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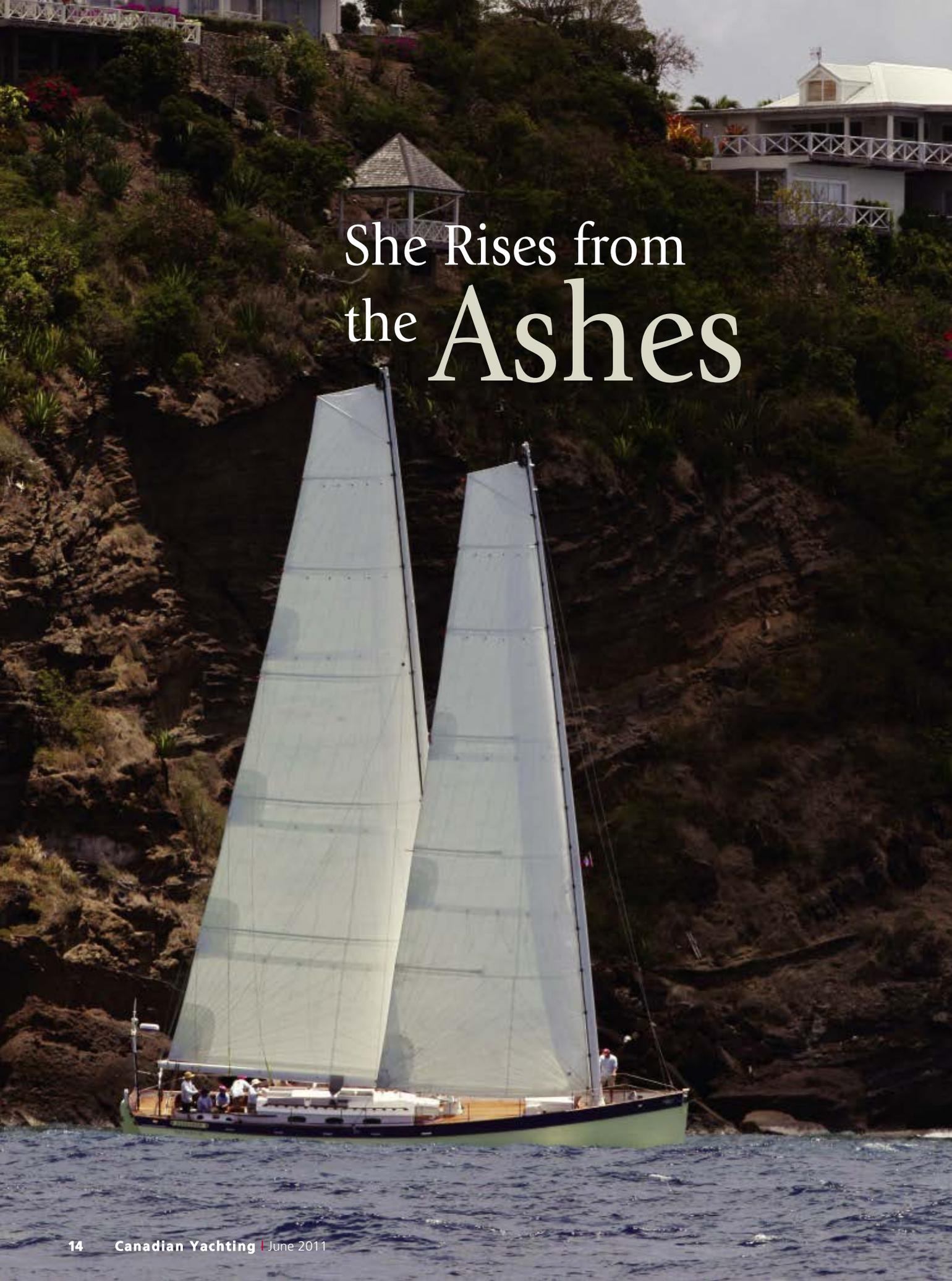
Covey Island Boatworks
Fanfarer – A Modern Classic

Social Navigation
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June 2011 \$5.95 CDN



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A two-masted sailboat with white sails is sailing on blue water. The background features a steep, rocky hillside with a house and a gazebo. The text "She Rises from the Ashes" is overlaid on the image.

She Rises from the Ashes



By Lynn Helpard
 Photographs by Mark Doucette

Just as the mythical “Phoenix” rose from the ashes, reborn to live again, so too was a beautiful yacht launched in September to replace another destroyed by fire.

In 2005, Covey Island Boatyard built a beautiful sixty-three foot classic schooner, “Maggie B” for Chicago venture capitalist Frank Blair. This boat cruised extensively, including a circumnavigation, and was ultimately returned to the boatyard for a refit. On August 12, 2008, disaster struck; a horrendous overnight fire completely destroyed the yard along with the “Maggie B”.

What really stands out as being unique about Farfarer is her rig with the twin fat-headed, incredibly beautiful sails.

PHOTO CREDIT: Tim Wright

The yard had been operating since 1979 with President John Steele at the helm. Steele, a man whose life has been devoted to boats and boatbuilding, started with a small shop on Covey Island, part of the LaHave group of islands about 25 kilometres from Lunenburg, Nova Scotia. They quickly developed a reputation for fine craftsmanship building around 90 pleasure and commercial fishing boats, both sail and power. Success made them expand and move to the mainland at Petite Riviere where they operated until that fateful day.

