



The legendary Baron Bror von Blixen-Finecke of Kenya – Blix to his many friends – lived out a life of passion, parties and thrills against the magnificent backdrop of the African bush. But his irrepressible charm, as **LISA GRAINGER** explains, always carried the day.

HUNTER OF HEARTS

LIFE IS LIFE AND FUN IS FUN, BUT IT'S ALL SO QUIET when the goldfish die!" Baron Bror von Blixen-Finecke, 1886-1946.

Mottos seldom reflect men's lives as aptly as that of the Swede, Baron Bror von Blixen-Finecke. To Blix, as he was affectionately known in his adopted Kenyan home, life revolved around three things: having fun, seducing women and hunting. The thrill for him was the chase. It was being outdoors and capturing beautiful creatures.

When he wasn't living under the stars as one of East Africa's most admired white hunters, tracking lion or hunting down mammoth-sized ivory for American millionaires and European Royals, he was carousing and drinking, usually with a high-spirited, intelligent and independent woman on his arm.

Yes, he was irresponsible, says the current Baron von Blixen-Finecke, Blix's great nephew, who runs the family estate in Näsbyholm, southern Sweden. And terrible with money – as were hundreds of colonial settlers in Kenya in the early 1900s. "But my mother, who knew him well and spoke about him frequently, said there was such a warmth and friendliness about him that he could charm the flies down off the wall. You could never be mad at him, apparently. He was just too charming."

Think back to 'Out of Africa', the award-winning film of the life of his first wife, Karen Blixen, and you get, says the current Baron, "a great romance, but essentially a film about a goodie, a baddie and a good-looking lady in the middle".

The reality of their life was far more complex, and interesting, he says, because all three were independent, intelligent, complex beings whose lives were interwoven in layers of friendship, passion and love: for each other and Africa. "While Bror had numerous affairs, they weren't marks notched up on the scoreboard," the Baron says. "I remember talking to a lady recently who had an affair with him and she says when he had conquered someone, there was no one who was as in love as Bror."

Extraordinarily, although he blatantly cheated on his wives and long-term consorts, none seemed permanently to resent him for it. "If I could wish anything back of my life it

would be to go on safari once again with Bror,” Karen Blixen wrote (under the pen name Isak Dinesen) after their divorce in 1922. Or as Cockie, his second wife, wrote after he'd taken off with a mistress: “I was a fool... I have never so regretted anything in my life as leaving Blix.”

Just as his female paramours included women with a zest for life – from the pilot Beryl Markham to the rally driver Eva Dickson, who was the first woman to drive across the Sahara in a normal car – his male friends were adventurers: fellow hunters, raconteurs and socialites with a taste for the high life, from Ernest Hemingway to Edward, the Prince of Wales.

One safari, with the Vanderbilt family from America, biographer Ulf Aschen records, “was probably the most expensive ever outfitted. A fleet of 20 trucks carried equipment and stores which included cases of champagne that were drunk until two in the morning... The plane left each day for Nairobi, either to take a guest to the hairdresser or trophies to Zimmerman, the taxidermist. It brought back fresh supplies: fish and Evian water for the Vanderbilt matriarch's bath.”

A highlight of Edward, Prince of Wales' life in 1928 was hunting lion with Blix, at the recommendation of Dennis Finch-Hatton, one of his closest friends and Karen's lover. Hemingway, too, so adored the company of Blix that, after a successful fishing trip to Malindi where he caught a 100lb sailfish, he immortalised the hunter in ‘The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber’ – still the most expensive American short story ever sold by Christie's.

While Blix will be for ever remembered as the lover, the partygoer and one of East Africa's greatest white hunters, he was also, the current Baron says, an enormous lover of wildlife, having lived outdoors a great deal of his adult life. “What we are providing is the opportunity to experience much of what Blix loved and appreciated in Africa, but without the hunting.”

With that in mind, the Baron has set up a new safari company with two partners; Samantha Ford and John Ormiston, formerly of Holland & Holland. Blixen's Africa recommends the cream of glamorous photographic safari camps to prospective clients. Ranging from the colonial Bedouin Camp in Samburu Game Reserve to the ultra-chic Singita Lebombo outside the Kruger National Park, the camps all offer the ultimate in luxury; the sort of style that Blix himself would have approved, with the standard of service his set would have demanded.

As aviatrix Beryl Markham wryly observed of the safari style of Blix: “The toughest, most durable white hunter ever to shoot a charging buffalo between the eyes while debating whether his sundowner will be gin or whisky.” Flicking through the Blixen's Africa brochure, with its photographs of gramophones and chilled drinks and spectacular game, no doubt he would have approved – charging buffalo or not.

For more information on Blixen's Africa or to request a brochure, call +44 (0)207 373 9182, E-mail blixensafrica@aol.com or visit their website www.blixensafrica.com

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Opening page Before he left for Kenya, Bror Blixen, on the Näsbyholm estate, with Caroline Gyllenkrok with whom he was very much in love. However they were not allowed to marry. **Top** On safari in Kenya today – Bror would have approved. **Above** Bror on safari in Kenya, washing the hair of his lover Eva Dickson.