



CAMBRIA

Winner of the Boat International Concours d' Elegance as well as the Tropical Studios trophy for most photogenic yacht.



Photo by Roddy Grimes-Graeme

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I could (and probably will) wax lyrical about the splendid *Cambria* that sailed into Falmouth Harbour in December to join us for, amongst other things, Antigua's 17th Classic Regatta. So be warned. I am a big fan.

But to capture the spirit of a yacht – especially one with a heritage as rich and proud as this – we must not just talk about her grace and speed; the faultless beauty and proportion of her lines; the immense 152ft mast carrying a staggering 390m² of mainsail. I should mention life on board which, after all, goes towards making up the soul of a yacht. How the crew took mid-morning tea together in the cockpit and biscuits from an old antique tin with a creaky hinge. The average age on board was around 32, indeed the skipper, Peter Mandin, was a mere 35. He told me how he'd spotted her original 1927 Fisherman anchor on the wall of owner John David's house, where it was hanging as a memento. Now it is raised and lowered each time she goes out. It is a complex but fascinating 20 minute exercise. How they love this boat. They all sail with huge smiles on their faces. Here are no rock stars. This is proper wooden-boat life.

OK, so the story: In 1928 *Cambria* was designed and built by Fife for Sir William Berry in the renowned Fairlie Yard as the first of the new generation of 23 Metre Class cutters (*Astra* in 1928 and *Candida* in 1933). Berry, a self-made international success as one of only a handful of 20th century newspaper owner/editors, was a respected art collector and approached William Fife to design his boat. History relates that he asked his wife if she, too, would like a similar yacht, an offer she declined. With an overall length of 135ft but just 80ft of the waterline, her overhangs have to be seen to be believed. It was the largest

boat Fife ever built and the first Bermudan cutter of its size. Of composite construction, she is made of Honduras mahogany planking on steel frames.

With her oversized mast, and complicated handicaps, competing against King George's *Brittania*, which was gaff rigged, made her early racing results unimpressive. And soon after, the new J Class Rule was agreed upon, for which *Cambria* qualified and later fulfilled.

She passed through three or four owners sailing the Mediterranean until the early 60s before embarking on a circumnavigation resting in Australia, where she was later discovered in 1994 by the Prime Minister, who introduced her to Iain Murray, Dennis O'Neil and John David who purchased her and started the fantastic restoration by Norman Wright Shipwrights in Brisbane. Never uncrewed, she was virtually intact with her deck structures and fittings still pure Fife and below her original elegant Mahogany interior needed only some French polish to bring it alive again. With her original rack and pinion steering, she really is one of the few unchanged yachts from this era still sailing. The conversion to original Bermudan rig was completed by Fairlie Restorations and Spencers of Cowes (using the Mizzen for the new boom) before being shipped to Cowes for the splendid America's Cup Jubilee followed by the Prada Series in the Mediterranean.

In Antigua, Chippy and his carpenters lovingly rebuilt the aft cabin and *Cambria*, galloping around the course like a true thoroughbred, won four trophies including a 2nd in the Single Handed Race Large Boat Class and overall winner of the Concours d'Elegance.

—Lucy Tulloch