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Mahogany Bay

The House That Todd Built

By
Tom Schley

*For Rome so near us, for the phoenix moment
When we have thrown off this traveler's trance
And mother-naked and ageless ancient
Wake in her warm nest of renaissance.*

Cecil Day-Lewis (1904-1972)

Flight to Italy

Meet F. Todd Warner of Mound, Minnesota. He is a most interesting fellow. Hell... he's downright fascinating. There is no one word or sentence to accurately describe him. To simply say that he is unique would be a gross understatement in fact. Genius?... in all likelihood. Knowledgeable?... exceptionally so. Passionate about boats?... intensely. Talented?... immensely. Professional?... Top Shelf. Tough?... as Rhino hide. Accomplished?... still counting. He is both a guardian of history and a maker of it. Old?... hardly.

In *Plato's Republic*, Socrates (469-399 B.C.) reasons: "Our guardians ought not to be imitators, for one man can only do one thing well..." Todd is the genuine article but defies the

predicate of the dictum. In the world and history of antique and classic boats, his vision, leadership and accomplishments rival those of Winston Churchill by the comparable age of forty-eight.

Born on March 20, 1953 in Hopkins, Minnesota, Todd was greatly influenced by his father, Frank Warner and, indirectly, by his grandfather, Harold Warner. Harold used to race Ramaley boats in the 1930s on nearby Lake Minnetonka. These boats were capable of speeds well in excess of sixty miles per hour and incorporated many unusual design features. Included is a cavernous interior, extremely high freeboard, incredibly artistic, sculptured curves in its sides, both forward and aft and an extremely innovative bottom design, referred to

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as a 'rocker bottom'. The rocker bottom is the forerunner the modern-day tri-hull.

Harold Warner was apparently something of a character when it came to racing boats. The story goes that his Ramaley, *Moona Hanas*, was regularly defeated by the Chairman of Cream of Wheat - Dan Bull's Ramaley, *Roweda* in their many encounters on Lake Minnetonka. In race after race, Mr. Bull would display his satisfaction in winning by articulating an incendiary gesture to Mr. Warner as he sped across the predetermined finish line. This, of course, planted the seed of determination in Mr. Warner to, one day, repay the distinguished gentleman in-kind.

Prior to what would be one of, if not, their last race, Mr. Warner surreptitiously made a slight modification to *Moona Hanas*. He located and acquired a relatively unknown, and significantly larger aircraft engine called a Hispano-Suiza, which produced 365 horsepower. One of only seven built, the engine was massive for its day. With a little slick altering of the engine compartment, which included a cleverly hidden extension of the hatches, forward, along with minor alterations to the interior, the new power plant was installed.

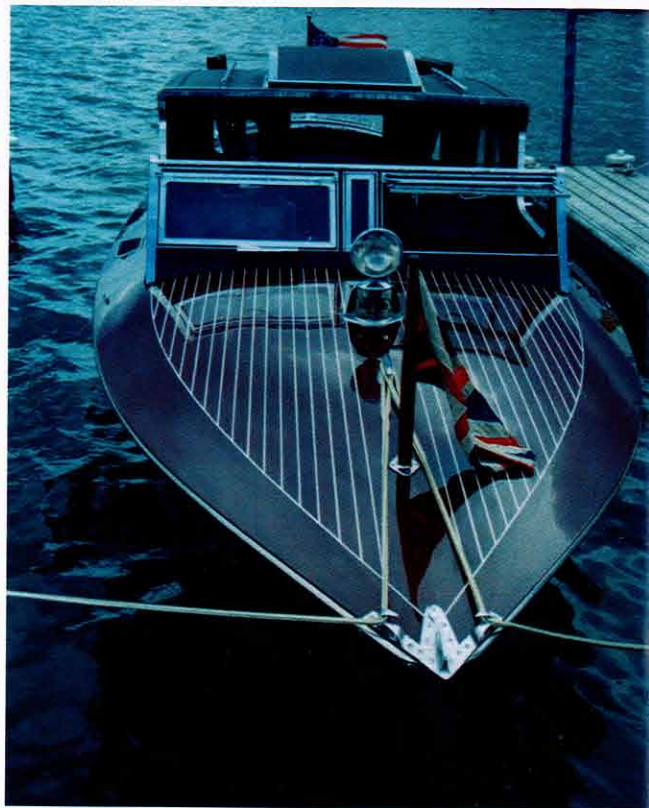
The next race began as usual. Mr. Bull took the lead, as he anticipated he would. Mentally, he was preparing for the usual grand finale, which of course would include the now, infamous victory gesture upon crossing the finish line. However, at the appropriate calculated moment, Mr. Warner engaged his throttle to full-bore, passing Mr. Bull with ease to cross the finish line well ahead of him... 'Going away', as they say. Mr. Bull was nonplussed, to say the least. Especially so when Mr. Warner presented Mr. Bull with the identical, trademark gesture that he had endured from Mr. Bull for so many races.

