

Summer 2003

# LAKEHÖM

SHARING THE ROMANCE OF LAKE LIVING



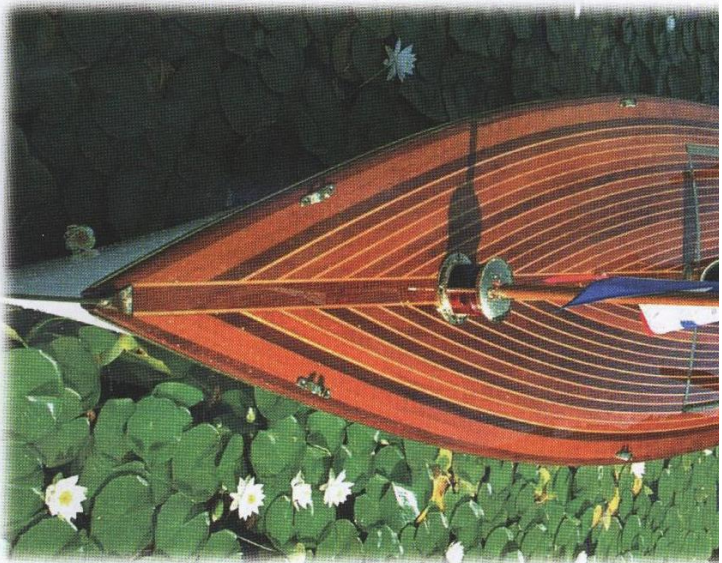
LABOR OF  
LOVE

rebuilding the old  
wooden classics

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# LABOR OF LOVE

REBUILDING THE CLASSICS

BY AMY BROUILLETTE

When most college kids were tossing pizzas in order to earn extra cash for beer, Dave Borner Jr. was entrepre-  
neuring his way through his undergrad career, buying, selling, and re-building boats in southern Wisconsin.

That was back in 1976, when Borner, now the president of the world's top vintage boat restoration and service company, Lake Minnetonka's Mahogany Bay, first launched his career in boat restoration while earning his bachelor's in business administration at the University of Wisconsin, Whitewater.

But his interest in restoring boats came earlier, as a teenager, when he and his father, Dave Borner Sr., completed their first vintage boat restoration project after moving to a lake in northern Wisconsin. It wasn't their first foray into vintage restorations; the father-son team had been reconditioning automobiles and furniture since Dave Jr. was a boy. "After moving to the lake, we realized we really weren't using any of the cars, so we decided to buy a boat," explains Borner. "One boat very shortly became nine."

After graduating, Dave Jr. was hired by Certified Parts Corporation, a company specializing in purchasing defunct companies in the recreational vehicle market, and providing parts and services for dealers still servicing those vehicles. While not directly involved in the boat business, Borner says his role at CPC gave him valuable experience in sourcing parts and servicing rare vehicles, along with firsthand knowledge of corporate culture, which he later brought to Mahogany Bay. He'd met the original founder of Mahogany Bay, Todd Lerner, while in



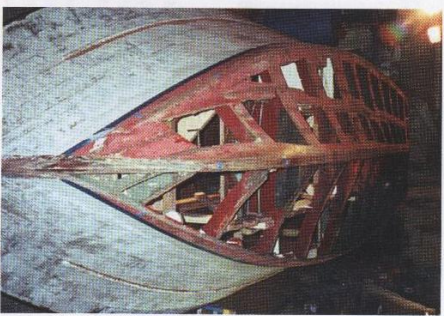
This vintage Garwood is headed for "stripdown" as shown in the photo below.

college, when the two bonded over their life's main passion, restoring vintage boats. And despite Borner's 20-year hiatus from the field - he had a brief stint in the publishing business after leaving CPC - the two remained in contact until finally Borner came on board as Mahogany Bay's president in 2002.

His appointment brought a level of corporate and sourcing knowledge to what was once a one-man operation, says Borner. "We're now a one-stop source for any vintage boat need: buying, selling, restoring, parts, accessories, trailers, and transportation," with an international clientele and reputation for handling the rarest and most expensive boats in the world.

