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Back to the FUTURE?

Annie Hill rails against the current trend towards 'boating with bling' – but finds the perfect fusion of technology and tradition moored alongside her in New Zealand



ABOVE:
Maori boom-end carving

The Nigel Irens-designed Maggie B: technology fused with tradition

leisure. How much carbon will be produced in manufacturing these hi-tech craft? If you want to be clean and green, buy a boat that already exists. Don't load her down with gadgets that become obsolete within a couple of years. The only way to use less is to buy less. Enjoy the challenge of making your way from A to B using only wind power and your cognitive skills. Sailing is an outdoor activity. It's about experiencing the natural world first-hand, getting cold and wet so you can appreciate being warm and dry later.

FUSION IN ACTION

Fortunately, naval architect Nigel Irens, who was also quoted in the article, seems to have retained a sense of reality, as you would expect of this multi-faceted designer. His racing machines (Ellen MacArthur's trimaran *B&Q* is one) are poems of flowing function but his cruising boats have timeless aesthetics and are real seagoing vessels that are easy on their crew. If a technological innovation is appropriate, Irens will use it, but it's never flaunted for its own sake. I recently climbed aboard *Maggie B*, a 62ft gaff-rigged schooner which he designed as the personification of these ideas. She was conceived in Chicago, designed in England and built in Nova Scotia, at Covey Island. But her hull looks as Yankee as her owner, Frank Blair. Our own boat, *Iron Bark*, a Wylo II design by Nick Skeates, provided an introduction and in no time, *Maggie B's* proud owner was showing us over his ship.

The rig fascinated us. Why no bowsprit? Frank laughed. 'Nigel told me that I'd asked for an easily handled rig and a bowsprit wasn't necessary,' he said. 'Irens' approach to technology applies to traditional ideas, too.' Frank's eyes took on a mischievous twinkle as he watched us. 'And yes,' he says, 'the rigging is rope, not wire.'

The next surprise is that *Maggie B's* white-painted masts are built of carbon fibre. 'They cost a lot of money, of course,' Frank explained, 'but they need hardly any maintenance and are much lighter than wood. This means that we required less lead ballast so, as Nigel pointed out, it was actually cheaper in the end.'

The two big masts are keel-stepped and each has only two fixed masthead shrouds. A hefty forestay supports the big roller-furling jib, there's a triatic stay between the masts, two sets of

An article on 'Yachts of the future' in the May issue of *Yachting Monthly*, filled me with dismay. Apparently, in the year 2057 we could be downloading a list of waypoints from www.voyage-u-like and mooring under sail could be

replaced by an 'electromagnetic system with GPS linked bow thrusters!' Boats will offer all the functionality of a nice penthouse flat.

It may be hard for people to lower their levels of comfort and consumption at home and work, but surely we can alter our attitudes to

Photo: Tim Wright/PhotoAction.com

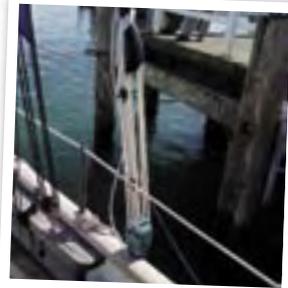
MAGGIE B



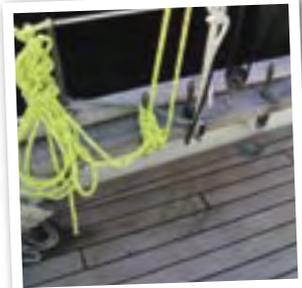
No need for a bowsprit



Beautifully crafted decklights

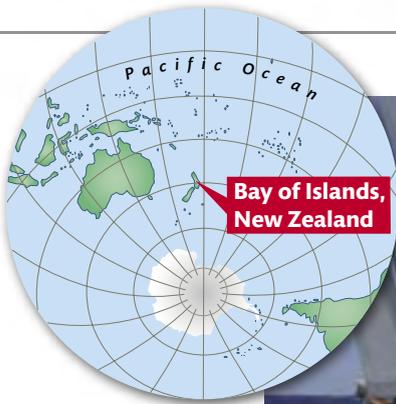


The rigging is rope, not wire



Modern lines on trad pin-rail

Photos: Annie Hill



Bay of Islands,
New Zealand

runners on the main – and that's your lot.

