and a two-week stay in the hospital.

Despite the few mishaps, Phil adores his homeland. “Africa remains a magical part of my soul,” he says. “I’m lucky I get to spend large chunks of the year on safari, taking guests to amazing places, and when I get home to Jupiter, I see my kids enjoying an idyllic lifestyle.”

The Wests now run their custom luxury-safari business from Jupiter. Phil meets with interested clients and scouts new adventures and areas that best match itineraries, lodges, camps, and countries to clients’ dreams and budgets. “Guests often approach us saying this is their once-in-a-lifetime bucket list experience,” says Rachel. “Then they’re bitten by the safari bug and return to Africa repeatedly.” Phil West Safaris has expanded beyond Africa to Chile, Argentina, the Amazon, and the Galápagos Islands. Over the years, loyal guests have included

Elephants, rhino, and
cheetahs shot by Phil West



Hollywood A-listers, CEOs, royals, and Saudi billionaires.

What Phil looks forward to most is the day he can take his personal VIPs—his children—on safaris they can fully appreciate as they grow a bit older. “They are little sponges, and the experience is sensory overload,” he says. “It can be life-changing.”

But for now, he says, Jupiter has its own “safaris” of sorts. He and the boys, now 6 and 4, track spiders and raccoons in the woods behind their house. “I can’t wait for them to be older and we can kayak, fish, and stand-up paddle,” he says.

He continues: “We’re really lucky to live in Jupiter. There are so many wildlife preserves, green spaces, and waterways to explore.” philwestsafaris.com ♦

QUICK PICKS

THE WESTS' FAVORITE LOCAL SPOTS FOR FOOD & FUN

BEACH: We love seeing the shaggy friends at the Juno dog beach.

PARK: Riverbend—with its waterways and running and bike trails, the kids can spot birds and aquatic animals.

RESTAURANTS: Dinner at U-Tiki Beach on the beautiful Jupiter Inlet waterfront; a charcuterie board and wine at Palm Beach Gardens' The Parched Pig; drinks at Guanabanas; breakfast at Berry Fresh Cafe; and takeout from Tequesta's Hog Snappers.