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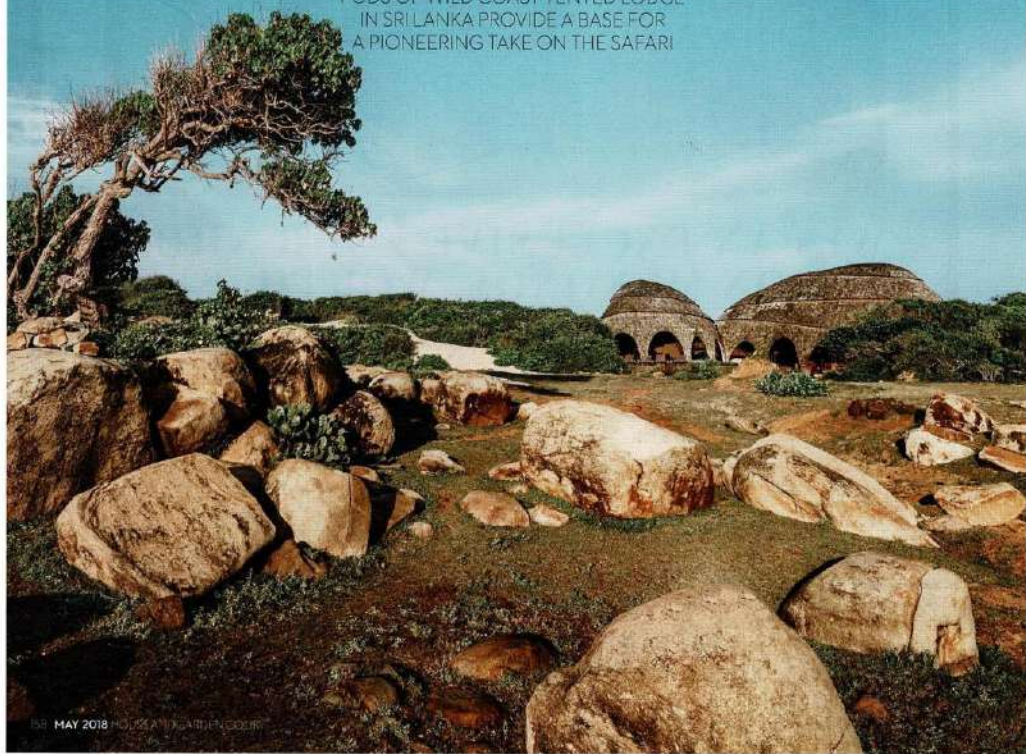
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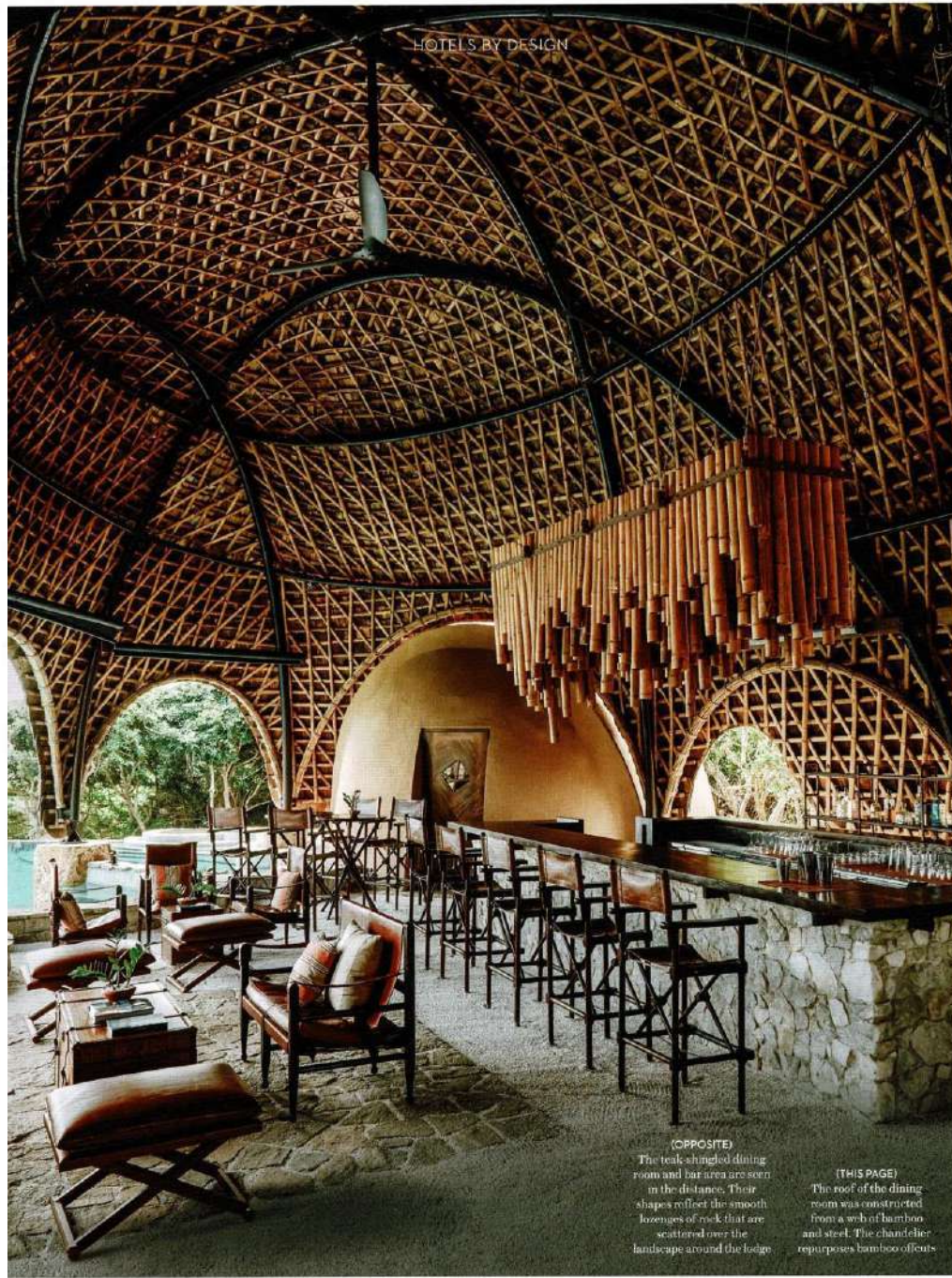
TEXT CHARLOTTE SINCLAIR / PHOTOGRAPHS PAUL MASSEY

