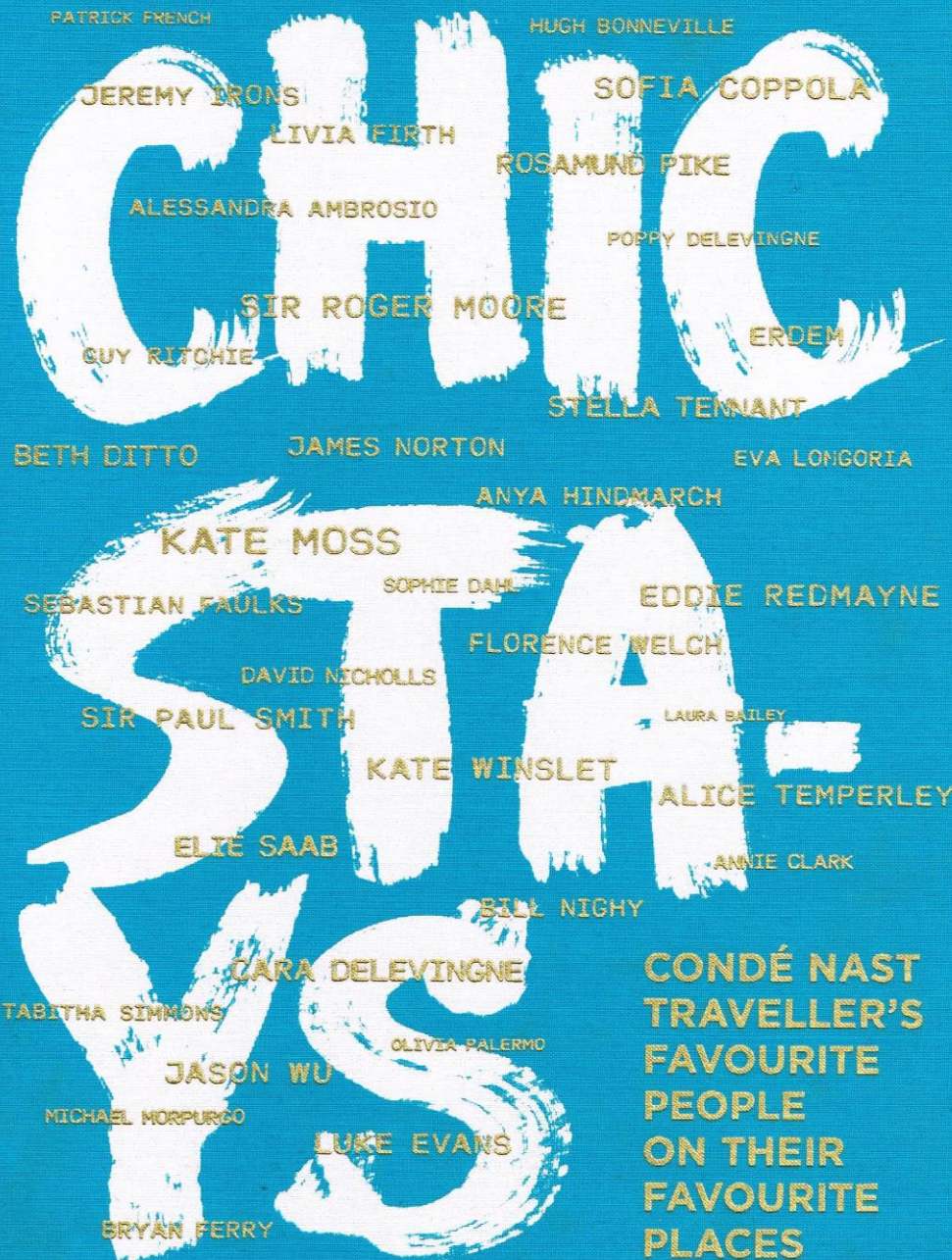




CONDÉ NAST
TRAVELLER'S
FAVOURITE
PEOPLE
ON THEIR
FAVOURITE
PLACES

ASSOULINE

LIVIA FIRTH

SONG SAA

Song Saa means 'the sweethearts', and the story of it is a rare tale of love over greed. When Melita Hunter and her husband, Rory, first discovered this pair of islands in the untouched Koh Rong archipelago, they fell in love with the place and immediately vowed to protect it. With their Song Saa Foundation, they created the first-ever marine reserve in Cambodia. They have involved the local community from the start, and it's truly a model sustainable business.

Colin and I have been lucky enough to stay in wonderful hotels around the world. But the true soul of Song Saa makes it different from other places. Melita and Rory describe it as luxury that treads lightly, and it's a lovely way of putting it. Real luxury today should be all about integration. Everything here has been produced with local materials and recycled and upcycled when possible.

The rooms are so private and beautiful that you are tempted to never leave your cocoon and instead just languish in the pool overlooking the sea. But when you emerge, the people who run the hotel immediately feel like family. You want to spend time with them, listening to their stories.

One day we took part in a very special Buddhist blessing ceremony and, a few months later, I'm still grateful to wear the red string they put round my wrist. All the meals on the island are, well, spectacular. Each night at a different location: a table on the beach; another under a tree, with millions of tea lights; even a feast in the middle of the pool. The spa also offers unforgettable rituals. Under a pagoda on the sea, all you hear is the water and the birds in the trees.

There is an Italian expression, 'mal d'Africa', or 'Africa sickness', used to describe the longing you feel for Africa once you leave it. Well, the day we left Song Saa, hugging and kissing everyone, we knew we had 'mal di Song Saa'. We long to be back there.



