

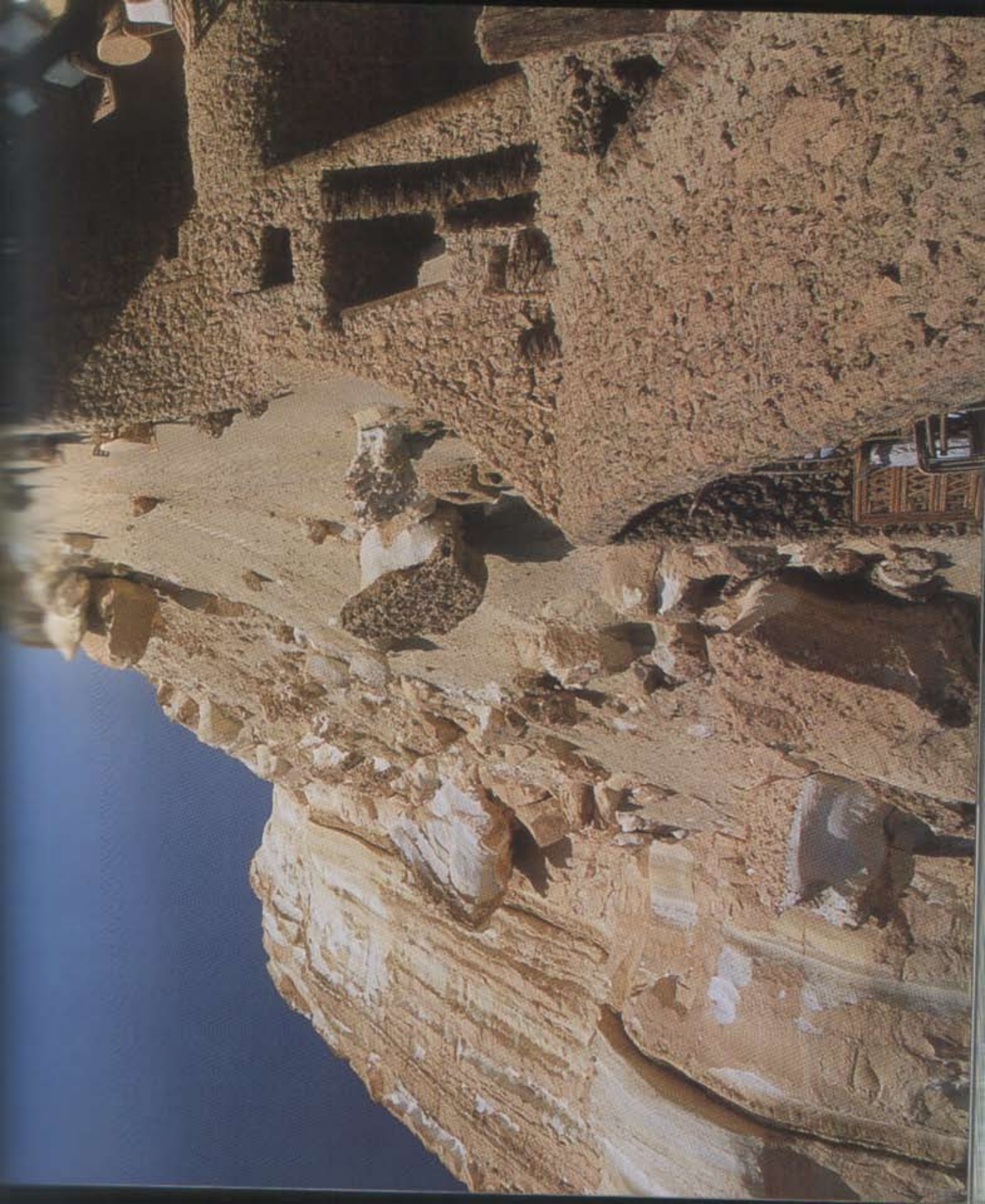
HERBERT YPMA

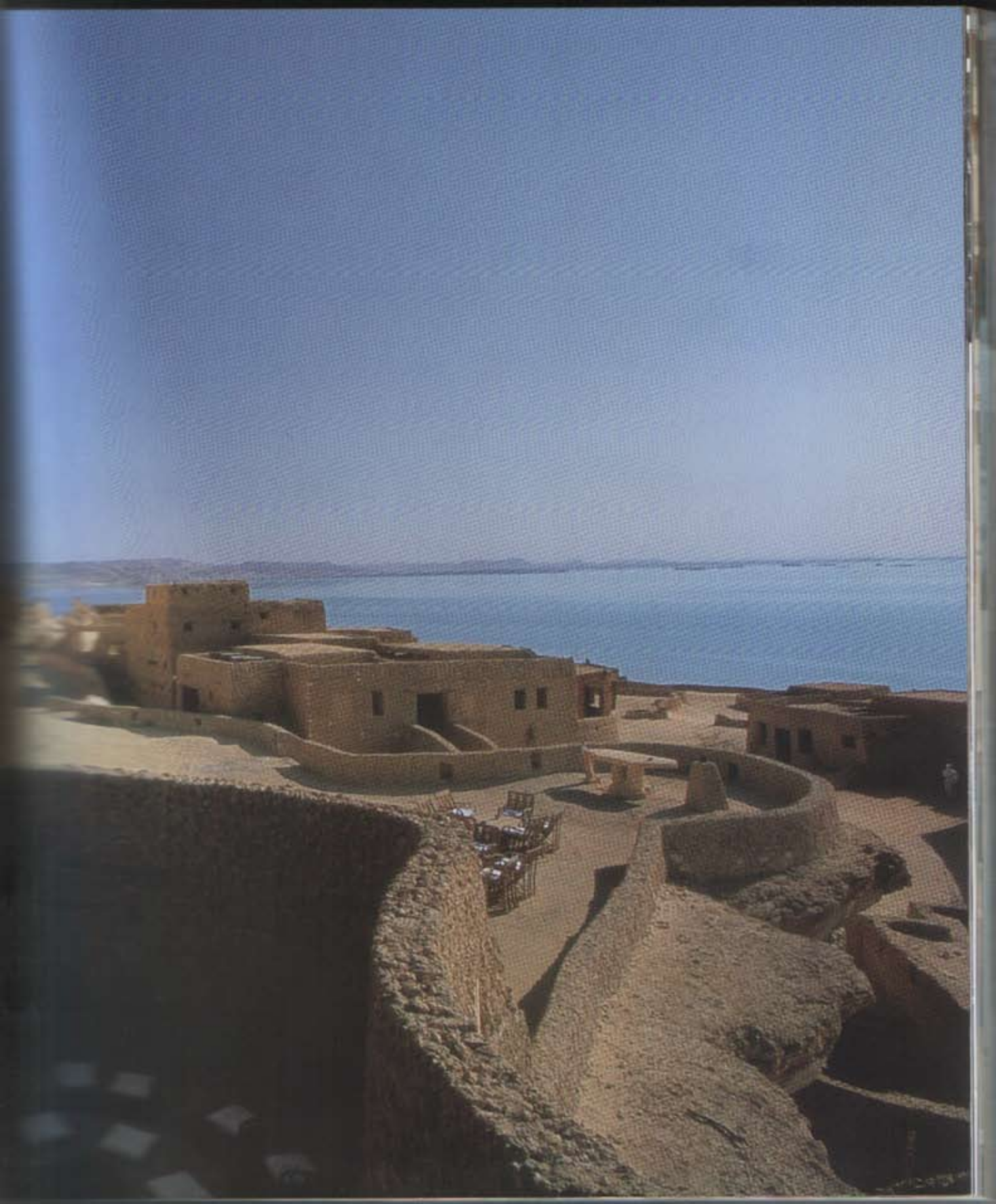
# HIP HOTELS

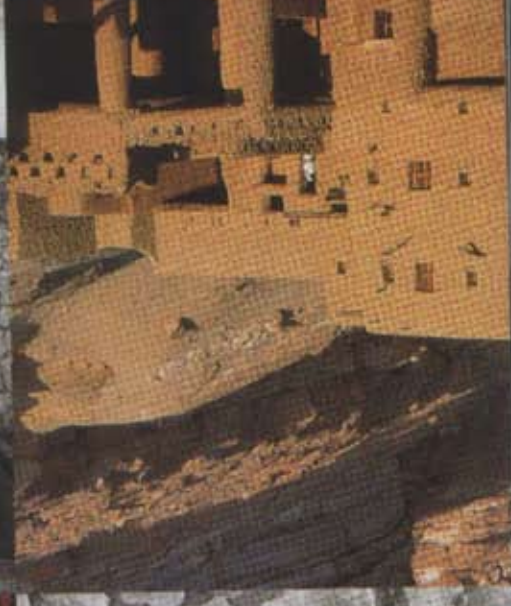
ORIENT

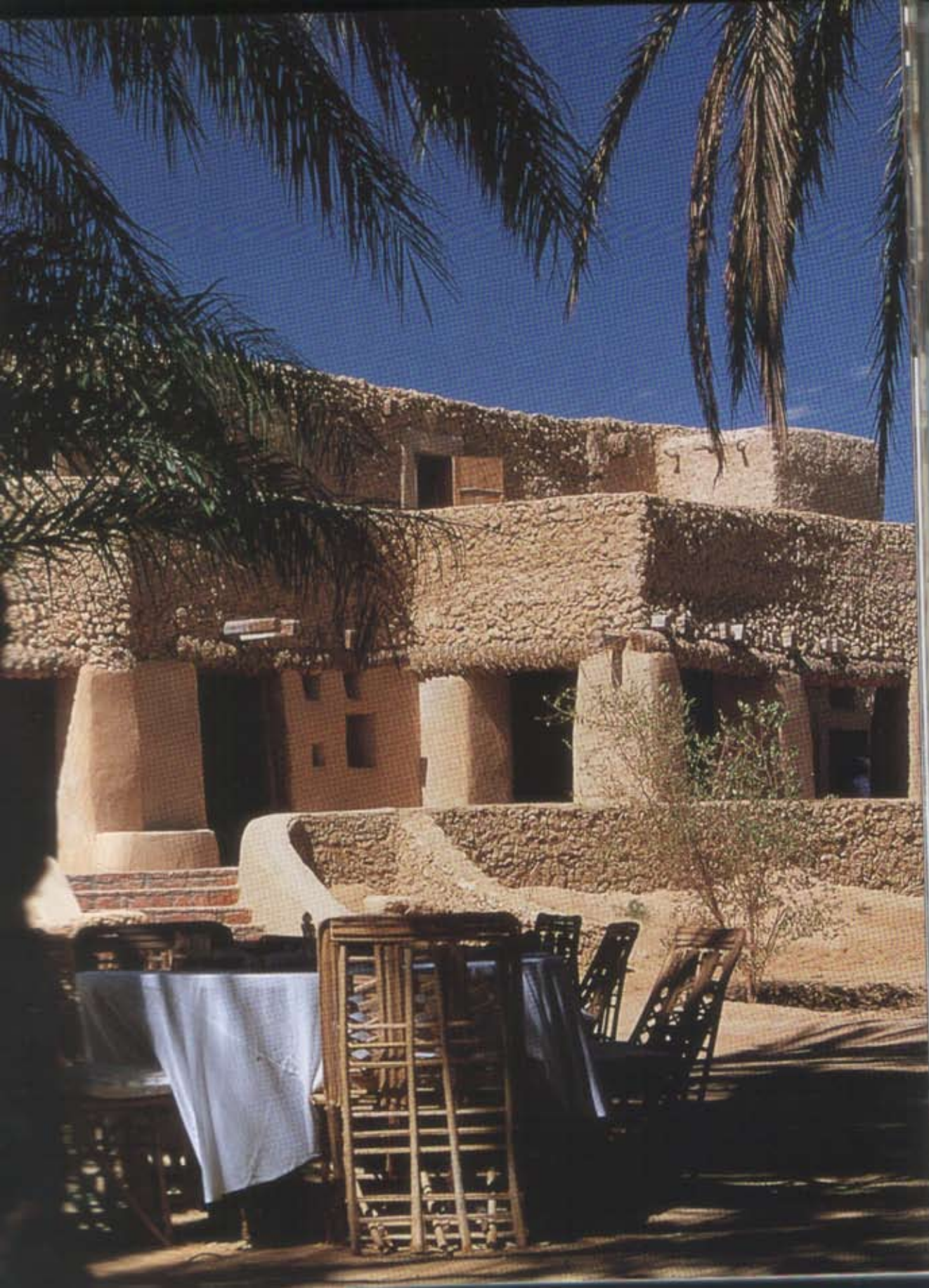
Thames & Hudson







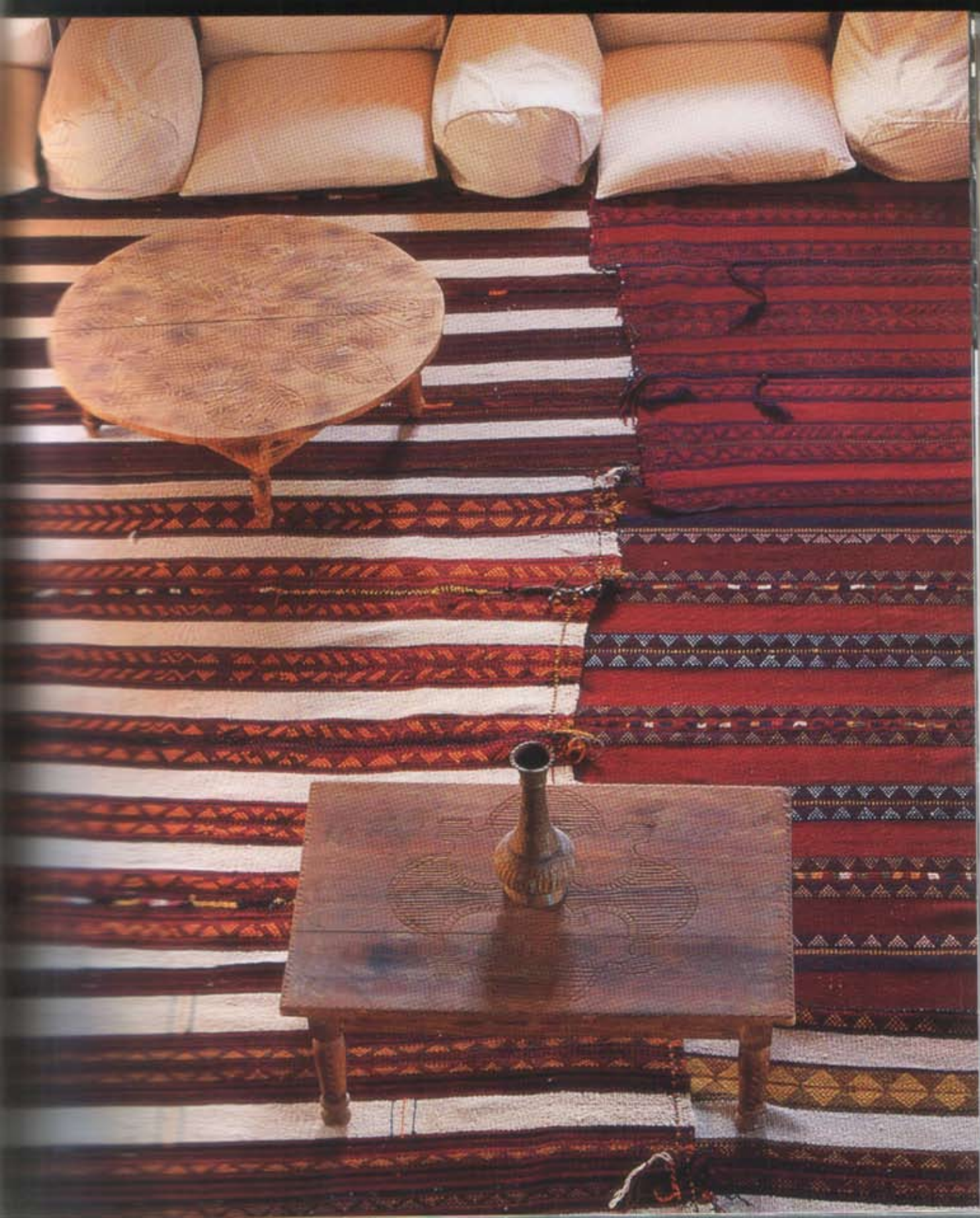




bathrooms galore (with plenty of hot water  
 and water pressure), but the real luxury of this  
 hotel is not in the bathrooms or the bedrooms.  
 It's in the experience. I defy anyone to come  
 here and not return home with at least a  
 handful of dinner party stories. Take, for  
 instance, the lake: unlikely as it may be, your  
 room is on the shore of a massive body of water  
 that dominates the scenery in every direction.  
 More unusual still, it is completely without  
 water traffic. None. No boats, no fishing craft,  
 not even the odd felucca so common on the  
 Nile. This emptiness only adds to the spare  
 machismo of the landscape. And then there's  
 the unexpected plus that the lake is brilliant  
 for swimming – or rather floating. With similar  
