

# Aboard EROS

## A guided tour of a 1939 staysail schooner

by John Tuma  
Photographs by Abner Kingman

When the schooner EROS is sailing on San Francisco Bay, sightseeing boats change course so their passengers can get a better view. Pleasure boats struggle to keep pace with her while their crews snap photos, and commercial tugboats swing alongside to salute her and her crew with two blasts of their horn. Capt. Bill Bodle responds with two blasts so loud that he warns his passengers about the location of the horn in his safety briefing before leaving the dock. Sailing EROS is a public celebration, and the horn is essential sailing equipment.

EROS is currently owned by Bill and Grace Bodle. They acquired her in 1992 as compensation for an unpaid yard bill when they owned Stone Boat Yard in Alameda, California. At the time, the boat had been completely dismantled and reconstruction had only partially begun. They spent the next 18 years restoring and upgrading the 103' schooner, finally recommissioning her in 2010. Since then, the Bodles have logged more than 20,000 miles in EROS, sailing to the Caribbean where they chartered her for two seasons, and then back to San Francisco.

The rebuilding was accomplished with painstaking

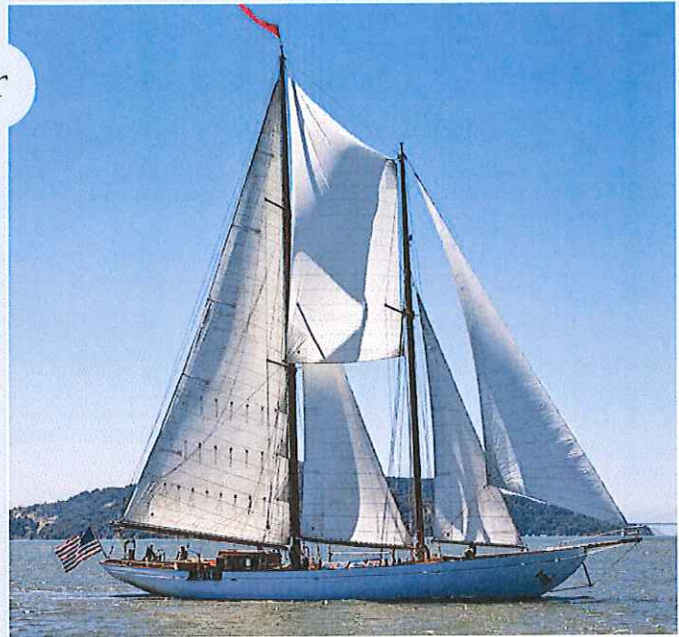
care, but the goal was never to produce a historically accurate restoration. As Bill Bodle explains, "EROS was intended to be our boat, and we wanted a boat that would meet our needs. We like this style of boat—it is our fourth large schooner of this vintage—so we knew what we wanted. We retained the fabric of the original vessel where possible, consistent with that goal."

EROS was originally launched in 1939. She had been commissioned by Henry Von Berg, an American married to the daughter of a British lord. Von Berg engaged William McMeek as designer, but provided him with very specific instructions to model the boat after a Gloucester fishing schooner. McMeek's design was 103' on deck, with a 22' beam, a draft of 13', and a displacement of 185 tons. She was conceived in 1937 as a boat that people would talk about, and that is still true today.

When you step aboard EROS, you are instantly transported to an earlier, elegant age of yachting. Bill and Grace will greet you with the warmth of old friends. They take great pride in their boat and want their guests to be comfortable and to enjoy the boat as well. And guests will certainly enjoy her—as long as they position themselves well away from the horn when commercial tugs sail by to say hello.

## A Staysail Schooner

EROS is rigged as a staysail schooner. With all sails set, including the fisherman staysail set flying, she carries 9,000 sq ft on solid Sitka-spruce masts. Bill explains that when they acquired EROS, she was undercanvased. Since the original sail plan was not available, the Bodles had to improvise. They added 20' to the mainmast, which is now 121' tall. To balance the larger main, they also added a bowsprit, increasing the sparred length to 115'. Aside from the fisherman staysail, each sail is raised on a single Spectra halyard, and each of the boomed sails has but a single sheet. The fisherman staysail is raised on two halyards, from each mast; the tack is made fast to the base of the foremast, and the clew is sheeted to the aft end of the main boom.



## Winches and Crew

Although her rig is large and powerful, EROS can be sailed by only three people. The winches are large, and also have hydraulic assist. So too does the original capstan, which is used for raising the mainsail and the main staysail. The capstan was originally electric-powered, running on 220-volt DC—a dangerous level of voltage. The hydraulic version is much safer.

