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# WoodenBoat

THE MAGAZINE FOR WOODEN BOAT OWNERS, BUILDERS, AND DESIGNERS



**Fresh Thinking in a Herreshoff Daysailer**  
A Restored Chesapeake Bay Buyboat  
An Unrestored Catboat

MARCH/APRIL 2013  
NUMBER 231

\$6.95

\$7.95 in Canada

£3.95 in U.K.



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**GETTING STARTED IN BOATS:  
Sawhorses—A Gallery of  
Boatbuilders' Favorites** *Damian McLaughlin,  
Tom Jackson, Harry Bryan,  
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**Cover:** A crew of boatbuilders and riggers swarms the Herreshoff Buzzards Bay 18 UNCAS at her launching last summer. UNCAS was the first boat built to this design in over a century; her cedar planking is edge-glued with epoxy.

**Pages 61 and 66**  
*Photograph by Alison Langley*



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**WoodenBoat** (ISSN 0095-067X) is published bimonthly in January, March, May, July, September, and November in Brooklin, Maine, by WoodenBoat Publications, Inc., Jonathan A. Wilson, Chairman. Subscription offices are at P.O. Box 16958, North Hollywood, CA 91615-6958; 1-800-877-5284 for U.S. and Canada. Overseas: 1-818-487-2084.

Subscription rate is \$32.00 for one year (6 issues) in the U.S. and its possessions. Canadian subscription rate is \$37.00, U.S. funds. Surface rate overseas is \$45.00, U.S. funds per year. Periodical postage paid at Brooklin, ME 04616 and additional mailing offices. In Canada, periodical postage paid at Toronto, Ontario (Canadian periodical Agreement No. 40612608, GST Registration No. R127081008).

**U.S. Postmaster:** Please send Change of Address (form 3579) to P.O. Box 16958, North Hollywood, CA 91615-6958

**Canada Postmaster:** Pitney Bowes, P.O. Box 25542, London, ON, N6C 6B2, Canada.



# Wooden Boatworks



by Pat Mundus

Photographs by Benjamin Mendlowitz

Visiting Wooden Boatworks' west railway shed at Hanff's Boat Yard at Greenport on New York's Long Island is like a walk through time. The building leading to it is filled with the nameboards of yachts long gone. Yacht ensigns with fading stripes are suspended between hawsers and chains, revealing Greenport's shipyard heritage. A tangle of rusty blocks and augers dangles from the rafters. Advertisements with four-digit phone numbers still hang, untouched, on the same 50-year-old nails. Modern portraits of yachts in color are interspersed in the mix. They look vibrant, and shock the visitor back to the present.

I'm not surprised by his answer when I ask 60-year-old Donn Costanzo, the yard's co-proprietor, to recall the first boat that really moved him. "I still get a little tingle when I think about it," he says, remembering the

crisp light of that day. He was fishing on the end of a home-built dock when a big, low-slung sloop slipped around a bank of tall reeds. In a whisper of a breeze, it briefly came alongside. He watched as a nimble young couple stepped into the cockpit and shoved off, the boat barely stopping. As the long boom jibed softly around, the boat revealed tumblehome disappearing into an oval transom as it bore away. "I was only seven years old, but it was magic, I'm telling you," he says with conviction. "It was the P-class Gil Smith sloop KID."

Costanzo believes this singular memory launched his trajectory into a life of wooden boats. Today he runs Wooden Boatworks, Inc., with his brother, Bruce Wahl. The company has 18 employees with several craftsmen from the International Yacht

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**Above**—CLIO (formerly SHEEVRA) on a late-summer outing near Greenport, New York. She was restored in Europe, in the mid-1980s, by a team of shipwrights led by Donn Costanzo; since then, Costanzo and his brother, Bruce Wahl, have built a New York-based business restoring and maintaining classic yachts—including this one.

## *How Donn Costanzo and Bruce Wahl have mastered the art of preserving the classics*

Restoration School (IYRS) and some others learning the old-fashioned way, out on the shop floor. Costanzo has acquired a highly evolved sense of aesthetics in a wide range of yachts during his lifetime, and has quietly become a leader in the wooden boat world. Bruce possesses a profound capacity for inventive solutions.

Unlike many wooden boat builders, Costanzo didn't grow up in a seagoing family or even one with particular yachting interests. He began his life on the water as a clam digger on New York's Great South Bay (see WB No. 226). So how did he come to his life in the world of wooden yachts? How did he acquire his refined sense of aesthetics and history? How did he emerge as an expert?

