



# HERRESHOFF'S LAST SCHOONER

She's survived hurricane, fire... even Hugh Heffner!  
Her owner has defied the odds to beat terminal cancer.  
Today, the two are almost symbiotically linked

WORDS LUCY TULLOCH

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It is mid-April in Antigua, when Falmouth Harbour would usually be bustling with classics for its annual regatta. Instead, on a calm afternoon, I sit quietly with Gerald Rainer, in the beautifully-varnished cockpit of this very special schooner, to talk about all the lives that crossed and brought him to this point.

Gerald grew up near Lake Traunsee in Austria. It was a small house for the size of family so the rivers, pastures and mountains became his playground. Forbidding the young children to play at the lake, his parents didn't find out until many years later that he had been learning to sail there instead of studying with school friends as he'd told them. But by then, he was converted...and this early passion would transform his life.

Nearly a century earlier, on the other side of the Atlantic, Nathanael & his brother John Herreshoff raced each other up Long Island Sound, building boats to beat not just the fastest patrol boat in the area, but the serious Long Island adults in their quick racing boats. They were only teenagers at the time, but of course history relates that they went on to design and build some of the world's fastest and most innovative yachts in history, including a succession of undefeated America's Cup defenders.

'Captain Nat', as he became affectionately known, did not want his son's keen interest in yacht design to be overshadowed by his father's fame, so he had the ingenious idea to send Francis to work as an apprentice at his biggest competitor, Starling Burgess. L Francis Herreshoff grew up to become a yacht designer in his own right, after he came back to work with his father, designing a series of clipper-bowed ketches including *Ticonderoga* and *Bounty*. Some say that the elegant Q-Class *Falcon*, recorded as designed by Burgess and built by Herreshoff, was actually drawn by Francis while he was there. She inspired the J-Class *Ranger*.

**THE ECOLOGICAL APPROACH**

In Austria, the young Gerald Rainer was awarded the prestigious Fulbright scholarship, attaining a joint degree from Harvard and Tufts Universities in just one year. His mind however, turned to ecology. "Growing up in a tiny hamlet, deep in the mountains, I was always a nature guy, a hillbilly." Gerald explains his early fascination

with ecology: "I wasn't afraid that nature would go down the drain or anything negative. I just thought, let's not destroy it, even, let's promote it." At the age of 32, he wrote a 20-page document titled *Ecö Economy* on the complex subject of how to combine the preservation of nature with commerce. He sent it to the Austrian Prime Minister, who was so impressed that for the next four years, Gerald was invited to work on his concept with a team of experts and a generous annual budget. Together, they changed the world's perception of commerce and ecology. Closer to home, a purification process was put in place that resulted in lakes across the country being clean enough to drink. Their toxic waste programme was later used in Denmark. Gerald went on to become adviser to the OECD for ecology.

In his 20s, Gerald sailed his 505 zealously along the north African coast while working in Algiers. Later, sailing with friends, his sailing skills developed and over the years, experience in navigation and seamanship followed and his eye always turned towards classic yachts. His father was a chemical engineer and carpenter and Gerald's love of the smell of varnish and wood stayed with him forever. And he dreamed...

In Warren, Maine, he met a farmer who would become his lifelong friend. With the renowned English shipwright John Anderson, the farmer was restoring the 1930 Q-Class *Falcon II* (later renamed *Hayday* and *Jour de Fête*). Their friendship blossomed and Gerald joked that one day, he would love to own a yacht like *Falcon II*. "No," came the reply, "you'll have something better. Let John restore this one and when I die, you'll get the next one." Incredibly, the farmer also had L Francis's 1926 *Falcon* in skeletal form. "But...are you dying?" Gerald asked. "If I don't have a heart replacement, I'll be dead in 12 months." But fate had something different written for his good old friend. "Don't worry, you'll get your boat" he promised Gerald.

