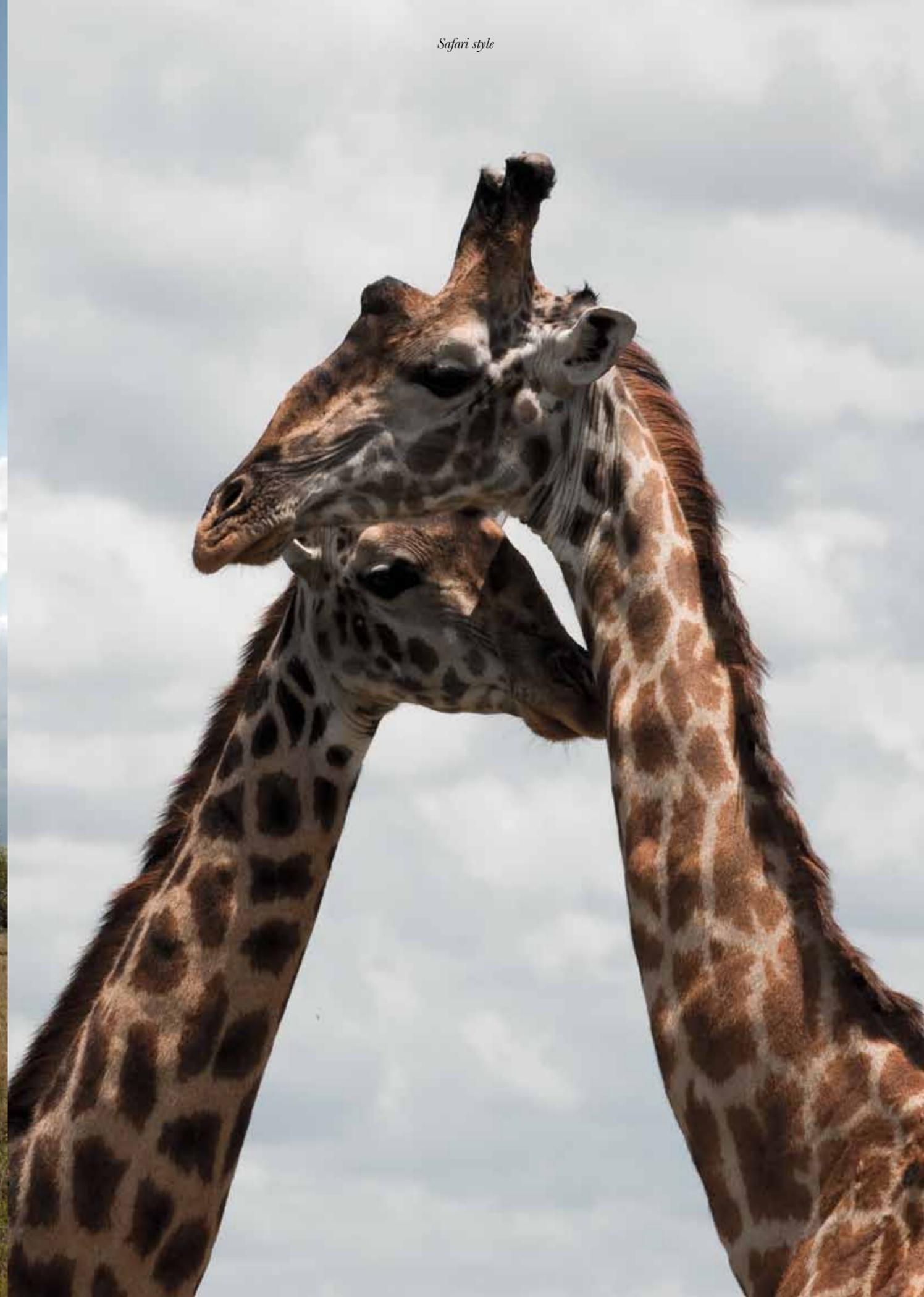
