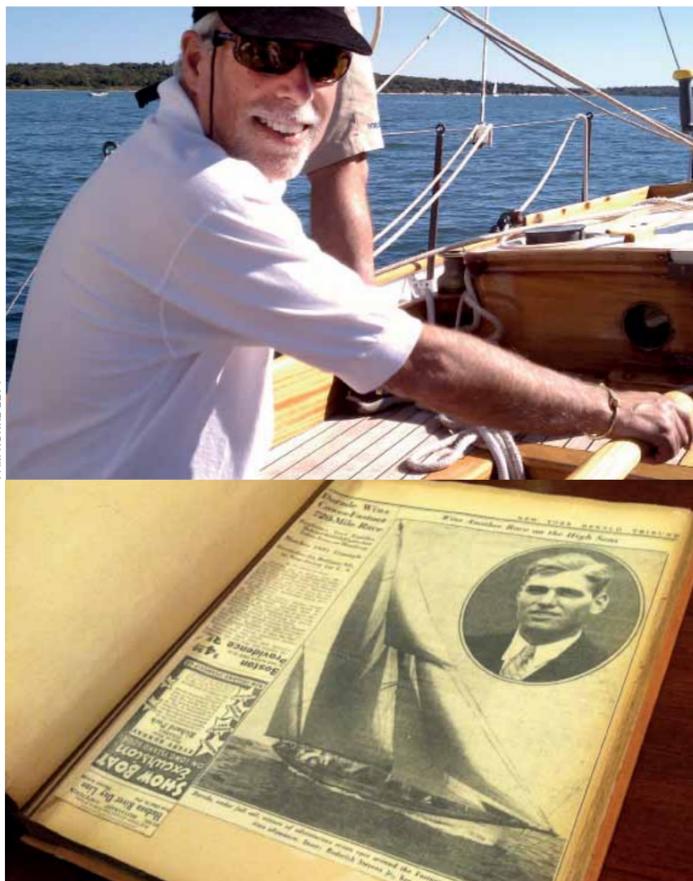




# ADORED DORADE

No ordinary yacht, she “changed the way people looked at sailboats” and is now lovingly restored, reports *Chris Museler*



PAM RORKE LEVY

PREVIOUS PAGE CORY SILKEN



BILLY BLACK

**H**annah Riley spent a large part of last winter analysing a tattered piece of 82-year-old, blue-dyed, woollen cloth. A textile conservator and restorer from California's Asian Art Museum, she is charged with replicating the item, a small flag with an artistically cut white seahorse in the middle of the field. She eventually sourced a similar woollen bunting from a manufacturer in England, dye testing it for the proper colour match. The embroidered maker's label on the hoist is even being reproduced by a machine.

Riley is on deadline. She is a critical part of a team competing in this year's Newport to Bermuda Race. It may seem unusual to have a textile conservator on a race team, but this is no ordinary campaign. This is *Dorade*.

The team are seeking to match the attention to detail and meticulous preparation that enabled Rod Stephens to win this race in 1932. After a one-year refit, her third in recent times, *Dorade* is stronger than ever and ready to tackle her new owner's ambitious goal of completing all the major ocean races of the 1930s and 40s – Bermuda, Transpac, Transatlantic and Fastnet – that launched the career of one of the world's most successful yacht design firms, Sparkman & Stephens.

When the crew hoist the Stephens family's racing burgee to the top of her varnished mainmast on 15 June, it will not only signal the legendary yacht's return to ocean racing, it will mark the dawn of a new genre of

competitive classic yacht racing. Led by the Europeans with the well-polished Mediterranean circuit, the scene has led to the restoration of hundreds of significant racing yachts from the past. Yachts of fine pedigree, drawn by the likes of Fife, Nicholson, Watson, Stephens, Alden and Rhodes, to name only a few, have been scooped up and restored to top form.

Around the globe, however, these greyhounds that predominantly raced distance in the ocean during their heyday, are kept in museum condition and only taken out coastwise in day-racing that contains as much pageantry as mark roundings. Save for the Transatlantic Classique, now on its second running, most classic events, and the boat owners, shy away from such aggressive racing.

#### OCEAN RACING

Starting this summer, Matt Brooks, *Dorade's* latest steward, hopes to change that mystique and build a critical mass for oceanic classic racing.

"When I bought her, the boat was fine for the intended purposes," says Matt, a Californian who bought *Dorade* in 2010. "[Edgar] Cato saved the boat by replacing all her frames. She was in fine shape for inshore sailing." But Matt had another idea. "I wanted to take her out in the ocean and repeat her early race history and other ocean races." This concept is now commonly referred to in the *Dorade* camp as "Matt's crazy idea".

