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IT'S A PLANE ... PAGE 7

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Simply Irresistible

BY DOUGLAS A. CAMPBELL
SENIOR WRITER

W

illiam Doyle's words, spoken in the sailing sanctuary that is the New York Yacht Club's oak-paneled model room in Manhattan, sounded like blasphemy.

The house lights had been dimmed during the dinner to honor the 100th anniversary of Nathanael G. Herreshoff's timeless design, the New York 30 sloop. Spotlights shining in the glass model cases were the room's only illumi-



NY-30 No. 9, Amorita

The timeless New York 30 celebrates 100 years, still mesmerizing the sailors devoted to her charms

nation. A Caen-stone fireplace rose a full story into the shadows above the eight linen-draped dining tables, like an altar for the assembled boat lovers. Standing before the lectern, Doyle named the 18 original NY-30 owners — J.P. Morgan, Alfred Vanderbilt, George Roosevelt and the rest — and went on to explain what, for him, was the reason for the assembly.

"They were wood," he said of the NY-30s. "They

were well-constructed. They were nice boats. But they really weren't that remarkable. They were about like the J/24s of 1905 in their status."

One expected gasps of horror, but there were none as Doyle continued his explanation of why, 100 years after the club ordered 18 of the boats from Herreshoff, there were a dozen of them still around, half of them still sailing and several others undergoing restoration.

"The fleet really lasted because of the people," Doyle said.

Certainly the oak frames that Herreshoff shaped in 1905 would have all rotted under the more durable longleaf yellow pine planking and the hackmatack knees without the generations of adoring owners. The allure of these boats, however, came from their stiletto-sharp lines and powerful sail plan with enough canvas

for a small circus tent. Whether by form or function, people have been drawn to the boat as much as they have cuddled it.

David Stimson, a professional boatbuilder who this year restored NY-30 No. 1, *Alera*, at the Boothbay Harbor, Maine, boatyard he manages, is enthralled by the function. "It is not only a fast boat but wholesome, being able to take a fair amount of wind and weather without lying down," says Stimson. He recently sailed the century-old boat to Newport, R.I., for a centennial event. "We had one four- or five-hour stretch to Provincetown [Mass.], 25 to 30 knots of wind, 4- to 6-foot rollers on the beam. She took all that energy and transferred it into forward motion," he recalls with admiration.

Carlo D'Antonio, owner of NY-30 No. 15, *Banzai*, is dazzled by the form. "I love that boat," says the cabinetmaker from Martha's Vineyard who spent four years restoring his boat. "Tremendous beauty. So pleasing to look at, to my eyes."

Doyle, who crews aboard NY-30 No. 9, *Amorita*, told his New York Yacht Club audience that the NY-30 was spawned in September 1904, when the club formed a committee to establish a one-design class that would qualify to compete in club races. In November 1904, Nathanael Herreshoff presented the club with the specifications of a boat with a 30-foot waterline and a cost of \$4,000 each, but with no plans. Rudder magazine later said that

“It was the centennial year

“every man of this group bought a boat on faith.”

Doyle said the club members chose Herreshoff as the designer because he could also build the boats, while another designer would have had to subcontract the construction. And they wanted the boats ready to sail in the spring. By Jan. 20, 1905, the first NY-30, *Alera*, was completed by the Herreshoff production line and the last boat, *Anemone II*, was finished on April 18. The boats came fully equipped, Doyle said — everything on board, from two anchors and eight life jackets to one scrub brush and one dust pan. Every piece of equipment had to be on board during a New York Yacht Club race, Doyle told his audience, because of a club rule that required each boat to have a 30-foot waterline. The NY-30 wasn't quite low enough in the water until the last pillowcase was on board.

Doyle speaks of the boat's "aura" and tells the story of an owner who sailed NY-30 No. 11, *Oriole*, during the 1950s. Returning from a sail one day, he collapsed

on the dock. His dying words, Doyle says, were to plead that someone take care of his boat.

