
THE
GOLDEN
CENTURY

CLASSIC
MOTOR
YACHTS

1830 - 1930

ROSS
MacTAGGART





104 feet and built in 1926 for A. J. Fay. Designed and built by Mathis-Trumpy. Powered by a pair of gas 6-cylinder Wintons.



Unfortunately, by the time I caught up with her, *Freedom* was no longer her original self. Like *Trail*, she'd lost her Pullman windows, as well as the bronze scroll-

work on her stern. The white painted deckhouse didn't help, nor did the white metal plates under the handrail, both of which conspired to make *Freedom* ap-

pear top-heavy. On the bright side, this picture was taken several years after I'd last seen her and she was in noticeably better shape.

Freedom was, in a way, a primer: a way to desensitize me for what lay ahead—the Haunted Yacht. Captain Eric had been mysterious about this vessel, which intrigued me all the more. Arriving in Miami, I drove up and down many potholed roads adjacent to small, obscure rivers looking for a particular marina. Once finding it, and after introducing myself, I asked to see this intriguing vessel, which I was careful not to call the Haunted Yacht but the name Captain Eric had given me: *Man-*

atee. Like the day before, I was eyed with extreme suspicion.

Had another person been killed here? Did a serial killer exist who killed only aboard Mathis-Trumpys?

It developed that the marina was nervous because they couldn't guarantee my safety aboard *Manatee*—I couldn't wait to board!—and so I offered to sign a waiver. This accomplished, and my quest now having the allure of danger, I set out toward the vessel.

Walking into the huge metal shed that housed her, it was instantly apparent why *Manatee* was infamous. In the darkened light she did in fact appear a phantom. She was impressively huge and, as I later discovered, the second largest Mathis-Trumpy ever built at 121 feet. She floated with a sad list to port, was covered with dust—the first yacht I’d seen as such—her many stanchions were askew, and, ominously, a bilge pump was steadily discharging impressive amounts of putrid water. Moreover, the mahogany trim and deck cabin was 121 feet of peeling varnish.

To my surprise, she was in pretty good shape inside, apparently the result of a major facelift not long before. How, then, I wondered, had she fallen from grace so quickly? Walking through her main saloon, I marveled at its length and expansiveness. Passing by a fireplace on the forward bulkhead—a *fireplace!*—I entered a long starboard companionway lined with large ports (a space quite impressive). A galley that seemed too small for such a large yacht lay just forward of the main saloon. I returned to the long hall and opened a mahogany door into a cabin lined with large ports puncturing dark varnished woodwork. What had it originally been designed as? The smoking room? The space radiated intimacy, and I touched the bronze ports, delighting in their sizable scale. Nor did the relative darkness totally obscure the beauty of the woodwork and its fine condition. My soul was enveloped by this cabin of immense charm.

Forward of this was another impressive cabin, its diametric opposite. Where the “smoking room” was a dark and masculine environment, this half-circle cabin was filled with light from the wraparound windows. I walked back and forth between these two spaces and marveled at the contrast and brilliant juxtaposition. Stepping onto the deck, I climbed up to the pilothouse and its attached captain’s cabin. Again, everything seemed in good shape. Peering out windows obscured with dust, I looked down to the majestic length of foredeck cluttered (appealingly) with impressively scaled hardware. Climbing down, I walked the length of the port deck and ran my fingers along the varnished deck cabin. Reentering the main saloon, I slowly descended the main stair while enjoying its fine detail. The hall before me was

dark and, as I soon discovered, dangerous; it was missing floor planks here and there. As my eyes adjusted to the light I started laughing nervously, excited by the proportions and length of the long, thin space. With careful steps, I entered cabin after cabin. These sad spaces were a contrast to the relative normalcy of the deck above and were covered with mildew, pulled apart here and there, and close to being disheartening.

I was enthralled. I’ve always been able to ignore superficial damage and dirt and appreciate the essence of any space. These many staterooms aboard *Manatee* were a delight, from the cozy charm of the aft cabin lined with those triple ports on each side, to the spacious main stateroom forward, behind the engine room. Moreover, *Manatee* was intact, original, and restorable.