After that first encounter with a Gil Smith boat, Costanzo continued to be moved by the beauty of Smith's yachts (see No. 177) and eventually found his way to the leading authority on the designer, Alfred E. Terry. "I owe a lot to Al Terry," he says, calling him a "master of aesthetics." Terry recognized a talent and a passion that perhaps Costanzo didn't even fathom in himself. Possessing equal interests in art and engineering, Al Terry was perfectly suited to mentor Costanzo in the essentials of yacht design, giving him the language to articulate his interest in form and beauty, at the same

time educating the teenager in the selection of excellent wooden boat building materials. In today's world of shrinking resources, this was an important priority to impart to a young man of Costanzo's inclinations.

Costanzo first restored a 24' George de Lorie wooden sloop called SALTY. Then he bought an old wooden oyster sloop aptly named QUAHOG and refitted it for working the Bay. Tonging for clams gave him plenty of time to contemplate wooden yachts and the minds that created them. "I worshipped Nat Herreshoff in those days," Costanzo recalls.

He decided to make boatbuilding his profession, and enrolled in Lance Lee's Apprenticeship in Bath, Maine, in 1978 (see WB No. 209). He immediately embraced the program's experiential-education philosophy, where personal growth and enrichment could be achieved through contemplation and hand craftsmanship. He flourished while studying boats and their origins, preserving significant ones, and recording their lines to build them anew. He also learned the joys of teamwork and fellowship. He said of his time at the Apprenticeship, "I discovered the value in being a contributor to something really meaningful, in an old-world sort of way." As an apprentice, he took part in building a Muscongus Bay sloop (the forerunner to the better-known Friendship sloop), and the 35' Tancook whaler VERNON

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**Donn Costanzo works with Beattie Hayes on the restoration of a Fenwick Williams–designed catboat. In addition to its commitment to classic yacht care, Wooden Boatworks is dedicated to helping to develop the next generation of shipwrights.**







The 45' Fife sloop SHEEVRA (now CLIO) sits on the ways in Cannes. This is how a young Donn Costanzo first found the boat in 1985; she would become his first of many major classic yacht restorations. (See page 80 for a photograph of the boat as she looks today.)

LANGILLE, one of the Apprenticeshop's "icon boats." In 1981 the apprentices entered VERNON LANGILLE in Nova Scotia's International Schooner Race. Crossing the Gulf of Maine and the Bay of Fundy in an open boat with only 14" of freeboard, Costanzo loved the open-water experience. "I knew then that boatbuilding was my ticket to voyaging," he said.

Costanzo was sure his future relied on his shipwright's toolbox, and faith in the richness of building one's own experience motivated him to go to sea. With tools in hand, he signed on to a Caribbean delivery in the fall of 1982 aboard a classic 45' Sparkman & Stephens sloop called BRIDE OF GASTONIA (formerly EASTERLY). In Bequia, he admired a 1930s English cutter named MORVA, and swam out to the boat to inquire about a job. "Things were a lot different in those days," he said. "The idea of working for a berth and food wasn't unusual. I just loved the boat and wanted to be part of it." He was hired, and stayed on until he had finished reefing out and recaulking the deck. When the 103', 1931 steel-hulled, gaff-rigged Alden schooner PURITAN sailed in, Costanzo found himself longing again for the fellowship of a big crew. He transferred his toolbox over the rail, signing on in 1983 as ship's carpenter.

Clark Poston, who is the current director of student and industry relations at IYRS in Newport, Rhode Island, was first mate aboard PURITAN at that time. The two Americans rapidly forged a friendship that stands just as strong today. Reminiscing about being shipmates for two years, Costanzo recalled that he and Poston once borrowed a Sparkman & Stephens dinghy they mutually admired. They hauled it up on PURITAN's davits where Costanzo shared his method of measuring and drawing a boat's lines.

One of Costanzo's more amusing memories of his time aboard PURITAN—one that

conveys his awareness of dwindling natural resources—was that of salvaging the lignum vitae bearings from a windmill on Antigua. In their youthful enthusiasm, Costanzo and Poston gathered hundreds of the dense pieces, brought them out to PURITAN, and hung each of them over the side from individual lengths of line to rid them of bugs. "It was a mess, but we were definitely thinking of the future," he said, laughing.