In the 1938 Speed Boat Races in Wayzata, Minnesota (pronounced 'Wy-zeta'), Harold Warner didn't see the necessity of formally entering his boat in the races but decided to compete anyway. Much to the consternation of the registered participants, Mr. Warner assumed the starting position as, what may be politely described as a 'wild card' entrant. Defying the rules and protocol, Mr. Warner proceeded to win the race in a runaway victory... which, in his view, just happened to be an amusement on his way home.

Although Todd never knew his grandfather first-hand, he has learned a great deal about him over the years. In fact, in his extensive collection of rare boats from the past is the very same Ramaley that Harold Warner used to race on Minnetonka back in the '30s.

His father Frank, a statesmanlike, dashing and avant-garde gentleman was, and is, an avid sportsman and collector of what are now referred to as antique and classic boats. Among his present collection is a one-of-a-kind, 1930 30' HackerCraft Limousine - *Miss Janet*, which made its first debut in 25 years at the 26th Annual Bob Speltz Land O Lakes Antique & Classic Boat Rendezvous this year in Red Wing. He also has

the 1939 19' Chris-Craft Sportsman that his father bought new. In an early issue of *Antique Boating* magazine from 1974, Frank Warner was declared the 'King of Antique Boat Collectors'.



1930 30' HackerCraft Limousine - *Miss Janet*

In the late 1960s, companies such as Chris-Craft, Century and others gave in to the market demands of fiberglass and stopped producing wooden pleasure boats altogether. Frank viewed the transition as a buying opportunity. In what has been described as the First Great Harvest, Mr. Warner went about the business of collecting as many of the old woodies as he could get his hands on. The advent of fiberglass boats had in effect, severely depressed the market for wooden boats. So much so that prices of the 'now obsolete' wooden models had dropped precipitously. They were available at bargain basement levels and Mr. Warner seized the moment.

Among those harvested were a 19' Chris-Craft Racier Runabout, the 1930 30' Hacker Limousine, a '55 Cobra, 1959 26' Riva Tritone, a 1937 27' Triple Cockpit Chris-Craft Custom and many Centurys, GarWoods and Ventnors. The Harvest was not restricted to runabouts and included many inboard and outboard engines as well. Inboard engines ranged from Kermaths to Cadillacs and a substantial number of Chris-Crafts. Quantities of sailboats and rowboats were also caught in the net during the Harvest.

Growing up around Lake Minnetonka, surrounded by hundreds of wooden beauties to admire and experience, Todd Warner was a kid in a candy store. And, with such dedicated and enthusiastic iconic mentors, it doesn't take a genius to

figure out which path young Todd would follow in life. By his early teens, he had become so exposed and immersed in the subject of wooden boats that he could readily recite much of the history of builders like Hacker, Gar Wood and Riva. He had caught the bug. It was contagious, infectious and incurable. Some might even refer to it as 'boatitis'.

