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# Mysterion ... fixing things

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**G**rowing up in the flat prairie environs of Winnipeg, I have always loved mountains, seas, and boats. My uncle had a cottage near Winnipeg, and a 12 foot wooden boat made in Peterborough. This was better than nothing and I have fond memories of fishing with my uncle for Pickerel and Pike on the Big Whiteshell Lake. But I always knew there were bigger seas, bigger fish, and bigger boats.

Also, from childhood I always loved fixing things. My grandfather and father were natural fixers and they had infinite patience in showing me how to repair anything – from watches to cars. One of my happiest

memories from these years was helping my father put a speedometer from an auto-scrap yard into our 1938 Lincoln Zephyr, and joining



in the celebrations when, in the test-drive, it worked!

In 1972 I moved to Vancouver to teach at UBC. Now there were mountains and seas, but the best I could

do for a boat was an inflatable from Army & Navy that sat six and came with oars. This boat served our young family well for visits to inland lakes, and fishing for Rock Cod off Caulfield Park. But the family soon grew out of this; the boat developed leaks; my arms

tired quickly from rowing against tides; and it seemed my nautical life was over. We sold this boat in a garage sale.

Nearly forty years at UBC flashed by pleasantly, if all too quickly. Then retirement. Somehow, the nautical impulse returned and the thought of getting a little motorboat to use for fishing and picnics held out increasing appeal. Soon I was checking out used boats listed for sale on the internet. And then my nautical instincts hit real temptation, as I discovered the world of classic yachts. Total seduction soon followed as I opened the website of the Classic Yacht



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Association, viewed an array of gorgeous historic boats, read up on their owners and builders, and started to dream about buying and restoring one of these treasures. Who wants a little motorboat when you can dream of being the owner and captain of a classic yacht?

Questions naturally occurred, not least from spouse, boat-smart veterans, financial advisers, and skeptical friends. What did I know about boats and boating? What did I know about large, old, wooden boats? Could I afford the maxim that boat is an acronym for "bring on another thousand?"

Well, I had responses for all these questions. I could learn about repairing boats; it wasn't rocket science -- and here was the opportunity to fulfill my lifetime love of fixing things. Indeed, I could chalk up some remarkable successes with repairing the electricity, plumbing and woodwork in our old Kerrisdale house, not to mention our bikes and cars. Moreover, I had spent many years learning the arts of restoring old pianos. Old

boats -- what's the difference? And, besides, the prices for boats had sunk to the bottom in the wake of the 2008 financial collapse.

Then I met Mysterion. No more convincing was needed; it was love at first sight. Mysterion was built in Vancouver in 1926 and launched in 1927 as a 50 foot bridge cruiser. It was built by Russell Arbuthnot, owner of the Arbuthnot Sash and Door Company, for his own family. The designer is unidentified; but Arbuthnot had done much cabinetry on boats, was familiar with nautical architecture, and was probably his own designer. The teak for decks, walkways,

stern, wheelhouse, and external cabinetry all came from the Empress of Japan, the CPR steamer linking Canada with the Orient since 1891, which was scrapped in 1924. The result was a classic yacht of beautiful proportions and presence -- fully meriting careful restoration.

Mysterion was moored in La Conner, Washington, when I bought her in September 2009. While substantial refitting had been undertaken, it was clear that a major restoration would be necessary. The purchase price reflected this. The seller was candid, and members of the Classic Yacht Association who knew the boat well gave me realistic advice on what the costs of restoration would entail. This, plus the absolute



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beauty of Mysterion's historical lines, closed the deal, and Mysterion sailed back to Vancouver 5 October 2009 under the care of Captain Jim Barrett and his crewmate, Chris Dailey.

After some pretty desperate searching, moorage was found at Shelter Island Marina on the Fraser River. Soon Mysterion was hauled up and spent most of the winter being restored under the skillful guidance of shipwright Murray Brown, while I learned about nautical construction, repairs and gruntwork. As it turned out Mysterion's basics were sound. Some planking beneath the portside walkway needed replacement together with sistering of frames; most of the through-holes were redone; and shaft bearings were refurbished. Fuel tanks were cleaned. I did lots of the gruntwork: cleaning the bilges, heat-scraping the whole of the hull -- assisted intermittently by my two sons -- and repainting it when the spring weather arrived.

Mysterion was relaunched 23 April 2010 assisted and celebrated by nautical friends. The summer was taken up

with further restoration: the expansive fore and aft teak decks were resealed and refinished; the mechanical steering was repaired and eased with copious lubricants; most of the brass was polished bright and top-coated; the radar was repaired; and as winter approached walkways were being rebuilt and fiber-glassed.

One of the most satisfying repairs was to an old brass Schatz barometer -- a gift, but which had been banged up badly and rendered unworkable. No one that I could find in Vancouver could repair broken barometers. After some reading up on aneroid barometer technology, I was able to inspect my dead instrument with bright light and magnification, identify and fix the multiple problems, and reassemble the tiny parts. The waiting then began for bad weather and falling barometer pressures. Sure enough, the needle moved overnight to signal the on-coming rains. Never was terrible weather more welcome, as it had taken four disassemblings to get the barometer to perform. It now

graces the wheelhouse along with its matching Schatz clock.

If, like me, one likes fixing things and making them work again, classic wooden boats seem to offer endless opportunities to satisfy the fixer's compulsions. This winter will be taken up largely with interior refitting, and redecorating under the direction of my wife, Manya. We now have the diesel stove working again to keep us warm. There will be rewiring, building a new head, re-flooring, and testing out the resilient (but smoky) 1946 Buda 844 diesel engine. Indeed, there will be no end to the joy of fixing Mysterion and making her beautiful again.

*By George Egerton  
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