



SECOND WIND

MANY OF US DREAM OF OWNING A PART OF HISTORY,
BUT IT TAKES A CERTAIN KIND OF PERSON TO TAKE ON A
YACHT FROM ANOTHER ERA, DISCOVERS *SAM FORTESCUE*



First launched in 1939, staysail schooner Eros is a regular fixture on the Med to this day



There is something almost ethereal about the sight of a yacht from another era. You'll know exactly what I mean if you've ever been passed by a tall ship under a press of sail or watched entranced as dozens of wooden Metre boats spar gracefully around a Baltic racecourse. With their long overhangs, elaborate rigs and gleaming brightwork, they are travellers in time, infusing their surroundings with the patina of the past.

It is an illusion, of course. Get a little closer, and you can see the deck hands wearing modern clothing, or hear the race crew yelling urgently about pressure and counting down to the lift before bellowing "send it!", just like their counterparts on modern yachts. They may hide it artfully behind fin-de-siecle panelling, but these boats often pack many mod cons, from flat-screen televisions to air conditioning. And yet there is something that sets them, and their owners, apart.

One of the best-known classic yacht brokers, Barney Sandeman, describes it like this. "There are a lot of people who would like to own a classic but it's a very special person that will commit. They are very passionate people who are careful what they do with their money, but owning a classic is not something they have suddenly decided to do. It's in their DNA. It's a love affair, something they can't do anything about."

Let's tackle that point about money head on. There is a sense that classic yachts are more costly to take on than their modern counterparts. Not so, says Ed Kane, owner of the exquisitely restored Sparkman & Stephens yawl *Bolero*

among others. "The normal maintenance and wear and tear is like on any other new boat," he says. "It's not inexpensive, but not out of line with a new 73-footer [22-metre]. Dockage and crew are the biggest costs, and that is the same regardless of the age of the boat."

The nature of that maintenance might be a little different, however. Or as Daniele Canelli, owner of the stately 26-metre gaff ketch *Javelin* explains it: "They do not need more maintenance, only more love." Instead of technical prowess with hydraulics, load cells and an arsenal of toys, there is instead acres of varnishing.

"It's so much work that you can't do it yourself," says Wilfried Beeck, who owns two towering 12-Metres - *Trivia*, designed and built by Camper & Nicholson in 1937, and the gaff-rigged *Cintra*, a 1909 Fife. "I have a full-time employee who does nothing else, but we share him across our two 12s. When you see little damages, you sand and varnish it during the season. Every little cut is always varnished immediately. It is constant maintenance." Both boats were acquired in the Med and brought back to the Baltic, where a vigorous 12-M racing circuit has developed. Beeck says that the difference in maintenance requirements is stark. "Two seasons in the Med, and you realise that

you have to varnish the boat three times a year, as opposed to once a year in the Baltic."

To buy a classic 12-Metre (which will in fact measure between 14 metres and 22 metres overall), you'd be looking at anything from £900,000 to £2.25 million, depending on the condition and pedigree of the boat. Beeck spends about £90,000 per year on each boat, including everything from mooring to insurance and repairs. Charter income covers half of that, but some spend twice as much. "The maintenance cost of the boat is much lower than many people think. You need a boatbuilder working on it constantly, but when you do, the cost is low. If you neglect the boat for three or four seasons, the cost can be huge."

FIXER UPPER

Neglect in the classic boat world is part of the landscape. It is at once a threat and an opportunity, both endangering the survival of

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BUYING A CLASSIC <#R#>

these beautiful boats and providing the raw material needed to transform them into head-turners and jaw-droppers. The sense of preserving a small but important, beautiful fragment of history is what drives some of the today's keenest owners.

"We're all keeping these things alive for the sake of history," says Cameron Ridell, co-owner of *Eros*, a fine example of a staysail schooner built in 1939. "These classics are floating museums, but they are also operational. It's a strange way to treat something that should be in a museum: take it out and beat it!"

Ed Kane, owner of 22-metre *Bolero*, believes that what he calls the "provenance" of the yacht is key to engaging with a restoration. "We spent as much time learning about the history and the ownership - its race record, where it sailed, its reputation - as you do studying the actual boat itself."

In contrast to maintenance, restoration can be ruinously expensive, so an exhaustive survey is critical to understanding what you're taking on. The work itself is a slow, precise process where traditional woodworking skills and an experienced eye are key attributes. Some owners insist there is a place for modern techniques

such as laser measurement and epoxy sheathing, but if the aim is simply to build a modern boat that looks like a classic, it is better to start from scratch elsewhere.

Tara Getty is in the final throes of restoring his fourth yacht - an S&S yawl called *Baruna* which belongs to the same design family as *Bolero*, and he takes comfort in a degree of wonkiness. At one point, his skipper and project manager Tony Morse rang him from Robbe & Berking's yard in Flensburg, Germany, with the news that the new stainless-steel water tanks they'd bought fitted on the starboard side, but not on port. "That's good news in a way, because it means it is still the *Baruna* it's meant to be," says Getty. "It's most definitely skew!"

