

## the trailblazers

### Chris Browne and Debra Fox

Owners  
Fox Browne Creative

The first time Chris Browne met Debra Fox didn't go as planned. Browne was on his way to Ngorongoro Crater Lodge in Tanzania in 1997 to add the finishing touches to the design of the newly rebuilt lodge when everything that could go wrong did. The car Fox sent to collect him was unbranded, and because of a language barrier and some miscommunication, Browne was left stranded in flood-like conditions on the side of an airstrip.

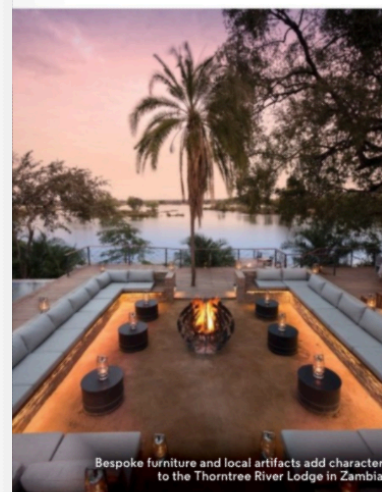
Desperate and out of options, he walked three hours to a hotel, found a high-frequency radio—there were no phones—and contacted Fox who was at the lodge waiting for him. A terse conversation about the placement of cushions ensued. Browne never made it to the lodge and for the next six weeks, he and Fox didn't speak.



Photos by DOCK CLUNIES ROSS and courtesy of FOX BROWNE CREATIVE



andBeyond Nxabega Okavango Tented Camp in Botswana takes inspiration from midcentury safari style



Bespoke furniture and local artifacts add character to the Thorntree River Lodge in Zambia

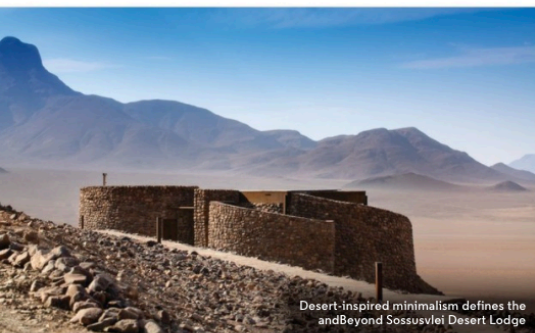


Organic shapes and textures highlight nature at andBeyond Sandibe Okavango Safari Lodge in Botswana



the trailblazers

A perforated steel overhang is a showstopper at the andBeyond Sossusvlei Desert Lodge in Namibia



Desert-inspired minimalism defines the andBeyond Sossusvlei Desert Lodge



andBeyond Sossusvlei Desert Lodge's color palette reflects the surrounding desert landscape

Though it was an ominous start to their partnership, Browne and Fox called a *détente*, became fast friends, and turned that passion into a professional and personal relationship that has lasted nearly 25 years. The lodge—the site of that first fight was also where they eventually were married—became a standout project in their enviable portfolio.

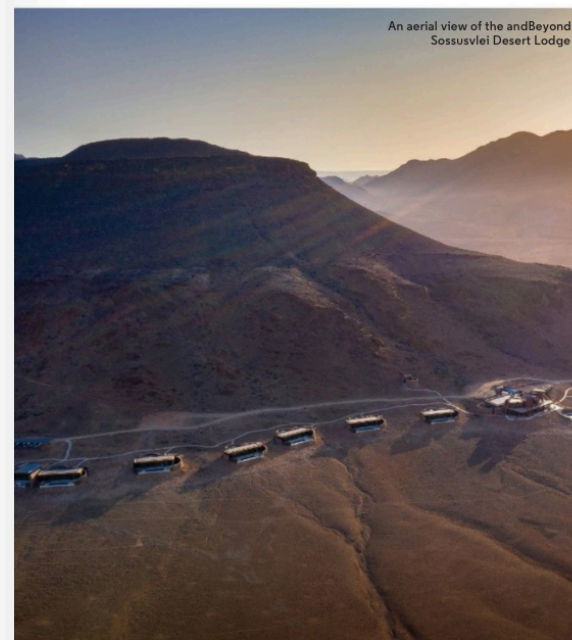
Indeed, Fox is a hotelier by trade and spent 17 years at andBeyond (formerly Conservation Corporation Africa or CC Africa until it rebranded in 2005), the last eight of which she served as COO. It's here where she met Browne, who always had a penchant for design and left the company as its creative director after 15 years. Together, they saw the safari lodge business explode. The '90s were "a pioneering time," says Fox. "It felt like we were leading the charge." Minimalist luxury rooted in nature became the company's calling card.

At the height of the Great Recession, andBeyond was forced to restructure, and Browne and Fox had to figure out their next move. On a whim, a friend of theirs who owns Babylonstoren wine farm in Western Cape, South Africa needed a good designer and hospitality manager. "The two of us looked at each," Fox recalls, "and said, 'We can do that.'" And they were off, with a company name—Fox Browne Creative—and an ethos they stand by to this day.

What started as a hobby turned into a full-fledged business for the Johannesburg-based firm with a foundation built on having fun ("because we got so stressed out in the corporate world," says



andBeyond Phinda Rock Lodge in South Africa is hidden among the landscape's granite outcrops



An aerial view of the andBeyond Sossusvlei Desert Lodge

Fox) and working with people they like who are making a difference within the communities they operate. Eventually, andBeyond—now under new leadership—approached them to help grow the brand. In 10 years, they have helped design 46 lodges, including the recently renovated andBeyond Sossusvlei Desert Lodge, which is set against breathtaking views of the Namibian desertscape.

Another key differentiator for the studio is its emphasis on providing clients with a 360-degree full-service approach that goes beyond design. The firm integrates itself into every touchpoint, from what the guests see and eat to where they sleep and how they're spoken to. Often, says Browne, it's too obvious where the design and architecture stop and the management starts. Instead, he says they seek to deliver "perfectly crafted moments of magic." Because of the nature of their projects, Fox and Browne also make it a priority to be sensitive to the location and culture, ultimately creating a foundation that trains and mentors young South Africans to work in hospitality.

For almost three decades, Fox and Browne have been a formidable duo on the safari lodge scene. Browne has an entrepreneurial spirit and an innate understanding of what works in a space. Plus, says Fox, "he makes me feel brave enough to tackle any idea." Fox, for her part, is a natural leader and caretaker, who brings empathy, clear thinking, and creativity to every project. "She's a generous soul who is a dynamic, brilliant force to have," says Browne.

In this way, they've found a formula that works. "He's a closet hotelier, and I'm a closet designer," says Fox. "It makes for interesting pillow talk most nights."