After spending time in each cabin, I returned to the main saloon in the hope of discovering how to enter the forward part of the hull. Finding a stair that was almost a ladder, I went below and into—oh!—the *real* galley. It was huge; obviously, the space above was the pantry. Stepping aft and opening a heavy steel door, I was thunderstruck. Before me was a space seemingly copied from a 1930s Frankenstein movie, with a bewildering array of massively scaled mechanical devices. There was a pair of original Winton diesels, which, at 7 feet high and 13 feet long, dwarfed any I’d ever seen. A gigantic electrical panel attached to one bulkhead was studded with a plethora of definitely original knife-edge switches (and surely the same type used by Dr. Frankenstein to bring his monster alive). And, while the room was appalling—rusted, wet, and so filled with debris it appeared as if an explosion had occurred—it was also powerful and impressive.

My heart was pounding so hard I could feel it. Exiting this chamber, I continued my expedition. There was a crew’s mess hall—the first I’d seen—and, forward, a row of cabins varying from semi-plush (for officers) to severely plain (for crew). What distinguished these spaces was the startling height of the overhead. In most yachts, the overhead will be just above one’s head, but aboard *Manatee*, in this area, it reached twelve feet as the foredeck soared high above.

Wow.



CIGARETTE

Once upon a time there was a beauty known far and wide. She had many admirers. Yet, under mysterious circumstances, a spell was cast upon her, causing her to fall into a long decline.

The marina reminded me of a 1930s movie where gangsters dumped bodies, where boats, like elephants, went to die, where the docks were a threat to life.

I thought it grand. There were plenty of boats, albeit decrepit, half-sunk, and otherwise unloved.

Contained within this yacht graveyard was a vessel I'd heard rumors of, a once famous commuter owned by a dashing millionaire that had the lines and general appearance I'd been looking for. As it developed, she proved a sleeping beauty.

The vessel was, I would learn, the once formidable *Cigarette*, a commuter that sped between Port Washington and Wall Street. She'd been commissioned by Louis Gordon Hammersley, a man who had the good fortune to unexpectedly inherit seven million dollars while still in college. This windfall was used, in part, to finance Hammersley's passion for speed. He owned a series of vessels named *Cigarette* and won the Presidents Cup Race on the Potomac in 1926 (the cup was presented by President Calvin Coolidge).

