

*You can't change the wind  
but you can change the course.*  
--Swahili proverb

## SWAHILI SHULE

Swahili. Derived from the Arabic *sawahil*, it literally means 'of the shore.' Many know it as the *lingua franca* of East Africa, a trading language that blends African, Arab, Asian, and European words. But Swahili is more than a language. It is also the *cultura franca* of Africa's Indian Ocean coastline, a traders' culture that combines elements of Africa and Arabia with East and West to produce a true cultural fusion.

The Swahili homelands are the tropical islands of Lamu, Mombasa, Malindi, and Zanzibar and the pristine coast of East Africa from Mogadishu in Somalia to Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. It is an Indian Ocean paradise: 300 miles of white sand beaches warmed to a constant 85 degrees by 10 hours of sunshine a day, tempered by the cooling Trade Winds.

I stumbled on this wonderful civilization years ago as a young backpacker. The memory of its charm beckoned me back as a photographer to document East Africa's wildlife and wild life. In my first book, *Safari Chic*, I focused on the savannah and the safari lifestyle of the interior. The East African coast and coral atolls are so unique, I realized that they merited a book of their own.

*Karibu* (welcome) to *Swahili Chic*, my pilgrimage in search of Swahili style. Along the way I realized that this style, like the Chinese feng shui, is not limited to a school of design or a school of architecture: it also is a school of thought. To

acknowledge this synergy, I refer to the Swahili aesthetic as Swahili shule – the Swahili school.

Swahili shule is expressed in a décor that harmonizes a home, creating a sanctuary of simplicity, spirituality, and sensuality. It is founded on a worldview that transformed ocean outposts into city-states of cosmopolitanism, world learning, and integrity.

This is a story little known in the West, but its time has come. We seek styles that celebrate ethnic diversity while uniting our global society. We long to tie traditions of the past with promises of the future. Like the Swahili, we aspire to impart a sense of dignity and balance to times of turmoil and trouble. This 2,000-year-old civilization may well offer helpful insights to a world moving uneasily into a new millennium.

Join me on a voyage as I take you to the Swahili Stone Towns to explore this fascinating style and then bring it home to the West, illustrating how anyone – whether in Malindi, Malibu, or Monaco— can transform a house into a haven of tranquility and personal growth with Swahili shule.

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## FOREWORD

The beautiful photographs in this book  
a wonder

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