

a sense of place

Husband-and-wife team **ROSE BARING** and **BARNABY ROGERSON** run Eland, a travel publishing house with a difference: no guides, just books of literary excellence that open doors to other cultures. ALISON PRESSLEY talked to them about the company and its philosophy.

Eland celebrates its 25th anniversary this year. It was founded by John Hatt in 1982 in sheer frustration when he couldn't interest other publishers in reprinting the books of Norman Lewis and Martha Gellhorn. 'All of Norman Lewis had gone out of print within a couple of years of coming out, and nobody recognised the long-term value of his writing – except John,' Rose told me after I'd climbed the several flights of steep stairs up to their lovely attic premises in London's Exmouth Market, complete with family dog on the sofa. 'He realised that the Norman Lewis books gave a greater window into the tropical world than anything else. He was just furious that the books should have gone out of print.'

Hatt no longer owns the company; Rose and Barnaby took over two years ago when Hatt retired. They had long been associated, as Barnaby had written to Hatt when he was still at university, asking about a job. 'He wrote back and said I'm not going to offer you a job because it doesn't pay me let alone anybody else,' recalled Barnaby. 'But he did give me a whole afternoon of his time.'

Both Rose and Barnaby went on to become travel writers, writing for Cadogan Guides, Dorling Kindersley, newspapers and magazines. When they bought the business from John Hatt, it had no premises. 'John had worked from the top of his home,' said Rose. 'We did too, at first. Barnaby had a desk in our spare room and I had a desk at the end of our bed; our bedside tables were filing cabinets, and a computer was constantly humming at the end of the bed. We have two children, and I was being driven mad because I couldn't work out when I was a mother and when

I was a worker. I'd go and pick them up from playgroup, come home to be with them and to be mummy, and the phone would ring. Then I'd think, well they're busy playing, I'll just go upstairs and check my emails ... I'd be sitting at my computer and one of them would come up and sit on my lap and I'd get cross with the child instead of cross with the computer. We decided we had to [get premises] for the sake of our sanity. And also to expand. We were about to appoint people to join us.'

Despite the expansion (two employees were beavering away as we talked), 'our major mission is going to remain as it is, preserving literature,' Barnaby said firmly. 'We get a lot of submissions, and we might be passing up some really wonderful things. But more and more we realise that all of the books we really rate are written at the end of someone's life: they've stopped proving themselves, they've stopped being the heroic centre of the narrative, and they actually just tell the story.' Eland keeps many gems from the past in print as well as publishing some new work.

'We have started to do a series of travel anthologies,' said Rose. 'Where we've been looking for a really good book on a country or place, and failed to find one that we think really deserves to be reprinted, we've put together a selection of travel writing on that country or place. We're just in the process of



▲ Barnaby and Rose in Ireland with their daughters

◀ Some Eland bestsellers



putting together Egypt and Persia, Iran, at the moment, because we've been looking for a book about Iran for ages, we've read lots and just haven't found one that sings from beginning to end. So we've taken extracts from all sorts of travel writing.'

'We did the first one, *Marrakesh*, to see what it was like,' said Barnaby. 'Then we did *Croatia*. Out of political anger we put together a collection of contemporary travel writing about the Islamic world [*Meetings with Remarkable Muslims*], because everything I'd read in the broadsheets was wilfully malicious. With a lifetime of experience, we really knew we had to be a friend – sort of a hand across a culture.' Which is what their books offer.

Eland's list – described by William Dalrymple as 'one of the very best travel lists' – includes such luminaries as Sybille Bedford, Winston Churchill, Martha Gellhorn and Norman Lewis of course, Arthur Koestler, Gavin Maxwell, Jan Morris, Hugh Trevor-Roper and Leonard Woolf. The books themselves are beautiful objects. 'A book should look, feel and read beautifully,' said Rose with passion. 'I think guidebooks will eventually go the e-books route because it's so convenient; and also for research. But *nothing* is going to replace the pleasure of curling up on a sofa with one of our books.' 91

Find out more about the Eland list by visiting their website, www.travelbooks.co.uk or checking out your local bookshop.