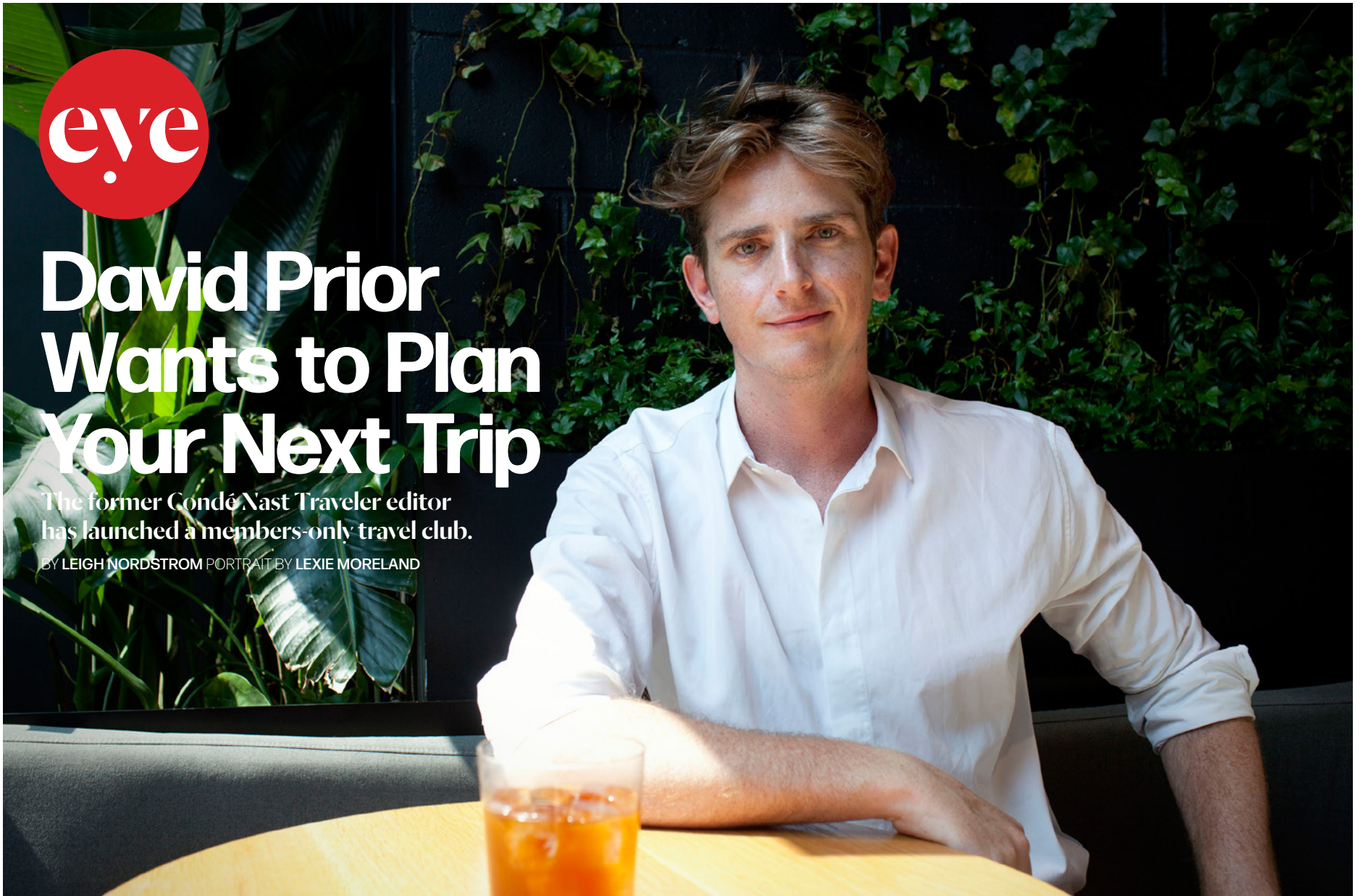




David Prior Wants to Plan Your Next Trip

The former Condé Nast Traveler editor has launched a members-only travel club.

BY LEIGH NORDSTROM PORTRAIT BY LEXIE MORELAND



On a hot day in early August, David Prior was in the Aeolian Islands off the coast of Sicily when he happened upon the perfect granita.