Besides the basic fabric of the boat herself, there is a challenge in finding correct or appropriate deck fittings and equipment. Unsympathetic refits or desperate patch-ups can



Owner Daniele Canelli carefully restored 26m gaff ketch Javelin in a manner true to her original spirit

make it hard to identify what is an original part. "You need to be very careful not to detract from a classic," says Getty. "We found one original cleat, so we're having it recast. We also found the clock and barometer, but it took us a while to verify that they were the originals. We had to check against the pictures in the archive at the Mystic Seaport [museum]."

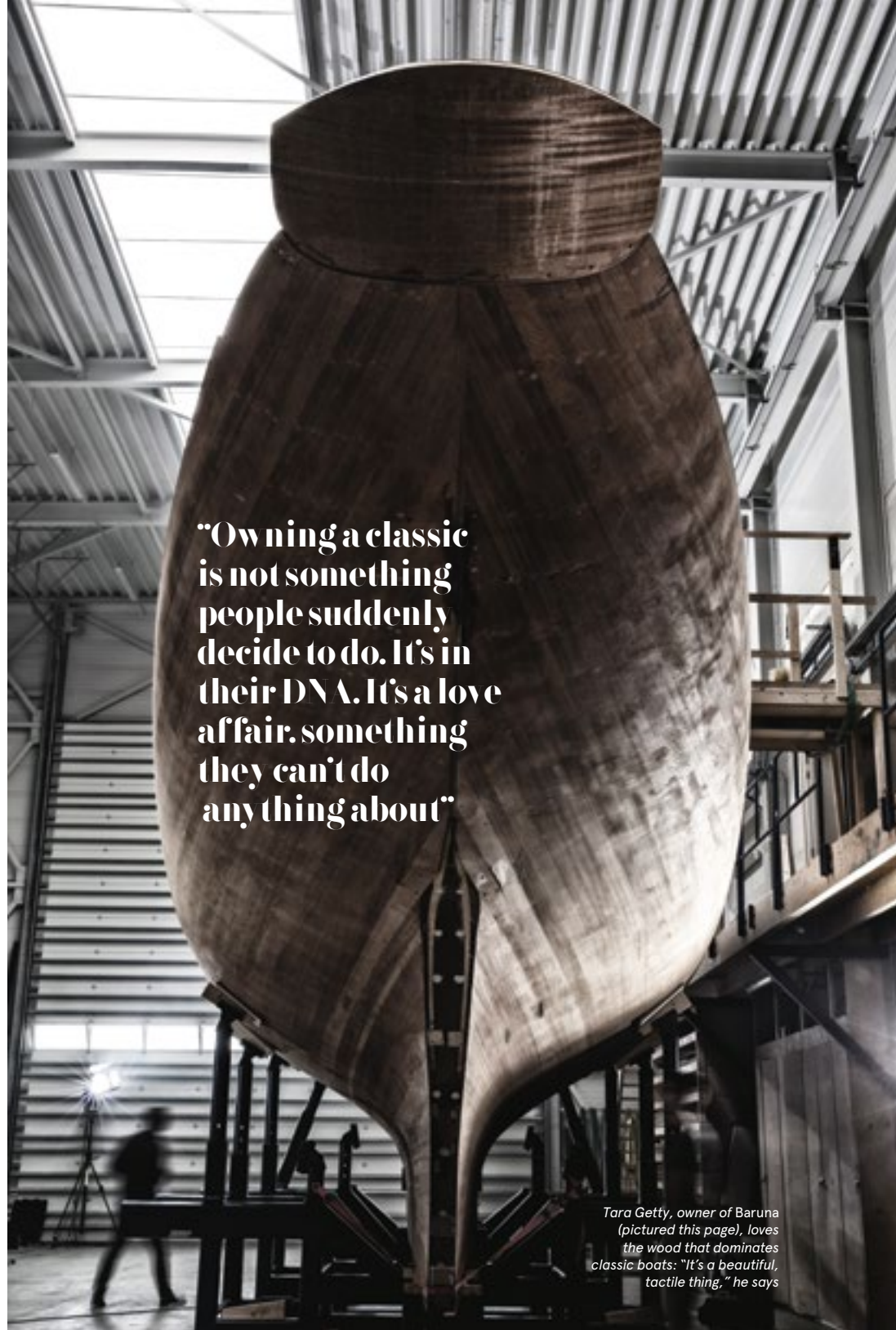
Restorations can yield up some glorious nuggets, like time capsules from the past. Getty recounts how they had to remove tonnes of concrete from the bilges of his yacht *Bluebird*



when she was brought back to life. Using pneumatic drills, they were stunned as they began to uncover the metal forms of the original deckhouse windows. Naturally, they cleaned them and returned them to their rightful place.

And when Daniele Canelli rescued *Javelin*, a process that required 57,000 working hours, they found more hidden treasure. The refit was extraordinarily detailed, touching every part of the boat's fabric and interior, from the oak frames to the fireplace and the bathtub in the master cabin. And when they removed the mainmast, there it was: a silver shilling coined in 1884, wedged into the oak step for good luck. It was eventually replaced under the new mast. He compares the process to that of philology "You must be prepared to take all the actions necessary to give a new life to a literary work, respecting the work and the intent of the author. There is nothing worse than a boat refitted by someone who does not respect her spirit."