As the fleet begins its second century, more stories about NY-30 ownership are coming forth. Consider, for example, the current owner of *Cara-Mia*, NY-30 No. 14. Alfred Slanetz found her in a cornfield outside of Newport, R.I., in 1991 and "fell in love with the long, sleek lines." He says he patched the boat together and sailed her for a year before he realized she needed serious repairs. The original plan was a partial restoration, but Slanetz found that Herreshoff had not just slapped the boat together. Rather, her strength was a product of detailed engineering, and that demanded a total rebuild.

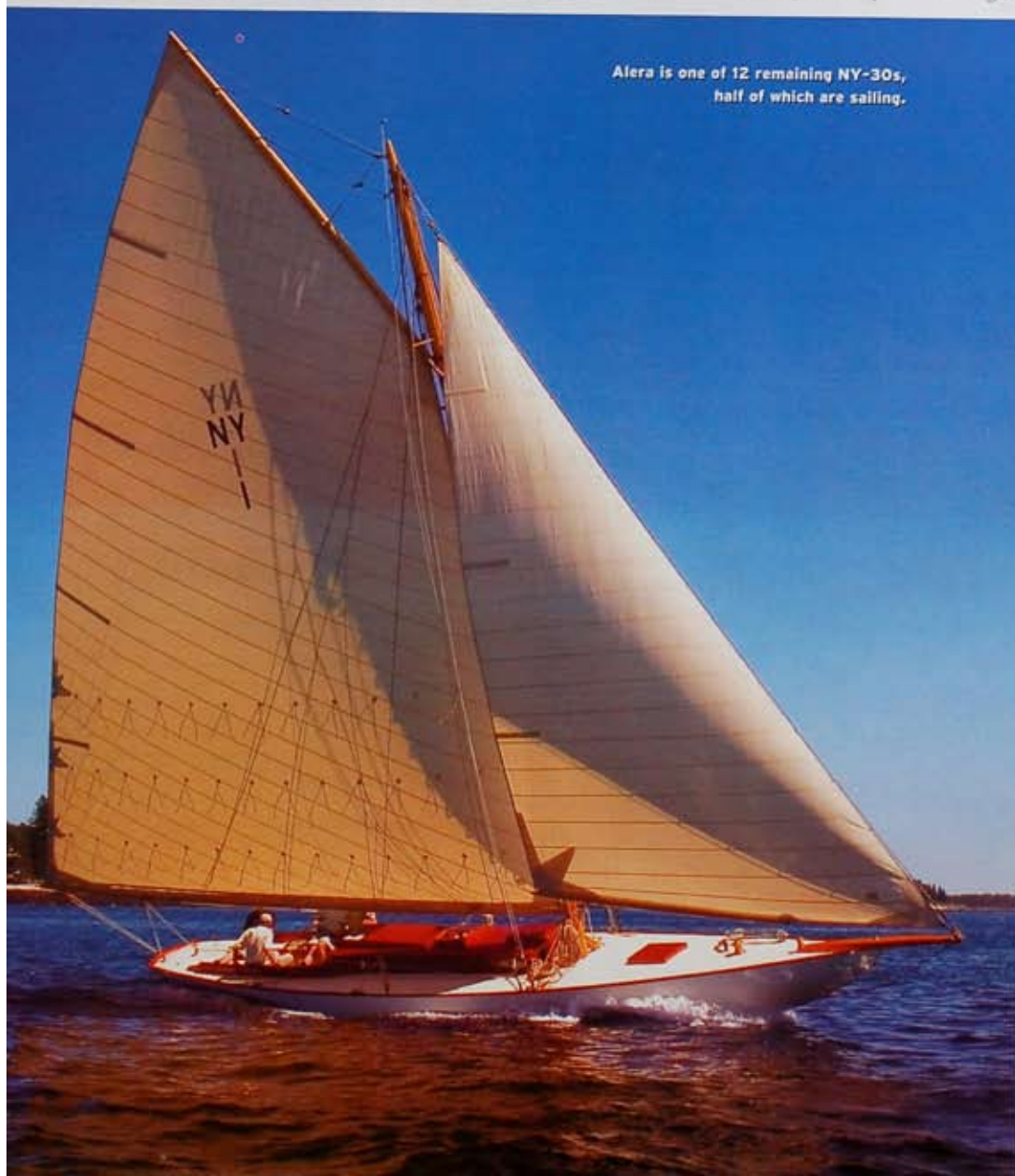
It was 2000 when *Cara-Mia* was relaunched. By then, the boat — which originally had no engine — had an auxiliary tucked inside an Edwardian-paneled box that complements the restored woodwork throughout the interior. The yawl rig that someone had given *Cara-Mia* was replaced with authentic spars, and the hardware was brought back to original specifications.