PURITAN sailed the Mediterranean during the summers of 1984 and 1985, and Costanzo's time there was life-changing. In the United States, the movement to restore and protect wooden yachts was just beginning to gain momentum. In Europe, though, Costanzo was immersed in a solid tradition of restoring and maintaining them, where reverence for yachting heritage mattered. His own preservation values were reinforced, and that shaped the course of his life's work. He was especially moved by the designs and construction of Scotland's William Fife III, Nathanael Herreshoff's European rival. "I had my eyes wide, wide open then," he said.

He certainly had his eyes wide open the day PURITAN sailed into Cannes in 1985. He spotted the 1921, 45' Fife sloop SHEEVRA (now CLIO) sitting sadly on the hard and announced, "Mates, Mr. Fife is in port today!" according to his then-shipmate Jeff Law. After considerable surveying, research, and negotiations, three PURITAN shipmates—Costanzo, Law, and Olivia Adshead—left the schooner and purchased this neglected Fife. Embarking on an extensive restoration, they brought SHEEVRA to Cantieri Navale dell'Argentario in Porto Santo Stefano, on the southwest coast of Italy (see WB No. 160). The trio's effort was financially daunting and labor intensive, and required extreme devotion to detail. The highly



Authenticity is a hallmark of a Wooden Boatworks restoration. Here we see one of CLIO's preserved original dovetailed cabin trunk corners.





## Replicating KID

**K**ID II is an exact replica of the boat that inspired Donn Costanzo to his career at age seven. Wooden Boatworks went to the Long Island Maritime Museum, where the original KID is preserved, and lifted the lines by laser scanning. Costanzo assembled an expert team of builders led by shipwright Daniel DeLeiris. Joining the team were two IYRS graduates, Joe Sayer and Ben Bentley. Gil Smith left nothing of his designs on paper, so he didn't record the characteristic extreme tumble-home near the transom. Referring to this part of

KID's stern, Bentley said, "The three views of lofting can't fully express that shape anyway. Donn shared his passion yet ultimately left it to us, the builders, to fashion." Encouraging the same interdisciplinary involvement in young builders that Costanzo had experienced at the Apprenticeship, Wooden Boatworks produced an exquisite yellow-cedar hull, with Port Orford cedar deck, cherry covering boards and coamings—faithfully following Gil Smith's materials choices and building methods. KID II was launched in 2009. —PM

acclaimed restoration would raise the bar for historical accuracy.

The dedication of SHEEVRA's restoration team caught the eye of Swiss industrialist Albert Obrist. An avid restorer of Ferrari cars, Obrist was convinced of the value of yacht restoration after chartering the 85', 1929 Fife ketch BELLE AVENTURE. Obrist asked Costanzo and his team to collaborate with BELLE AVENTURE's captain, Paul Goss, on restoring the 1931, 108' Fife gaff schooner ALTAIR, which Obrist purchased in 1985. A fanatic for historical accuracy, Obrist said he wanted to "make ALTAIR into a big SHEEVRA." Costanzo and his team joined the new project, with Goss as project manager. The job—a complete structural rebuilding in 1986-'87 at Southampton Yacht Services—would finance SHEEVRA's restoration.

During SHEEVRA'S restoration, Costanzo and his crew had been frequent visitors to the defunct Fife yard in Scotland—then called Fairlie Slip Company. Midway through the ALTAIR restoration, Costanzo received a tip from William Fife III's last yard manager, Archie Macmillan, who had assumed ownership of the yard in 1944 upon Fife III's death: The property would soon be razed to make way for condominium development. Costanzo rushed to Fairlie, but was too late. "I can still picture those yellow bulldozers emerging from the mist. There was nothing left but a massive pile of smoldering timbers," Costanzo recalled. Galvanized by the loss, Costanzo was instrumental in convincing Obrist to acquire the surviving Fife drawings from Macmillan. Obrist eventually purchased more than 600 William Fife III drawings in 1991, founding





**The 22' 1885 Gil Smith-designed Great South Bay catboat WINDWARD sails in company with the Smith-designed TAMAYASAMAZ. WINDWARD was an intact original when she underwent a complete structural rebuild at Wooden Boatworks in 2006. Her stem, keel, sternpost, and centerboard trunk were replaced in the manner of her original construction, while 85 percent of her framing was replaced as-original with natural-crook wild cherry frames. WINDWARD retains all of her original cedar planking, except her garboards. She received a new deck and cabin sole. WINDWARD is 127 years old and sails seasonally in East Hampton, New York.**



the organization that grew into Fairlie Restorations.