BACK TO THE FUTURE

IN A UNIQUE LOCATION THAT BRIDGES BEACH AND FOREST, THE STRIKING PODS OF WILD COAST TENTED LODGE IN SRI LANKA PROVIDE A BASE FOR A PIONEERING TAKE ON THE SAFARI



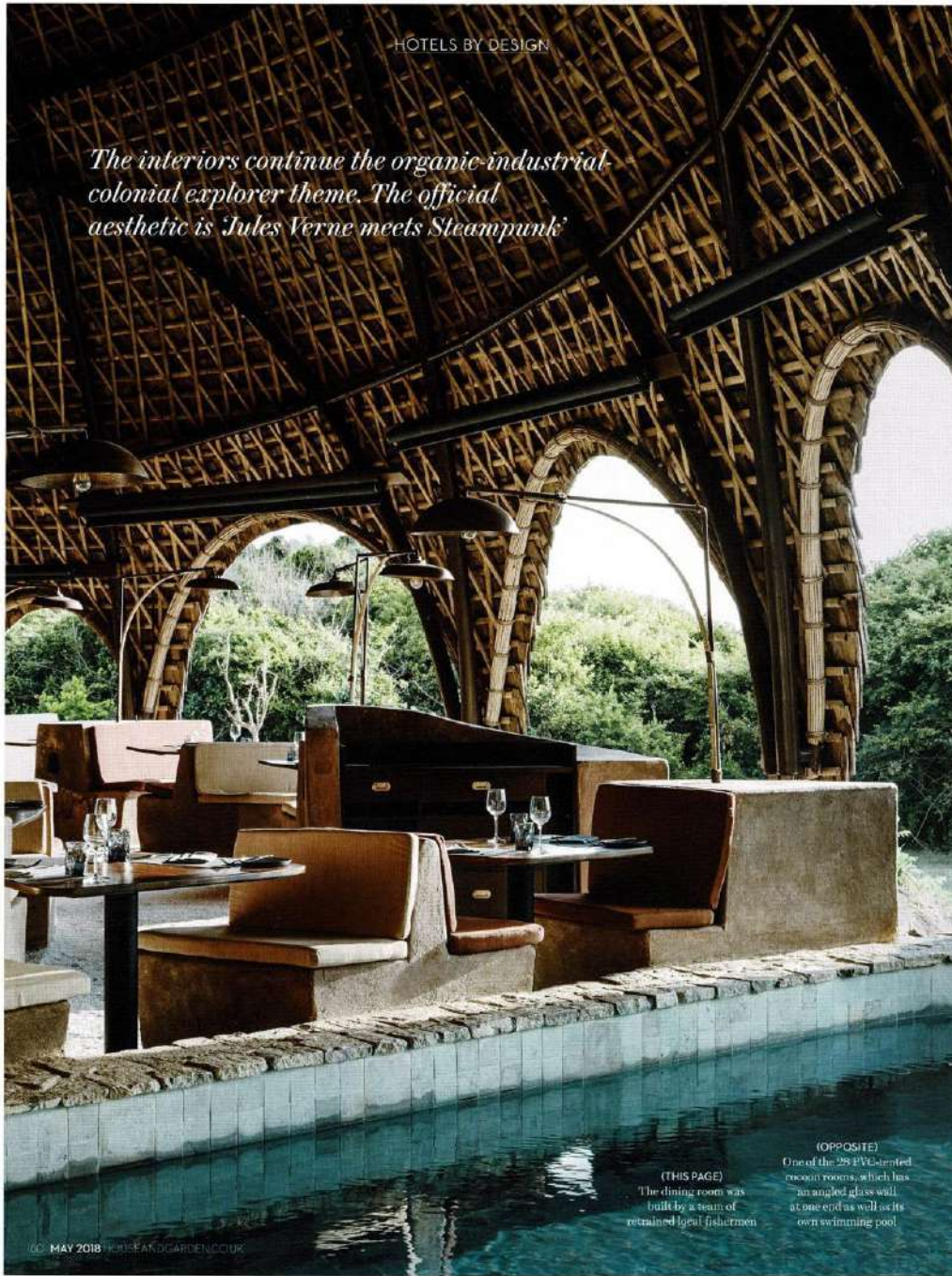
HOTELS BY DESIGN



(OPPOSITE)
The teak-shingled dining room and bar area are seen in the distance. Their shapes reflect the smooth lozenges of rock that are scattered over the landscape around the lodge.

(THIS PAGE)
