

“We are in an Out of Africa-like setting, worthy of grand exoticising.”

VOGUE INDIA

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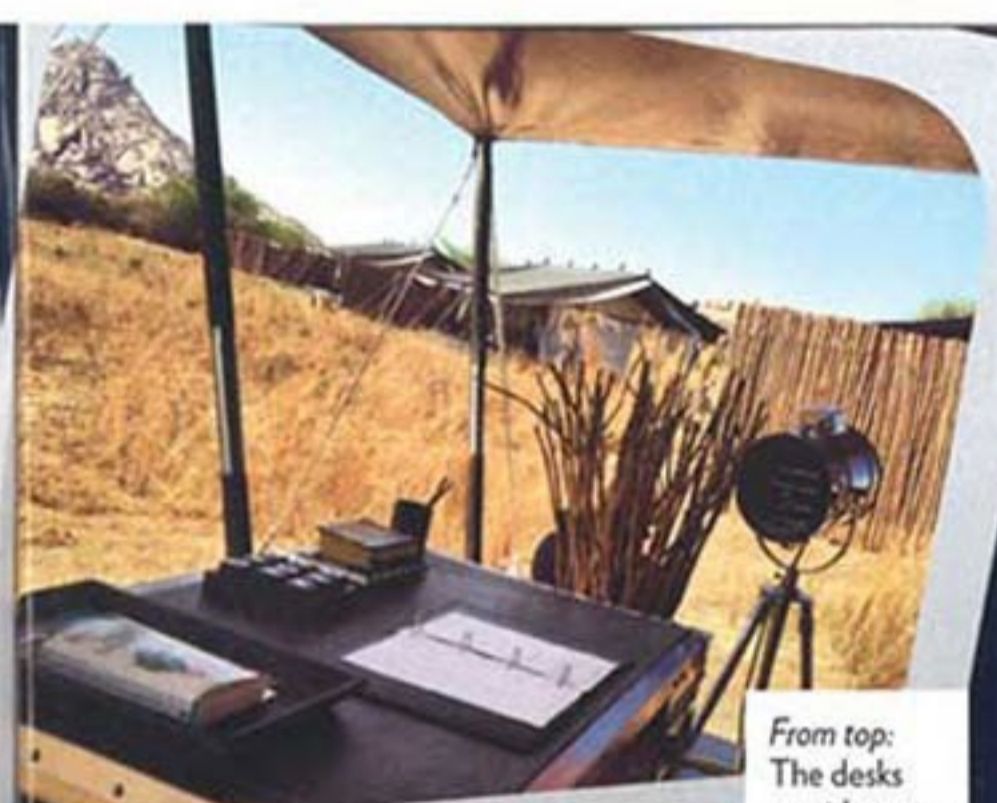
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Jawai, the third Sujan Luxury camp in Rajasthan, is set amid remote leopard country. It is an experience not simply for the curious outdoorsperson but also for the solitary thinker, says HIMALI SINGH SOIN

As with most lived experiences, this one too distended time. Already, the tarmac road had turned into hot, golden sand, spotted with scrub and the odd, persisting flower. The otherworldliness of where we were excused us from the rhythm of real life.

We are met by an open jeep. We climb in, with cold towels to distract us from the dust and the petrified landscape. We enter the bamboo gates of Jawai to a glass of champagne. (At this point, one might expect the lodge's quiet awareness of how exactly to distort the sense of time this author is trying

to hyperbolize.) Perhaps it is the late afternoon sun or indeed the drink that gives us the illusion that we have returned somewhere prehistoric, somewhere only dinosaurs and men of stone roam. Piles of molten granite surround the camp, now a globe thistle, now a cactus or a flame of the forest bursting in orange, defining the horizon that appears infinite. A stack of crimson turbans and the call of a landing lap-

wing interrupt the camp's stark tones of black, steel, khaki and white, lending a luxuriousness to the chic, minimalist aesthetic of the eight tents. Two particular elements of design strike me upon entry: a very large clock, the size of a harvest moon, and a steel light that punctuates the desk outside every room, overlooking an endless scape buzzing with creatures.

Early morning and late afternoon jeep safaris punctuate the three days, only interrupted by delicate meals—salads and pasta in the day and a thali at night—and birdsong. Dried chickpea, sesame, millet, desert palms and stray grasses line the land, making the journeys an epic experience in which farmland and fauna coexist. The area is not a national park, though the presence of flamingos, crocodiles and, of course, the wild cat would qualify it to be so. Each ride traverses a different path; each seems more spectacular than the last. The mornings begin



A BURRA-PEG, A CAMERA AND CHILDREN OF THE WILD

Jaisal Singh—son of wildlifers and filmmakers Tejbir and Malvika Singh, and nephew of Valmik Thapar—and his artist wife, Anjali Anand, are avid wildlife enthusiasts and the hearts and eyes of Sujan. In 2000, they created Sher Bagh in Ranthambore, in the style of the Raj. In 2008, they founded the more elegant, opulent camp, The Serai, in Jaisalmer. Jawai is their most recent creation, while more lie in wait. They speak to Vogue about their adventures in the wild.

HIMALI: Describe your first visit to a jungle.

JAIKAL: I was eight weeks old, so I don't have any recollection of that. But I spent most of my childhood in Ranthambore observing and photographing tigers with my father and uncle. Those were amazing days; living in the picturesque Jogi Mahal, sleeping under a canopy of stars, learning the ways of the forest from them and, of course, the legendary conservationist Fateh Singh Rathore.



H: How do you begin designing the camps?

A: We debate critical aspects of design, practicality and guest comfort with defining statements that separate our properties from the rest. The first step is piecing together a storyboard of ideas, textures and images from the local surroundings. At Jawai, the rock formations set against a rural backdrop provided me with a natural two-tone black-and-white palette. The vivid weave of the Rabari tribe's turban threw up scarlet red as a signature splash of pigment and intertwined through the design of the camp.

ANJALI: It was Corbett National Park. As a child, I remember being awestruck. Later, it was Ranthambore that opened my eyes to the majesty of the tiger; the emerald-green forest post-monsoon and the enigma of the medieval ruins and grand banyan trees...

H: Please share some anecdotes and alarm calls from the wild.

J: They have instilled in me an all-embracing conservation ethic. I was given my first pair of binoculars from the moment I was able to hold a pair, and my first camera when I was just five was a Nikon EM. My father taught me that to get the best photographs, one needs patience and also, at the same time, one should be able to anticipate what is going to happen next. From the time I was a toddler, I was dressed by my parents in safari clothing. Our two-and-a-half-year-old twins are now following suit. Wearing muted colours like khaki and green are a must whilst on safari!

A: Anecdotes are best shared around a campfire sipping a burra-peg! In the 1980s, I spent almost every winter evening around a fire listening to jungle lore, someone stringing a cauldron of desi maas and ghazals playing off a music system fitted on the c1942 Ford jeep. Often, alarm calls would bounce off the ramparts of the impregnable fortress of Ranthambore. Jawai re-opens for the season next month. Sujanluxury.com