Even with the hydraulics, EROS is easier to sail with a larger crew. Here, Alfredo Perez Ysandoval and Frank Faybusovich prepare to tack the jib using one of the big deck-mounted primary winches. Running backstays are used to support the head of the mainmast and to tension the rig. As with the jib, the runners have to be tended on each tack or jibe.

## Chainplates and Turnbuckles

The chainplates are clearly evident inside the bulwarks, and are really extensions of the steel framework that is the skeleton of the hull. EROS was built by J.W. Brooke and Company in Lowestoft, England, which was known for its engineering prowess; while the yard built fine boats in wood, they specialized in steel construction. Hence, the composite construction (steel backbone and frames, teak hull planking and decks) employed in building EROS was a natural fit.

The standing rigging was replaced during the refit, but the turnbuckles are original. Throughout the reconstruction, original parts and equipment were retained if they were still serviceable and appropriate for the job. The standing rigging required 2,102' (almost half a mile!) of new stainless-steel wire.





## Mainsheet Blocks and Traveler

The mainsheet blocks are original, and the original boom end fitting was duplicated in stainless steel. The mainsheet leads to a winch abaft a short traveler, and is dead-ended on the stainless steel framing of the gallows frame. The gallows frame also holds the coiled mainsheet to keep the decks clear. The mainsheet traveler features rubber shock absorbers to reduce the impact of tacking and jibing. Modern blocks are used to sheet the clew of the fisherman staysail to the end of the boom.



## Steering Station

The steering station is well aft, with a good view forward along either side of the house. EROS carries contemporary electronic gear, which is visible from the helm or from the chart table inside the cabin. She can be steered with the wheel or with a joystick that controls the autopilot. A bow thruster, added during the refurbishing, makes maneuvering EROS much easier in tight quarters. Bill notes that the steering wheel goes through 12 turns, stop to stop, and that if the autopilot is instructed to put the helm hard over, the wheel spins so fast that it will just about throw you off the boat if you are holding on to it.



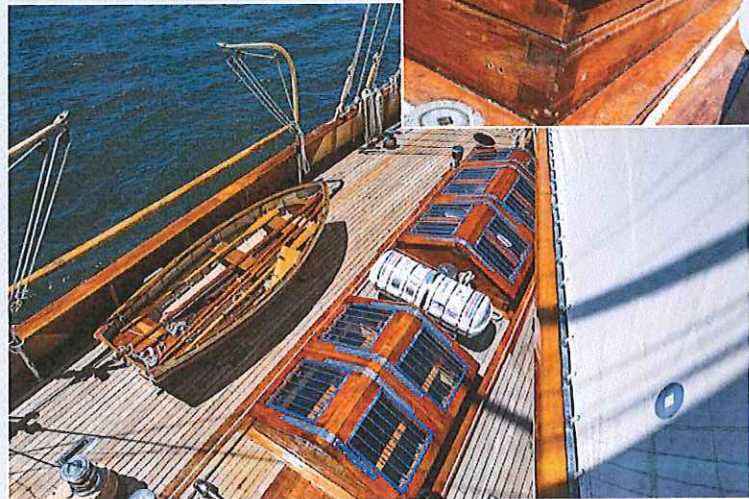
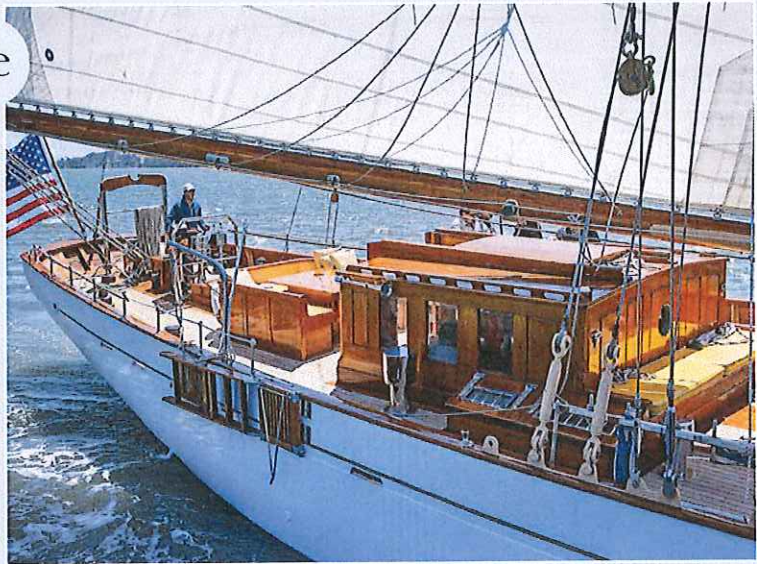
## Teak Hull Planking

Teak is an excellent boatbuilding wood, and except for the steel backbone and frames, and spruce masts, the entire schooner was built of Burma teak. The hull was planked with 3"-thick planks, and fastened to the steel frames with bolts of Admiralty bronze. Back when EROS was built, it was not unusual for English boatbuilders to submerge teak logs for 25 to 30 years before sawing them into planks and drying them, a practice that enhances the wood's dimensional and color stability.