During his mid to late teens, Todd apprenticed at Tonka Bay Marine where he received formal training in the art and skill of restoring wooden boats. It would serve him well in later years. In his early twenties, he met another young boating enthusiast by the name of Robert G. Speltz (1943-1993). 'Bob' Speltz and Todd met at the Minneapolis Boat Show in 1976. At the time, Bob was in the process of compiling information for a book that he wanted to publish. It would be entitled *The Real Runabouts*. It was to be the first of seven encyclopedic accounts of the history of wooden boat builders ever produced. Todd eloquently contributed the Forward for the historic volume as well as substantial documentation for many segments of the book.

Though Speltz suffered from kidney disease and had to undergo dialysis three times a week, he didn't let it interfere with, or dampen his enthusiasm for, his passion for the boats. He, like Todd, had grown up around them. His father had owned several wooden boats over the course of his life and Bob followed in his footsteps. His meeting with Todd would prove to be fortuitous.



F. Todd Warner - 2001

By this time (mid '70s), Todd participated in the Second Great Harvest of wooden boats. His interest, knowledge and skills had risen to such a level that he decided to join his father in the business. Bob Speltz made arrangements to drive up from Albert Lea to visit with the 22 year-old prodigy and to write a story about him and his growing collection of boats. In the story, Bob reveals that upon launching his business in January, 1976, Todd was "very much in the boat business... actively selling, buying and restoring boats for his many customers." The enterprise was called the Lake Minnetonka Restoration Company, which was part of Classic Runabout Corp. of America, founded by Todd in 1975.

Bob also reported that Todd had become a dealer and distributor for both Federal and Michigan propellers and was capable of custom building any shaft size to order. Furthermore, he had access to all of the pre-1965 Century hardware molds enabling him to produce any part a customer might want. Between Todd and his father, the collection of boats was rapidly growing into the hundreds. Also in the story, Speltz dubbed the young Industrialist "The Burt Reynolds of the Antique Boating World". Now days, it might be more appropriate to refer to Todd as the "Don Johnson of the Antique Boating World" as he somewhat resembles the actor in appearance, style and fame.

The next couple of years were ambitious ones. In 1976 Todd became an Antique & Classic Boat Society (ACBS) Approved Judge. In that same year he became a Qualified Marine Surveyor. He had previously acquired a Captain's and Engineering License for boats up to 55' in length for Lake Minnetonka. In addition, he earned a similar license for boats to 70' from the state of Iowa. In 1977, he founded the Land O Lakes Chapter of the ACBS, which was only the third chapter established at the time. He also served as it's first president. The ACBS had been established two years earlier (1975) and in 1976, had less than 100 members nationally. As of 2001, the Land O Lakes Chapter is one of the largest and most active in the country with over 800 members.

Also in 1976, Todd initiated, planned and executed one of the earliest antique and classic boat shows in the U.S.: the Land O Lakes First Annual Antique & Classic Boat Rendezvous. It was an adjunct to his founding of the ACBS Chapter. Though the now famous boat shows in Clayton and Muskoka were known to have been held since the 1960s and early '70s, organized shows across the U.S. were few and far between. Todd was instrumental in breathing life into the new movement to save and preserve the heritage of wooden pleasure boats. Remarkably, he was only 23 years old at the time.

Over the next ten years, Todd continued to accumulate boats and amass information about them. His skills improved, his knowledge expanded and his collection of boats continued to grow. He is also, and has been, a major collector and curator of an ever-growing library of original, historical documentation on wooden boat builders from all over the world. His present library includes over 6,000 documents, brochures, photos, magazines, literature and research spanning the last century. It is one thing to be a collector and to be familiar with bits and pieces of the information acquired; it is quite another to be intimately familiar with the contents and details of such an expansive archive. But then, what else would you expect from someone who has personally owned over 1,000 vintage boats?

By 1986, Todd's reputation and business had expanded to national proportions. His interests now included importing and selling fine English, German, Italian and American classic automobiles. To reflect the evolution into specializing in the best of the best, the name of the company was changed to

Bristol Classics, Ltd and was located in Excelsior, Minnesota. The boat restoration aspect of the business continued to grow along with a national renaissance of fine, wooden boats. As interest in owning vintage boats rose, so also did the necessity of providing quality workmanship in restoring them.