The roof of the dining room was constructed from a web of bamboo and steel. The chandelier repurposes bamboo offcuts.

The interiors continue the organic-industrial-colonial explorer theme. The official aesthetic is 'Jules Verne meets Steampunk'



(THIS PAGE)
The dining room was built by a team of retained local fishermen

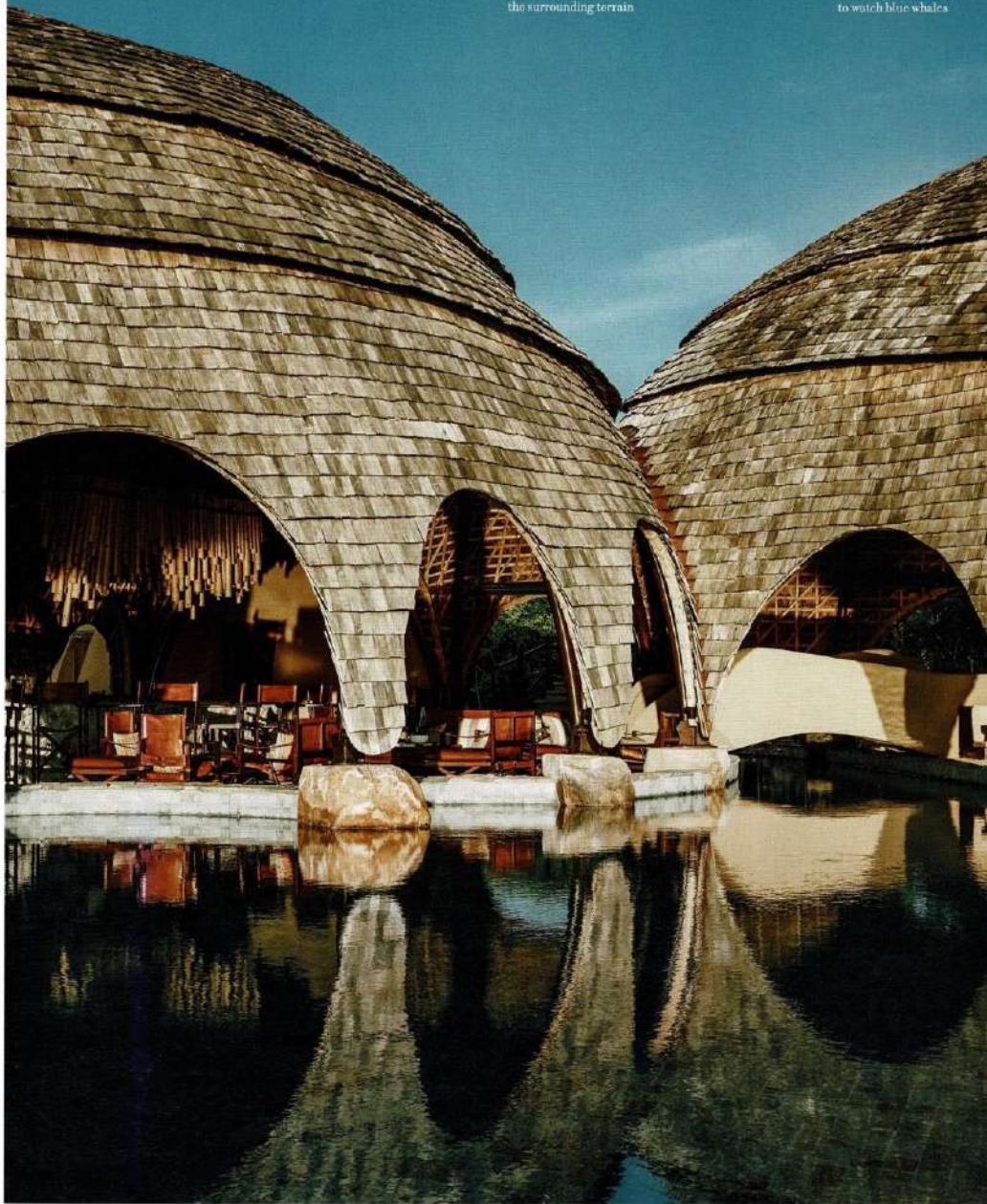
(OPPOSITE)
One of the 28 PVC-laminated cocoon rooms, which has an angled glass wall at one end as well as its own swimming pool



