

# EXPERIENCE

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## THE NEW GLOBAL COMPLETION CENTRE



NETJETS' GLOBAL 6000 SIGNATURE SERIES AIRCRAFT  
KEITH URBAN'S SKY-HIGH GIG + SAIL THE WORLD + SKI YELLOWSTONE CLUB





## IN OUR NATURE

From a lifetime spent behind his camera lens in the South African *bushveld* and behind a desk at the helm of his international business empire, Brian Joffe has learned that nature provides the ultimate truisms by which the fittest survive.

BY STEPHANIE PLENTL | PHOTOS BY BRIAN JOFFE

The story of Brian Joffe, one of South Africa's most admired entrepreneurs, has played out like a series of snapshots, each one setting the scene for the next.

As a youngster in Johannesburg, he packed birdseed for pocket money at a grain and milling business run by his father, where he would have had a good view across the street of Chipkins, the prominent grocery wholesaler. These industries were to play vital parts in his future success: He part-purchased his own animal feed retailer in 1978, a venture that made him his first million by the age of 32. At 41, he bought Chipkins. From there, he progressively assembled an international services, trading and distribution conglomerate that is today's JSE-listed Bidvest Group, with a R134 billion annual turnover.

One of the cornerstones of his prosperity, Joffe maintains, is his stance on autonomous entrepreneurship within his purposefully decentralized Bidvest empire. This unique business model is founded on empowering managers in his various companies across four continents, encouraging individuals to be competitive in nurturing their operations. Where all his 105,000 employees are concerned, Joffe's own management style relies on an approachable, open-door policy. These methods have earned him several official accolades, including being declared by *Forbes* magazine one of the 10 Greatest Living Business Leaders in Africa today.

While Joffe was already a regular lecturer on his philosophy at the Bidvest Academy – a leadership program he launched for nominated delegates within the company – the clamor for him to write a business

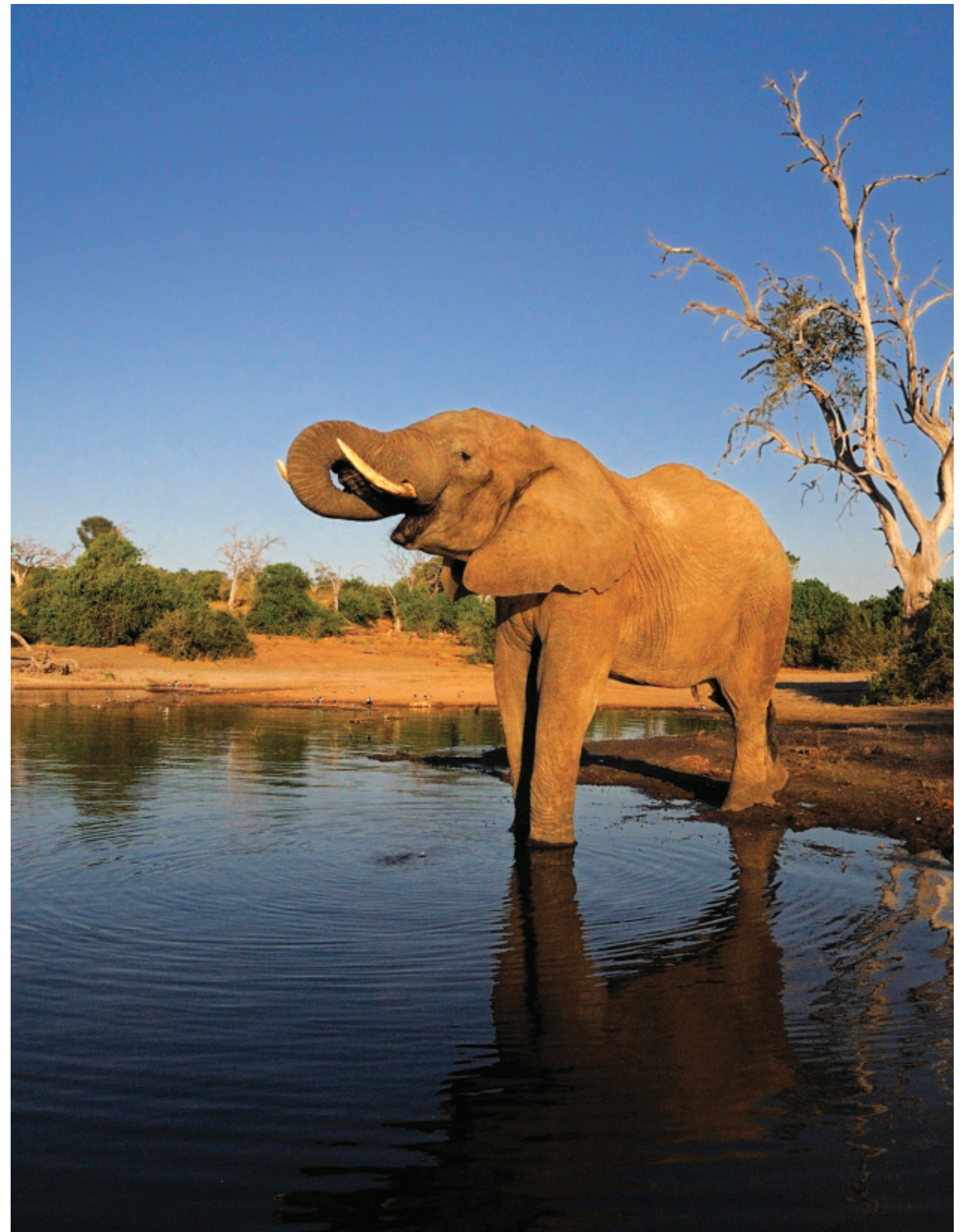
motivational book became too loud to ignore. His published response was typically unconventional: a collection of his own photographic work entitled *My Book*.