**THE PROCESS**

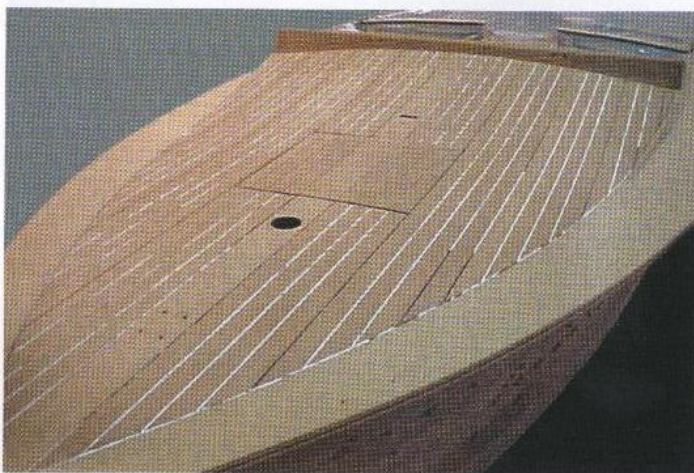
There is no such thing as an average boat restoration project, says Borner. Still, he says each one is approached the same way, and with attention on three main areas of the boat, in order of importance: restoring the structural integrity of the hull; servicing the mechanical aspects of the boat; and lastly, the aesthetic, or the finish and interior.





"For instance, when we look at the hull, we ask, 'what needs to be done structurally? Is there dry rot? What needs to be replaced?' The same is done for the mechanical and visual areas of the boat.

Sourcing the original parts means referencing the company's extensive in-house



*The rich wood on the deck of this Chris-Craft undergoes painstaking restoration for a flawless, visually-pleasing surface.*



archive of manufacturer catalogs and consumer boating magazines from the early 1900s through the 1960s.

Failing that, Mahogany Bay relies on its extensive network of contacts that specialize in a given area. "If we need to know what color a particular Garwood boat was stained before it was varnished, for instance, we have a person who we can call to find that out."

This is where Lerner's long-time presence in the industry comes into play, says Bortner. "Because Todd has been active in the industry since 1974, he has cultivated a strong family of contacts we can call upon when needed."

#### THE TIMING

Despite there being no such thing as a typical restoration, Bortner reports the

average time to refinish a boat from beginning to end - which means replacing the bottom, replacing the frame, replacing all the wood, fixing and sanding the hull, staining and varnishing it, rebuilding the engines, replacing the upholstery, rewiring it, re-combing all the hardware, and then putting it all back together - is about a year.

Because it is such a time-consuming process (and a labor of love), Mahogany Bay does not typically restore a boat before it is sold. Instead, the company buys unrestored boats, sells them to a customer, and offers to do the restoration once purchased. "We have enough to do getting the restorations we've already contracted done without taking on a boat that hasn't yet been sold."

That's not to say the company has never restored a boat for a non-purchasing client; on rare occasions, it has agreed to work on a boat that a client has brought them - but gaining access to Mahogany Bay's extensive restoration, expertise and resources is a privilege Bortner and company reserve for only their "very best clients."

#### THE PLAYERS

Bortner says those who dabble in the vintage boat market, generally speaking, are not first-time boat owners. Usually such buyers already have several boats, to which the addition of a vintage boat would be the crowned jewel of the collection.

"These kinds of boats are more of a lifestyle statement, something that marks a milestone in a person's life - a retirement, for example." To own one sets you

clearly in the upper echelons of the boat-collecting world, adds Bortner, where usually money is no object.

The most coveted vintage boats are from the 1920s and 1930s, which Bortner correlates to Duisenberg vintage automobiles. Another highly desirable boat is the Riva, an Italian brand, made after World War II, which he calls, "the Ferrari of the boat world."

In fact, the most extensive restoration project he's ever worked on, totaling three-and-a-half years and 5,000 hours, was on a 1959 Riva which originally belonged to Rita Hayworth.

#### THE TEAM

While the combined expertise of Bortner and Lerner is certainly the driving force behind the company's success, Bortner knows to give credit where it is due. "In essence, we are a general contractor, of sorts, bringing together the best and most capable people in any given aspect, from restoring a WWI vintage V-12 Liberty engine, which we did last year, to the guys who know how to restore the rarest interiors, with the best chrome, the best finishings, and so on."

That extended family includes an all-star roster of about 25 experts, a dozen of which work in-house. "Truly, it is a team effort, and we're just lucky to have such a great team."



*The finished deck looks "just like new."*

