

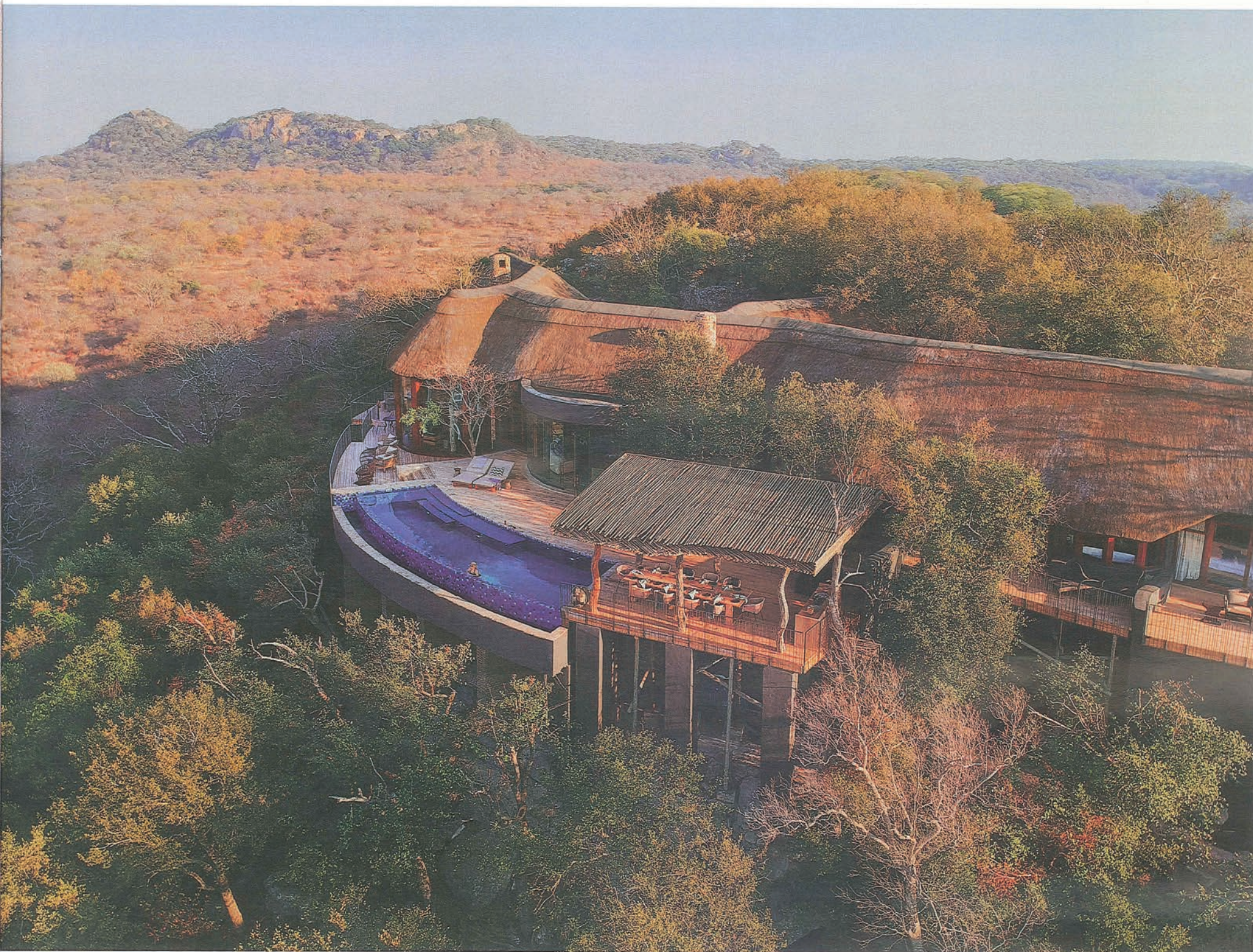


Paul Tudor Jones. Opposite page: Malilangwe House, his Zimbabwe home within Singita Pamushana safari lodge

THE BIG BEAST

PAUL TUDOR JONES II, AMERICAN BILLIONAIRE AND ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST SUCCESSFUL HEDGE FUNDERS, TELLS LISA GRAINGER HOW HE IS HELPING TO TRANSFORM AFRICA'S CONSERVATION MOVEMENT

ALEX NICKS



PAUL TUDOR JONES has no doubt where he got his love of the outdoors. As a child in Memphis, Tennessee, he spent weekends with his father and brother exploring rivers and forests and patches of wilderness. "We'd always be somewhere outdoors, fishing in summer and bird-shooting in winter," the billionaire hedge-fund trader tells me by phone from the 50,000-hectare Malilangwe Wildlife Reserve in southern Zimbabwe, where he has a home. "It was just part of the culture. So I learnt to appreciate the wild early on."