During the renovation, each plank was carefully numbered and removed. The teak planking was in such good condition that the entire hull was replanked without having to replace any of the planks, and each plank fit back precisely in its original location. The wood for the hull planking was harvested more than 100 years ago, and still looks new.

## Deckhouse and Table

When the Bodles acquired EROS, she had a sunken cockpit and an oversized house. "The house did not match the style of the boat," Bill recalls, "and it was so ugly that it was not worth saving, anyway." The Bodles had an idea of what the original house looked like, but it is one thing to have an idea, and another to bring that idea to fruition in a way that looks right, ties into the existing structure, and does not end up compromising something else. The task was complicated by the need to locate machinery. A table on deck was part of the solution: Not only is it in a good location for socializing, but it sits atop the engine room. The framework under the table provides additional space for machinery.



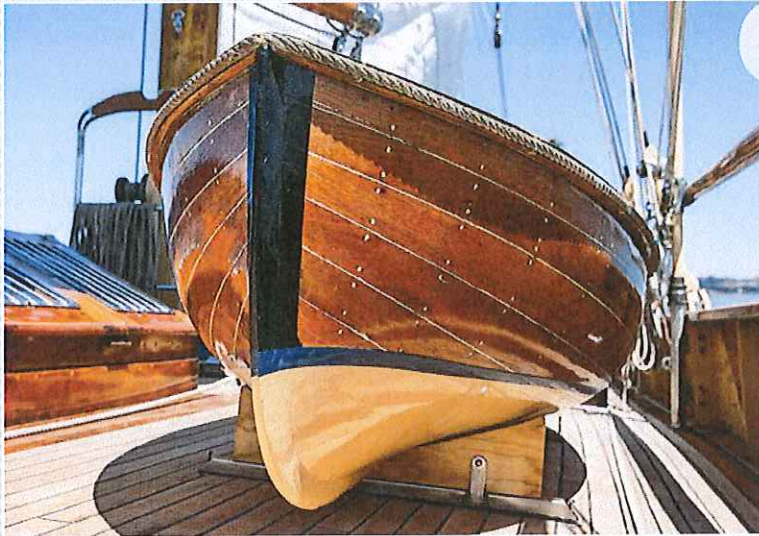
## Skylights

The deck and deck structures forward of the house are original, and provided the basis for the design of the new house and table. The skylights are built of 3"-thick teak, and joined at the corners with dovetails. The frames of the opening portions of the skylight are joined at the corners with pass-through mortises, in which the tenon extends all the way through the mortise; two pins secure this joint. These joinery details and hardware style were reproduced in the new deck furniture.

## The Original Bell

When first announced at the naming ceremony, the schooner was called WHITE BITCH, which caused quite a scandal in polite British society. But when launched two years later she had been renamed JEANRY, a combination of the owners' first names. The bell is mounted on the aft end of the bowsprit, and is the only place where the original name is still evident.



