

YOUR HOLIDAY HOST GUIDE: THE FINEST WINES, SPIRITS, CIGARS

# Robb Report

FOR THE LUXURY LIFESTYLE™

Fine  
Jewelry  
& Watches  
Our Annual Celebration

Classic  
Timepieces  
Artwork  
for the Wrist

NOVEMBER 2002



\$9.99 U.S. \$9.99 CDN

robbreport.com  
CURTICO ROBB MEDIA

## Search and Rescue

McMillen Yachts saves and restores wooden yachts that are destined for the scrap yard.

WHEN EARL McMILLEN first saw *Belle* in 1996, the 77-foot wooden boat was half-buried in mud behind a house in St. Petersburg, Fla., its hull resembling a slice of Swiss cheese. *Belle*, built in 1929 by the New York Yacht Launch and Engine Co., contained all of its original systems, all of them thoroughly rusted, including a 110-volt DC panel that looked like surplus from Dr. Frankenstein's laboratory.

The boat was a nightmare for the two brothers who owned *Belle* and for their neighbors, who were forced to tolerate this scourge. In short, everyone wanted to be rid of *Belle*. Everyone except McMillen, who eagerly purchased the boat and hauled it to Newport, R.I., where, for two years, he and his crew worked on *Belle*, replacing the keel and replanking the entire hull below the waterline. McMillen is the president of McMillen Yachts, which buys old wooden boats throughout the United States, restores them, and offers them to clients for use in its fractional ownership program. McMillen recently completed the restoration of *Scout*, a 73-foot commuter boat.

McMillen has driven from Key West to Maine, speaking with dockmasters and exploring countless boatyards, sheds, and rivers for the next great find. He has stumbled upon a New England owner who, armed with a chain saw, removed the original interior from his boat to install a mishapen pot-bellied stove. "If we hadn't stepped in, the boats would have been lost," says McMillen.

McMillen, an Atlanta native, grew up on *Mahogany Lady*, his father's 1927 68-foot wooden boat. They used to go fishing aboard *Mahogany Lady* in the Florida Keys, where McMillen became attached to the boat's powerful displacement hull and graceful lines. "To step on a 1927 yacht was like going back in time," McMillen says. "The boats from the interwar years of the '20s and '30s are the pinnacle of yacht design."

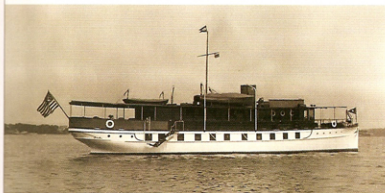
In 1995, McMillen launched McMillen Yachts. Since then, the company has restored five wooden yachts, adding modern equipment such as electrical systems and roll stabilizers. McMillen's wife, Elizabeth, oversees the restoration of the interiors, researching the boats to ensure that the design elements are historically accurate.

Owners purchase at least a 5-percent share in a boat, which guarantees them a minimum of eight days a year. The boats are based in New England during the summer, and in South Florida during the winter. The company is currently restoring *Freedom*, a 1926 104-footer that is the sister ship to *Sequoia*, the 104-foot presidential yacht used by commanders-in-chief since the Hoover administration.

Last December, McMillen received a phone call from a Jacksonville, Fla., resident who was the executor of his uncle's estate, which included *Freedom*. The executor was told that if he did not remove *Freedom* from its marina in a week, the boat would be destroyed.

McMillen flew to Florida to examine the boat and found it in such disrepair that it had to be hauled on a barge from Savannah, Ga., to Newport. Nevertheless, McMillen was thrilled by his discovery and is looking forward to completing the restoration. Says McMillen, "You can't imagine the excitement of turning a corner and seeing a boat you had no idea ever existed."

—FLUTO SHINZAWA



*Freedom* is McMillen Yachts' current project. The 1926 104-footer is the sister ship to *Sequoia*, the former presidential yacht.

McMillen Yachts, 401.846.5557, [www.woodenyachts.com](http://www.woodenyachts.com)