Beyond the boardroom, Joffe had quietly developed skill as a wildlife photographer and the humbling landscape of the *bushveld* has allowed him to find balance in his life. "The bush does that to you, gives you a wider perspective and keeps your feet firmly rooted in the good red earth of Africa," he says. "Your subjects are majestic... every shot is a reality check. There are no corner offices in the African bush, no status symbols and no new millennium distractions."

Over time, his photographic experiences in the wild revealed numerous philosophical observations. It was these simple associations that inspired the clever concept behind *My Book*, which combines a photographic image with corresponding business-leadership advice.

The result is humorously wry, sardonic and often very powerful. "It became a chance to share my passion for wildlife photography and some insights on leadership, teamwork and business success," he says. "Some of the insights came from me, but most came in the form of quotations from successful leaders and high-profile entrepreneurs."

The chessboard-sized tome features 156 photographs accompanied by soundbites from luminaries such as Bill Gates, Warren Buffett and Jack Welch. Its popularity has since inspired a sequel, which Joffe called *Focused*. Here, in his own words and pictures, he reveals why his corporate and artistic attitudes are utterly in sync. >





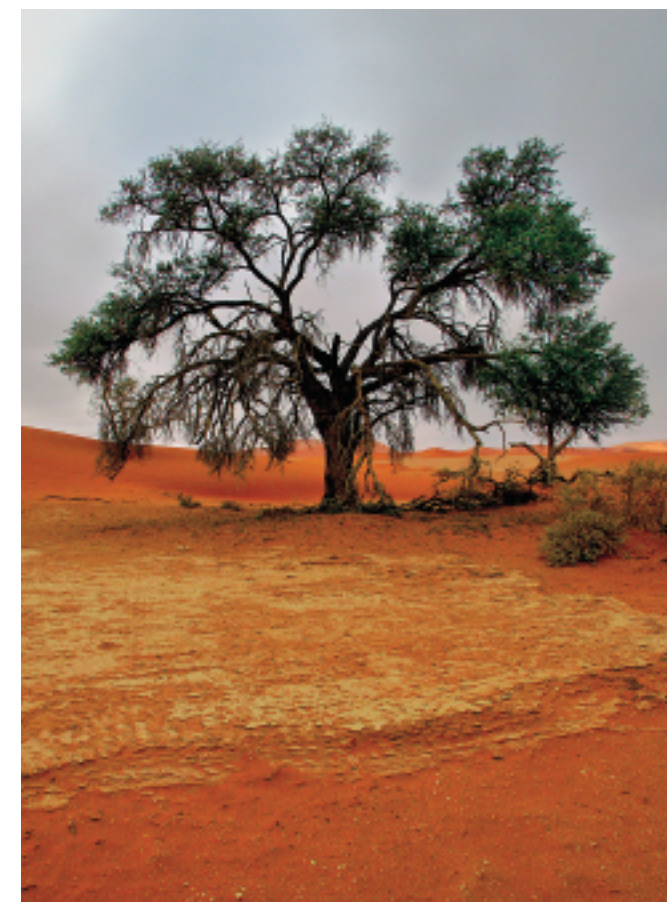


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### BASIC INSTINCTS

“You sit all day with camera and tripod in the heat of the African sun, close to a waterhole used by a bloat of hippo. Experience tells you they are going to give you something, but you don’t know just what. Suddenly three of them break the surface at the same time, just marginally, with only snouts and eyes visible, but all in a perfect line, triggering the perfect caption for any leader who depends on quality support: ‘If you are going to lead from the front be sure someone is behind you.’ Nature teaches enduring lessons on teamwork and the value of purposeful perseverance.”



### NATURAL PARALLELS

“Both photography and business require patience, perseverance and passion. Making the most of the moment pretty much sums up photography and the opportunistic side of business growth. On one occasion, the sight of a young bull elephant wallowing in the mud, then getting up only to slide back down, crystallized some of my own thoughts on success and sustainability. Standing up is a challenge, falling depends on your ego. I’ve been privileged to have my moments: behind a lens and behind a desk. The satisfying thing about the photographic ones is that you get to take them home with you.”







## PREDATOR AND PREY

“It’s most unusual to see a baboon eating meat, especially from a recent steenbok kill. Yet I was fortunate to spot a big male sit down to an early dinner in the last rays of the late afternoon sun.

The light was fading and I’d just spent three hours lurching overland in an open Land Rover. It would have been easy to miss the moment, however, the baboon gave me a split-second to line up the shot using a monopod. I had my moment, and like all bush-loving photographers, I look forward to many more. Such opportunistic success should not be underrated whether in photography or business. On the surface, you’re just plain lucky to get the shot (or land the deal), but you know that experience, hard work and painstaking preparation played a part. I’m convinced the key to business success lies in the ability to stay focused. When your vision and goals are not clear, stop and adjust your lens. Focus.” ■



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