Set in Stone

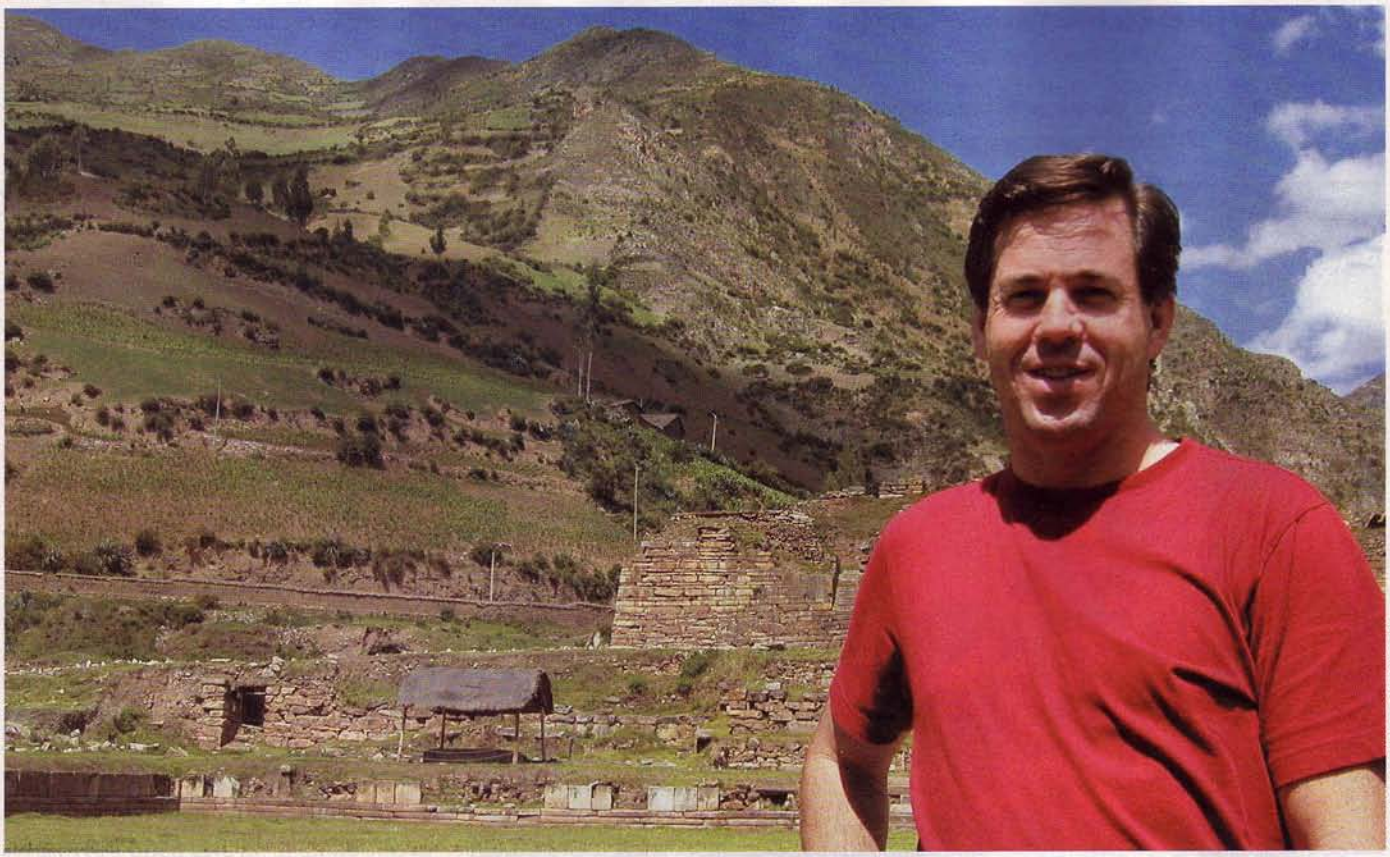
CAN JEFF MORGAN SAVE THE WORLD THROUGH ENLIGHTENED TOURISM?

THE GARDEN OF EDEN AND THE hometown of Gilgamesh. The city of Ur, where Sumerian civilization flowered and the Biblical Abraham was born. Babylon, famed for its gardens and the codes of King Hammurabi. The roots of civilization itself lie in the delta of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, the region once called Mesopotamia and home to modern Iraq. In 1923, Iraq established a board of antiquities to protect the country's estimated 100,000 historically significant sites, but decades of political unrest, war, and economic sanctions drove away most scholars and turned the looting of artifacts into a thriving industry. Since the U.S. invasion in 2003, the Cradle of Civilization is better known for car bombings and kidnappings than ancient archaeological wonders.