"Wild mulberries – from Vulcano Island – and fig granita, and then they put the cream on it," he recalls. "It's kind of the perfect analogy of time and place, because it was the right week to have mulberries and the exact right week to have figs, in that heat as well – 33 degrees [Celsius]. It was one of those emblematic experiences of time and place, which is what we're always trying to evoke and get in the travel experience. And it's simple – that's, what, two euros? But it's incredibly memorable."

The ideal combination of time and place (and the high with the low) is what Prior aims to deliver with his new travel club Prior, which he cofounded with Marc Blazer, the backer of Copenhagen's famous Noma restaurant. The Brisbane native – and lifelong traveler – has been the contributing international editor at Condé Nast Traveler and has written for T magazine, WSJ magazine, the Financial Times and others. Included on Bloomberg's "Ones to Watch" list in 2018, Prior has put his knowledge and experience of the travel industry together with his network of other editors and global industry contacts to launch a club offering members custom-planned trips worldwide, as well as access to organized group journeys with other members. But such experiences don't come cheap: membership costs \$2,500, exclusive of the trips themselves, and is available upon application, beginning Sept. 4.

Prior, who is based in Manhattan's Greenwich Village, graduated from the University of Gastronomic Sciences in Pol-



Branding from Prior.

lenzo, Italy. He began his career in the San Francisco Bay Area working with Alice Waters as the director of communications at Chez Panisse before moving into travel journalism.

His desire to launch his own business began with a trip last spring, when he took 18 people to India for 23 days.

"All quite high-profile people: Alice Waters, the guys that own Zuni Café [in San Francisco], various other people," he says, sitting in Atla restaurant in downtown Manhattan. "They were people who had tapped me over the years: 'David, where

should I go in blank, what should I do in blank?' And I said, 'Hey, look: I would like to turn my editorial point of view into an experience.' Because that's where I felt that it was going. So I created this trip – kind of a wild trip – and the rationale behind it was to try to create a cover-worthy moment, almost every day."

He contends his viewpoint as an editor is what sets him apart from a traditional travel agent. "I would do those stories, those beaches-around-the-world, for [Condé Nast] Traveler, and you'd want to slightly engineer that moment where you capture the



Rinconcillo in Seville, Spain, from one of Prior's trips.

time and the place and the right thing that really lifts people's spirits, and allows them to experience something that they otherwise might find difficult to find themselves. Because that was the purpose of the travel magazine, right? Particularly 20 years ago," he says. "What I tried to do was elevate those experiences and also find the essence of those experiences."

He brought a few photographers with him and began posting the content on Instagram, which eventually was seen by Blazer, who approached him about going into business

together.

"Experience is the new luxury' is the giant cliché, but it just happens to be true," Prior says. "You could do the grandest gesture, but then the tiniest moment could also be the most memorable – so what we try to do is that spectrum. The middle is the thing we don't do: kind of high road and low road."

He works contacts worldwide to create these diverse experiences for his clients.

"When I went out the door at Condé Nast Traveler [last May], they said I had contacts with everyone from the fisherman

to the prince," he says. "What we do is try to activate that spiderweb of networks to create experiences that exist outside of the travel industry currently. Very often you can have a guide, say, in Barcelona, who presses play on 'OK, this is the La Boqueria,' and they just do the spiel. But instead, what is it to have the architect that is preserving the Gaudi, and to ask them if we could do a private dinner in there for something special?"

There is no formula for acceptance in his new club; he stresses that curiosity and character are the most important things. "I think interesting and interested people travel for diversity, to open their eyes, ears, hearts, stomachs. It's the ultimate sensory experience," he says.

The club began accepting a few token members six months ago – "people we couldn't say no to" – who include the likes of Aurora James, Deborah Needleman and John Derian.

"I've very deliberately figured out people with specializations all around the world. I've taken a lot of people from different industries with different perspectives," he says. "A lot of people from the fashion industry are working with us: Our board is full of people from the fashion industry, like Fiona Golfar, who was the editor at large at British Vogue for 25 years; Deborah Needleman; Anjali Lewis, who is the cmo at Alexander Wang, and John Mehas, who is the president at Tory Burch. How we're thinking about it is establishing a brand."

He's even taken inspiration from Diana Vreeland, invoking the phrase "Why don't you...?" into Prior's travel literature. "It's about imagination, it's not just about ticking an Instagram box," he says.