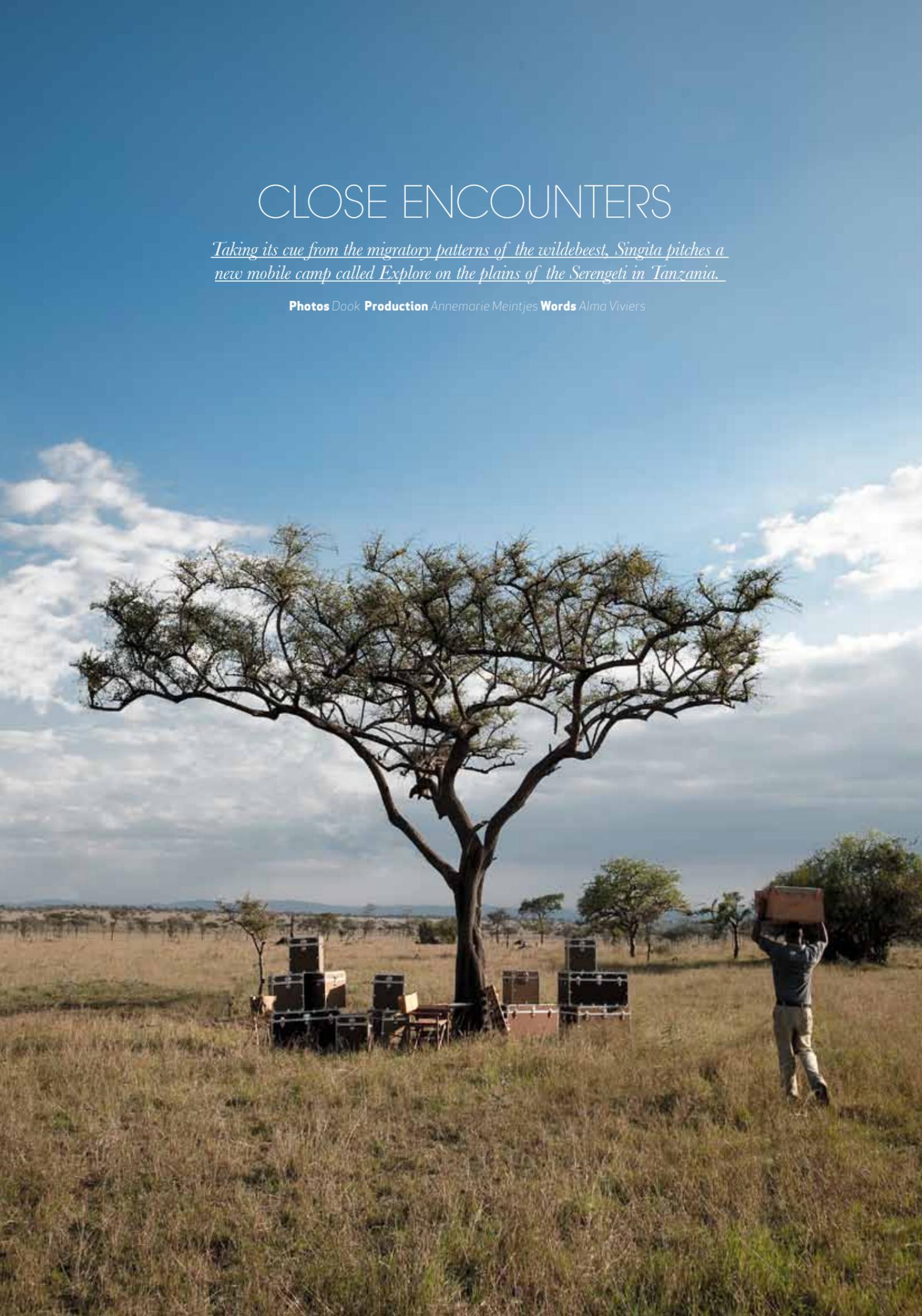


CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

Taking its cue from the migratory patterns of the wildebeest, Singita pitches a new mobile camp called Explore on the plains of the Serengeti in Tanzania.

Photos Dook **Production** Annemarie Meintjes **Words** Alma Viviers





THIS SPREAD, LEFT Waiter Mayenga Edward mans the bar in the lounge tent, in which the couch and shelving were designed by Pedersen + Lennard. One of the first items Tracy sourced for the project were rubber vessels made from recycled tyres (in the corner of the tent and on the stretcher table). This gave rise to the predominance of black in the project's colour palette. **RIGHT** A tent like no other: the Grumeti tents feature luxuries such as memory-foam mattresses and hand-woven linen, providing the comforts that guests would expect from Singita. Without solid walls, many storage units and utilities have been suspended from the tent frame. These include bedside pockets with bottled water and torches, and the vanity mirror. **OPENING SPREAD, LEFT** In the shade of a desert date tree (*Balanites aegyptiaca*) sit the trunks that Tracy Lynch sourced from US-based manufacturer XXXXXX – makers of ash-wood trunks for over 100 years. **OPENING SPREAD, RIGHT** The giraffe is Tanzania's national animal and one of deputy editor Annemarie Meintjie's favourites.



THIS PAGE The sweeping, gently curved tent roof is reminiscent of traditional Japanese roof lines. With its double layer, the roof works with nature for ventilation and thermal control in the absence of mechanical air-conditioning. **OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT** Bedding in natural materials such as mohair, felt and hand-woven linen adds texture to the tent interiors; The bar consists of storage trunks on legs custom-made by Pedersen + Lennard; Robust materials such as rubber, leather, wood, and steel, along with adapted items from outdoor stores, heighten the authentic camping experience; The choice of peaceful camel beige for the tents means daylight is diffused into a honey glow inside.



It is little wonder that the word “safari” comes from the Tanzanian indigenous language Swahili. The word means “long journey” and is integral to this part of the world. Here, vast numbers of wildebeest, zebra and impala go on one of the world’s most epic annual journeys, across two countries, trekking after good grazing to ensure their survival.

Immediately springing to mind when one thinks of a traditional “African safari” are the early western explorers and adventurers who first started using this word in English in the early 19th century. Undertaking long treks across wild, uncharted plains teeming with wildlife, they would have pitched up camp in the shade of trees, unpacking trunks that contained everything necessary to survive a wild land.

And, with their new camp, Singita wanted to offer visitors something that harks back to this original safari experience. Something that revels in the journey, the impermanent, and the freedom of the wilderness, yet retains the six-star luxury synonymous with the brand.

Operating within the Grumeti reserve, a concession in the Serengeti region, Singita

already boasts three distinctly different lodges: Sasakwa, the largest of the three, has an opulent colonial feel, while Sabora is a tented camp and Faru Faru, on the banks of the Grumeti River, has a strong, contemporary feel. But the new, mobile camp is unlike any of these.

The idea is to pitch and strike the camp according to the movement of the animals. Five sites were identified along the migratory route; sites that would give visitors the best views and an intimate, close-up experience of the wildlife.

The job of conceptualising the new camp fell to Cécile & Boyd’s who have had a long-standing relationship with the Singita brand. “We wanted to take the traditional image of safari accommodation and turn it around by recognising the simple, utilitarian beauty of the camping experience,” explains Boyd Ferguson. “With the design actually celebrating the act of camping, the camps can take a back seat to the real stars: the landscape and nature itself.”

Although roughing it Singita-style still means utter luxury, the focus at the Explore

camp is on the luxury of experience instead of the luxury of objects. This is echoed in the design of the tents by Cécile & Boyd’s. Steering away from hiding the realities of camping, they instead decided to exploit these to the fullest. Here, you won’t find the layering of art and objet covering up any aspects of the camping experience. Instead, utilitarian items *become* the decor.

“We’re celebrating the almost ‘hard edge’ of the true, original camping experience, albeit in a luxurious way. The focus is on the beauty of the tent and the thrill of packing it up and moving, getting away from an overly-romanticised tented safari experience that tries to recreate the feel of a permanent home.”