Bristol Classics' reputation for exceptional work gained greater and greater fame in subsequent years. At the 1991 Concours d' Elegance in Lake Tahoe, one of Todd's restorations won 'Best of Class'. High praise indeed. In order to win at Tahoe, the condition of the boat can be nothing less than exemplary. The quality of the work was so good that it was now justifiably referred to as 'Award Winning'. The number of craftsmen in North America who specialize in the restoration of extremely rare and exotic boats at this level are as rare as the boats they work on.



Mahogany Bay's Showroom

Through the 1990s, restoration activities and sales continued to expand. Additional storage buildings and work facilities were added to address the increase in demand for quality boats and service. At the end of the decade, the company's name was changed to a more reflective... Mahogany Bay. The business has evolved to include larger office and showroom facilities. The showroom certainly lives up to its name and is richly adorned with awards, trophies, plaques and historical memorabilia, in addition to a number of rare and diverse boats from the past.

Headquarters of Mahogany Bay is now located in Mound, Minnesota which is just a few miles west of Minneapolis and St. Paul. Between Mound and the Twin Cities are numerous storage facilities which house a multitude of rare boats. Viewing the contents of these buildings is like stepping through a portal in time. To the uninitiated, the vast collections in these cavernous dwellings might be mistaken for

a gigantic time capsules that time has forgotten. Not so. In fact, they are enormous vaults filled with accumulated riches. They also serve as staging areas preparatory to their day of resurrection.

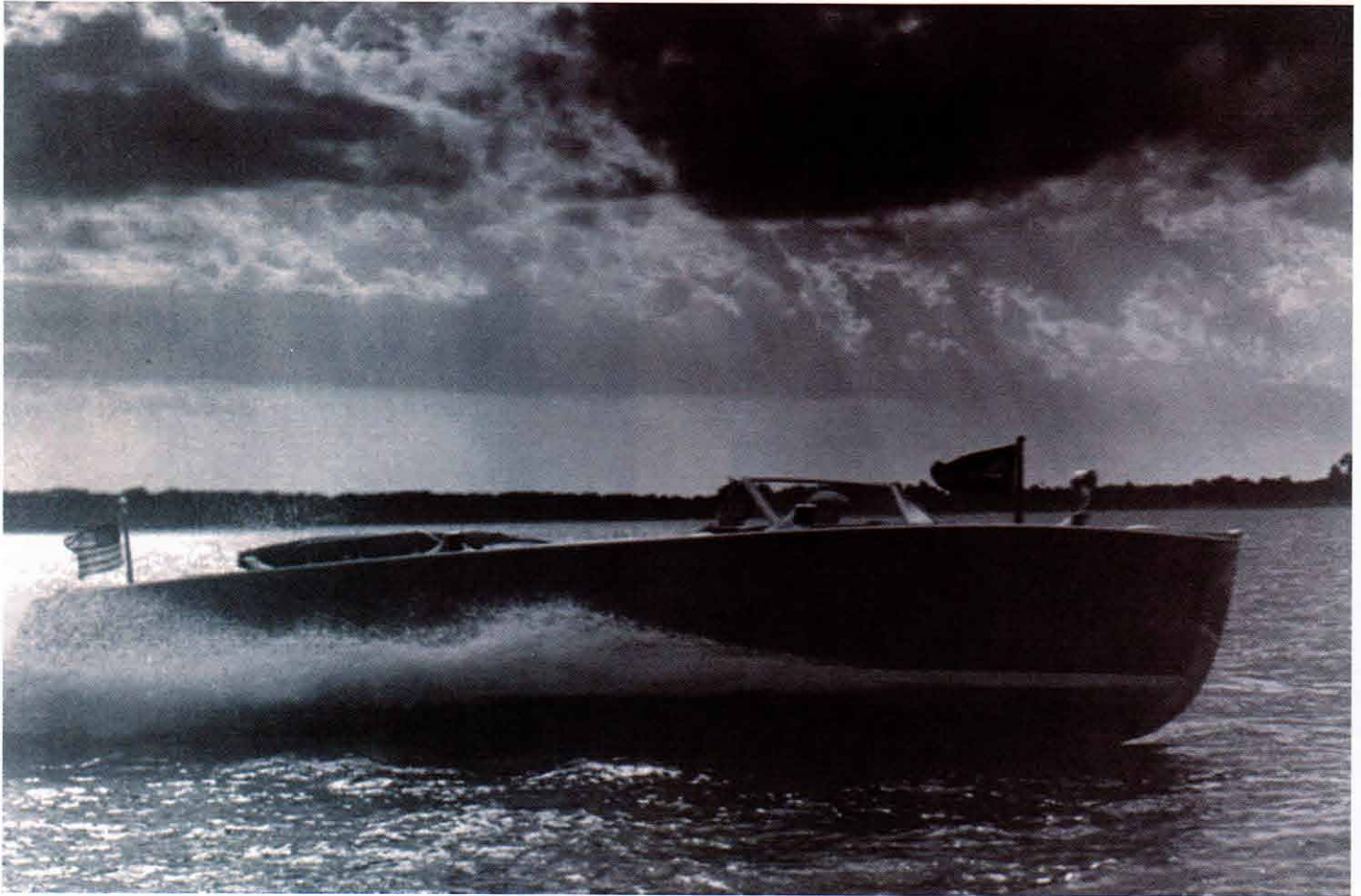
One of the great educational aspects of the tour is Todd's encyclopedic knowledge of each boat and its respective historical significance. Regardless of the boat selected, there is a story to tell about it. As he rolls the cover back on one of the boats to expose its black-sided hull with sunken headlights at the bow, Todd immediately begins to explain its place in the world of vintage boats: "This is an Ancarrow, built in Richmond, Virginia in 1950 - 1960. It went to the London Palladium boat show... I bought it in England and shipped it home. Its one of only a very few in existence... this boat a Cobras for breakfast... it has a 427 Ford in it..."