There are other surprises. As word gets around about the rescue of a yacht, people emerge with tales, documents and sometimes even whole fittings. "We're getting lots of information from



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Tara Getty, owner of *Baruna* (pictured this page), loves the wood that dominates classic boats: "It's a beautiful, tactile thing," he says

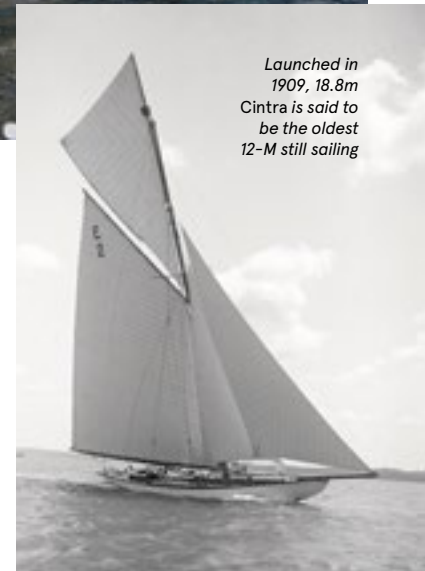
people who knew *Baruna*," says Getty. Far from looking down their noses at a restoration and critiquing every detail, the classic boat fraternity has been helpful, says Kane. "People give me magazine articles, things that say *'Bolero'*, or used to be on the boat. I even have some leather-bound scrapbooks that people have collected."

WHY OWN AT ALL?

When you take on the ownership of a classic yacht, you are making yourself a public figure.

That's because people don't just stand and admire these yachts as they screech round the mark or slide into their berth; they want to come and talk to the crew, the owner and admire the details. They galvanise people around them.

"When I go into a yacht club, and people know that I own *Bolero*, I never have to buy my own drink," laughs Kane. "I've probably saved enough on drinks to buy another boat!" He has been invited to join eight clubs around the world, all keen to have *Bolero* on the membership list.



Launched in 1909, 18.8m Cintra is said to be the oldest 12-M still sailing

Classic boats are a natural conversation starting point for many. "One of the most fun parts of all this is the people we meet in all sorts of wonderful places," says Cameron Riddell, co-owner of *Eros*. "The locals come to the boat because it's big and beautiful, and they turn out to be really interesting themselves. The human contact is one of the most rewarding parts of the classic yachting scene."



In a different way, Wilfried Beeck would agree. His 12-M *Trivia* was and still is a mean, lean racing boat of astonishing beauty. He always wanted nothing more than to campaign her, and his first challenge was to find the crew of 16 people necessary to do so. "You learn quickly that you can't win in the first season. Building the crew is the bigger concern, not so much the maintenance of the boat." After that, you have to find your place in the crew. He was always keen to helm, but not all owners do. One of the joys, he says, is the immediate, honest feedback you can get from a crew. "Most of us would love to have that in our own companies."

He also warns that you will eventually have a collision if you're too aggressive at the starting line. Fortunately the shape of a 12-M means that damage is rare, but it can still be dangerous. "Pro crew from more modern boats will produce crashes because they're used to boats that turn more quickly and are more manoeuvrable. They sometimes underestimate how long it takes to

turn 30 tonnes around. You have to prepare in advance."

In most cases, the specifics of manoeuvring and trimming a rig that was designed 80-plus years ago are enjoyable. Owners appreciate the peculiarities which have to be mastered. *Eros*, for instance, has a large rectangular "fisherman" sail strung between her two masts, clewed down to the boom. "She doesn't look right without the fisherman, but we only use it for racing because it takes a team of eight people to get it up," says Riddell. "We keep one on each side because you have to take it down on one side and raise it on the other every time you tack or gybe. The manoeuvre can take between five and 10 minutes."

If you have reached the end of this piece with the sense that you are not alone, or with a nagging memory of a classic boat that you saw as a child, then beware: you could well be a future owner. And, if Barney Sandeman is right, you have little choice in the matter. "I sometimes feel I've got an orphanage and I'm getting the children out to the right families," he explains. "To a degree, these boats pick their owners." ■



Restoration or replica?

One of the most vexed questions relating to the rebirth of a wooden boat is whether it can remain "original" after everything has been replaced. "We say a boat is a restoration, not a replica, if during the entire time of construction you can recognise the hull shape," explains *Bolero* owner Ed Kane. Despite his boat being completely taken apart for restoration, she has retained the original deck furniture, doghouse, keel, some planking and most of the interior.

At the other end of the scale, the recently relaunched 12-M *Jenetta* (pictured above and below) has just one small piece of original woodwork left, scarped into a deck beam. Oh, and 17 tonnes of lead in the keel. Oliver Berking, who runs the Robbe & Berking shipyard where she was rebuilt, likes to say that she is 63 per cent original by weight. And yet the International Twelve Metre Association has accepted her as an original, allowing her to race in the classic classes.

The main thing is to save the boat, as Tara Getty says: "As long as you can stop her from going to the knacker's yard, then I've got no problem with that. It doesn't have to be a perfect restoration."

