

VOGUE

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INTERNATIONAL

HORS-SÉRIE

FASHION

Fantasy,
safari,
sexy,
for summer
2014

From
Australia to
Kenya: *a dip*
into the lands
of dreams

EXCLUSIVE

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Laurent,
the film

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a body
of scandal

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He's a dead ringer for
 the impetuous *Indiana Jones*,
 except that *David Gulden*
 actually prefers the waiting game.
 Dividing his time between homes
 in *New York* and *Kenya*,
 this astounding *photographer*
 is a tireless prowler
 in search of *wildlife's*
rarest specimens.

—Deep in the heart of the Nairobi suburb of Karen, named after the writer Karen Blixen, whose farm, famously celebrated in her novel, *Out of Africa*, was built on the same fertile land, at the end of a lush, steaming trail set between thick flowering bushes filled with the shrill call of birds and insects, a converted garage offers studio space and an oasis of calm and concentration to the American photographer David Gulden. His first collection of extraordinary black-and-white studies of Kenyan wildlife, *The Centre Cannot Hold*, was published last year to great acclaim.

Gulden first travelled to Kenya from New York with his father when he was fifteen. He did not take a camera with him on that first trip, but the experience nonetheless changed the course of his life forever. Wrapped now in a traditional Swahili kikoi, dark hair dishevelled, skin weather beaten, his eyes flicker in the half light of his studio as he remembers. "The most powerful moment of the trip was getting up from dinner in a safari tent, walking a short distance to the edge of a clearing and watching a pride of lions amble past in the torch light. It was the most incredible experience of my life."

By JERRY STAFFORD
 Photographs DAVID GULDEN

GULDEN EYE

Gulden's father was a friend of the celebrated photographer, artist and adventurer Peter Beard, one of whose unmistakable blood-smeared photographic collages covers a wall of the Karen studio. He had introduced his son to Beard just before a second trip to Kenya three years later. "We had driven out to Montauk on the eastern tip of Long Island, in the dead of winter, to have lunch with a man who turned out to be the most interesting man I had ever met." Gulden travelled then to Kenya to stay at Beard's makeshift home, a tented encampment called Hog Ranch, which adjoined the Blixen farm, not far from his present studio in Karen. There he showed up "unannounced and didn't leave for eight years. I was an appalling house guest! It was a rustic, decadent, liberating place. Giraffe showed up every night at sunset and we fed them by hand."

His own interest in photography developed slowly and, as he explains, he only took it up in earnest after several more trips to Africa. "It started with snapshots; slowly, slowly it became something more. It took a lot more time to learn about animals and how to approach them and then how to take a photo."





*“Animals are the
works of art
and I just present them.*

*My thought process
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naturalist or a conservationist.”*

Gulden's first book was compiled from work he shot predominantly in Kenya over a period of nine years. In it he has created his own visual language, at once scientific in its approach but also deeply personal, shooting in a black and white, whose timeless quality he feels invites the viewer to look more closely, to spend more time. "Shape and form are of more interest to me than colour, which feels more distracting and ephemeral. I think of the animals as 'ready-mades' à la Marcel Duchamp, they are the works of art and I just present them. My thought process is more in line with a naturalist or a conservationist but art interests me deeply."

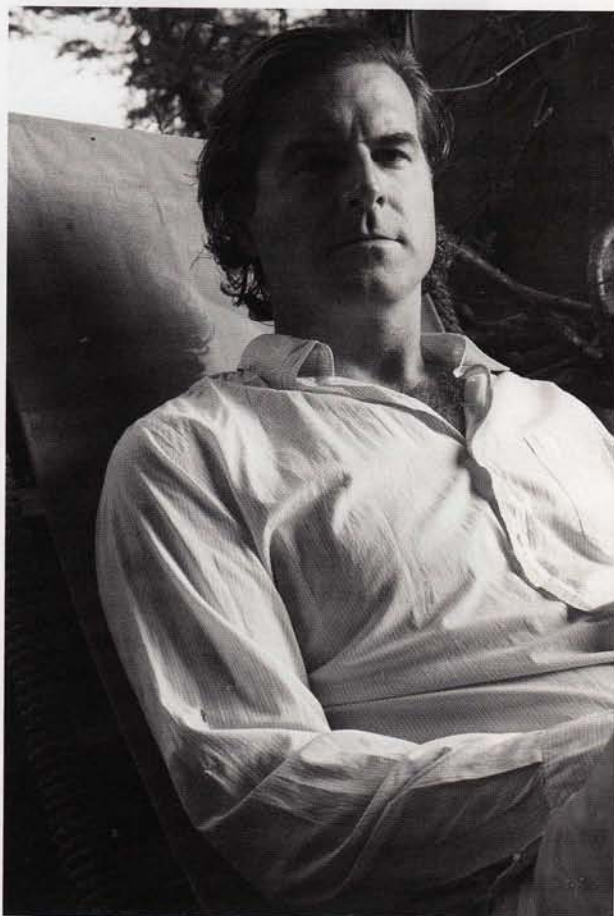
Gulden has worked alongside wildlife experts like close friend and raptor conservationist, Simon Thomsett, in his search for the most effective way to photograph particular species. To achieve the extraordinary studies of African crowned eagles in his book was particularly challenging as he had to design and position his own camera mounts precariously in trees many hundreds of feet above the ground, hoisting it up and down with minimal disturbance to the birds. "Once the camera is in place, patience and concentration take precedence and I wait near the bottom of the tree with a wireless remote control. The eagles generally enter the nest once a day and I often have a split second to react."

As one might imagine, such rich reward comes at a price and Gulden is the first to admit to experiencing several close shaves with his more unpredictable subjects. "To get to my camera traps that captured the highly endangered Mountain Bongo (a type of forest antelope), I had to walk through an area of very low-visibility bamboo, which I nicknamed 'The Buffalo Maze'. Buffalo can be merciless! An elephant once tried to flip my car and a black rhino smashed full speed into my Land Cruiser then popped its horn through the roof like a scene from *The Flintstones!*"

Although Gulden lives on the outskirts of Nairobi, a city of over four million people, he has crowned eagles literally in his Karen garden and if he drives in any given direction, within a few hours he can be in close proximity to some of the

world's most diverse wildlife and habitat. However it is a delicate ecosystem that is under constant and continued threat, and Gulden's photographic work is naturally underscored by a deep awareness of his subject's fragility. The title of his book of course alludes to the W.B. Yeats poem, "The Second Coming" (1919), whose apocalyptic message described the atmosphere of post-WWI Europe ("Things fall apart, the centre cannot hold") and is an equally pertinent allegory to the present state of wildlife and its conservation across Africa.

As Gulden ominously concludes, "The continent has roughly one billion people right now and in less than 50 years there will be two billion. Even if the population rate went to zero growth today the hopes, needs and desires of the populace will eventually strip the land bare." VHI



David Gulden
(photographed
here by Glen Luchford)
lives on the
outskirts of Nairobi,
ideally situated
for coming face
to face with
richly diverse wildlife,
just a few hours'
drive away.