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## ARTISAN BOATWORKS *CLASSICS REBORN*



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To See In Miami

All Night In The Ocean  
Surviving A Survival Course



*Cobia 320CC, Vicem 58,  
Great Harbour 37*

February 2018



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At The Corner Of  
**History & Reverence**  
by Laurie Schreiber

BILLY BLACK PHOTO





Traditional craftsmanship is alive and well at Artisan Boatworks.



Artisan Boatworks specializes in restoring classic yachts and building replicas.



Yachtsmen typically know Maine from the water, as Camden, Brooklin and Jonesport beckon with gunkholing adventures. But driving through these places along Route 1 affords a different view, especially in Rockport, where a turn onto Main Street leads inland to rolling, rural countryside. It's no surprise to see barns and scrubby fields, hill and dale swelling to the horizon. What is surprising, a mile along, is to find a gem of a boat shop called Artisan Boatworks.

Owner Alec Brainerd and his crew are passionate about restoring, and producing replicas of designs by such legendary naval architects as Nathanael and L. Francis Herreshoff, B.B. Crowninshield, Aage Nielsen, William Fife, Starling Burgess, John Alden, Olin Stephens and Joel White. Brainerd is a serious person, almost grave, and yet welcoming in tan jeans and a gray fleece sweater. He and his shop stand at an intersection in time, linking great designers and builders past and present; the first boat I see in one of his four buildings is a 1947 Spidsgatter, a double-ender drawn by Danish designer Aage Utzon, known in the first half of the 20th century for his sturdy, seaworthy boats. She's a 35-footer named *Kondor* that once raced on the Great Lakes. She recently sold to an Islesboro resident.

"We're doing some systems work and some frames and keel work," Brainerd says, as carpenter Alan Castonguay, wearing a respirator and safety gloves, scrapes peeling paint from the hull. "But the first step is getting all the old varnish and paint off." It's a first step that came after years of waiting while the boat was here in storage, seeking a new owner.

"I'm really jealous right now," Brainerd tells Castonguay. "I've been wanting to do this for so long."

Nearby, Jerry Borowski, who has been in boatbuilding for 20 years and at this yard for two, is gluing teak raised-panel deck boxes for a motoryacht on the West Coast. The yard also built a 24-foot tender that will fit onto the yacht's deck. The tender's design was based on a 1920s Herreshoff launch, but modified to achieve speeds approaching 20 knots.

Outside, Brainerd points out a 1903 Nathanael Herreshoff Bar Harbor 31 named *Joker* on jackstands. It's a project for the future: Brainerd is advertising her as a restoration project. She was abandoned in the early 1990s at Bob Vaughan's Seal Cove Boatyard in Harborside, Maine, where Brainerd worked as a younger man.

"Since we started this place 15 years ago, we've come to specialize in Herreshoff designs, both replicating new boats and restoring the

original ones," he says. "This particular boat is the cream of the crop. So we acquired it from Bob. It needs a complete restoration. It will be a new boat, just about, when we're finished."

Inside the paint bay, two Dark Harbor 20 sloops, a 1934 Sparkman & Stephens design, and a Fishers Island 12½, a 1938 Herreshoff design, gleam like jewels. Each is strategically taped for a fresh coat of paint. One of the Dark Harbors is the green-hulled *Fildil*, well-known locally and the third that Brainerd and his crew have restored.

Ethan Hutchins is prepping the other Dark Harbor 20, named *Sans Peur* ("without fear"), for a final coat of red paint. "It will look really good when it's done," says Hutchins, also a friendly fellow. (Friendliness is the flavor here.)

Also tucked away is an icon: *Alera*, the first of the 18 New York 30s that Herreshoff designed and the Herreshoff Manufacturing Co. built in 1904. *Alera* was lost until 2004, when she was discovered in Ontario and shipped to Sample's Shipyard in Boothbay, Maine. Her new owners commissioned a restoration.

Near *Alera* are other classics, including several L. Francis Herreshoff Buzzards Bay 14s, an Aage Nielsen double-ender, a Herreshoff Fishers Island 23, more Dark Harbor 20s, a Herreshoff Buzzards Bay 15 replica, a 1960s Sparkman & Stephens yawl that is Brainerd's own boat, and much more.

"We have a lot of folks who come through here, who say this place is better than any museum they've been to," Brainerd says.

He's adored boats like these since his youngest days. Growing up in Brooksville, Maine, Brainerd loved to sail small boats. "As kids, it was amazing, the freedoms we were afforded," he says. "My brother and I sailed little boats all over Penobscot Bay before GPS and cell-phones. It's hard to imagine parents today letting kids have the adventures I had as a kid."

In high school, he worked at Seal Cove Boatyard, taught sailing at the Boy Scouts' Camp Roosevelt, then milled and varnished canoe paddles and oars for Shaw & Tenney in Orono, Maine. After high school, he worked on the 137-foot schooner *Roseway* in Camden, Maine. Crewing on the *Roseway* from Camden to St. Thomas, in the U.S. Virgin Islands, ignited a passion for travel. "It was the first time I was offshore, out of sight of land," he says. "It was a lot of firsts."