Or, he might point to one and say, "That's a 1939 Goodhue Laker... built by Nat Goodhue. It was commissioned by J.C. Penney for his niece Laura Bushnell. It's built of 3/4" cedar over sawn oak frames... the hardware is commonly referred to as 'German silver'. It has a high nickel content which gives it a beautiful champagne color. We had to fabricate the ventilators from the original drawings because they were no longer available... what makes the boat so special is the tremendous flare on the sides, the beautiful crown of its deck and the unique drop in the gunwales as you look aft..."



1929 30' Triple Cockpit Dingle - Gerry Lo

One of the favorites in his collection is a 1929 30' triple cockpit Dingle called the *Gerry Lo*. It is quite famous on Lake Minnetonka. Originally custom-designed by millionaire Fran Wolcott Griswold, the mahogany masterpiece was built by the Joseph Dingle Boatworks Company of St. Paul, Minnesota. Griswold, by his twenties, had already made millions with the Griswold Sign Company. His first major success was the 'Bobby Sign' which was the earliest version of the stoplight. He was nearly killed in a car accident in downtown Minneapolis in the 1920s and reportedly was overheard muttering, on the way to the hospital: "Someone ought to be able to invent a stop signal that would be visible in all kinds of weather."



Original Photo of the 1929 30' Dingle the *Gerry Lo* – Circa 1950s (Note Mattress on Engine Hatch)

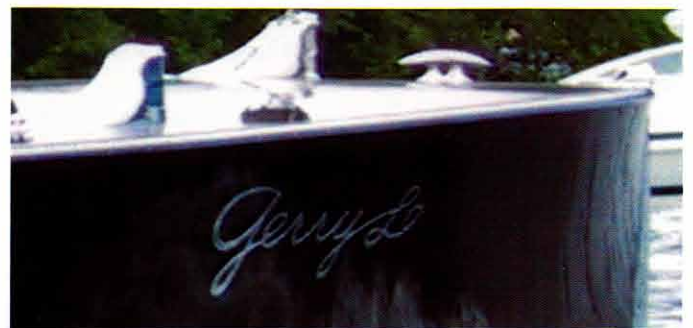
Placed in the middle of an intersection as a traffic regulator, the Bobby Sign was spring-loaded so that, when hit, would come back up and still work. The invention flashed red and green lights and was in great demand. It was a mechanical marvel that was a considerable improvement over existing road sign technology of the day. The city of Minneapolis reportedly saved \$10,000.00 in accident claims in the first year the device was used. Griswold later branched out into coffee, machine products, hotels and resorts.

