



Starboard Tack

PAT MUNDUS

To celebrate East Hampton's 350th birthday, East End wooden boats will be on display at Three Mile Harbor in East Hampton's first Classic Boat Festival.

The festival will take place at Gardiner's Marina on Saturday, Sept. 12, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., followed by a Parade of Sail. The festival will feature wooden boats including the East Hampton Dory Rescue Squad's boat, local work boats, power and sailing yachts, and rowing and sailing small craft.

Robert D.L. Gardiner has agreed to let many of the boats dock at his marina, which is near the head of Three Mile Harbor, and many of the small craft will be placed on land there for viewing. The public will be invited to meet wooden boat enthusiasts and boat builders and to see at first hand some boats that contributed to our maritime history. All Three Mile Harbor boats, wooden or otherwise, will be invited to participate in the Parade of Sail. It will proceed out the inlet to Gardiner's Bay and back from 2 to 3 p.m. Earl Vorhees of Northwest Landing Road in East Hampton is coordinating the event.

One such wooden boat builder is Donn Costanzo, a 46-year-old Southampton resident, who grew up in Sayville admiring Great South Bay sailing oyster boats. By the age of 12, he was destined for boat-building, having constructed his own rowboat. The young Mr. Costanzo was a great fan of the Great South Bay catboat designer Gil Smith, and, while still in high school and working as a waterman, he spotted the 34-foot Gil Smith R-boat Pauline. He got in touch with the leading authority on the designer, Al Terry. Mr. Costanzo refers to Mr. Terry as a "master of aesthetics," and says Mr. Terry gave him the knowledge to articulate his love of classic boats into boat-building terms. With Mr. Terry as mentor, Mr. Costanzo restored the 24-foot George DeLorie gaff-rigged sloop Salty in exchange for the use of the boat. He continued to love and learn about Gil Smith's designs as well.

His need to work on the water was cemented by a brief year too far from the sea at New Mexico State. Mr. Costanzo returned to work on the bay. He bought an old oyster sloop, restored it, and repowered it for clam tonging.

While he clammed and potted conch (whelk) in Great South Bay year-round, he

continued his admiration of wooden boats. "I used to worship Nat Herreshoff," Mr. Costanzo said, calling the 1903 America's Cup defender Reliance the number-one yacht of all time.

Like others catching fewer and fewer clams, and with the encouragement of Mr. Terry, Mr. Costanzo made wooden boat-building his profession. He enrolled in Lance Lee's Bath, Me., Maritime Museum apprentice shop in 1978, where, with other apprentices, he built a Muscongus Bay sloop (the early predecessor to the Friendship sloop) and a Tancook Whaler, a 35-foot double-ended schooner.

In 1981 Mr. Costanzo entered the Tancook Whaler in the Nova Scotia International Schooner Race and the boat had the distinction of being the only open boat to have crossed the Gulf of Maine and the Bay of Fundy in 60 years to compete in the 100-year-old race. Since the boat had only 14 inches of freeboard, Mr. Costanzo demonstrated his seamanship as well as his boat-building skills.

Missing the East End and ready for income, Mr. Costanzo packed up his tools and put his black Lab in the back of his pickup truck. He drove to Greenport to ask the locally famous boat yard owner Annie Barstow for work.

"Hell, you belong on the South Fork," she told him, and she suggested he visit the East Hampton Town Marine Museum's Boat Shop on Three Mile Harbor, where the late and wonderful John Collins was then the master boat builder. Ralph Carpentier was the Museum's director.

Getting out of the truck at the Boat Shop, Mr. Costanzo said he could not believe his eyes. There he was face to face with a Gil Smith catboat! Mr. Costanzo recounted that Mr. Carpentier asked whether he believed in magic. It seemed the Boat Shop's intern was finishing his term the next day and the shop had just received grant money to restore the catboat.

The boat was the oldest Gil Smith in existence, the 26-foot Senad. So Mr. Costanzo signed on the project, bringing along both his journeyman talents and his knowledge of Gil Smith's work.

Locals may remember Senad before her restoration motoring about Three Mile Harbor when she was owned by John Spear and later on land when her beautiful sheer line caused many a marine-minded motorist on Three Mile Harbor Road to do a double-take.

Mr. Carpentier copied Senad's lines, which were used by Lance Lee to build the Senad replica Matigan.

