

# HOW DID THEY DO IT ?

*One thing is obvious to aficionados of classic yachting: the yachts that we know today were built over periods that seem incredibly short to us, and yet nowadays a complete restoration takes years. Herreshoff built the yacht Royono, designed by John Alden, in only four months, but it took two years of hard graft to restore her original appearance and get her sailing again. Merrymaid, the big cutter built by Nicholson, was delivered to her new owner only six months after he commissioned her, but she has just spent two-and-a-half years in refit to make her as she was in 1905. Did Fife, Nicholson and Herreshoff share some secret? We have tried to find an answer to this vexing question.*

*Lulu, le plus ancien yacht de plaisance français restauré au Chantier du Guip pendant plusieurs années.*



## IF THE YARDS HAVE CHANGED SO HAVE THE YACHTS

By Dr. William Collier

Regardless of style or size it was once an orthodoxy in yachting that virtually any order could be fulfilled in a year. The definition of a year was, of course, often interpreted by would-be yachtsman as spanning not twelve months but those few months that divided the end of one season and the beginning of the next. In extreme cases some builders even managed such Herculean achievements as building small racing yachts in a matter of weeks. Charles Sibbick, the Cowes-based builder of Bona Fide, built similar yachts on several occasions in under two weeks. Yards such as Fife and Camper & Nicholsons regularly delivered 12 and 15 Metre class yachts in under six months. Indeed their production problem was often linked to securing orders to take them through the summers when typically they risked having neither refit nor new build work. So if the 300 foot steam yacht Nahlin could be built in a year and the revolutionary 15 Metre Istria in four months what has changed and indeed



why are restoration projects now so time consuming? In truth virtually everything. Nahlin was built in a yard that had built many of the great battleships that fought the First World War; the yard's next order was the liner Queen Mary. Until the 1930s large yachts were built by shipbuilders operating at the lower end of their capacity. At the other end of the scale the Camper & Nicholsons-built Istria, a cutting-edge racing yacht, was a great undertaking since she represented little more than a tenth of that yard's tonnage output in 1912.

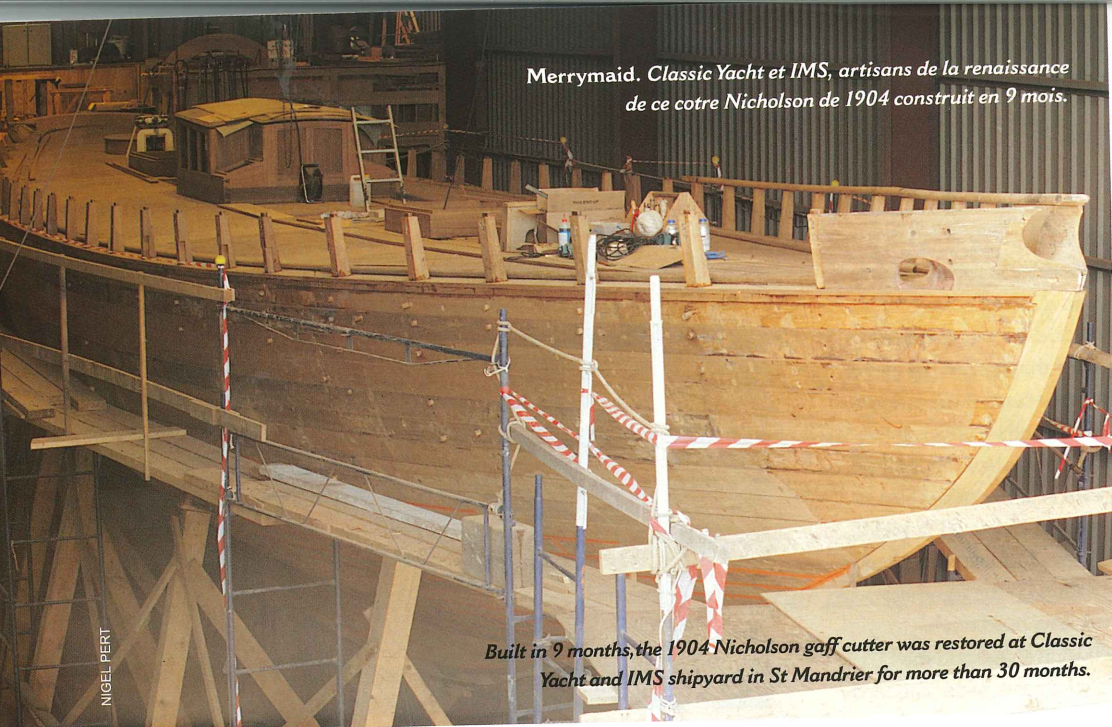
Although by shipbuilding standards most of the leading yacht building yards were small in scale they were invariably large enough to be building several yachts at any one time. Typically they might build up to ten yachts a year. To achieve this they had vast resources of materials and craftsmen. In the field of restoration even the most expert yards have nothing like these resources, so that restorers who set up one-off projects are further hampered. The craftsmen, timber and fittings are individually sourced. Most yards work on one project at a time and are unable to benefit from the flexibility inherent in the larger scale production.