Overlapping experiences through his 20s included countless yacht deliveries along the East Coast and crewing aboard the 94-foot William Fife ketch *Sumurun* during the Atlantic Challenge Cup from New York to

JANE KURKO (LEFT, 2); ALISON LANGLEY

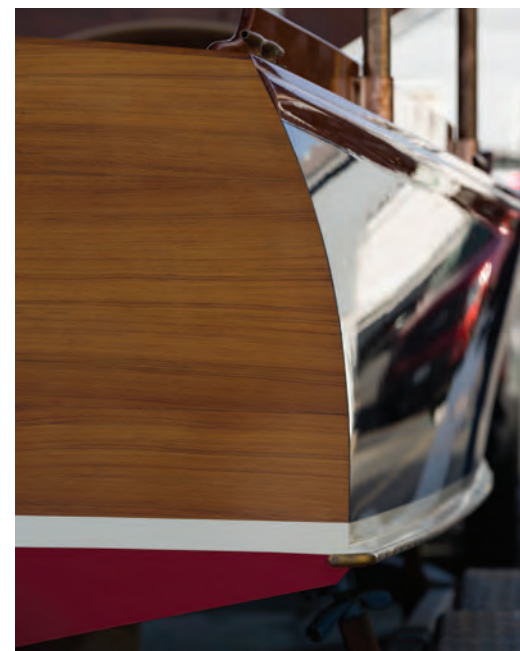




“Building things is really satisfying,” says Artisan owner Alec Brainerd.



This launch is a recent Artisan build. There’s timeless beauty in a touch of tumblehome and a classic sailing rig.



Falmouth, England. “That was amazing,” he says. “A lot of adrenaline, a lot of cold and harsh conditions. Day and night bled into one. You were up as much during the night as you were during the day, just pushing the boat to go faster. We won, so we were rock stars for a while.”

Brainerd crewed in the Pacific, lived in New Zealand for a year while overseeing the refit of a 100-foot wooden yawl, then returned to Penobscot Bay, where he replaced the deck of the 83-foot Bud Macintosh schooner *Appledore III*. He captained her for three years, running day sails from Camden. Between adventures, he attended a boatbuilding school in Rockport. Afterward, he worked at Rockport Marine, which builds and restores wooden boats. With Rockport windjammer operator Nigel “Twig” Bower, Brainerd built the 53-foot John Alden schooner *Heron*; with Dave Corcoran of Bullhouse Boatworks, he worked on a 26-foot Chuck Paine daysailer based on a Herreshoff design.

On the last two projects, he was inspired to see that experts could also own small shops. In 2002, he started Artisan Boatworks. “For the first five years, it was just two or three of us doing one boat at a time,” he says. “Our first storage building was a little fabric tent beside the shop.”

Today, the business encompasses restoration, new construction, and a growing storage and service division. For new construction, the yard produces replicas of classic designs, and high-performance carbon fiber and cold-molded Spirit of Tradition daysailers, cruisers and racers. Classic designs are based on original blueprints, woods and bronze hardware, but also can incorporate epoxy coatings and adhesives, combining the classic qualities of wood construction with improved strength and low maintenance. Restorations can be customized, and custom designs can be built. Most projects are 40 feet and shorter, but the yard can handle far larger.

Projects during the past few years have included *Colt* and *Filly*, W-Class 22-footers with lines adapted from Joel White’s double-ender *Lala*. There was the restoration of a 1928 Herreshoff 12½, construction of a Herreshoff 12½ replica and rebuilds of two Herreshoff Fish Class sloops, both from the original 23-boat fleet delivered to the Seawanhaka Corinthian Yacht Club of Oyster Bay on Long Island, New York.

*Vim* was a project combining old with new. For the 1957 Newbert & Wallace lobster yacht, converted from a working lobster boat, the

JANE KURKO

JOHN SNYDER (TOP, LEFT); ALISON LANGLEY (RIGHT)



client wanted modern systems. The challenge was to incorporate them in a way that retained the boat's authenticity. The shore power plug was stainless steel and would have stood out; Brainerd had it electroplated in bronze. Thin slate veneers were glued to the galley's plywood countertop to make it look old. Traditional cabinet doors with bronze hinges hid new wiring.

All of Brainerd's clients arrive with a deep appreciation for venerable designs. His magic is to dive deeper into how the customer will use the boat. The result could be a restoration or replica that exactly conforms to the original design, or a modern version that incorporates cold-molded woods, carbon fiber and foam core, the latest in electronics or new interior layouts.

"As a truly custom shop, there's no limit to what we can do," Brainerd says. "A lot of times, our first contact with a new client will be, 'I see you build this particular boat. How much is it?' They think we're a production shop. So my answer is, 'Yes, we can build you a boat, but that particular boat was designed for another client who had a set of parameters. So tell me more about yourself.' Somebody will say, 'I love the look of this boat, but I wish it was big enough to have two more people to sleep aboard.' Or, 'I love this boat, but there's a strong current in my harbor and I need an engine.'

"Similarly, if someone wants to restore an original boat or build a replica of a classic boat, they might say, 'It might be nice to have a bunk down below.' Or, 'I need to be able to single-hand the boat.' We'll go through what the boat needs to do and talk about aesthetics and different construction methods."

Thanks to its expertise with fine wooden-boat furnishings, the yard

also offers furniture for home use. "A lot of the big Herreshoff yachts were 300-plus-foot steam yachts with lavish interiors, with tables and chairs and chests of drawers," Brainerd says. "So we're primed to make that for people's homes. It's cool to have a Herreshoff boat, but to have a Herreshoff dining table is something people don't think about."

Today, Brainerd is not as hands-on as he once was, relying more on his managers as he runs the business. But he's just as happy. "I think building things is really satisfying," he says. "At the end of the day, you put your tools down, and you've created something or fixed something that's going to outlive you and go off and have a life of its own. It's really cool. But building a business is just as satisfying. I feel really lucky that building a business is as satisfying as building a boat. It's just different challenges." ■

BILLY BLACK



The 1957 lobster yacht *Vim*'s helm (above) combines old and new technology, but she retains the look of a classic.