 remedial properties to the Dead Sea, it's so  
 salty that it's almost impossible to submerge.  
 And then there's the Sahara. Think of a  
 celluloid fantasy set in the desert: *Lawrence of  
 Arabia*, *The Mummy*, *The Scorpion King*, *Beowulf*  
*Geste* or even the sci-fi film *Dune* – any of  
 these could have been shot in the area around

Siwa. It's a vast expanse of rippling dunes  
 straight out of *The English Patient*. Even if  
 you've been to countless other deserts (which I  
 have), *nothing can prepare you for what you'll*  
*encounter here. Alone and surrounded by*  
*endless mountains of talcum-powder-quality*  
*sand, a guide will take you on a Sahara*  
*rollercoaster, where you drive with tyres*  
*deflated at breathtaking speed. And just*  
*when you think you've seen it all, you hurtle*  
*down the side of yet another mammoth dune*  
*and find yourself at a different lake. You're*  
*free to dive straight into the water, which is*  
*surprisingly cold and deep. Swimming in*  
*the middle of the Sahara's sand dunes is an*  
*experience you're not likely to forget.*  
 Appropriately enough, since we're less  
 than thirty miles from the Libyan border,  
 I remember seeing footage of Colonel Gaddafi  
 disappearing on a regular basis to camp out in  
 the desert. I'd never really understood what the  
 fascination was. It wasn't something I could  
 relate to...until Siwa.

address Adère Amellal Oasis, Sidi al-Jarfar, Siwa, Egypt  
 t +20 (0)2 738 1327 f +20 (0)2 735 5489 e info@adere.com.eg  
 room rates from US\$300







## adrère amellal

Before marching his troops eastwards to Persia, in 331 BC Alexander the Great made a little known detour to the distant oasis of Siwa. It had long been whispered that Alexander was the son of the god Amun, and he came to Siwa to consult the legendary Oracle of Amun and discover whether this was true. Though we'll never know exactly what happened there, it seems that Alexander left Siwa with the answer he was looking for. He returned from the desert to embark upon some of the greatest conquests in the history of civilization.