Stylist and VISI’s Cape Town decor editor, Tracy Lynch, worked as a production designer on the project and put her great talent for sourcing to work here. From mass-market retail finds to commissioned custom-made pieces, the emphasis is always on necessity and usefulness and together these items create a unique aesthetic. Great attention was paid to the detail, not only in

ABOVE, LEFT Instead of hiding utilitarian objects like crockery and glassware, these become decor items in the lounge and dining tent. **ABOVE, RIGHT** Singita Grumeti sits adjacent to the western corridor of Tanzania’s Serengeti. The word is derived from the Masai word “Siringit” which means “the place where the land stretches forever”. **OPPOSITE** Though one may have seen elephants many a time, it is an almost holy moment when a herd numbering more than 40 parades across the grassy plains of the Serengeti.



terms of the look, but also in terms of the experience itself.

“We decided to add detail as a means to bring attention to taken-for-granted items. So the idea of extreme detail was introduced,” Boyd explains. “Our main inspiration came from the Land Rovers used on safari and from the way guests arrive ‘dressed for safari’ from America and Europe – they are ideal as inspiration in terms of colour, materials, and durability.”

This hard-edge approach can also be seen in the choice of colour palette, which also breaks with tradition in opting for utilitarian black, beige and stainless steel. Veering away from the more traditional military green, the camel-beige tents are a collaboration between Singita operational staff, Cécile & Boyd’s and the tent maker Jan Allen of Bydesign from Nairobi. The tents have the distinct feel of a photographer’s jacket.

Fortunately, there is definitely no crawling on all fours into a cramped space here, or living out of a suitcase by the dim light of a torch. The roomy tents, with wood, leather and steel detailing, are designed with a couple in mind and have a stationary desk, coffee

station, plenty of storage space, and an *en-suite* dressing room and shower room with toilet. Each tent has a solar panel, which charges a battery to provide electricity for lights at night, as well as a lovely shaded veranda with outdoor table and even a daybed.

Since this is a mobile camp, it was essential that everything be designed to be easily packed up and moved. This means furnishing items can be stacked, folded, hung, or hooked up, and most have handles for easy carrying.

The trunks used for transporting the works also form a central part of the design, doubling up as furniture pieces in the tents. “Finding the right trunks was a real feat,” recalls Tracy. “After much searching, I finally found the US-based company that makes these trunks online. They are traditionally used for summer camps, and it took some convincing to have them shipped to South Africa, but we finally got them.”

You’ll also spot the work of several South Africa designers, like Pedersen + Lennard and the talented Stephanie Bentum of Krafthaus, who manufactured very special, custom-designed elements for the camp – roll-up storage units, stationary folders, bedside

hangers, cushions, and tapestries. And yet, although every component is carefully considered and you don’t want for anything, the real hero here is nature itself.

Framed through each netted window and doorway is the magnificent African bush. From your tent you can watch elephants silently chart their course across the plains or trace the dark clouds on the horizon as they grow into a boisterous, thundering shower sweeping across the plains. Here, the rising sun wakes you and the wind (rather than air-conditioning) wafts through your room. You become deeply aware of your dependence on natural resources, like the sun as it generates electricity through solar panels. Experiencing an authentic safari camp in this setting, and the rare privilege of an unmediated encounter with nature, brings with it a profound sense of freedom seldom felt in modern life. **V**

- Singita, www.singita.com
- Cécile & Boyd’s, 021 425 5110, www.cecileandboyds.co.za
- Visit www.visi.co.za/tanzania for more.

ABOVE, LEFT Real campfire cooking meets fine dining – executive chef Frank Louw has developed a menu unique to the Explore camp which gives visitors a real taste experience. Braaiing “stokbrood” is a fun and social way to get diners involved. **ABOVE, RIGHT** Early morning coffee and rusks before heading out on a game drive. **OPPOSITE** Everything in the Serengeti is constantly on the move – a concept that Singita is now exploiting in their new mobile Explore camp.