Frank wanted the boat optimised for fast Southern Ocean passage-making,

with the wind well abaft the beam. 'The Marconi (sloop) rig is such hard work off the wind,' he commented. 'I didn't want to be doing a lot of sail-changing and fill the boat full of sails.' The design has been called a 'fusion schooner' – a fusion between the best of traditional sailing and modern technology. She has beautifully cast bronze deadeyes with hi-tech rope lanyards, and her hull is built from recycled Douglas fir and epoxy. The result is a powerful seagoing rig above decks, with a modern chart room below.

The schooner has notched up some smart passage times, covering 23,000 miles in 16 months. Hannah Joudrey, a 22-year old Acadian (French-Canadian) who's been aboard since *Maggie B* left Nova Scotia, holds the record of seeing 17.9 knots on the log. Prior to crewing on *Maggie B*, Hannah learned the ropes on the barquentine *Eye of the Wind* and then sailed half way round the world on the barque *Picton Castle*. *Maggie B* has all the elements that she loves in traditional boats. 'Of course, she has all the electronic nav equipment, too, which is great, but I get more satisfaction out of traditional navigation methods,' she says.

Theresa Chapman, 24, from Brisbane, who joined the yacht in Hobart, finds *Maggie B* a revelation. 'I'd only sailed GRP sloops before,' she told me. '*Maggie B* is totally different'.

The fourth crew member, Ben Carpenter, is a 27-year-old from Bristol. A woodworker by trade, he lives up to his name. He'd been looking for a berth for months and had given up hope. 'It's just



Maggie B's rig is optimised for trade-wind sailing

Photo: Tim Wright/PhotoAction.com

'The design has been called a fusion schooner'

awesome that I'm going sailing on this,' he told me, although he suspected that his woodworking skills were not likely to be needed.

With her enthusiastic skipper and lively young crew, *Maggie B*, is a happy ship. She left on 15 July, headed towards the Australs and then to Tahiti, expecting to sail the 2,300 miles in a fortnight. By the time this article appears, she should be in Patagonia. Visit her website: www.schoonermaggiieb.net

PLUS ÇA CHANGE...

Trevor chose a gaff rig for *Iron Bark*, because he was planning a long Southern Ocean passage, where there was a real risk of capsize. A keel-stepped, gaff rig might well survive intact. Such pragmatic thinking defines his approach to sailing and on *Iron Bark*, we use many strops, which are cheap and kind to the ship. They are on the mainsheet blocks and runner backstays, used in place of shackles and as reefing pennants. Usually, we splice them from Silverline, the cheap Australian polypropylene cordage that we use for nearly all our running rigging. But at the end of the day, they're really no different from the 'Kohlhoff's Loop Blocks' featured in March's *Yachting Monthly* New Gear pages.

YOU CAN'T HAVE TOO MANY ANCHORS

Trevor decided that he'd had enough of hauling in 20 kg of anchor on the end of many metres of 9 mm chain by hand and fitted a new windlass, which made us rethink our anchors. In addition,

THE CREW



Skipper Frank Blair (LEFT), long-term crew Hannah Joudrey, 22 (BELOW LEFT) and Theresa Chapman, 24, who joined in Hobart



Photos: Annie Hill



Iron Bark's old and new anchors

the *Yachting Monthly* group test on anchors (YM December 2006) has caused much debate among cruising sailors.

Self-reliance is the norm for long-term voyagers and we take our anchoring seriously. Our old Manson plough needed regalvanizing and had let us down once too often. My complete faith in our 20 kg Delta was shattered one day, when we returned to find *Iron Bark* a long way from where we'd left her. The obvious solution was to invest in the locally-made 20 kg Manson Supreme, but its 'roll bar' is not bowsprit-friendly.

After much debate and consulting of bank statements, we decided to replace our 15 kg Bruce kedge with the 16 kg Manson, get rid of the plough, move the Delta to No 2 and invest in a 20 kg Spade, which fits under the bowsprit like it grew there. Once they were on board, we put the Supreme alongside the old plough. It looked larger, even though it's nearly 5 kg lighter: you can see why they work. This so-called kedge looks man enough to hold *Iron Bark's* not-inconsiderable weight on its own. ▲

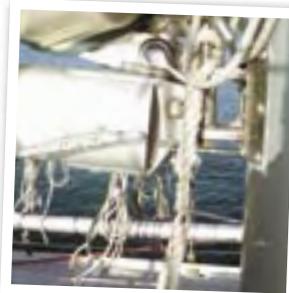
IRON BARK



Strops galore: on the boom end...



...attaching runners to mast...



...as reefing pennants...



...and as a kicking-strap fastening