In 1982, courtesy of Forrest Shropshire, Mr. Costanzo headed south with his tools, helping deliver the mahogany S&S sloop Bride of Gastonia (now in Dering Harbor renamed Easterly) to the Caribbean boat-building island of Bequia. Mr. Costanzo soon signed on Puritan, a 1931 John G. Alden 103-foot gaff-rigged schooner, as

ship's carpenter. Although nearly twice the size, Puritan's design is very similar to the Sag Harbor-based 66-foot Lelanta, which was also designed by Alden as a cruising yacht during the Depression.

Owned by Oscar Schmidt of Austria, Puritan spent summers in the Mediterranean and winters in the Caribbean. It was during his two-year assignment on Puritan that Mr. Costanzo first saw the 95-foot William Fife ketch Belle Adventure. He was smitten and dreamed of owning a William Fife 3d-designed yacht.

More magic for Mr. Costanzo occurred when he discovered Mr. Fife's personal 45-foot yacht Sheevra, originally named Clio, on land, in Cannes. Sheevra was built in 1921. After considerable surveying, research, and negotiations Mr. Costanzo and two friends and shipmates, Jeffery Law, Puritan's chief mate, and Olivia Adshead, Puritan's cook, purchased the Fife. Together the trio undertook a two-year restoration of the beautiful sloop in Italy, right down to replicating her red velvet-covered horsehair upholstery. Sheevra was campaigned for several years on the European classic yacht circuit, winning lots of silver. Her story was featured in every major European yacht publication, including an article in the magazine most familiar to those of us on this side of the Atlantic, "The Yachtsman," in September of 1992.

Because Sheevra raised so many eyebrows, Mr. Costanzo was contacted by Albert Obrist of Switzerland, who owned Altair, a teak-on-oak gaff-rigged William Fife 3d schooner. Altair is 108 feet on deck and displaces 161 tons. Mr. Obrist asked if Mr. Costanzo would "make Altair into a big Sheevra."

Sheevra was laid up in storage while Mr. Costanzo and Mr. Law assisted in the restoration of the Fife classic, which cost in excess of \$3 million.

Partly due to Mr. Costanzo's and Mr. Law's diligence and concern with the defunct, highly historic Scotland yacht yard, Mr. Obrist eventually went on to procure most of the Fife sail plans and line drawings, saving them from destruction when the yard was destroyed to make way for condos in 1987.

On the suggestion of Mr. Costanzo and Mr. Law, Albert Obrist continued the Fife revival movement. He went on to collect Fife yachts, much in the same way he collected vintage Ferraris. Similar to his barn full of coveted red sports cars, Mr. Obrist purchased six additional Fifes for restoration, including the 75-foot Mariquita, the 90-foot ketch Kentra, the 15-meter boats Lady Ann and Tuiga, and the 8-meter boat Fulmar.

Sheevra was sold in 1992 to Uva Greinhart, a German who eventually shipped her to Maine for annual New England summer cruising.

Last week when I came alongside Clio (Mr. Greinhart has reverted Sheevra's name back to Clio) in Rockport, Me., he spread his arms beam to beam and boasted, "Everybody wants to photograph my beautiful yacht!" Thanks to Mr. Costanzo and

company.

After his own yacht was sold, Mr. Costanzo went on become the restoration project manager for Kentra, the William Fife 3d 90-foot, 86-ton gaff-rigged ketch built in 1923.

Mr. Costanzo and his wife, Linda, returned to the East End in 1993 to get reacquainted with their roots and their land legs, becoming estate managers in Southampton. Still boat-building in his spare time, his restorations include a 14-foot peapod and Peter Jennings's 75-year-old canoe.

Richard Baxter, a builder who concentrates on restorations, also recruited Mr. Costanzo to assist in rebuilding the Gardiner windmill and the Mulford barn.

In upcoming racing news, the Breakwater Yacht Club will sponsor the 16th annual Sag Harbor Cup, a benefit regatta Saturday in Noyac Bay. Proceeds from this race will be help fund the club's youth sailing program.

This season, the Breakwater Yacht Club provided scholarships to many young people who otherwise would not have the opportunity to learn to sail. There will be a cocktail party immediately following the race at the club.

Chris Dowling, who works at Bruce Tait Yacht Sales in Sag Harbor, has further details.

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