Although, Jones admits, like most American children, inspiration also came from TV. "I loved *Tarzan*," he says with a rueful laugh. "When I was four or five, I'd watch it all the time. For some kids, it's music or art or sport. For me, it was this idea of Africa ... In my freshman year a guy from Nairobi invited me to go on safari with him for six weeks

and it was incredible. Ever since, I've been in love."

When Jones, 66, talks about love, it isn't some passing crush. Since he started to pour his considerable funds into Africa in the 1990s, he has become one of the biggest philanthropists on the continent. He is reluctant to say exactly how much he has donated, but when I visited the 140,000-hectare Grumeti Game Reserve he leased from the Tanzanian government in 2002, "about \$90 million" was unofficially mentioned. Grumeti is not his biggest project, nor his most ambitious. Across the continent of Africa, his support is "steering and protecting and preserving over two million acres of land", according to Paul Milton, whose eponymous company helps Jones to identify tracts of land, acquire or lease it, then manage it.

Jones's first project was in Zambia. "Then I went into Zimbabwe," he recalls. "Then Grumeti

in Tanzania, then Mozambique, then Rwanda, then Zambia again." He's not planning on stopping soon. He is involved in three projects: around the Kafue National Park in Zambia ("which is the second-largest national park in Africa, but unloved, heavily poached out, and underutilised"); a new 200,000-hectare private eco-tourism reserve in Mozambique bordering the Kruger National Park; and 130km of coast near Mozambique's San Sebastian peninsula.

His reason for setting aside land, Jones says, is simple: "The biggest threat in Africa is the extinction of its creatures. Things are disappearing every single day, thanks to population explosion and land encroachment into areas that were formerly wild. If we aren't careful, Africa will end up being like Europe and the Serengeti will look like Kansas."

While huge stretches of the continent are set aside for wildlife conservation, as the population

increases so do the conflicts between humans and wildlife. "When we started work on Grumeti there were 10,000 people along our 130km border," Jones says. "Now there's close to 100,000. And the conflict is huge: we had 400 incidents a few years ago, in one year. Which is why we have begun to erect a fence: to stop elephants destroying crops at night. It has brought our neighbours joy and dramatically reduced the conflict. I can't tell you how many people as well as animals have died in the past 15 years: lions poisoned, elephants shot... the fence has been a godsend."

A better way, he says, of keeping creatures and people apart is to buy land between them and create a buffer zone. As Milton explains: "In the Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda, [where Jones has invested], there is a solid green line that is a forest and on the other side, over a stone wall, is agricultural land that has been farmed right to the edge. What Paul did is help to reforest that piece of regional landscape so the scale of human-wildlife conflict is reduced." In other countries, Jones has done the same on a bigger scale: in Tanzania, he converted former hunting concessions beside the Serengeti into the Grumeti Game Reserve; and, in Zimbabwe, he transformed a former cattle ranch neighbouring the previously heavily poached Gonarezhou National Park into the now well-managed Malilangwe Wildlife Reserve.

Not that Jones does this work on his own, as he readily acknowledges. Instead, he operates like a conservation kingpin, bringing together big players to work in unison. In 2018, for instance, when the Duke of Cambridge in his role as the royal patron of Tusk Trust, hosted the first Conservation Thought Leadership gathering at Buckingham Palace, it was Jones who underwrote the event, helping to bring together leaders, philanthropists, conservationists and strategists from across the world.

Jones's reasoning, Milton says, is that he knows that conservation requires "significant thought leadership, which is why he has partnered with organisations which have extended their influences across borders, [and] involve governments and environmental agencies... Since the summit, there is now dialogue across many governments and jurisdictions, and we've seen more of them working together: African Parks, Peace Parks, Conservation International are now all collaborating and sharing data across borders. In the old days, there were technocrats and bureaucrats working in insular ways. These private-public partnerships have developed because of Paul."

Jones has influence not just because he understands the world of conservation, but also because he has access to huge amounts of money. As well as donating his own funds, he has been instrumental in working with other wealthy philanthropists, such as Paul Allen and the Danish billionaire Anders Holch Povlsen, to fund Grumeti in Tanzania, the American hedge-fund managers Louis Bacon and Ken Griffin to help to restore the Kafue National Park in Zambia, and the Bedari founder Matt Harris to create the new Karingani Game Reserve in Mozambique.