But if the yards have changed so have the yachts. Even the most simple and authentically restored such as Avel are finished to a far higher standard. We embellish and protect the restored yachts with a level of painting and varnishing that was never aspired to. We cannot today even contemplate launching a restored racing yacht with the paint still wet on its topsides; yet such was the case when Camper & Nicholsons launched the revolutionary 15 Metre Istria 1912. And the contemporary owner who cared more about winning races than looks cared little about appearance. Now the nature of patronage has changed.

The motivations for restoring yachts are many and can rarely be governed by such simple requirements as winning a particular trophy or visiting the world. And if they could, they would regardless be more complex; a patent coal stove and an ice box no longer cut it as galley equipment. Running hot and cold water implies watermakers and heaters and therefore pumps. Clean bodies need clean clothes and these require laundry facilities... The Pandora's box is open and restoration, just like yacht building, has become a feast of options. The process of construction is often as important as the eventual use. If it takes up to six times longer to restore a 15 metre than it did to build one it is perhaps worth remembering that there are plenty of yacht builders today who can build a modern 70 foot racing yacht using current technology in a matter of

*The oldest French yacht has been at Chantier du Guip (île aux Moines) for many years before sailing again.*

Merrymaid. Classic Yacht et IMS, artisans de la renaissance  
de ce cotre Nicholson de 1904 construit en 9 mois.



NIGEL PERT

Built in 9 months, the 1904 Nicholson gaff cutter was restored at Classic Yacht and IMS shipyard in St Mandrier for more than 30 months.

months. We value classic yachts because they are rare, they illustrate a value set that is no longer current. When we try to emulate them in restoration we learn just how rare and precious they are.

*Dr. William Collier. As a yachting historian is the author of "The Yacht Builders: A study of the History of Camper & Nicholsons, 1782-1939"*

## CLASSICS, COMPLEX AND TIME CONSUMING TODAY...

by Jill Bobrow

So...Noëlle Duck, formidable Editor of Les Voiles des St. Tropez program e-mails me when I'm up to my eyeballs in work and gently reminds me that I am supposed to write an article for her on why it takes such a long time today to build a new classic in America, when it used to take such a short time in the early 20th century. I demurred, deferred, even declined, but Noëlle says "it won't take too much of your time...just call Alden, Sparkman & Stephens, descendants of Herreshoff, the retirees from Concordia, etc. and ask questions"....Well it turns out everyone is as busy as I am. Bruce Johnson chief naval architect for S & S is in Castine, Maine sailing (on business!), Olin Stephens is probably there too, but then it's hard to keep up with the 96-year old Olin because his social calendar had him in Mystic at the 75th S&S gala one week and at the IYRS (International Yacht Restoration School) fundraiser a week later, at the NYYC for a lecture...so I called Niels Helleberg designer at Alden Yachts and he was on the phone. I called him again and he was in a meeting. I figured Halsey Herreshoff was racing and since I couldn't be bothered to send repeat e-mails or to press redial on my phone, I decided who needs sources, I can guess why it takes such a long time to build a yacht now.