The most extraordinary thing about Siwa today is that the place is not so different from the time of the Macedonian conqueror's visit. Its inhabitants still speak a Berber language, *Tamazight*, and their customs and traditions have changed little. Islam may have replaced animism as the mainstay of their beliefs, but the people's way of life remains the same: there's no industry, there are more donkeys than cars, and most of them still make a living from growing and selling dates and olives.

If you stay at Adrère Amellal, the impression that time has passed by this niche in the North African Sahara is even more accentuated. The architecture, decoration and building materials (salt, timber from palm trees

and baked mud) are just as they would have been more than two thousand years ago. Add to this the fact that there are no telephones or electricity and the time warp is complete.

Adrère Amellal offers the most complete escape imaginable, not just from daily routine but from the world as we know it. Set beside an enormous saltwater lake, it's hard to believe that you're sixty feet below sea level, bang in the middle of the world's largest sand deposit. But, you may ask (as most people do), how comfortable is it to live without electricity or modern telecommunications? The answer, surprisingly perhaps, is that it's not only comfortable; it's actually quite luxurious. With the exception of being on a commercial flight, it's one of the few opportunities to exist without being telephoned, e-mailed or text-messaged. No one needs to be convinced of the romance of dining by candlelight, but the experience of a bedroom and bathroom illuminated solely by dozens of candles (all in natural beeswax) is something few of us have encountered. Suddenly your skin looks radiant and you can forget about make-up. In other words, it's conducive to total relaxation.

As an intelligent concession to the expectations of Western travellers, there are