Jones has also become a legendary fundraiser in the US, whether that's for politicians (such as Barack Obama, during his presidential campaign), for the disadvantaged of New York through his Robin Hood



Lions prowling on a Singita reserve in South Africa

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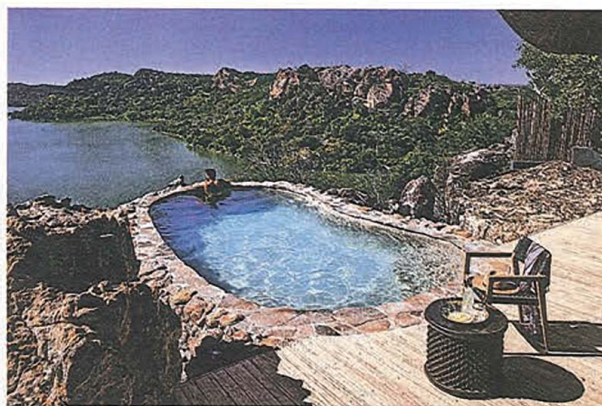
Foundation (which recently helped, through a TV and radio appeal, to raise \$110 million in an hour for those hit hardest by Covid), or for conservation organisations, such as Tusk and his own African Community & Conservation Foundation. Last week, in the Hamptons, Jones helped to arrange a successful Tusk Lion Trail auction of 12 lifesized lion statues painted by American artists. A similar auction will take place on November 9 at Bonhams, London, featuring lions painted by artists such as Ronnie Wood, Gavin Turk, Jake Chapman, Noel Fielding and (perhaps unexpectedly) John Cleese.

Jones says he did not get involved in the Tusk auction merely to raise funds, but to raise awareness about the plight of lions. Since the 1960s the world has lost about 70 per cent of this species. Today it's thought there are only about 20,000 left in the wild and in 26 African countries there is none at all. Jones witnessed such local extinctions first-hand when he leased three hunting concessions in 2002. "In 360,000 acres there were zero lions, zero leopards, about 600 buffalo and about 150 elephants," he says. "Now [within the Grumeti Game Reserve] there are about 300 lions, 300 leopards and 10,000 buffalo."

Having been part of projects across Africa for almost 20 years, Jones knows what works and what doesn't. "It's a pretty straightforward formula: find a place that's unloved, provide capital, try and convert it to eco-tourism – which provides more employment than hunting – and let Mother Nature do her thing. Finding wild places next to national parks where you can have a large-scale terrestrial impact is the way to do it... Then you replicate it, so it has the Michael Jordan effect. You make it the best it can be, so everything around it gets an uplift too," he says.

The work has to be done fast, Jones warns. "Populations are expanding so quickly that you have to pick and choose iconic areas and ringfence them. So if you are going to protect landscapes, you have to pick them now and get as many resources as fast as possible." Where

The pool at Singita Pamushana Lodge, Zimbabwe



conservationists failed in the past, Jones says, was not recognising the needs of people around the parks. "If you are going to do conservation you also have to put on your humanitarian hat: some of the poorest people in the world live around the wildest areas of Africa. If you are going to save that wilderness, so future generations can benefit from it, you have to help the people in those areas. You have to bring resources and love to both the people and the wildlife. You can't do one without the other. They go hand in hand," he says.

That is why all of his African philanthropic projects are run not by him, but by trusts that fund the communities living around the reserves. Although some trusts build clinics and schools and create jobs ("we have 900 people now on the payroll at Grumeti"), others give people survival tools, such as propane stoves (thereby reducing the communities' need for firewood) and solar-powered water pumps, so villagers can grow vegetables. In addition, conservation camps and junior ranger courses have been created and, in the dry southeast region of Zimbabwe, a nutritional drink is given to more than 20,000 children a day. That, Jones says, "is one of the things in Africa I'm most proud of: providing those kids with a nutritional meal. Kids and nature, that's what I care about the most."

Jones's wife, Sonia, a former model and yoga enthusiast, and their four children, he says, have benefited hugely from their exposure to the wild and African people. "We spend a month to six weeks in Africa and are always tearful when we leave. Some of our best friends are here. Our youngest child came here when he was only six months old and wouldn't understand a summer without Africa. They love it and I know will carry on [my philanthropic work] well beyond my years," he says.

