

SUMMER 2019

ISSUE 16

# BOISDALE

*Life*

THE NAUTICAL ISSUE

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## BOAT LIFE

**Charting the rebirth of  
British boat building**

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**Exclusive interview  
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The 69ft 675 sailing yacht from Oyster Yachts. Top: Oyster's new 595 yacht passes under Tower Bridge. Opposite: The groundbreaking R35 from Princess, from £500,000



# MAKING WAVES

Simon de Burton tracks down the finest exponents of the great British art of boat building, from dinghies to superyachts

Indeed, following a period in the doldrums brought on by the financial crash of 2008, Britain's boat building industry now appears to be riding the crest of a wave.

For example, I was recently aboard the thrilling, 60-knot Hawk 38, the latest creation from Sunseeker (£535,000 plus VAT to you, sir) that harks back to the type of craft originally built by the firm when it was founded as Poole Powerboats in 1969 by Robert Braithwaite – who, to the boating world's sorrow, died in March aged 76.

Nowadays, of course, Sunseeker is best known for the type of large, white, ocean-going cruisers that are often referred to as 'gin palaces' by those who don't approve – but moneyed buyers who care little about such disdain are once again filling the firm's order books, as well as those of other British builders such as Princess Yachts of Plymouth, whose range-topping, 40 metre M-Class superyacht could be in your berth for as little as £15 million. Its smaller boats are just as exciting. Indeed, readers may well have spotted Princess's latest magnificently sleek launch, the R35, on show in Cabot Square, outside Boisdale of Canary Wharf, in June. Designed in collaboration with Ben Ainslie Racing Technologies and the legendary Italian car designer Pininfarina, the R35 (from £500,000) is more or less the supercar of private speedboats, with a special hydrodynamic foil system designed to



It only takes the first few chapters of Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat* to bring out unfathomable nautical desires in even the most level-headed of Brits.

We dream of hazy days drifting along the Thames, the Avon or the Cam in a perfectly maintained craft as the less fortunate watch enviously from the river bank; we imagine ourselves traversing the country via a complex network of little-known waterways; we picture long winter evenings spent in boathouses, lovingly applying varnish and burnishing brass fittings in preparation for the forthcoming

season. In our minds, indecipherable charts, rotting timbers, problematic bilge pumps and rain-lashed afternoons simply do not exist. And, as a result, some of us buy boats.

Some of us even buy entire shipyards, as in the case of gaming software tycoon Richard Hadida, who saved 46-year-old Oyster Yachts from 'going under' when he acquired it last year from the administrators. The turnaround has been so successful that the Southampton firm recently celebrated its first year of recovery by sailing its new 565 model beneath London's Tower Bridge.



dramatically reduce drag as you whizz around your private island.

But if boatmaking of a more old-fashioned, understated style is your thing, then read on, because traditional wooden craft are being lovingly created around the country in all shapes and sizes by Britain's burgeoning network of classic boat builders. And, as Jerome K. Jerome demonstrated, you don't need to go large to have nautical fun.

Indeed, for larking about on the river Jerome-style, you need look no further than the handsome little rowing boats from Peter Freebody & Co, which has been in business at its exquisite boathouse in Hurley, Berkshire, for more than 50 years. Electric canoes and characterful saloon launches are also made, but the Freebody flagship is the fabulously elegant and commodious Thames Slipper launch, the 'slipper' term relating to the boats' sloping stern.

Using woods such as mahogany, cedar and teak, the Freebody team crafts each boat individually and can make bespoke interiors to suit all tastes (especially those tastes that appreciate

As Jerome K. Jerome demonstrated, you don't need to go large to have nautical fun

the benefits of carrying plenty of wine and a decent picnic on board).

Now run by the founder's son, Richard, the classic appearance of the firm's vessels, which start at around £250,000 plus VAT, belies the fact that they are powered by the latest, eco-friendly electric motors and can comfortably cruise for an entire day on a single charge.

But for those whose navigational ambitions extend beyond Britain's inland waterways and who dream of mixing their first G&T the very second the sun crosses the yardarm, only a truly seaworthy vessel will do.

Up at Lochgilphead in Argyllshire, the husband and wife team of Adam and Ros Way have spent more than 20



The Thames Slipper, built at Hurley in Berkshire by Peter Freebody & Co. Bottom: a Shrimper from Cornish Crabbers starts at £20,000



Above: the Titian Tender made by Cockwells, priced at £1m. Left: Ben Harris at work in his Falmouth workshop; below, software entrepreneur and saviour of Oyster Yachts, Richard Hadida



years restoring, upgrading and building traditional wooden boats that range from sailing skiffs to 50-foot blue water cruising cutters that are capable of taking entire families around the world.

Similarly, Ben Harris Boats of Falmouth in Cornwall will knock up a beautifully finished sailing dinghy or full-sized, carvel-built yacht in order to fulfil your nautical dreams. His 'Auk', for example, can be had in sizes from seven-foot six inches to 10 foot and is made using traditional, copper riveted larch on oak construction for strength, durability – and swimmingly romantic *Swallows and Amazons* looks.

Indeed, Cornwall seems to be the place to go for a hand-crafted vessel, with one of the most renowned builders being Dave Cockwell, whose



eponymous boatyard at Mylor Creek in Falmouth has become famous for its Duchy motor launches that range from the open, £35,000 21-foot day boat to the elegant, £800,000 twin-engined 60 that's capable of running at up to 24 knots in open seas.

Perhaps the boat that best exemplifies Cockwell's skills, however, is the gorgeous, 10.5 metre Titian Tender – a day boat that combines a futuristic hull design with the best of old-world craftsmanship.

With planking of rich Burmese teak and copper-infused caulking to the deck, the Titian Tender is as beautiful as it is practical, with capacity for up to a dozen people, a small galley and fold-out table in the stern. There's space enough, in fact, for a couple to enjoy an

intimate overnight stay – assuming they can raise the £1 million purchase price.

But for sailors on a less extravagant budget, who want the old-school look of a clinker-built boat (that's one with overlaid wooden planking) at an affordable price and without the need for careful hull maintenance, nothing beats the tried and tested products of Cornish Crabbers (from £20,000).

A range of GRP (glass reinforced plastic) vessels are made at a yard in Rock near Wadebridge, Cornwall. The smaller 17-foot Shrimper open sail boat starts from less than £20,000, with the range rising to the 26-foot Crabber at £114,950.

And if you're looking for a last bit of nautical inspiration, a summation of the sailing bug from Oyster's Richard Hadida

should provide you with all the encouragement you need.

"For me, sailing is both the ultimate form of relaxation and the ultimate form of adventure," Hadida says.

"The moment my bare feet touch the deck, all the troubles of the world fall from my shoulders and I know that I have everything I need to explore the world's oceans. What other activity gives you that?"

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