But Jeff Morgan '84 has another vision for Iraq—tourist destination. Within a decade, the forty-three-year-old former software executive insists, visitor dollars could be second only to oil revenue. As executive director of Global Heritage Fund (GHF), a San Francisco-based nonprofit conservancy, Morgan is employing a strategic combination of archaeological preservation and tourism promotion to transform some of world's most endangered regions. Currently, GHF has ten projects under way on five continents, from pre-Incan ruins in the highlands of Peru to the ancient city of Lijiang in China's Yunan Province. "We're going to use these sites as a cluster—to save the nature, protect the culture, provide jobs," Morgan says. "If you just go in there and restore the stones, that doesn't do it. You have to train the people, develop the tourism, help their living culture survive and prosper."

Each GHF project shares common features: UNESCO World Heritage Site ranking or nomination, proximity to an airport, and local funding commitments. And, Morgan says, each is fundamentally unique: "The sites where we're working aren't just another Roman amphitheater, Catholic church, or mosque. These sites are one-of-a-kind." Essentially, GHF serves as a broker, bringing together American philanthropists, local and national government officials, industry leaders, and the experts necessary to develop a detailed conservation plan. Once GHF approves

Road to ruins: Morgan's Global Heritage Fund aims to protect sites such as the pre-Incan temple complex of Chavín de Huántar in Peru.



COURTESY OF GLOBAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

the plan, it establishes a financial trust for the site. "We'll basically put in $250,000, get local donors to match that, then we say to the government, 'You match us.' We're able to leverage a small amount of U.S. funds to generate long-term financial support." Since 2001, Morgan has raised $2.5 million, plus an additional $1.8 million in matching grants.

The son of Silicon Valley executive James Morgan '60, MBA '63, and former California state senator Rebecca Quinn Morgan '60, the Palo Alto native studied city planning on the Hill, but followed his father into the high-tech industry after graduation. He spent a few years in Japan with Mitsui, worked for Sun Microsystems, launched a French start-up, married, started a family. Then, in the late 1990s, a friend and former nonprofit director asked him how he planned to make the world a better place.

Morgan's travels had already taken him to some of the world's poorest regions. On a vacation to Tikal, Guatemala, he'd seen first-hand how tourism could bolster a sagging economy. "I'm basically a sales and marketing guy," says Morgan, who wanted to combine his business savvy with the enthusiasm for history he'd discovered in his favorite undergraduate class—Historic American Cities, taught by regional planning professor John Reps, MRP '47. He approached Stanford archaeologist Ian Hodder to develop the idea, and the two launched Global Heritage Fund in March 2001.

Over the next year, Morgan identified some 160 sites that met the GHF criteria, then narrowed the list with help from the nineteen museum directors and archaeologists from around the world who make up GHF's senior advisory board. "We are basically cherry-picking the world," says Morgan. "Absolutely the most spectacular sites and they're sitting out there rotting." In Guatemala's Mirador Basin, where Mayan ruins are threatened by deforestation and looting, GHF spearheaded the creation of a 525,000-acre biopreserve and provided funding for park rangers and guards. For Lijiang Ancient Town, where China's ethnic Naxi minority live in a labryinthine city largely unchanged since the Ming Dynasty, GHF developed a matching-grant program to help residents restore their crumbling homes and protect them from encroaching development. "We're doing three things really well," says Morgan. "We're bringing great science to the conservation, we're bringing new financial mechanisms into place, and we're involving the communities around the sites and helping them get up to speed."

The challenges of preservation in the developing world are on vivid display in Hampi, India, once seat of the huge Vijayanagara Empire. The region's largest employer, Jindal Steel, brought an airstrip and a highway to the once-remote area, and pollution and stone quarrying have already taken their toll on the centuries-old ruins. GHF successfully launched a partnership with Jindal executives, community members, and the local government to create a master plan for land use and monument conservation. "Jeff has a magnetic personality, an infectious enthusiasm that I have yet to see anywhere else on the globe," says GHF academic advisor Michael Tomlan, PhD '47, director of Cornell's historic preservation program. "I can't tell you how impressive he is in a public forum in raising one's consciousness. He's young and very bright."

The task in Iraq is particularly daunting. GHF began in June by assembling thirty experts for a ten-day conference, cosponsored by the World Bank, to identify preservation sites in the north, which has been largely spared the post-war plunder. "All of the looting has been in the southern part of the country, in these tribal no-man's lands," says Morgan. "It's a disaster." In July, Iraq's State Board of Antiquities signed a multi-year partnership with GHF to develop master conservation plans and training programs. Already, the conservancy has hired guards to protect the sites at greatest risk from looters and partnered with University of Chicago archaeologist McGuire Gibson to create detailed maps for further planning.

