



LEATHER TOP, *Bottega Veneta*.
Authentic African COLLARS.

BENEDETTA MAZZINI

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Benedetta Mazzini is a true scion of the Italian arts, and now also a self-made daughter of Africa. Her mother, the much-loved Italian songstress Mina, has informed her world-view just as much as her adopted homeland of Africa; for it was in Africa that Benedetta discovered herself and her burgeoning spirituality.

Having started her professional life as a model, author and TV and radio producer, as well as acting on both stage and screen, it was when she was reporting on Africa for Vanity Fair Italia that she found her true calling. After that, she filmed a series for Italian TV network RAI about wilderness safaris in South Africa and Namibia, thereby cementing her career and interest in that part of the world.

When she started her own safari company, Benedetta realized a lifelong ambition. She gave herself the ability to show others the land she fell in love with, in hopes that they might do the same.

Her concept? The tailor-made safari, a custom-designed experience based on the taste and inclinations of her clients. The idea is that there's an in-depth meeting before the journey begins in order to decide to what the traveler would best be suited. Benedetta then helps choose the route, location and mode of transport. Because if, as the proverb goes, anyone can find himself in Africa, then everyone has the right to their own mode of discovery with a fully personalized safari.

Let's start with something personal to me. I love giraffes. Where would I go to see them? I would definitely take you to see the reticulated giraffes in the Samburu National Reserve. **Do people feel like fish out of water on these wilderness safaris?** A very urban person can feel a little out of place, but that's also the beauty of it. Slowly, you see how you're part of nature. Walking safaris have the biggest impact on city-dwellers, because they find themselves completely immersed in nature, even though the rangers are always there with them. Those rangers are used to reading animals' body language, and know that one should always keep at a safe distance. The animal will let you know if you can come closer. The distance you have to keep with animals is not only about safety, but also about respect. We're in their home, after all, and we want to be as un-intrusive as possible. I actually think that it would be better not to be seen by the animals, and to observe them in their natural state. For instance, I am against nocturnal safaris. Light is shown onto the animals as they hunt, so visitors can see it. But that artificial light alters the nature of the animal's routine, and it can be advantageous or disadvantageous to either the predator or the prey. It's not right. It's best not to ever intervene and change the course of nature. What right do we have to do that? Yes, you could step in and stop a lion from attacking a gazelle, but what right do you have to do that? And who says it's right to save that gazelle and potentially let a lion cub starve? **What kind of safari would you recommend to a nerdy guy in his 20s, who is addicted to social media and has only seen wildlife through a computer screen?** I think I'd take him on a safari around the less-travelled routes in Tanzania, or around lake Turkana in Kenya, where you have an adventure around more unusual places. That would allow him to escape his virtual reality and to feel the rich wilderness and the natural diversity of Africa live, with his hands. At night, he would sleep in a tent mounted on the roof of a jeep. **What would you recommend to a couple in their 40s who love contemporary art and are always travelling for work?** I think they might enjoy a South African safari in Sabi Sand, staying in camps like the Singita, the Londolozi or even the Sabi Sabi. These are historic camps, in which the art of the safari has developed over time and is reflected even in the look of the lodging. Travellers could find themselves seated by a fire on an old leather sofa next to a basket of ostrich

eggs, underneath a canvas by an artist discovered at the last Art Basel fair. These camps are immaculately luxurious, particularly the Sabi Sabi Earth Lodge in South Africa and Abu Camp in Botswana. **What about a touring group of modern gentlemen? What experience would you recommend for them?** Well, the safari was conceived for a group of gentlemen on the hunt. It was like a sport in which men hunted for biggest trophy to take home with them: an elephant with enormous tusks, the antelope with the largest horns, the biggest lion... But then after the 19th and 20th century, they realised it was harming the species, and those hunters became conservationists. The safari became a trip about observation, to contemplate and live with nature and animals. For today's gentlemen, I'd think a mobile private camp would be just the thing. Instead of sleeping in camps, you have increased contact with nature. Each night, an entourage of people set up a camp in which nothing is left to be desired. This is really a tailor-made experience. **Has it been easy investing in Africa professionally and as an entrepreneur? How did you find the bureaucracy and the quality of services?** The local population clearly understands that ecological safaris are a development opportunity for them. It doesn't just conserve their land, but saves it from men that are interested in another kind of development that would ruin nature and would evict people from their homes. Today's safaris look to cultivating the local population and working with them for a universal result. It is entrepreneurship done in collaboration with the local people. **What do you mean by eco-safari?** Firstly, it means they don't involve hunting. But not just that – most of today's lodges have solar-powered energy. That said, you'll sometimes come across a lodge with a swimming pool in the middle of the desert, and you have to ask yourself where that water came from and if it's right for it to be there. **When I was in Africa, I had this feeling that there was this overriding state of mind that concentrated on the organic, and you feel a profound, natural wisdom intrinsic to your person. But there are such extremes – the situation in Darfur, for instance. What do you make of those extreme states of being in Africa?** I'm mostly in the middle of the nature and that's where you feel that wisdom most acutely. Africa pulls you out of your shell, and it amplifies your ways of being. When you're there, you are in direct contact with yourself and you become aware of these situation that

SAHARAN LINEN, *Umit Benan*.
LEOPARD PRINTED SILK TOP,
Roberto Cavalli. ACCESSORIES,
authentic Maasai pieces.



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are imposed on you in one way or another, and how useless they are. It seems clichéd to say it, but in Africa you can be yourself. I chose to throw away everything I didn't need in life thanks to Africa, which helped me discover my true self. When I used to return to Europe from my first trips here, I had this strong sense of understanding how people hide behind certain things. **Has nature ever frightened you?** The first times I was in Africa I was very scared. I didn't know the language, and I didn't know, for instance, what mock charge meant. Basically, it's when a lion or an elephant tries to understand if you're afraid or not, and you have to show no fear in front of what they do. You can't run away. Once, we were walking and an enormous elephant began to run towards us at 40 km/hour until it stopped three metres away from us. With animal there's a key rule: don't run. If you run, they understand that you're afraid, and that you're a prey so they should

attack you. **Have people in Africa ever scared you more than that?** I'm actually more afraid of humans in Europe. For instance, we take for granted that elderly people in our society can't be productive – that they're no longer needed. The Maasai tribe has great respect for the elderly, because they have seen more and know more the older they get. Young people can't wait to grow old to garner that respect. A tribal child will consider contact with an adult a symbol of honor. I think about how Italian youths treat their seniors and I think we're missing something. **Do you think the idea of courage means something different in Africa than it does here?** In Africa, I've come across people that experience things daily that we would consider insurmountable. They do so with wisdom and grace, quietly accepting things as if they were natural. Because of Africa, I have learnt that you know how to be courageous only if you know what fear means.



AUTHENTIC TOGA
from Masaai "shuka".
COLLARS, *original*
Maasai. LANZE, *Mkuki*.

HAIR *Andrei Guida at Close up Milan*,
MAKE-UP *Martina D'Andrea at Close up Milan*,
PHOTOGRAPHY ASSISTANTS *Angela Improta & Filino Tarentini*,
DIGITAL ASSISTANT *Giuliano Carparelli*.
www.wildplacessafaris.com and other websites as needed