



Classic

WOODEN MOTOR

Yachts

RON McCLURE





Introduction

It usually happens in a heartbeat. You're walking the docks in the quiet evening sun, ambling through a floating maze of plastic and reflective chrome. Suddenly, you see a boat like no other in the entire marina: a wooden beauty, marvelously unique. It pulls you like a magnet. Your eyes narrow as you inspect the old-fashioned design: part Model A, part *African Queen*. Antique violin in color, she's full of burnished-bronze deck fittings and fancy knotted stanchions. You want to touch the boat, slide your hand over her varnished teak rails. When the owner peers out through lace curtains, surrounded by brass kerosene lamps, you can't help asking the obvious, "Is this a classic?"

The term *classic* has become a cliché—it's applied to everything from a can of Coke to a fiberglass MG replica. Even dedicated boating enthusiasts argue about what constitutes a classic. The Classic Yacht Association defines *classic* as a pleasure boat built before World War II, made of wood and still true to her original design. Yet, in this book, you'll find other boats as well: workboats, tugboats, boats built after World War II, and some that are not made entirely of wood. The photographs and stories that fill

each chapter will help you understand—as I have over the years—what makes these, and hundreds of other boats, classic.

After reading this book and gazing at the color photographs, you'll understand that the term *classic* does not mean just a type or genre or period; it connotes something much more: it's a process. And you'll begin to appreciate that boats become classics because of the love, sweat, and tears that go into them over the decades. It's a moniker hard earned, hard maintained, and always presented with pride and affection by a loosely affiliated subculture of wooden-boat aficionados who understand the concept because they are the essence of it. It's not just about the boats. Classic yachting is a way of life and, once smitten (often in a heartbeat), you're forever netted.

I would like to thank the following people for their gracious help with and enthusiasm for this project: David and Ruth Gillespie, Earl McMillen III, Mike and Peggy O'Brien, Martin McNair, Dave Walker, Dorin Robinson, Mel and Gig Owen, and Julian Matson.



Belle

ELIZABETH AND EARL McMILLEN III AND CHUCK PARRISH, MANAGERS

Newport, Rhode Island



It's 8 A.M. on a clear and magnificent summer morning at the tiny airport outside Newport, Rhode Island. I'm buckled into the cockpit of a vintage Beechcraft Bonanza. My wife Kathy is behind me, sandwiched between a new Yamaha outboard engine and several boxes of supplies. We're about to take off for Martha's Vineyard to photograph the 1929 classic Launch, *Belle*. Her owner, Earl McMillen, is at the controls. We taxi and rise, lumping through the updrafts, and then bank over the harbors and marinas. Newport and the surrounding oceanside communities are a boat lover's paradise—I've never seen so many boats on a bay. Earl banks the plane sharply against the sun, flying south along the beach to point out the famous Gatsby-esque mansions along Bellevue Avenue. Then we climb and Earl heads us out to sea, east to another tiny airstrip on the island of Martha's Vineyard.

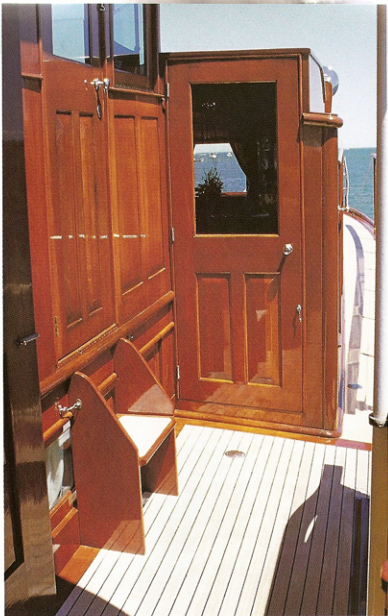
I'd seen pictures of *Belle* on Earl's Web site, and I'm eager to see her firsthand and have the privilege of boarding her. But when I finally see her, I'm left speechless. This 77-foot varnished mahogany pleasure yacht is as pristine and perfectly detailed both inside and out as the day she was built.

Owned briefly by country-western singer-songwriter David Allen Coe, *Belle* spent much of her life in the South, in Florida and North



Carolina. Built in 1929—the year the stock market crashed—by the New York Yacht, Launch & Engine Company of Morris Heights, *Belle* was originally named *Madge III*. Her hull is planked with Douglas fir over steam-bent oak frames, and she was powered with twin six-cylinder 100-horsepower 20th Century gasoline engines. She was the prototype for many of the boats that NYL&E produced but, like many yachts during the unstable 1930s, she went from owner to owner. By 1934, she had been acquired by a man in Norfolk, Virginia, and became a “southern belle.”

We step from the small launch that has ferried us out from the harbor at Martha's Vineyard onto her beautiful teak and bronze swinging gangway and are greeted by her captain, Craig Callahan, and chef Hannah Troggis. They are largely responsible for the boat's pristine condition. Her teak decks are almost pure white and stunning against the varnished Honduras mahogany cabinsides and caprails. *Belle's* immediate attraction is the spa-



acious aft deck, shaded under taut canvas and mahogany ribs. With wicker lounge chairs and a full-beam cushioned seat at the stern, this deck is more like an open-air saloon. This section of the boat is enhanced by a small fishing or boarding cockpit abaft the aft seating area, accessible by a companionway that opens from center and steps down.

The cabins below are accessed via a companionway amidships, just aft of the pilothouse. The quarters are spacious, beautiful, and original. Accessed from either side, the pilothouse is small and designed for captains only. It overlooks the formal dining area, which is reached through a companionway to starboard. This elegant cabin showcases the extravagance and opulence of the Roaring Twenties: the joinery work and paneling, the hand-carved furniture, the drapes framing massive opening sash windows, and the tastefully placed antiques.

Earl tells us that during the spring and fall, *Belle* cruises the Georgia and South Carolina coasts, and southern Florida and the Bahamas in the winter months. The boat's summer cruising areas are primarily the coastal waters of southern New England and Maine. "She calls at Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard frequently, where one of my partners in the boat, Chuck Parrish, keeps a summer house."

Although it's difficult to believe, *Belle* lives outside year-round. Her condition is equal to any classic we've seen—most of which spend sheltered lives under covered moorage. Earl explains that the boat wasn't always in such excellent condition, however. "She was a complete basket case, with oysters growing in the bilges and a worm-ridden keel when I found her." *Belle* was fully restored by McMillen Yachts Inc. in 1998.

Moving around her decks above and below, I find it impossible to stop shooting pictures—every inch, every detail is so classic wooden yacht. Eventually, we have to leave; as we pull away in the open launch in a lively midday chop, *Belle's* hull rises above us. She is more ship than I expected, yet she possesses all the grace and charm any classic yacht owner could want.

Soon we are again climbing sharply in the Beechcraft. The reflection of the sun plays on the harbor below. We gaze down at *Belle* one final time before flying westward from Martha's Vineyard toward Newport.



Belle

YEAR:	1929
DESIGNER:	New York Yacht, Launch & Engine Company Morris Heights, New York
BUILDER:	New York Yacht, Launch & Engine Company Morris Heights, New York
LENGTH:	77 feet
BEAM:	16 feet
DRAFT:	4 feet
ORIGINAL POWER:	Twin 20th Century, gasoline
CURRENT POWER:	Twin Caterpillar 3116 Turbo, diesel
CONSTRUCTION:	Douglas fir over steam-bent oak
HOME PORT:	Newport, Rhode Island