Matt and his wife, Pam Levy, were intrigued by antique yachts after years relaxing aboard their friends' stately S&S yawl *Santana*. This majestic yacht, formerly owned and raced by Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall, was the showpiece in front of the St Francis Yacht Club. Once he started the usual addictive online search for an S&S of his own, Matt serendipitously stumbled upon *Dorade*, and the couple were hooked.

They first sailed the boat as Cato had left her, in October 2010, in Sail for Hope, a charity race around Conanicut Island off Newport. Though the northerly that day died, *Dorade* and fellow S&S-designed cutter *Sonny* had a neck-and-neck battle to the finish. After immersing himself in the history of the boat, Matt, a mountaineering guide with several global aviation records, made his decision to take her far.

"I've been told that these boats are fine pieces of antique furniture and you would ruin them by taking them offshore," he said. "My response is that *Dorade* is designed and meant to be sailed offshore. Hopefully I will be making this point with the Bermuda Race."

In the winter of 2010/11 he set about preparing *Dorade* for her first challenge, the Transatlantic Race from Newport to Cowes. It would be the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her win. "Matt was originally just going to put a new engine in her," says Greg Stewart, of Nelson Marek Yacht Design, who had been involved with the boat when Cato owned her. Cato had removed the engine, making her as original, and used a large RIB

to manoeuvre her in and out of the slip. "Then we found cracks in the mast and measured it. The dimensions were less than original spec. Stiffness was 15-20 per cent lower from sanding over the years."

A massive undertaking ensued, involving S&S's president Bruce Johnson, the sailmakers from North Sails and countless shipwrights, machinists and even metallurgists. The July Transat deadline was missed, but the refit was a model of perseverance and minutiae.

#### THE REFIT

"After the first season, it became clear she needed a manoeuvring engine and a stem repair," says Matt. "We got the boat on the hard and found, in getting her ready for ocean sailing, there was more."

The mast, the boat's third, fitted in the late 1930s, was not worth salvaging, according to Matt. The stem had been leaking and had multiple repairs with a "Swiss cheese approach", and the rudder, which had a plug where the propeller aperture had been, had multiple damage. With a spotty electrical system, Matt adds that *Dorade* "needed different systems for offshore, too".

After discussions with S&S, and others who had worked with Olin Stephens before his death, there was some thought put into bringing the boat back to her original arrangement, bowsprit and all. But Matt's drive towards ocean racing, and contemporary offshore requirements, led to a subtle re-thinking of Stephens' original breakthrough design.

*Previous spread and above: Dorade stretches her legs in Sail for Pride off Newport in September 2011*

**Top:** Matt Brooks at the helm of *Dorade*  
**Above:** A page from the 1934 scrapbook Olin and Rod Stephens (pictured) prepared for their grandmother

“We were never trying to create a museum piece”



Right: The latest interior conceals offshore gear and electronics behind matching cabinetry

“We were never trying to create a museum piece,” says Matt. “I never had the pleasure of meeting Olin, but I know he has encouraged modernising. We want to keep that essence, modernising her in a way that’s invisible.” Everything from the structure of the boat and spars, to the placement of the stove and the electrical system, was given thorough analysis. “*Dorade* originally only had an 8-volt battery for the compass light. I don’t think Olin would advocate just that now.”

The mast and sail plan was the largest undertaking in *Dorade’s* refit, and the adjustments to arguably one of the most significant racing yachts of all time were not taken lightly. Bruce Johnson provided extensive notes and plans from the design to glean insight into what Stephens might have considered for an upgrade.

“The rig in the boat now is a pretty subtle development of what was there,” says Greg Stewart, a leading consultant for classic racing yacht restoration in the US. “The spreaders are distributed with a more modern spacing and are shorter.”

*Dorade’s* 1929 rig had a round-section mast with three headstays, the two forward stays ending at a moderate bowsprit. Before her 1931 transatlantic victory, the rig was shortened and the bowsprit removed. A new, lighter, rig was designed for the boat when she was sold to a West Coast owner in 1936. An oval-section mast was brought back to the original height of the spar. “This was a downwind rig,” says Stewart, “made for California, to hold spinnakers and light-air genoas.”

The new, heavier mast section is now strong enough for a full masthead rig. In 2010 and before, the inner forestay was removed for tacks with anything but the high-clewed Yankee flying. Now, up until the top-end wind range of the largest genoa, there is no need for the inner forestay and its associated runners.