"They're just beautiful boats and wonderful sailboats," Slanetz says. "The people in the club that originally owned these boats ... could have bought any boat they wanted" but were drawn in by the modest sailboat. "You touch the tiller and the boat turns up or down," Slanetz says. "Exquisitely sensitive" is his term. He credits this quality and the fact that a NY-30 is an "exciting boat to sail" for keeping the fleet alive.

It was a purely physical attraction that led Samuel Birger to romance *Carlita*, NY-30 No. 8. The naming consultant from Newport was taking a class at the International Yacht Restoration School "for fun more than anything else" when he went to a boatyard for some wood. There he saw *Nautilus*, NY-30 No. 16. "There's still a scar where my jaw hit the floor," he jokes. He wanted his own NY-30 and in time found a hull in Greenport, N.Y., which he bought at auction in 1997.

"She had been covered over in fiberglass," Birger says. The sheer had been raised by two planks, and a Rhodes-style cabin house had replaced the original, squared Herreshoff cabin with its trademark oblong ports. The gaff rig had been replaced with aluminum spars and a Marconi sail plan. Despite these changes, *Carlita's* heritage was obvious in her lines, Birger says. "When the fiberglass was removed, we found a hull of original planking in remarkably good condition. The knots were still leaking sap." The proof of her pedigree was the Herreshoff build number

Alera is one of 12 remaining NY-30s, half of which are sailing.



and Alera was hull No. 1”

carved into the keelson. He began a restoration.

“Right now, she is a bit better than halfway done,” Birger says, with new ribs, keel, deck beams and decking. “She needs someone to take her the rest of the way back on the water. That’s where she needs to be.”

The boatyard where Birger had fallen for the NY-30 was Narragansett Shipwrights, whose owner, Frank McCaffery, had bought Nautilus in 1988 and begun a slow restoration, hoping one day to sail the boat himself. In 15 years, he had completely restored the hull, but illness forced him to sell the boat.

William Pedersen, a Manhattan architect, and his wife, Elizabeth, bought the boat and continued the restoration. They had owned the L. Francis Herreshoff yacht Araminta, which they gave to the Mystic (Conn.) Seaport Museum. Pedersen had always thought of Araminta as a feminine vessel. Nautilus he saw as masculine, “very powerful.”

Directing his architect’s attention to his new old boat, Pedersen decided that the interior needed some changes. “I designed the interior differently from the original for a number of reasons,” he says. “Most people who cruise nowadays, they eat 90 percent of the time in the cockpit. The galley was up forward and not accessible, and I was not a fan of the quarterberths. We moved the galley back,” making it larger and closer to the cockpit. The couple removed the backs from the two settees to expose the curve of the hull. They eliminated the quarter berths, creating storage space under the cockpit. And they relocated the head so that there was “complete visual openness” that allows a view of the entire, long cabin top.

For the last three years, the Pedersens have cruised from their Shelter Island, N.Y., home port, sailing as far as Nantucket and Martha’s Vineyard, where another of the NY-30s, No. 15, Banzai, has made its home for the last 17 years.

Carlo D’Antonio bought the boat in 1988 from a friend, hauled her to his yard and then spent four years working by himself, replacing everything from the sheer plank up. He relaunched Banzai in 1992 but took another year to build and step a hollow Sitka spruce mast before he could sail her. Since then, D’Antonio has sailed his boat every year.