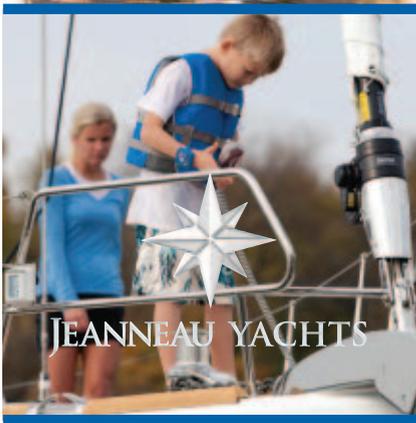
Blair, now 66, was understandably flattened by the disaster, but it only took him six months to come to the decision that they couldn’t build another Maggie B; it was time to move on. He contacted Steele and the famous British marine

Farfarer puts her shoulder into the chop as she powers into a light southwest breeze.

architect Nigel Irens to a discuss building another schooner. Irens is considered by many to be the most brilliant naval designer alive today. The new boat was to be slightly shorter at 56 feet and more refined in order to be handled by a smaller crew of four offshore.

However, Covey Island Boatyard needed a new home. Steele discovered that there was huge unused building at the Kraut Point fish plant, in Riverport. Within two months of the fire, a deal was struck to lease this space as the new yard. A head office for Covey Island Boatyard was also set up in Lunenburg.

Four months later, work commenced on the new boat to be named “Farfarer” after the nomadic tribe who were chased



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The double berth in the master cabin.

out of northern Scotland. They are alleged to be the first whites to cross over to North America, way before the Vikings. Farley Mowat, the acclaimed Canadian author, wrote a book of the same name that gave Blair the inspiration for his new schooner.

Blair's business success was largely due to his foreseeing the development of all things "green" and set out to follow that concept with his new boat. The wood epoxy hull would be built out of recycled materials. A 136-year-old ware-

house, only one block from ground zero in New York, was being torn down. Steele discovered that it was constructed with very old beams of Douglas fir and pitch pine. These were acquired and trucked to the yard where they were milled to create the 1½-inch planks and laminated 3-inch square beams. The hull was built upside down and covered with E-glass in epoxy to a mirror-like finish, then turned right side up (a major feat in itself) for



The crew mess to the left and to the right the ancient fish fossil in the galley counter.

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Looking aft into the galley.

decking and finishing.

The decks are laid with aged pitch pine, salvaged from the warehouse, which is bonded to structural Corcell foam-sandwiched between epoxy E-glass. The interior is constructed of three materials: 1) tongue and groove pine painted white for all the deck heads and bulkheads; 2) trim is all black walnut from the owner's farm in Illinois; and 3) cabin soles are cork throughout.

The Covey Island workers, all highly skilled craftsmen, are shareholders in the company and were glad to be back to

work. Other local labour was added to create a closely knit team of 34.

"Farfarer" is anything but a conventional schooner. She is 56 feet on deck, weighs 35 tons, and draws 6½ feet with the centerboard up (and 13 feet with it down). The centerboard, which floats, swings up on a 4-inch bronze axle into the base of the long keel. A hydraulic pump lowers the board, but doesn't need to raise it.

"Farfarer" sleeps six with a crew cabin



The "Ship's Office" is built of Black Walnut.

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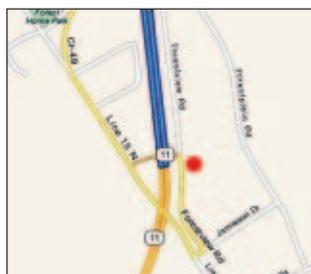
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The cockpit and custom made wheel are built of Angelique.

forward and the owner's suite midship. Blair's constant four-legged companion "Mac" has his own bunk. The galley is a unique design with an island featuring a truly ancient rock fossil counter.

The masts are of free standing carbon fiber with the mainmast reaching 82 feet into the sky. Blair said of the spars, "they are whippy and more rocket science than I intended". The rig is very high tech with two loose-footed mainsails and no headsails. The designer maintains that jibs are inefficient and dangerous when crew need to be forward in heavy weather to handle or change sails. The full batten Kevlar sails, crafted by North Sails of Lunenburg are neither marconi nor gaff but rather have a large head about 8 feet long.

The masts are round and will pivot on their base when tacking. The two sails rise, lower, and reef conventionally with lazy jacks for control.

Power is provided by twin 40hp Nanni diesel engines made by a Spanish firm from Kubota blocks that push her up to 10 knots. There is no genset but rather a large water-cooled DC 350 amp generator mounted between the engine and transmission on one engine, an entirely new concept. As well, there are

two alternators, one on each engine, plus solar panels mounted on the cabin roof. The extensive electronics are all state of the art. The yacht has tanks for 200 gallons of water and 300 gallons of fuel.

The custom-designed and hand-built schooner was started in April 2009 and launched in September 2010. When asked the price tag, Blair replied, in good humor, "More than I expected, but less than I feared". "Farfarer" is an anomaly, being very high tech with the newest and best of rig and electronics, but made by meticulous Nova Scotia craftsmen with a fit, finish and classic touches seldom seen in today's new yachts. She may resemble a schooner, but she sails like a racing yacht.

After sea trials and final delivery she headed for her home port in Maine and then to Brazil for the winter. Blair intends to have "Farfarer" in the Mediterranean in the spring and the Baltic in the summer of 2011. So, this beautiful new schooner will indeed be another adventurer and explorer. 🐾