A hallmark image of *Dorade* has been the precise intersection of three headstays at and near the stem. The two upper stays met at the stem and the staysail stay terminated barely a foot or two aft along the deck. But, the 2010 profile showed only one forestay at the stem. And, though Matt and his team shared a concern that the Comité International de la Méditerranée rule would penalise the boat for diverging from original, the decision was made to move the staysail stay aft by three feet. This allowed more room to make headsail changes, since hanks were still being used with the forward sails. The mast attachment for the stay was also slid proportionately down the mast to keep it parallel to the forestay.

While still having mostly external halyards on both the main and mizzen masts, *Dorade’s* deck layout and gear look virtually as original. All winches were replaced with bronze Meissner winches, even the small ones on the masts. The primary winches and the mainsheet winch on the cabin top were upsized, and the runner winches were left non-self-tailing so as not to be penalised by the CIM.

Both Matt and Pam have been heavily involved in the refit. Pam’s background as an award-winning documentarian has led to brilliant coverage of their love



CORY SILKEN

Above and right: *Dorade* races hard in the 32<sup>nd</sup> Classic Yacht Regatta at Newport in September 2011

affair with, and efforts in preparing, *Dorade*. The boat’s blog at [dorade.org](http://dorade.org) showcases high-end photography and periodic updates that document each stage of the refit, including the arduous decision-making process. The boat also has her own press agent. Though Matt believes the level of refinement brought to the boat sets a new benchmark for classic yachts, Pam believes the legacy is equally important.

“*Dorade* is an extraordinary object but it’s also a great story,” says Pam. “Both of us have kids the same age Olin was when he designed *Dorade*. It’s a classic story: the underdog triumphs beyond his wildest dreams. Getting the story out there is a big part of my interest.”

#### SCREENPLAY

Pam is writing *Dorade’s* and her designer’s story in the form of a screenplay. “This story told in film form would reach a much greater audience,” she says.

While shipwrights and sailmakers have been diligently putting *Dorade’s* pieces together, Matt and Pam have been collecting artefacts from around the world relating to the boat. “People are deeply moved by the boat and its history,” says Pam. “People actually saved things.”

One of the most exciting discoveries for the couple has been a transatlantic log book from 1933. Though not the log from their spectacular 1931 race win, it was the book Rod Stephens penned on the delivery back to the US after the Fastnet Race win. It was found at an antiques shop in Newport nearly 20 years ago by Bill



CORY SILKEN

“People are deeply moved by the boat and its history;  
people actually saved things”

Right: Detail of  
*Dorade's* rigging,  
including one of  
her bronze  
Meissner winches



## DORADE

DESIGNED  
Olin Stephens

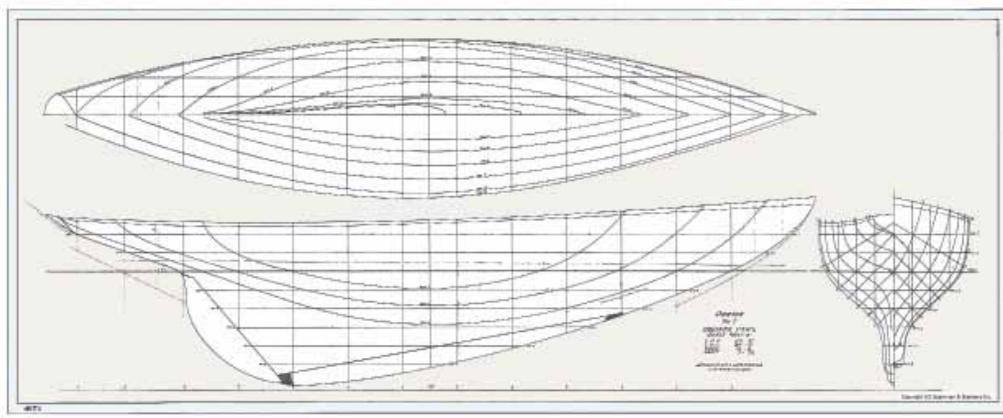
LENGTH OVERALL  
52ft  
(15.9m)

LENGTH WATERLINE  
37ft  
(11.3m)

BEAM  
10ft 3in  
(3.1m)

DRAUGHT  
8ft  
(2.4m)

SAIL AREA  
1,100sqft  
(102m<sup>2</sup>)



### So what makes *Dorade* so special?

From the pen of 21-year-old Olin Stephens, *Dorade's* design broke new ground. Her 'pencil-slim' frames and narrow beam kept her extremely light, while power came from the combination of long lines, deep keel and a pioneering bermudan yawl rig. She was particularly good upwind and on a run, according to legendary British designer Uffa Fox, who experienced her in her racing heyday.