Obrist and his Fairlie Restorations partners collected and restored six more big Fifes, including the 19-Meter MARIQUITA, the 15-meter boats TUIGA and THE LADY ANN, and the 8-Meter FULMAR. Through the ALTAIR experience, Costanzo learned that history, a passionate owner, and a dedicated team of craftsmen are inextricably intertwined to execute successful restorations.

Costanzo and crew completed SHEEVRA in 1988. In addition to historical accuracy and fine craftsmanship, this Fife sloop's restoration was remarkable because she was comparatively small. She made a name for herself competing on the European

classic yacht circuit, sailing in fleets often composed of yachts over 100' long that had large paid crews. Most of these yachts were owned either by royalty, the prominent fashion houses of the day, or highly successful businessmen. "Almost none were restored and sailed by owners," recalled Costanzo. "They loved us, and we learned a lot about presenting a yacht properly, about etiquette, and about teamwork between owners and the crews." In company with the most elegant classic yachts on the planet, SHEEVRA won as much silver as she won notoriety in the European press, winning her class in the Mediterranean's La Nioulargue in 1988, 1989, and 1990—plus receiving line honors at Monte Carlo and St-Tropez.



Unlike most of their competitors, however, after the champagne was emptied and the silver stowed, Costanzo and Law went back to working in boatyards during the off season, doing various refits and freelance maintenance on other boats. In an editorial in *The Yachtsman* in 1992, Tom Cunliffe summed it up when he described them as “regular paid hands who found a grand old yacht. She [SHEEVRA] was down both on her marks and on her luck, and they couldn’t afford her. They found the way however, and they went yachting as owners, along with the rich and the famous. They won their races in the sunshine, then quietly bowed out with a dignity few could match and returned to work, which is what most of us must do to enable us to live for our sport.”

The trio sold SHEEVRA in 1991. Costanzo’s hard-earned reputation in Europe allowed him to immerse himself in a series of historically accurate restorations

ranging from being the initial project manager on the 84’, 1923 Fife ketch KENTRA, to foreman of a complete rebuild of the 1921 Canary Island ketch ROSA. In 10 short years, Costanzo was propelled from caulking-for-food in the sunny Caribbean to the upper echelons of classic yacht research and restoration. In the process, he learned how to align an owner’s interests with the schedule and needs of a vessel, and how best to employ the talents of a large crew.

Costanzo brought his sophisticated business sensibilities home to Long Island in 1993, seeking to apply his standards of authenticity to American-owned wooden boats. By this time, his brother, Bruce Wahl, had worked his way up from teenage boatyard hand to head of the maintenance department for the Sayville Ferry Service, where he was responsible for everything—daily operations, hauling and repair,



**Below**—The 1905 Herreshoff NY 30 BANZAI (right), seen here with her sister NAUTILUS underwent a Wooden Boatworks restoration in 2009 and 2010. The boat’s double planking was completely replaced after the yard renewed 60 percent of her framing, installed new floor timbers, and replaced her keelbolts. She then received a new Dynel-sheathed deck, new systems, and power plant and drive train; her interior was restored, too. **Left**—Wooden Boatworks restored STORM, a 1946 Luders-designed-and-built 49-footer, in 2010 and 2011. The boat’s double planking was completely replaced, and she received a new deck, cabin sides, and coamings. Redrawn as a yawl, STORM’s latest rig and sail plan were designed by naval architect Theo Rye in collaboration with Costanzo. She was fitted with Nathaniel Wilson sails, and her spars were built by Wooden Boatworks’ Ben Bentley. Period hardware was fitted or fabricated in Greenport.







**Bruce Wahl at the railway winch. He and his brother, Donn Costanzo, began their careers on Great South Bay tonging for clams and running wooden ferries. Through their stints in Europe restoring classic yachts, the pair developed a shared appreciation for the classics. Bruce runs and manages all of Wooden Boatworks' mechanical equipment.**

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Smith boats he and Wahl could store. The north fork of eastern Long Island proved most suitable because of its bountiful agricultural barns; the covered storage they provided eventually allowed the pair to become leading experts in restoring and replicating Smith designs.

Their company grew into Wooden Boatworks as they established themselves by maintaining the sizable fleet of Beetle Cats owned by East Hampton's Georgica Pond summer community. (Each season they store, repair, restore, or refinish almost 50 of these little catboats.) Typical of Wahl's inventive resourcefulness, the building where the Beetle Cats are stored is big enough for the brothers to build an indoor swelling-up pond. It's a comical sight to see several freshly painted catboats bobbing in the rubber-lined "soaking up" pool before delivery to their summer moorings.