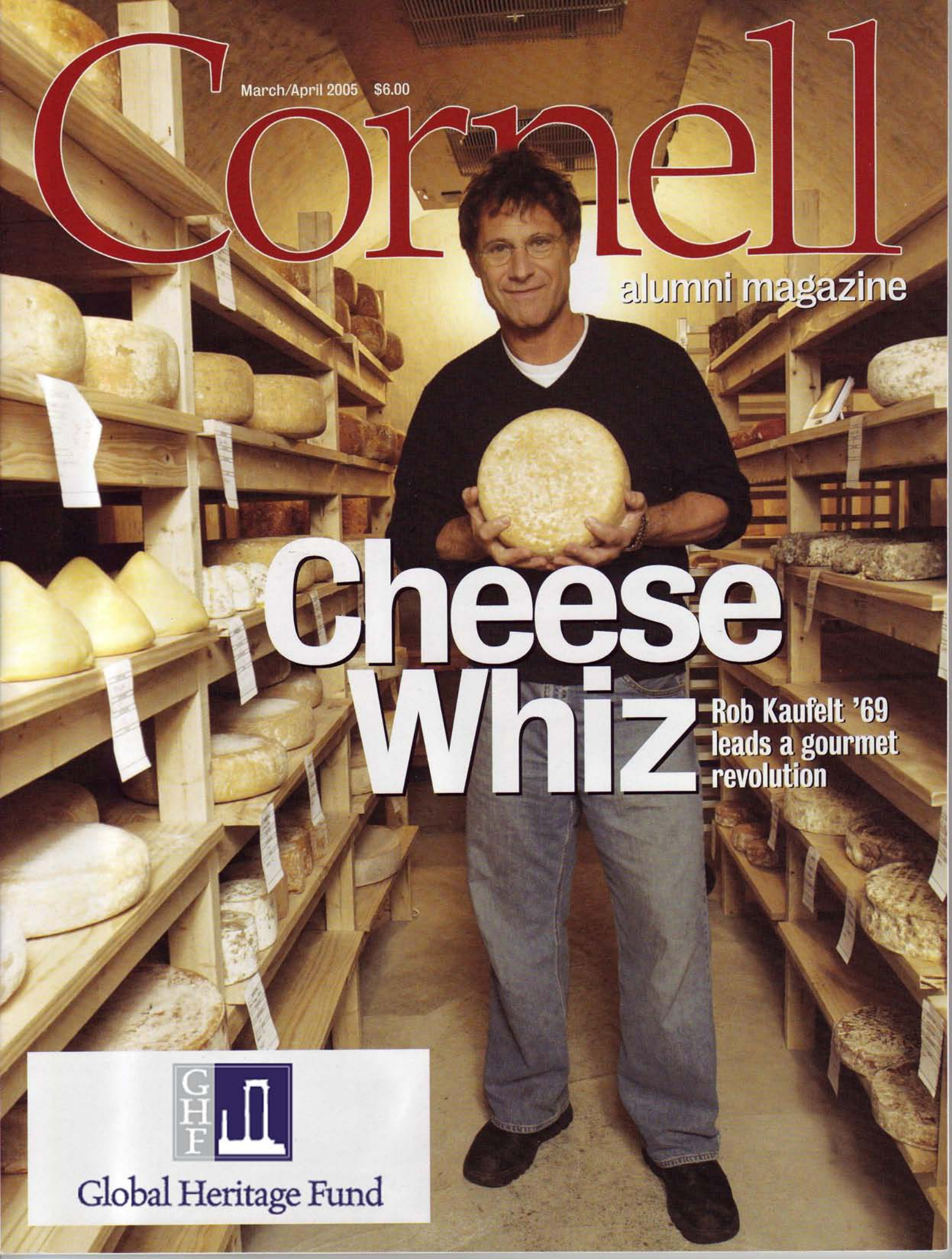
There's still the matter of the current hostilities, but, as Morgan says, "things can change very quickly." As proof, he cites Peru, terrorized for decades by the Maoist insurgent group Shining Path, now home to a thriving tourism industry anchored by the Incan ruins at Machu Picchu. "Peru, fifteen years ago, was the Shining Path," he says. "They'd taken over half the country; they were killing everybody. Now Shining Path's gone and Machu Picchu brings in one million people a year." With the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime, Cambodia now generates 30 percent of its GNP from visitors to the temple complex of Angkor Wat. In a decade or so, Morgan hopes, Iraq could be hosting busloads of tourists instead of truckloads of soldiers.

But the first priority is developing a sustainable strategy. Of the sixteen historic sites considered by Iraq experts, only five—the fortified Parthian city of Hatra; Samarra, famed for its great mosque; Ctesiphon, home to the tallest free-standing arch in the ancient world; the fortress at Al-Ukhaidir near Baghdad; and the Sumerian capital city of Ur—met all of GHF's criteria. Or, as Morgan calls it, "the Picasso Test."

"If you could save only three Picasso pieces, out of all of his paintings, pottery, everything else, which are you going to save?" he asks. "You lose these sites and you lose a huge piece of mankind."

—Sharon Tregaskis '95

Global Heritage Fund



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