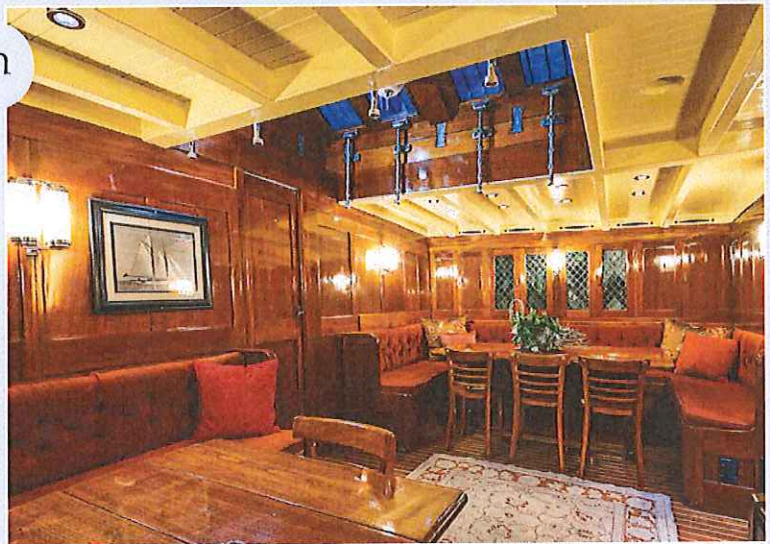


## Yawlboat

The yawlboat is a recent addition and was built by Jack Erhorn in 1941 under Lester Stone's direction. Lester Stone was the grandson of the original proprietor of Stone Boat Yard, Frank W. Stone, who founded the yard in 1853. It was Lester Stone's custom to provide a yawlboat for any new big yacht he built, at no extra charge. More than anything, this is an indication of just how quickly and efficiently the yard could turn out a boat of this size. This yawlboat was recently discovered at the Corinthian Yacht Club in Tiburon, California, where it had been in storage for many years. Given the Stone Boat Yard connection, the yawlboat was a perfect fit for EROS.

## Saloon

Bill reports that the most difficult part of rebuilding the yacht was reassembling the main saloon. This was one of the first areas to be dismantled, and almost the last to be reassembled. In the 18 intervening years, the labels that had been so carefully applied had faded, been stripped away, or had simply disappeared, so re-creating the saloon was like putting together a jigsaw puzzle without benefit of the picture. The Bodles enlarged the table but built it in the same style as the original. It swings on gimbals and is weighted with 300 lbs of lead. In addition, they added a false overhead to support recessed lighting and conceal the wiring for the entertainment system.

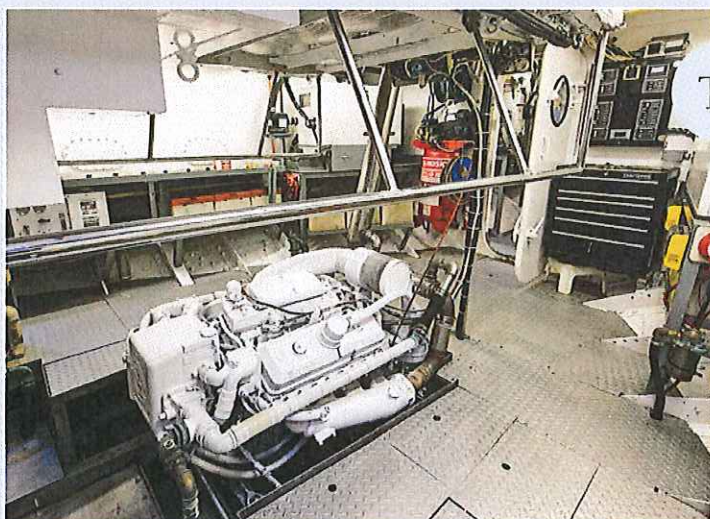


## Guest Cabins

There are four guest cabins with accommodations for eight guests. Two of the cabins have a private head. Each is appointed in a simple and elegant style, and deck prisms and skylights provide natural light. Crew and captain's quarters forward of the galley are a bit more spartan.

## The Galley

The galley was updated with modern appliances and rearranged to Grace's design. It was set up to enable Grace, who trained as a chef at Le Cordon Bleu, to produce in this efficient space anything that she or her guests might desire. Grace noted that she favors sandwiches and simple fare while sailing. "Even with all that space, it's just easier. But when we get to port," she paused for a moment to consider her favorite meals, and then smiled, "we can make anything we want!"



## The Engine room

The engine room is accessed through a hatch between the helm and the deck table. Gloucester fishing schooners were known for their speed and efficiency, and EROS, fitted with a single 350-hp engine, cruises at 11 knots with a range of 2,500 miles, despite a displacement of 185 tons. At 9 knots, she has a range of 3,200 miles, and uses only 0.8 gallon per mile. The engine room also houses two generators, a watermaker, the hydraulic system, and the batteries. She is fitted with five watertight bulkheads, one of which is visible in the photograph.

## Bill and Grace

From the very beginning of Bill and Grace Bodle's life together, the schooner has played a part. Bill laughs as he recalls the early days. "I was working on my second doctorate at UC Berkeley, but I wasn't making much progress. I thought a break might help me to refocus. I asked Grace if she would sail to Europe aboard a schooner—as much to get her away from my competition as anything else—and she said yes."

The trip to Europe, however, did not go quite the way Bill had planned. By the time they reached the Caribbean in their 72' schooner NORDLYS, the sails were torn, the engine had quit, and money was short. Bill confides that he hadn't made any progress on his dissertation, either. But things have a way of working themselves out. After making repairs, they entered the charter business, and stayed in it for the next 18 years on three different schooners. 🛥

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*For information about EROS and charter opportunities, visit [www.schoonereros.com](http://www.schoonereros.com).*