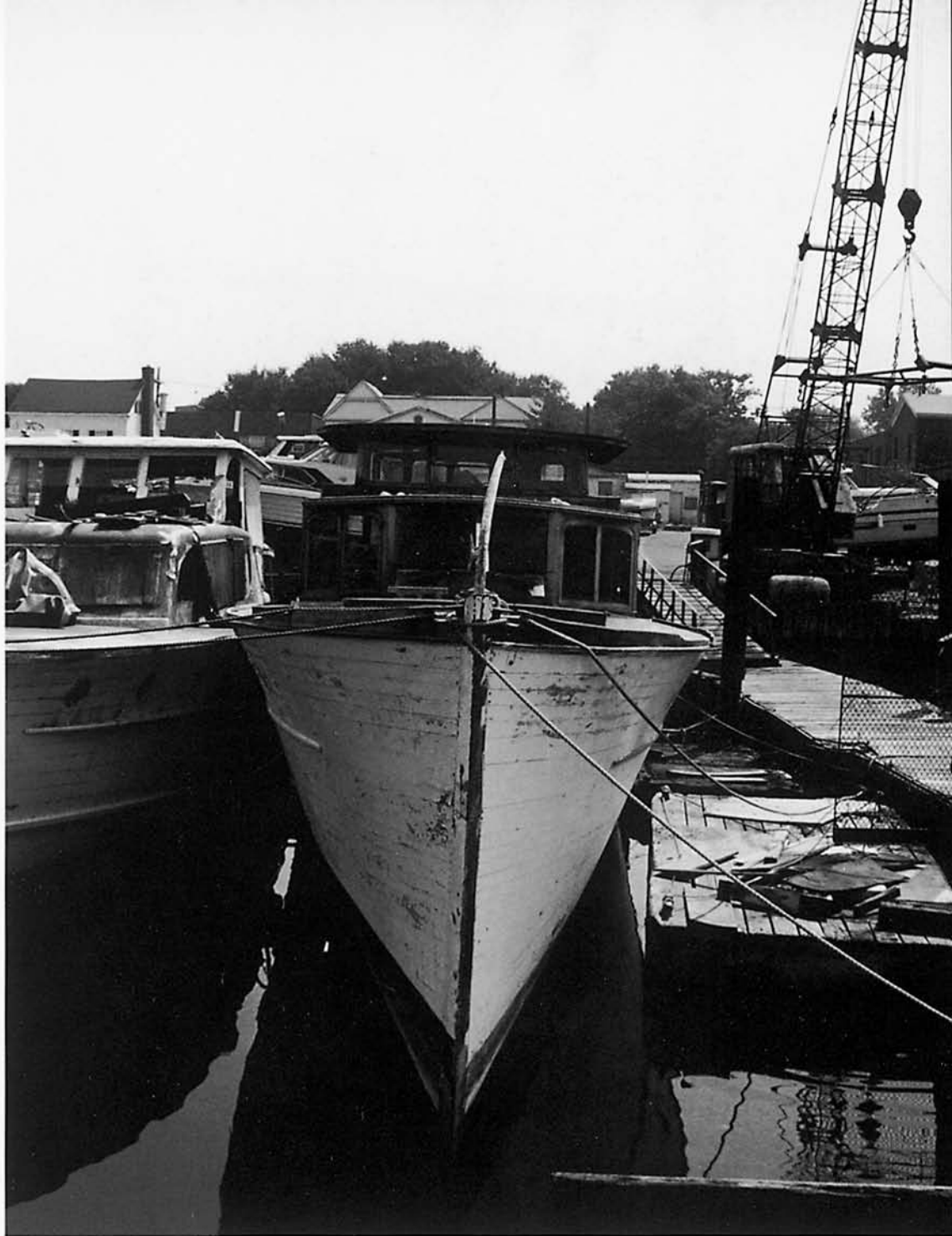


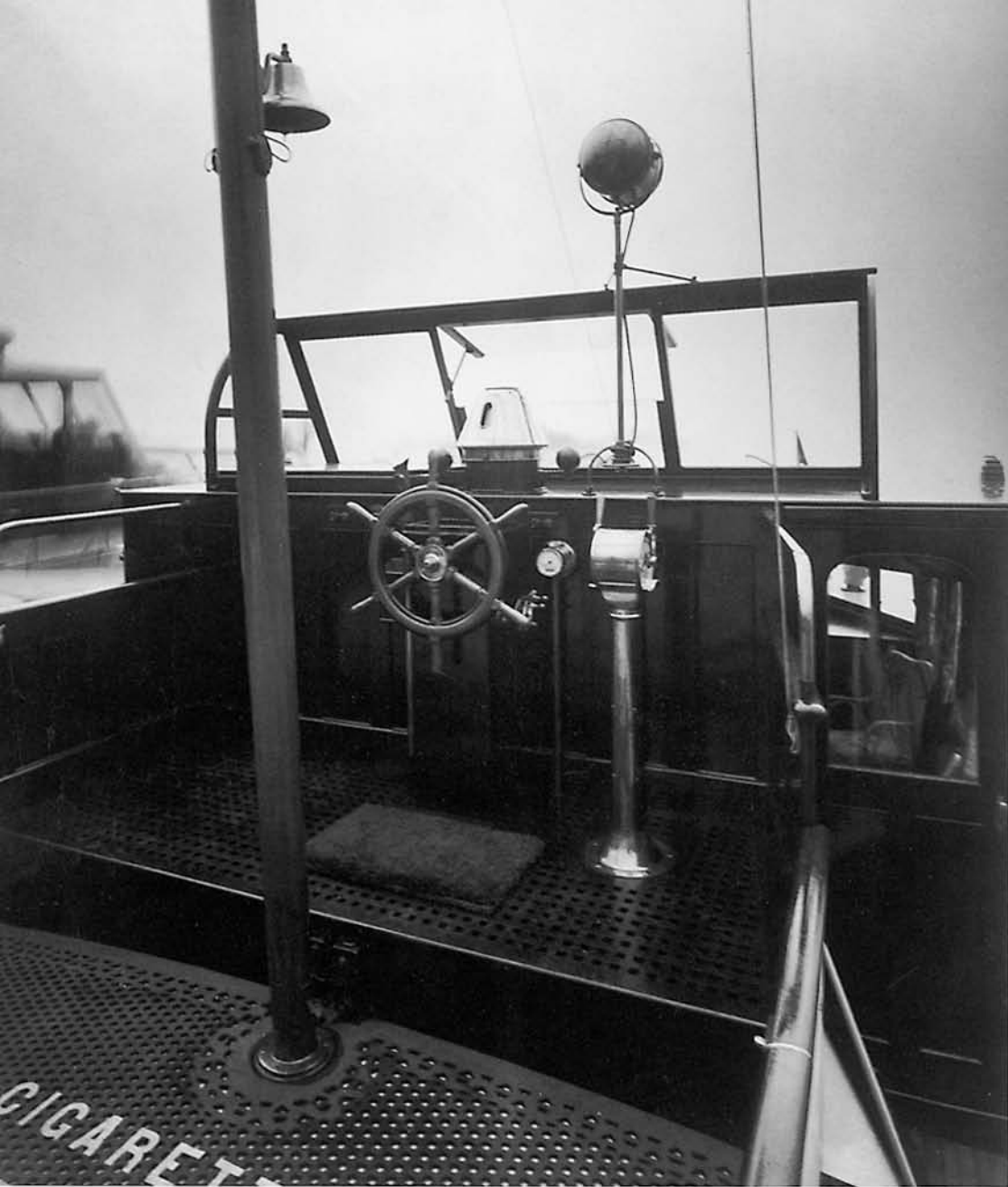
*75 feet and built in 1928 for Louis Gordon Hammersley.
Designed by John H. Wells. Built by Nevins. Powered by
a pair of 450-hp gas Winton engines.*



Firmly held by her husband, Mrs. Hammersley breaks a bottle of Champagne across the bow of the newly launched *Cigarette* (opposite). Mr. Hammersley died in 1942, at forty-nine, and Mrs. Hammersley remarried. She reportedly maintained the Cigarette Trophy Room through at least the late 1980s.

Right top and bottom, *Cigarette* as I found her in the late 1980s. Beyond the obvious dereliction, one can see that the pilot station has been enclosed and the aft cockpit raised, thus raising its overhead.