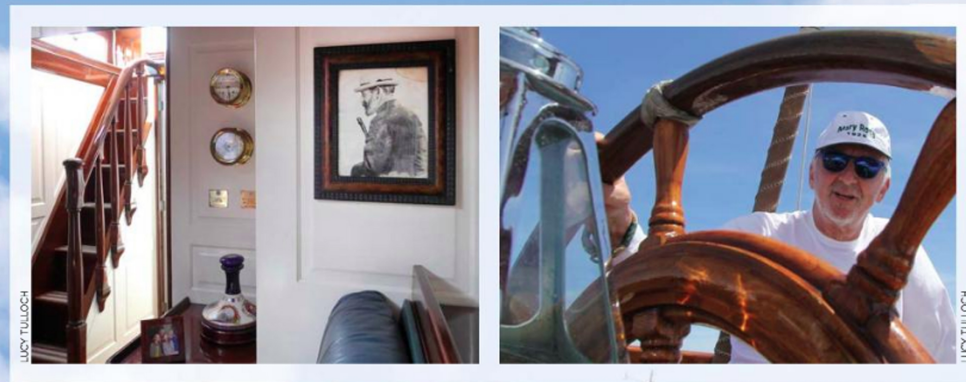
It was 18 months later, when Gerald had returned to Europe, the news came that his friend had actually died of blood poisoning on his farm and that he had been bequeathed the skeleton of *Falcon*.

There was also a barn for his use for \$1,000 a month and the use of a boatyard. Gerald spent every summer for the next seven years overseeing the restoration, carried out by John Anderson. His motto during this rebuild was "No compromise" and so she was restored square inch by square inch.

**NAT HERRESHOFF'S LAST SCHOONER**

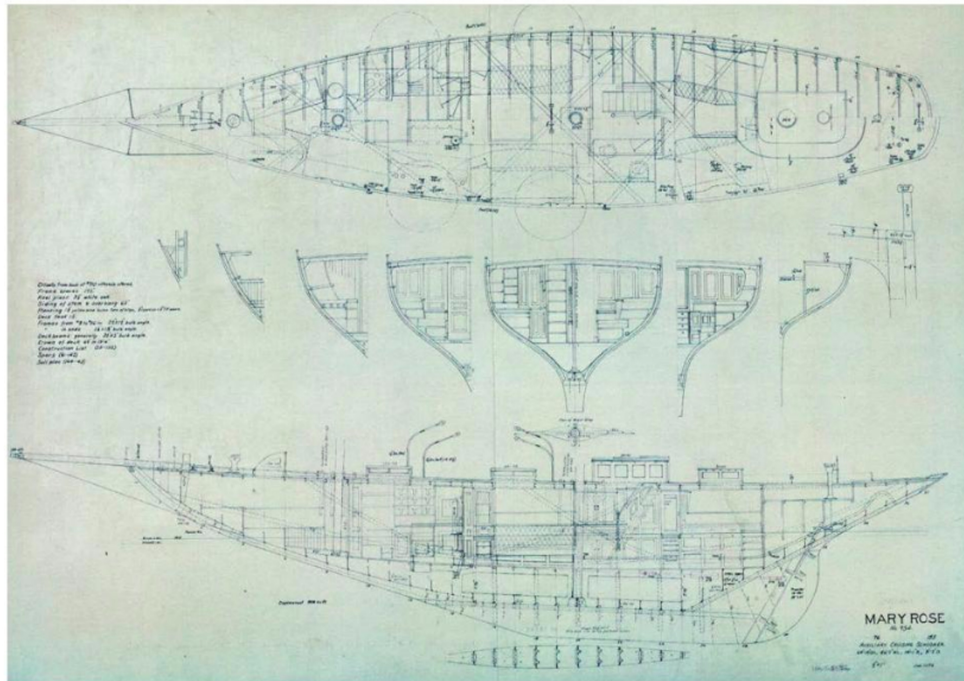
At the age of 78, Nat Herreshoff designed and built his final schooner, *Mary Rose*. On 5 August 1925, Harold Brooks from Long Island ordered a schooner. It is said that he had already decided on the name. Capt Nat started immediately with the design, inspired by his sloop *Flying Cloud* whose lines he had drawn in 1910. The stunning *Mary Rose* was launched the following year and went on to win the New York Yacht Club annual regatta. In 1930 she won the City of Newport Cup, beating the 12-M *Iris* and the J-Class *Enterprise* skippered by Harold Vanderbilt. Many more victories followed.

