

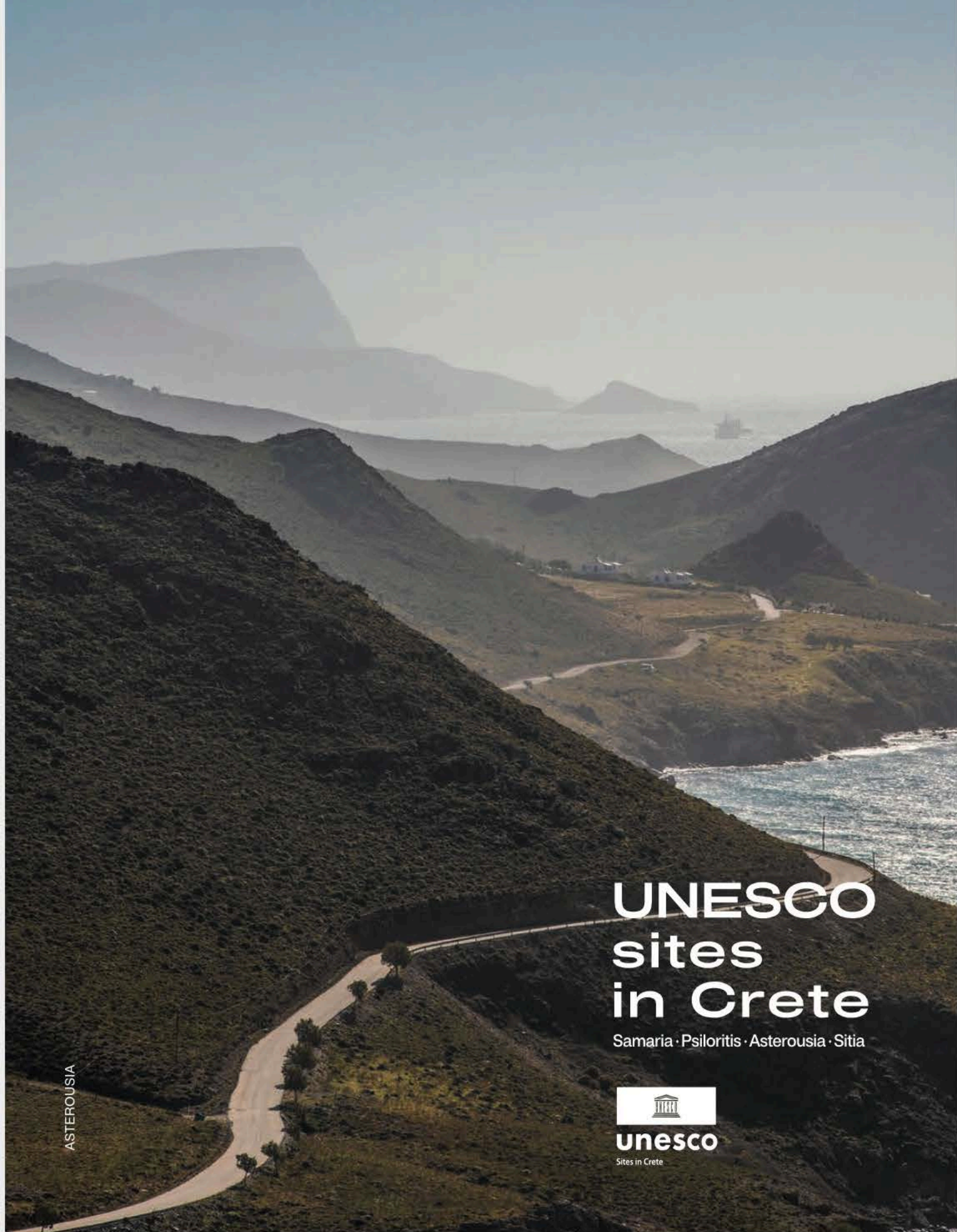
10.2022

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC



MINDS OF THEIR OWN

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HAVE COMPLEX EMOTIONS—
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EXPLORE

INNOVATOR

CATHERINE DE MEDICI JAFFEE

BY JORDAN SALAMA

PHOTOGRAPH BY BENJAMIN RASMUSSEN

She produces podcasts at the crossroads of science and social justice.

Catherine de Medici Jaffee has always been surrounded by storytellers. The first was her father—a literature-loving rancher with a radio show who, even when terminally ill, led their family on global travels. Following in that adventurous spirit, Jaffee spent time in India and Japan, learning how well-told tales can advance religious, political, and social change.

She then turned storytelling into a career and at first considered creating documentaries. But something felt off, she says: “The camera would come out, and the people stopped smiling.” Jaffee wondered whether her subjects would feel more comfortable speaking into a microphone than being filmed.

Her solution: podcasts, both less intimidating and more accessible. In 2017 she founded House of Pod, a nonprofit that helps would-be podcasters tell stories centered on their communities, which often lack a voice. A National Geographic Explorer, Jaffee recently worked with Angolan biologist and environmental anthropologist Kerllen Costa on *Guardians of the River*, part of the National Geographic Society’s Okavango Wilderness Project, which surveys and seeks to protect the biodiverse river basin in southwestern Africa. In 2021 *Guardians of the River* won the Tribeca Festival’s Podcast Non-Fiction Award.

Another virtue of podcasts, Jaffee says, is that “audio moves with you.” She has many more stories on the way. □

The National Geographic Society has funded the work of audio storytelling specialist Catherine de Medici Jaffee since 2012. Learn more about its support of Explorers at natgeo.com/impact.