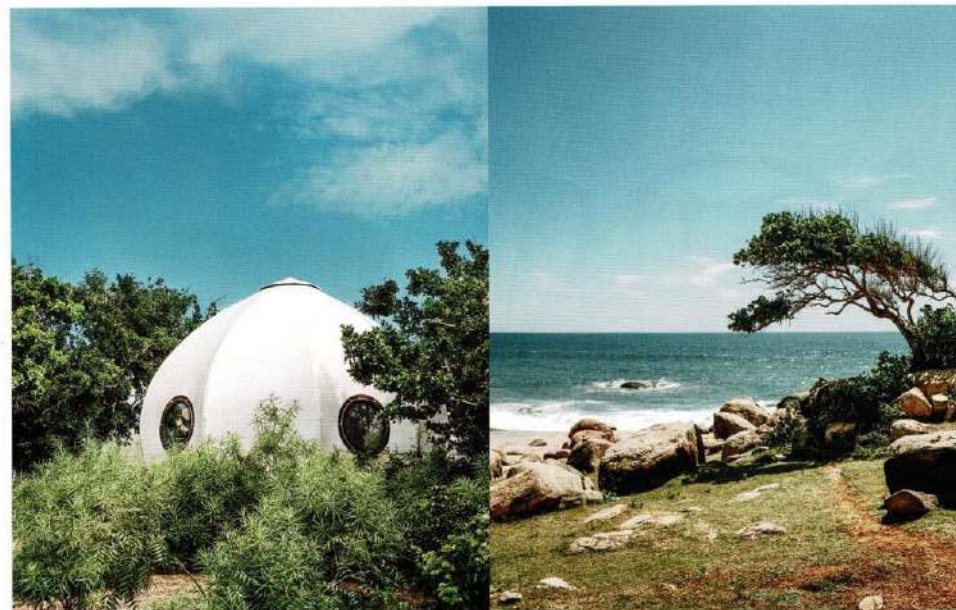
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The wraparound infinity pool adjoins the dining room, which has been furnished in earthy tones to reflect the surrounding terrain

(OPPOSITE LEFT)
An urchin tent with a pale PVC skin stretched over a steel exoskeleton, with porthole windows

(OPPOSITE RIGHT)
The beach aspect of the resort gives guests a unique safari experience, enabling boat voyages out to sea to watch blue whales



HOTELS BY DESIGN



At the south-eastern corner of Sri Lanka, spreading inland from a coastline where waves crash upon the sand with a ferocity rarely seen in the Indian Ocean, green hills rise from jungled interiors at such regular intervals that the horizon resembles a cardiograph. Each hillock is stacked with smooth lozenges of rock, upon which ancient stupas decay and leopards climb to survey the panorama. Much of this land is dedicated to Yala National Park – hence the leopards, numbering 200 at last count – and it is within the park's adjacent buffer zone that Sri Lankan hotelier Malik Fernando has sited his latest opening, Wild Coast Tented Lodge, under his Resplendent Ceylon label.