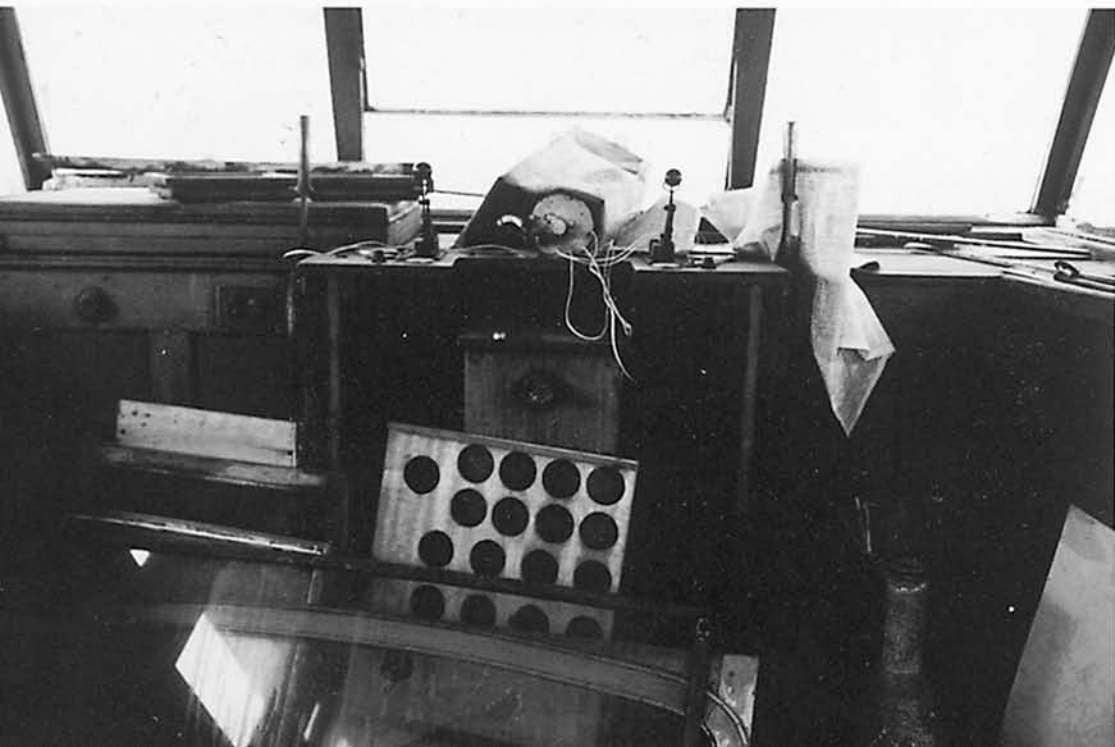
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Cigarette's pilothouse in pristine original condition (1). Note the raised teak deck and custom rubber mat.

Fast-forward six decades and you find this sad sight (2). About the only recognizable item is the knob (center), which once held the wheel.

Cigarette's dining saloon in 1928 (3). The wicker chairs were a nice tactile contrast to the otherwise polished setting.

The dining saloon in the late 1980s (4). The wicker chairs are long gone, as are the leaded glass windows on the attractive sideboard, and the lighting fixtures. However, contrary to appearances, everything is in good shape. The wood is sound and original, and even the mother-of-pearl call button (lower left) is still in place.



2



3

After accessing archival images of *Cigarette*, I was further pained by the contrast between what the photographs presented and what lay gently bobbing in murky waters. My concern for her led me to make an offer, even though she didn't possess the interior space I required (or thought I did). A survey was commissioned, and its conclusions scared me; my offer was withdrawn. It would take several more years, years during which *Cigarette* peacefully awaited an end to her plight, before I reboarded. By this time, I knew a little about boats. I crawled over, into, and under her every inch, looking for rot; to my amazement, I discovered almost none. Her double-planked hull was impressively impervious to my ice pick, and her exterior planks, under the peeling paint, showed tight and true. Even her deck cabins were startlingly intact. Sticking my hand deep into unspeakable mud, I found her keelson and frames were as hard as steel.

ALONDRA

68 feet and first owned by George C. Smith, of New York, in 1927. Designed and built by the J. M. Densmore Company. Powered by a pair of 6-cylinder gas Sterling engines.

Alondra was built by the J. M. Densmore Company, of Quincy, Massachusetts. Densmore, like many such yacht builders during the booming twenties, lasted a very short time and is forgotten today, unlike others, whose names continue to resonate: Lawley,

Consolidated, Trumpy, a.c.f., Elco, Chris-Craft. Densmore built five sister ships on speculation and gave each the working name of *Maya*. *Alondra*, pictured here, was *Maya III* until being renamed by her first owner, George C. Smith.



The original owner of *Alondra*, George C. Smith, was a member of both the New York Yacht Club and the Seawanhaka Corinthian Yacht Club, and he purchased the yacht for \$60,000. In 1932, John H. Clowes became the new owner of the five-year-old vessel, and he and his family cruised Long Island Sound extensively before losing *Alondra* to the Fyfe Shipyard in 1940 (due to an unpaid \$850 bill). The yard, in turn, sold the fifteen-year-old vessel in 1942 to Mr. and Mrs. Clarence S. Bruce, who renamed her *Sallie B.* The Bruces, members of the Corinthian Yacht Club in Washington, D.C., cruised *Sallie B.* extensively, shuttling back and forth between the Potomac river and their winter home in Fort Meyers, Florida. When Mr. Bruce died in 1962, his widow sold *Sallie B.* after twenty years of care and ownership.