From her launch in 1930, *Dorade* established winning ways; here are some of the highlights.

**1930** Second in class, Bermuda Race  
**1931** First, Transatlantic Race

**1931** Second, Round the Island Race  
First, Fastnet Race  
**1932** First in class, Bermuda Race  
**1933** First, Fastnet Race  
Set a new record for 3,000-mile westbound Atlantic crossing: 26 days and 15 hours  
**1936** First, Transpac Race  
**1947 - 1964** Five times winner, Swiftsure Race  
**1997** First in class, Veteran Boat Rally, Porto Cervo  
Twice first, and second, Régates Royales, Cannes  
**2012** First in class, St Maarten Heineken Regatta

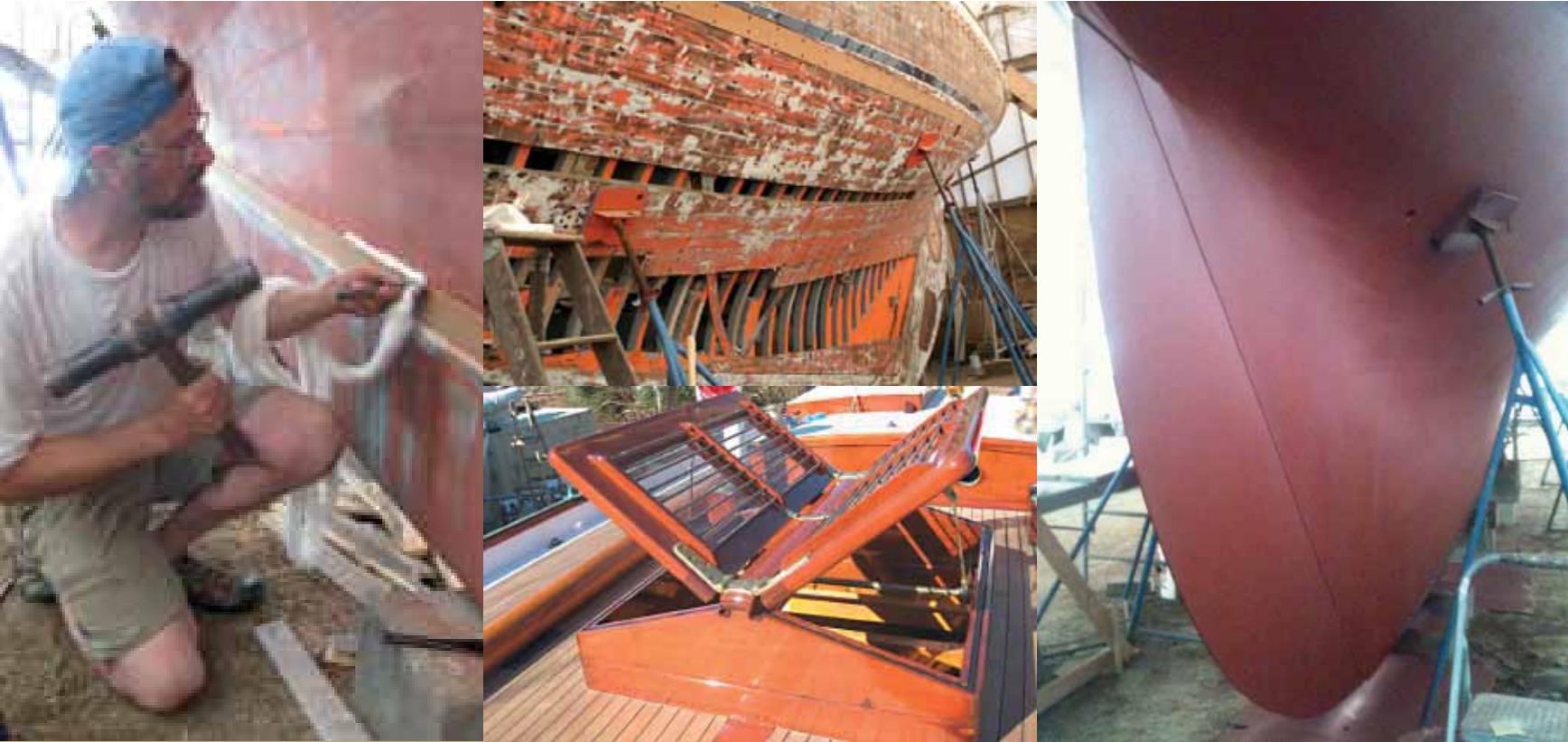
Doyle, owner of the remarkable Herreshoff NY30 *Amorita*, better known now for having been sunk in 2007 by the Fife ketch *Sumurun*. “I found it and just knew I had to hold onto it,” says Bill. Along with the log, he purchased a scrap book of the Stephens brothers’ travels around Europe that summer. It was lovingly compiled for their grandmother, who reportedly helped fund *Dorade's* build. Matt and Pam met Bill to view the two books and they are all now working together to have them preserved and professionally documented.

