

# St. Briac

BY LUCY TULLOCH

**N**aming a boat after an Irish Monk famous for his navigation skills is a fine start for a vessel, and appropriate, for one that goes on to sail three circumnavigations. *St. Briac*, built in France in 1955 is 44ft. on deck but with her fixed bowsprit and lampkin, she is over 62ft. overall. The biggest of five that were probably built in Brest, she was commissioned by Claude Dupres, who first took her around the world. Good friends with Uffa Fox, they sailed together in the early days and *St. Briac* might well have been the first freedom-rigged yacht built, but was later converted to a gaff rig only to change to the Bermuda rig she has now. With her 850 square ft. of sail, she has an enormous sail area for her size, and stepping on board, she feels as big and powerful as she looks and sails. Traditional baggy wrinkles adorn her rigging and her tall mizzen and high bulwarks emphasize this feeling of power.

Her skipper and owner, Vince White, grew up in Woodbridge, Suffolk in England living amongst a community of houseboats. He bought himself a 'sinking wreck' on which he lived, learning the wisdom and talents of boat restoration from the surrounding salty sea-dogs. He took the best of this experience with him and worked in boatyards in Devon & Cornwall for a time before heading to the Canaries. Here he found no shipwrights but plenty of demand for them, so in Tenerife he took to the busy world of boat repairs.

It was here also that he found *St. Briac*. She had dragged and lay helplessly bumping on the rocks for an astonishing ten days. Seeing her in a fisherman's yard in Los Cristianos, Vince decided not to get involved – there was simply too much work to do on her. Although the sails & rigging were good, her port side was completely stove in. His friends told him that he was crazy but they knew he would not let her go. They wished him luck! A partner joined him for this arduous nine-month refit.

Living a 'bread & jam existence', they replaced 22 planks and laminated 17 frames with Iroko and caulked her seams. Trying to stay as close to original as possible, they rebuilt the entire interior from Iroko. They



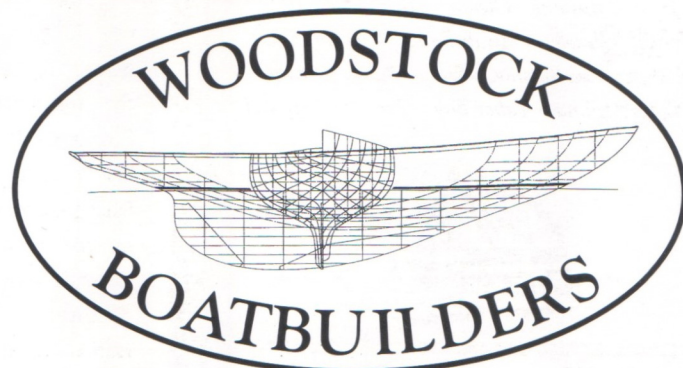
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also rebuilt the engine and water tanks. All this, as the familiar story goes, with limited tools and no workshop. By this time, Vince on his own, started chartering. He advertised in England and the first guest loved it so much she helped to set up further charters. Vince had always wanted a boat to travel (too many houseboats maybe!) and he started thinking about doing a transatlantic. Almost before he knew it, he had sold six places. All novices. They took 23 days to sail to Antigua

with light winds nearly all the way. Nevertheless, they sailed into English Harbour with a good feeling of arrival. Also, much inspired by the story of the Looe Lugger *Guide Me* (See A.C.Y.R. programme article 1993) Vince was looking forward to the Classic Regatta in April.

Vince intends to take *St. Briac* south before returning for next years ACYR then would like to sail her back to her roots to Brest where she will once again be a star.

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