During the Golden Age of Yachting, a customer went to (for instance) Herreshoff because he wanted a Herreshoff boat. The men at Herreshoff plain and simple built a boat how they had always built it. They didn't consult with the customer how to build it. There was not a naval architect plus an engineer, plus an exterior stylist, plus an interior stylist, a structural designer, a project manager, a soft goods purveyor, a window treatment specialist, a custom carpet consultant, a fibre optics expert, a techno guru, a SurroundSound maven, a computer nerd, ...there probably wasn't even a 'knowledgeable owner who knew what he wanted', nor an owner's wife

who concerned herself with lighting, linens, pillows, and chenille throws. The original J-class Ranger was built in nine months. She had no engine. She was simply elegant. Not a stripped out racer, she had a butternut interior and stately owner's quarters—albeit no one probably ever spent a night aboard her. A bevy of beautiful famous yachts from yesteryear—Lelantina, Shenandoah, Ticonderoga, still sailing on the classic circuit today, were built by craftsmen who had generations of experience and a strong work ethic—they no doubt plugged steadily along 10 or 12 hours a day. For unrelated reasons, I spoke to a gentleman yesterday who had been managing a refit (that was nearing completion after three years) of a classic 90ft Abeking and Rasmussen-built yacht.

He ruminated over the impossibility of getting people to show up when they said they would show up, then worked for two hours, claimed they needed a part, went to get the part and didn't return for a week. Subcontractor A could not get on with his work until Subcontractor B finished his work. It isn't rocket science to see how much more complicated it is to build a boat today, having to be mindful of MCA codes and other regulatory bodies. How straightforward it was to have one simple cranky engine—no layers of electronics, no fussy hardware, no watermakers. For instance, take a look at the Sparkman & Stephens-designed Dorade—she was built without an engine and she won the 1931 Bermuda Race then set the record for the 1931 transatlantic challenge. Come to think of it, Stormy Weather also raced and cruised sans-engine. (While racing, Rod Stephens thought an engine an unnecessary bit of ballast.)

Remember when you could get by with just an RDF (Radio Directional Finder), a compass, and a DBS (Double Side Band) ship-to-shore (parentheses are included for those who speak only GPS and SatNav. Today, even on a classic, we want state-of-the-art electronics, a good stereo system, maybe even air conditioning. It goes without saying we also want to have every joint dovetailed, all bulkheads panelled with solid book-matched teak—cut from the last teak tree in the last forest of Burma. And yes, the dining table should be inlaid with ebony and paduk interlaced with anigre and accented with rare red twig marble and be able to be lowered into a coffee table or maybe even raised into the overhead.

The information revolution has us all buying into sophistication and complexity in the name of progress. However, what turns us classic junkies on is simplicity. True classic yachts strike a primal chord in our soul because they represent an archetype. Stripped of hydraulics, helicopter pads, and hoopla, classics are just that...classic. Nobody, simply nobody, today has time—but true classics are timeless. And having time means, sittin' in the cockpit without your laptop, your mobile phone, or your two-way pager...just sittin' there with a friend or two and perhaps a glass of rosé. sittin' there with a friend or two and perhaps a glass of rosé.

*Jill Bobrow is Editor in Chief of Boat International USA. An avid sailor, oddly enough she lives in the mountains of Vermont, still she manages to find time to sail in New England, the Caribbean, and the Mediterranean. She has written several books including "Classic Yacht interiors" and "In the Spirit of Tradition, Old and New Classic Yachts".*