For in-water storage and maintenance, Wooden Boatworks leases the 1906 Hanff's Boat Yard in Greenport, New York. In collaboration with Costello Marine Contracting, owners of the historic yard, they rebuilt two of the three railways on the site—and they plan to complete the third in the near future.

Costanzo and Wahl share a passion for collecting

USCG certification, and engine rebuilding—on a fleet of 16 ferries running to Fire Island. Wahl said he was so in tune with his fleet that “On my days off—which weren't many—from inside my house I could tell how the engines were doing just by the sound of them.” Wahl also shared Costanzo's classic yacht aesthetic, having sailed as engineer on European classics for four years.

The brothers bonded through their common admiration of wooden boats and their mutual respect and trust in each other. They melded their complementary knowledge, networking contacts, and resources to create a wooden boat business of their own. With historic preservation a priority for Costanzo, he joined the keepers of the Gil Smith legacy by collecting as many of the

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**Wooden Boatworks rents three former potato barns from a local farmer. The connected buildings house a great collection of hardware, as well as boats and over 60,000 bd ft of seasoned yacht-quality lumber.**







**In 2011 at Wooden Boatworks, PATINA, a modified 1956 King's Cruiser sloop designed by Tord Sunden and built in Sweden, received new keelbolts, floor timbers, and a complete cosmetic refurbishing. PATINA had been converted for racing by replacing her cabin trunk with a twin-cockpit layout prior to her arrival at the yard. Wooden Boatworks repowered and rewired PATINA, installed new instruments, and rigged her with new running rigging, bronze deck hardware, and new sails.**

boatbuilding materials, often buying wood on the stump and milling it themselves. Mindful that the future of wooden boats relies on a dwindling supply of natural resources, Wooden Boatworks' barns are now filled with over 60,000 bd ft of boatbuilding stock. This holds true for hardware, as well: Another barn holds a collection of no-longer-available bronze fittings that were manufactured by Merriman Brothers, Wilcox-Crittenden, and Perko.

Costanzo emphasizes the importance of art in yacht design, which he feels helps explain today's market for new classic yachts. He insists that art's influence on our learned intelligence is overlooked in many of today's dialogues that are primarily focused on science and mathematics. "I'm sure that one of the main reasons we are attracted to certain boats is the art of the design," he says, referencing his memory of Gil Smith's 1906 KID—the boat that first influenced him as a child. Having had this discussion many times with the grandchildren of KID's original owners, Costanzo says, "I really couldn't believe it when, after I thought about this boat for a half century, they asked Wooden Boatworks to build them a replica." That boat was launched four years ago (see sidebar, page 83).

Wooden Boatworks has a certain ethos based on its partners' life experiences, and that ethos might be distilled into three points: First, Donn Costanzo and Bruce Wahl have a profound appreciation for authenticity; they know when to leave things alone and when

and how to enrich and complement the elements of the past. Second, Costanzo has clung to the lessons and influences of his own education in building, restoring, and maintaining classic yachts; the company encourages its workers to be fulfilled in their jobs. The emphasis on historical accuracy taps into many disciplines, and Donn believes in mentoring and in passing on opportunities to upcoming builders. And, finally, Wooden Boatworks encourages dialogue between owners and craftsmen—a relationship that brings great synergy to their projects.

The formula has attracted an enviable collection of boats to the Greenport shop. As Wooden Boatworks' reputation for authenticity spread through the area, the fleet of yachts coming in for annual maintenance swelled. Among them: the 1905 Herreshoff NY 30s BANZAI and NAUTILUS; the 1914 Herreshoff Newport 29 DOLPHIN; the 1953 Bunker & Ellis Down East cruiser TARTAN; the 1957, 56' Rhodes sloop CAPER; the 1964, 49' Sparkman & Stephens CHINA CLIPPER, and EASTERLY (formerly BRIDE OF GASTONIA). And, most remarkably, the present owner of SHEEVRA (now CLIO again) sought out Wooden Boatworks. After halting her almost-certain demise two decades ago, Costanzo is once again caring for this lovely little Fife sloop. 🛠️

*Pat Mundus is a retired Merchant Marine officer. She now operates a fleet of charter yachts—some of them classic and wooden—as East End Charters ([www.eastendcharters.com](http://www.eastendcharters.com)) in Greenport, New York.*