Jones became one of America's most successful traders – making an estimated \$100 million on the 1987 stock market crash alone – because of his work ethic and he insists that his conservation projects

'We just took in two rhinos, one of them a calf whose mother had been poached and had stayed with her carcass for three months'



operate to the same standards as his financial offices. "Put it this way," says Mark Saunders, who runs the Malilangwe Wildlife Reserve, "we are very, very strictly governed by our budget and audited every year." Or, as Milton puts it: "Thirty years ago the philanthropic world perhaps took decisions from the heart. But now smart philanthropists, Paul being one of them, have demanded that technology, data, the landscape and community are all understood. Which has positively disrupted the NGOs and ensured that baseline measurement is now commonplace."

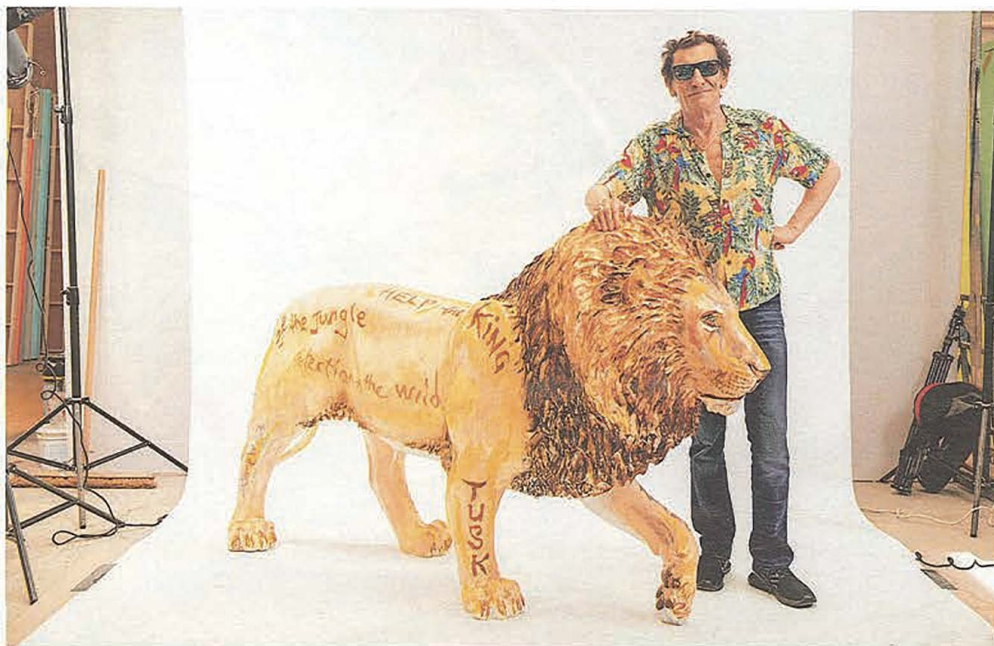
What also works is Jones's partnership with Singita, the finest safari-lodge operator on the continent, created by the conservationist Luke Bailes, whose camps attract high-paying guests from around the world, who include Ralph Lauren, Oprah Winfrey and George Bush. Paying tourists, Jones admits, "contribute a bit financially to the bills". Primarily they're there "to make more people fall in love with Africa ... Conservation is an expensive business. During Covid, we kept all our employees on and our tourism revenue went to zero. So we really need people back in the camps to spread the word."

Poachers, he reminds me, don't stop travelling during Covid. "We just took in two rhinos [from other areas], one of them a calf whose mother had been poached and had stayed with her carcass for three months. So she isn't in great condition ... We are well resourced and don't have poaching. But in other areas, rhinos will become extinct," Jones says.

It is heartbreaking scenes such as this that galvanise him. "We have to find new ways to appeal to people's imagination, to generate enthusiasm and to find critical players who can combine to make an effort to save those disappearing parts of Africa." Besides, Jones adds, "our generation has been terrible at being stewards of our Earth. So we need to strive as much as we can, so that future generations have the same privileges we have had."

And that, according to Saunders, Jones does in spades. "He is an amazing human being, with a huge appetite to help people and landscapes in a very, very progressive way. What's more, he's not only very engaging and approachable – a nice human being – but is genuinely passionate. A really great philanthropist," he says.

The Bonhams auction in aid of Tusk is in London on November 9, tuskliontrail.com



Lions painted by John Cleese, top, Gavin Turk, middle, Jake Chapman, bottom, and Ronnie Wood, above, will be auctioned