She is planked in southern yellow pine below the waterline and douglas fir planks above. Surprisingly, much of her interior is teak with a convincing mahogany



Main picture: Mary Rose sailing at Antigua Classics  
 Above left: Nat Herreshoff's portrait below decks  
 Above right: Gerald Rainer





stain. But delve more deeply and you will learn why she has been termed the “Stradivarius of classic sailing yachts” because 24 different types of wood are used in very specific places for their different properties.

She was sold in 1936 to Russel B Stearns, member of the Eastern Yacht Club, who changed her name to *Gallant* but two years later she was tragically destroyed by a category five hurricane that dragged her and her four anchors in the wind. The storm took hundreds of lives and destroyed countless yachts along the East coast, but her fortune turned when E Howard Reed bought the wreck and restored her.

As with many yachts during the war, the US Coast Guard requisitioned *Mary Rose* from 1942-1945 but in the decades that followed, little is known about the details of her private ownership in California.

Cover girl *Mary Rose* hosted a deliciously risqué photo shoot with Hugh Hefner in the July 1957 issue of *Playboy* magazine. There were six pages of on-deck and interior shots with scantily-clad models enjoying a typical cruise aboard the yacht.

Sadly, that very interior was destroyed in a fire in 1975, after which a new caretaker bought her and in 1994 embarked on a six-year complete restoration. Using plans and documents from the Herreshoff Museum, she was restored meticulously to her original standards. Some 25,000 man-hours and a change of name later, *Gallant* sailed again away from the dock in 1999 and immediately won the Baruna Trophy in San Francisco.

Gerald had many friends and sailing mentors from

**MARY ROSE**

TYPE  
Gaff-rigged schooner

LOS  
84ft (25.6m)

LWL  
46ft 6in (14.2m)

BEAM  
14ft 4in (4.4m)

DRAUGHT  
9ft 2in (2.8m)

DISP  
29 tonnes

SAIL AREA  
2,547 sqft (236.6m<sup>2</sup>)

whom he learned much. One trip took him from Greenland to Maine crossing the Labrador Sea where Gerald first saw *Gallant* anchored in Boothbay Harbour. The wealthy American couple who owned her became his good friends but she remained out of his reach. Later, when the owner embarked on a substantial restoration project of the Abeking & Rasmussen *Sea Diamond*, Gerald put in a low offer for *Gallant*. The owner's lawyer sent counter-offers to an apparent stony silence... But far from Gerald being stubborn in the negotiations, he had not actually seen any of the counter offers, being completely out of communication in the midst of escaping a dramatic tsunami in the far east, leaving him clinging to a palm tree and losing everything except the clothes he stood in. His original offer was accepted and the sale was agreed.

Having returned *Gallant* to her original name, he enjoyed cruising *Mary Rose* for two months in the BVIs and for two months in Maine every year. Gerald learned his boat well and concluded that there is a relationship between sailor and boat. She has a soul. He strongly believes that if you put your soul into something, it will come back... there will be some response.

He didn't know it then, but Gerald had contracted a rare type of cancer and it wasn't until he was in the advanced stages, that he was diagnosed and given a week to live by his oncologist. He immediately underwent an intense nine-hours-a-day chemotherapy course for several months “You have to fall on your nose first before you can recreate yourself,” he says. “If you fall



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down... you have to get up.” And it is from this experience of surviving cancer that Gerald decided how to live the rest of his life. “Benevolence and tolerance are my modes of life now.” It shows in everything Gerald is. And as if summoned, in the quiet afternoon in Falmouth Harbour, a small family of dolphins swim through the harbour breaking the water silently.