During the ensuing quarter century, *Sallie B.*, renamed *Mahogany Lady*, changed hands repeatedly, all the while declining, her forty-year-old hull in urgent need of repairs. Among her owners were Herbert P. Field, brothers Lee and Ray Bass, Captain Doug Kenny, Earl McMillen and his business partner, Arnold Guest, and Frank Rash, who donated the yacht to a church in Florida that lacked the resources to care for the vessel. Mr. and Mrs. W. Edward Guy rescued *Mahogany Lady*, refitted the yacht, and enjoyed her until 1986, selling her to Arthur and

Ingrid Burch, of Morristown, New Jersey. The Burches renamed the sixty-year-old vessel *Somewhere in Time* and embarked on an extensive rehabilitation until Mr. Burch's poor health forced the family to sell the yacht after just one season of use.

After buying *Somewhere in Time* from the Burches (and restoring her original name after forty years), I wanted to see her place of birth. Traveling to the small town of Quincy, I was thrilled to discover a Densmore Street on the map, and headed there. Turning onto the short, narrow lane, I soon came upon a small tract of land fronting the Neponset River. Was this barren stretch where my *Alondra* had been crafted, where her long-leaf yellow-pine hull first touched the cold water, where her twin gas Sterling engines roared to life?

Walking along the pebble-strewn lot, something caught my eye. Coming closer, I kicked some dirt and small rocks out of the way, and to my astonishment a rail appeared—leading right into the water. A few feet away I uncovered another long-buried track. I knew that I'd discovered the launching ways to an old boatyard. But was it Densmore? To find the experts blessed with answers to these questions, I went to the one place they'd be—the local diner.

It *was* the Densmore yard.

Alondra's predecessor, built the year previous, was *Maya II* and named *Percianna* upon her purchase by Percy L. Hance. All the images that follow are of *Percianna*, an almost exact sister ship to *Alondra* except that she was two feet shorter, with a little less beam.

In the image opposite her foredeck is covered in canvas, which offered a nice tactile touch and a contrast to

the bright mahogany adjacent. Canvas decks were common on smaller yachts, unlike the teak seen on larger and more expensive vessels. The skylight aboard *Alondra* lighted the dining saloon below, although *Alondra* didn't have cowl vents on her foredeck. The foredeck ends at the right angle of the main saloon, which featured a forward bulkhead of both curved mahogany and plate glass.





The main saloon looking aft. Aboard *Alondra* this aft bulkhead was mahogany and pierced originally (as far as I could tell) with two large ports at the edges. During the 1930s a picture of Long Island Sound hung between these ports, a picture given to me by Jack Clowes, the son of the then owner. The type of tufted settee shown here—nice—was long gone by the time I owned *Alondra*, having been replaced by a modern sofa in brown velvet.

This image is rich in details pertaining specifically to the decor of yachts from the 1920s. Note the radio (which doesn't quite fit the built-in table it rests on). A radio from the thirties would have been sleeker, more

tall than horizontal, a cloth-covered speaker its central design feature instead of the dials shown here. The simple wicker chairs were typical for the decade. The dark gate-legged table, while a type dating back centuries, would not appear on a 1930s yacht (a more Moderne version would). Curtains from the Victorian era of yachting would have been much more elaborate, fringed, and not as sheer as the curtains shown here (probably cotton or linen), which were typical for yachts under 100 feet; aboard a larger vessel they would have been more detailed, and probably silk. (Modern synthetic materials wholly lack the ability to properly mimic the subtle characteristics of linen, cotton, and

silk and should not be used aboard a classic yacht if one is hoping for an authentic restoration.) Note also the tufting on the settee, a detail surprisingly hard to manifest (an upholsterer's art). Modern versions are invariably too "tight" and look as though a penny would bounce off them—something quite unlikely to happen on this settee, where a tossed penny would just snuggle in for an afternoon nap. Even the doily, while a Victorian holdover, will vanish by the 1930s.