“She’s like a work of art, I think,” says the cabinet-maker. “When I put the sail covers on her and set her away for the evening, she’s beautiful. A lot of [N.G. Herreshoff’s] boats are kind of homely, but I think the NY-30 is beautiful. ... I was awed by the way she performed. She handles like a small boat. She turns on a dime. You can zigzag out of a harbor and feel comfortable on her. When you’re out on heavy seas, she doesn’t bob too much. She just charges right through.” Banzai, despite D’Antonio’s devotion, is no museum piece. He sails her at least once a week all season.

It was with the hope that Banzai and several of the other NY-30s would be able to sail to Newport that Doyle and his boss at a Newport sponsorship consulting firm, Jed Pearsall, owner of NY-30 No. 9, Amorita,



Alera was found in Ontario and restored in Maine at Boothbay Harbor Shipyard.

began planning for the 100th anniversary celebration. On the NY-30 Web site (ny30.org), on a page titled “Rebirth of a Class,” Doyle noted that only 16 of the original 18 NY-30s had been accounted for. No. 1, Alera, and No. 17, Phryne, were “somewhere out there just waiting to be discovered.”

The Web page was created some time before the anniversary year began. In December, at approximately the 100th anniversary of the signing of the deal between the New York Yacht Club and Herreshoff Manufacturing Co. for construction of the NY-30, another business deal was transacted. The Samples boatyard in Boothbay Harbor, Maine, was sold to new owners who hired David Stimson, a veteran wooden boatbuilder, as manager.

“One of the things I wanted to do was get the yard [now called Boothbay Harbor Shipyard] known for restoration of plank-on-frame boats,” Stimson recalls. “I told the new owner one of the best things we could do would be to choose a vessel that needed restoration, a showpiece.” Stimson discovered the lost Alera in Hamilton, Ontario, and in two weeks had her in his yard in Boothbay Harbor. “I used to own a P-Class sloop named Seneca that was built two years later by Herreshoff. I’m fond of that type of boat,” Stimson says. “When I found out it was the centennial year and Alera was hull No. 1, it seemed like the best thing that was available.”

Alera’s interior had been removed, as had the deck and rig. “The only thing left was her shell,” Stimson says. “On Jan. 2, we had a 100th birthday party for the boat here in the shipyard. On Jan. 3, we started the restoration.” The ambitious goal was to have the boat ready for the NY-30 centennial celebration in July in

Newport. “We decided to concentrate on the hull and interior and get subcontractors to do things like building the spar, deckhouse, hatches and joinery.” The yard hired Maynard Bray, the former shipyard supervisor at Mystic Seaport Museum and an authority on Herreshoff yachts, as a consultant on authenticity.

When Alera was built, Herreshoff Manufacturing Co. had a work force of 300 specialized employees, Stimson says, and the company had developed standardized procedures for every element of boat construction. Stimson started with a crew of five. In May, he doubled the work force. By July, the boat had been launched, rigged and was ready for the big party in Newport. Stimson — with his wife, Tamora, and sons Abraham, 21, and Nathaniel, 18 — boarded Alera and sailed straight for Provincetown, Mass., seldom needing the engine. They sailed on to Nantucket and then to Newport, where they joined Amorita, Oriole, Cara-Mia, Banzai and Nautilus for a weekend of fun races in the Narragansett Bay fog and haze.

Met also by an unrestored NY-30 with a Marconi rig, No. 7, originally called Tabasco but now named Helen, the yachts raised their gaffs and spread their sails in light winds. As in any reunion, the boats were gathered for group portraits. World-famous photographers clustered around them and flew overhead in helicopters. Awards were given. A few owners of boats still needing restoration looked for new hands to take over their projects. And when the weekend was over, the boats, as doted on as any family pet, sailed back to their home ports.

Would they still be around to return in 2105 for their bicentennial anniversary?

“Absolutely!” says D’Antonio. ■