In 2010, after a period in the shed in Portsmouth, Rhode Island, she was on a Herreshoff Museum mooring in Bristol for three months while she was prepared for her upcoming Caribbean season. A varnisher went aboard daily to build up the necessary coats to withstand the unforgiving sun and trade winds of the tropics. While an expert in the field of varnishing, he had no sea experience and when 30 knots howled through the anchorage and the mooring chain broke, he was left helpless. Calling the captain for advice, he was told not to touch anything, in case the insurers might not pay. He sat in what must have been terrifying circumstance, as she sailed under bare poles north to south before making an elegant 90° turn to the shore. She steered a course right through a crop of rocks with no more than 20ft (6.1m) of water either side, and ran softly aground pointing her bowsprit to the estate of Nat Herreshoff. As the tide rose, people gathered on the shore, praying and singing to save the boat.

**NOT INSURED**

The salvage company called Gerald and agreed on a “no cure-no-pay” arrangement of \$10,000 and at high water, the tug pulled her off safely with barely five scratches on her keel. A relieved Gerald called his insurance company to let them know there would be no claim, to discover that, having not received payment demand emails during his cancer treatment, *Mary Rose* was not insured.

Sailing with Gerald is a romantic experience. He is the most at ease with boat and crew I've ever seen. He talks to his guests on board about how a schooner sails and his light touch on the helm echoes his words about a boat's soul.

“I've sanded and varnished the boat from stem to stern at least four times... you climb into the bilges to get them clean, try to figure out that which you are never able to... I think it's for love. Falling in love is one thing...but being in love

**Above left:**  
Saloon looking forward  
**Above right: At anchor off Angitua**  
**Below: July 1957 Playboy cover**

– it's the tiny work. It's not the big things. Show them continuous attention you will get back. You get attached.”

Why do you love this boat, I venture. “I could never master her. I think that's what it is. I never thought I was the boss. She showed me every time,” is Gerald's reply.

Gerald has raced for a decade at Antigua's Classic Yacht Regatta. He sails with an amateur crew made up of friends and family and has won many trophies over these years, including a personal victory in 2015 over two classic greyhounds *Mariella* and *Dorado*. There are tiny nuances to sailing *Mary Rose* that Gerald has learned over years sitting at her helm that led him to these successes. When he was asked why he doesn't lose speed one day, he replied “Because I know what's going to happen in the next five seconds.” From talking to Gerald over the years, it seems to me, this is also how he lives his life.

“One day out racing, I tried to force it, and we got stuck. The fleet pulled away from us. Then on the second race, we were having a ball, we beat everybody.”

He doesn't like the term “owner” and sees himself more as a “caretaker”. He insists on all the work being done to Herreshoff's original specifications. Four years on the board of the Herreshoff Museum has given Gerald an in-depth knowledge of what the master intended.

Helping him on his mission is skipper Manfred and his partner Gemma and long-time friend Foerbie. There is no one-man-show feel to this boat: everyone is involved in creating what she is today. There is real dedication in all that the four have done on board. Recently the ‘schooner girls’ Gemma & Magdali built a trailer for the Antigua-built Herreshoff sailing dinghy and this spring has seen Gerald sailing in Falmouth Harbour most evenings among the anchored cruising boats and super yachts. Now it takes five minutes to launch and be sailing, “less time than it takes to buy the beers,” Manfred laughs.

Gerald and his team are keen to share the boat with young people, especially those who might not get a chance to sail. Enthusiastic teaching of traditional skills reward those willing to learn, including girls, sometimes disregarded in classic racing. They and the younger generation get involved with every aspect of racing and the graft needed for Gerald's winning formula. A respectful nod surely, to the Herreshoff brothers' childhood and their 12½, and to Gerald's own summer days on the mountain lakes of Austria. ☺