In short, 1920s yachts aren't as elaborate as their predecessors or as subdued as their descendants. They fit comfortably between an age of wonderful excess and Moderne simplicity.



The cozy aft deck and distinctive wicker chairs (matching the pair in the saloon). The style of this rattan and wicker set would still be a yacht feature during the 1930s, but not before the 1920s. Note also the glass ball (with built-in strike) holding matches. Can

you imagine a more restful place to spend a warm afternoon, enjoying conversation with friends, the occasional shriek of gulls adding their song while you are gently rocked, like a baby in a mother's arms, by the steady waves?



This image of *Percianna* (the photographer is standing on the aft deck looking forward) offers more than just the pleasure of canvas awnings, detailing numerous delightful features prevalent on classic yachts: the pair of dinghies, finished bright, hanging on hemp—

not nylon—lines; the nicely rumpled leather cushions seducing one into an afternoon snooze, the narrow beam not found on modern yachts, and as such, offering a coziness that “bigger” can’t replicate; and, the final touch, the call button (bottom, center) connected

to the galley annunciator and precisely placed just inches from the unseen wicker chairs so as to be convenient for calling the uniformed steward to fetch another after-dinner cocktail. Ahhhh.



The main stateroom aboard *Percianna* was identical to *Alondra's*, except a little narrower. The two side mirrors (beveled) were hinged. I also like the cut-glass vase for flowers—remarkably, one was still aboard *Alondra*.

In the tiny space pictured above, there is all one needs to offer a comfortable and exceedingly intimate sleeping chamber. Of course, newlyweds may find twin beds a logistical challenge, but older married couples

may find them a blessing. Why, then, are land-based bedrooms (as well as staterooms aboard modern yachts) vastly larger in size? Why aren't houses built like this? They'd certainly be cheaper to heat, to say nothing of taxing the global environment less. Yet the scale of bedrooms is increasing, and the charming lessons that this cabin aboard *Percianna* offers are overlooked. Architects, are you paying attention?

THE HUNT CONTINUES

The captain of *High Spirits* had enjoyed my wild, if misplaced, enthusiasm for impressively scaled Mathis-Trumpys and offered me tantalizing clues as to where others lay nearby. I bid adieu and set off to hunt for more. An hour later a target was spotted across the Intercoastal Waterway.

Unlike the shimmering *High Spirits*, the vessel before me seemed sad and tarnished. I came toward her but was stopped by a police officer, who regarded me with extreme suspicion. *What, I wondered, was going on?* The officer grilled me and my story only seemed to increase his suspicions.

“Come on, what do you know about the murder aboard this boat last night?” he asked, pointing to the forlorn Mathis-Trumpy adjacent to us.

The look on my face apparently conveyed more than any words could have, and the officer let me go.

An hour later I returned.

Walking along the dock, I saw, in black stick-on letters, the name *Sunset* rudely tacked onto the counterstern, which was missing its bronze scrollwork. I also observed two other important details: no one seemed to be around, and the cabin doors were wide open. I stepped aboard.

Sunset was a wreck. Cabin after cabin was full of clutter, a jumble of furniture, old, rusted gizmos and whatnots, and debris. I was fascinated that something once so beautiful could degenerate into such chaos. What had happened to this fine lady? When was she last owned by someone who lavished care and attention? What would happen to her?

As the sun crept toward the horizon, these questions would remain unanswered. I departed this sad vessel (launched as *Freedom*) without knowing that she'd remain an item of curiosity in my life for years to come.

FREEDOM

K N O W N A S S U N S E T

Freedom was advertised as the first Mathis-Trumpy to have a “new-type full-deck” stern: a counterstern with fantail, bronze scrollwork, and triple portholes aft. Moreover, she sported the essential features that made *Trail* so attractive: the dark canvas above the toerail, double “sweeps” adjacent to the Pullman win-

dows, a plumb bow, a canvas awning stretching almost her length, one buff-colored stack, and a raked mast.

Starting with *Freedom*, and continuing into the early 1930s, Trumpy-designed yachts reached a pinnacle of grace unmatched by competitors or even successors.