The property, five-and-a-half hours' drive or a 30-minute seaplane flight from Colombo, occupies a thickly wooded acreage of jungle, fronted by high, wind-sculpted dunes and wave-bashed inlets. It is the beach, a rarely encountered facet of safari, that lends this spot its unique aspect: guests can voyage by boat to nearby deep water channels where blue whales can be seen.

If this is safari with a twist, then the largest surprise comes by way of the lodge's rooms. Working

with Netherlands-based architects Nomadic Resorts, Malik conceived the idea of 28 tented 'cocoon' pods positioned around water holes or facing the beach. Each cocoon comprises a pale PVC skin stretched over steel exoskeletons with angled glass walls at each end, which give the structures a uniquely futuristic appearance. The resulting whole – set with porthole windows – resembles part butterfly chrysalis, part Zeppelin, part UFO.

The interiors continue the organic-industrial-colonial explorer theme, with copper piping washstands and bathtubs from Jaipur contrasting with teak floorboards, Turkish rugs and leather campaign chairs. Particularly beautiful is the effect of the internal canvas shell, which is laced together over the structure's steel braces, creating elegant lines that arch high above the four-poster beds. The official aesthetic, as described by Malik and Dutch interior designers Bo Reudler Studio is 'Jules Verne meets Steampunk'. And there are eight 'urchin' tents, too, designed with families in mind, which are tapered and teardrop-shape, their metal-framed pods overstretched with PVC and similarly spacecraft-like in appearance.

For all the fun of the design, there is sophistication at work here, too, and an abiding attempt to



merge with and respond to the lodge's setting. This idea is articulated not only in the reliance on solar power, greywater recycling and locally sourced food, but also in the bones of the architecture itself. The dining room, with its bar, library and wraparound infinity pool, is like a vaulted cathedral created from a web of bamboo and steel and topped by teak shingles, the silhouette evoking the soft planes of the area's rock formations. It is a feat of construction and engineering performed by a team of local fishermen, retrained in carpentry after an overseas contractor dropped out.

A clay nook houses the library, and the same hand-smoothed clay has been used to carve dining booths, seating areas and a bridge that connects the bar and the restaurant over the pool. Copper lights, ochre cushions, and wine-coloured leather chairs echo the sun-scorched palette of the surrounding terrain.

Safari here is accessed by liveried vehicle in a matter of minutes. Oven-hot afternoons are spent cruising the lakes and forest tracks of the park in the company of expert guides, spotting crocodiles and elephants and the main draw, leopards. It is important to note, however, that this is not safari as practised in Africa. Yala is a bustling, busy park,

with Tarmac roads and trucks packed with schoolchildren. There are holidaying locals, backpackers and tourists, and multiple vehicles per sighting, but the guides are experts in timing guests' visits to avoid the crowds and offering unique privileges such as afternoon tea on a bend in the river.

Then there are the lodge's further enticements: the blue whales, the important Hindu pilgrimage site of the temple of Kataragama, not to mention the lazy pleasures of an afternoon spent by the pool. Malik recently secured permission to create a conservancy in the buffer zone, to allow for private wildlife encounters by foot or bicycle. Not that the animals are aware of any limits to their movement. Elephants regularly enter the camp to investigate the kitchen block, or to seek out the lodge's watering holes. And leopard pawprints are often found in the sand – proof not only of these predators' presence but also, perhaps, of their approval of this new arrival on their patch □

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Charlotte Sinclair stayed as a guest of Wild Coast Tented Lodge (resplendentcylon.com). Scott Dunn (020-8682 5060; scottdunn.com) offers seven nights in Sri Lanka from £2,900pp, including two nights at Wild Coast Tented Lodge, B&B*

(OPPOSITE LEFT)
The copper bath was sourced from Jaipur, with teak floorboards setting a warm tone for the interior

(OPPOSITE RIGHT)
Copper piping has been fashioned into washstands for an industrial feel

(THIS PAGE)
The beds have also been made from piping. The internal canvas shell has been laced together over the steel structure.