Matt is also collecting all *Dorade's* winning trophies, either through purchase or loan, and plans to keep them all together in one place. “At the end of all this, we want to have the exhibit ‘*Dorade*,’” says Pam.

The Stephens burgee is an excellent example of their treatment of the boat and her history. Pam discovered that it was retired shortly after *Dorade's* inaugural season, as it too closely resembled the Royal Ocean Racing Club’s flag. Once the original is stabilised, it will be framed and hung in the main saloon alongside Matt’s personal two-star racing flag. The replica will be “flown from the main masthead briefly at the beginning and end of each race in tribute to Olin and Rod.”

Below, the interior LED lights are covered by period fixtures. The Inmarsat dome on the aft deck is made to look like the binnacle once used by Rod Stephens to take daily sextant sights during ocean racing. The interior in front of the mast remains unchanged, and the main cabin

“Dorade has always been a trendsetter. She changed the way people looked at sailboats”



GREG STEWART

cabinets were changed to accommodate modern equipment. Though in the 1930s, *Dorade* had a coal stove, a smaller, propane stove is there now, and the engine is sited where the coal bin was.

The starboard quarter berth was extended to allow for a larger chart table. “The original drawings had a simple chart table,” says Stewart, “with a fold-up pipe berth over it where Olin supposedly slept.”

*Dorade* was entirely re-measured this winter and she came in at 37,000lb (16,783kg). There were notes about her original launch that stated she was 4,000lb (1814kg) overweight, much to the fright of young Olin. Now she’s 800lb lighter than she was when launched, which came as a surprise to Stewart. “It’s amazing. You don’t really know if she was that much over back then.”

### CARIBBEAN CONSUMMATION

Pam jokes that on certainly one occasion, her husband looked at the complications and dead ends within the refit and said, “sell the boat”. Ironically, his predecessor, Edgar Cato, was quoted as saying “donate it”, after discovering a series of cracked frames. But, what started out as a cross-country love affair, was finally consummated this winter in the Caribbean.

“It’s been a long-distance relationship,” says Pam. “We would read about the boat, read the blog, but we’ve only been able to spend a handful of days aboard her. The Caribbean has intensified our feelings of affection and admiration. I’m awestruck.” The couple spent several

blustery and sunny weeks driving the yawl between the islands. “We pulled into St Thomas and I was tired of cooking on the camp stove,” recalls Pam. “But Matt wanted to stay on the boat. He woke up one morning on the boat and said, ‘I’m having an affair!’”

*Dorade* is making more headlines than ever, and a comprehensive book on her was published this year. She is racing in no fewer than three Caribbean regattas this spring in preparation for the Bermuda Race. More than anything, however, her new owners are hoping to continue the pace of success set by the Stephens brothers.

“*Dorade* is a living, breathing vessel, not a static museum piece,” says Pam. “When you look at other forms of restoration, there are different camps. In the Williamsburg Tradition, they bring history back to life. You have a different appreciation for history when you see things how they were meant to be used.”

Matt puts his current use of the boat into perspective. “Atkins’ book says that *Dorade* has always been a trendsetter. She changed the way people looked at sailboats,” he argues. “He makes a point in the 1960s and 1970s that no one wanted her. Then, with the Italian restoration, she was again setting a trend [legitimising the classic yachting scene], once again making history. I believe she is on the cusp of history again. She’s going to set a trend with the Bermuda Race. Even if she just finishes in good order, it will speak to what Olin did in 1929 and the Italians in the early 1980s. It will revolutionise how you look at these boats.”

**Above left and top middle: Jim Titus of Mt Hope Boatworks completes *Dorade*'s second refit under Edgar Cato**  
**Lower middle: the skylights rebuilt**  
**Above right: the new rudder and offshore race-ready, faired hull**