In 1928, Griswold and his team of engineers went to the New York Boat Show to come up with a design for a boat that would benefit his newly elevated economic status. The engineers were assigned the task of studying the lines of boats at the show and to develop a blueprint, consider various hardware designs and configurations, and contemplate a suitable engine for the boat. Once the details had been decided on, construction began in the winter of 1928-1929. At the time, the Dingle Boatworks was strictly a custom boat builder and had gained notoriety by building the 135' *Norstar* for the Mayo brothers of the famous Mayo Clinic. The *Norstar* was Dingle's crowning achievement and was the largest yacht on the Upper Mississippi.

The total cost to build the *Gerry Lo* in 1928 was \$25,000.00. Griswold decided to use a Curtiss D-12 World War I aircraft engine which represented \$9,000.00 of the total expenditure. Construction methods included the use of Monel fasteners which were found to still be in perfect condition some sixty

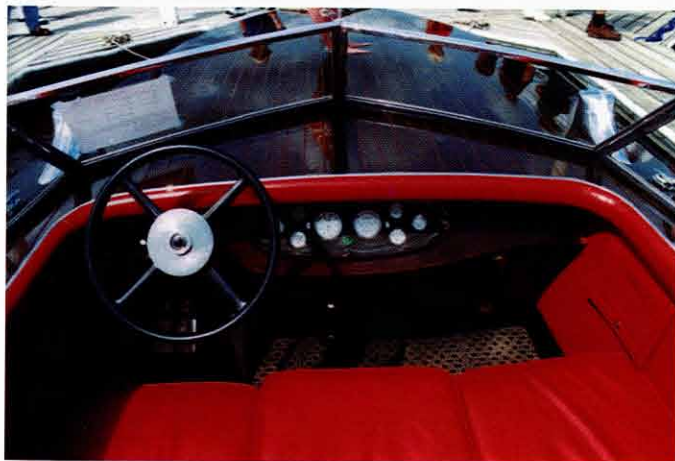
years later. Metallurgically speaking, these particular fasteners were a composite that were infinitely superior to the brass screws commonly used at the time. Most of the hardware and instruments used on the boat were special cast. Some of the hardware was sourced from Lyon Tuttle whose designs were used in the construction of the 30' Sea Lyon runabouts.

The windshield, grab rails, spotlight and other pieces had to be custom cast to match the look of the acquired hardware. Every casting, ranging from the strut to the multi-linked steering gear, was over-engineered to ensure durability. The bottom was double-planked, the sides were batten-seamed and the hull was a dark-stained Honduran mahogany. At the time of completion, the boat weighed nearly 7,000 pounds. The final length was 29' at the waterline, 30' overall with a beam of 7'1".



Original Scripted Special Cast Nameplate

The name *Gerry Lo* comes from the traditional practice of the day of naming boats after the children of the family. Griswold had two daughters named Geraldine and Lois Mary, hence the truncation. The nameplates were custom cast in script and affixed to the appropriate places on the hull. Once launched on Lake Minnetonka, the *Gerry Lo* quickly gained the reputation of being the fastest boat on the lake. Griswold always took immense pride and pleasure in defending the title and the two quickly became a legend.



Cockpit View

Todd remembers seeing the boat for the first time at the age of 10. The noise emanating from the massive Curtiss engine had a Pavlovian effect on the children around the lake, much as the Sirens in Greek mythology (who "... sing so sweetly that all listen spellbound to their song...") had on Odysseus and his fellow adventurers during the Odyssey. Upon hearing the song of the Sirens, Odysseus said: "As I listened, my heart almost burst with the yearning to go to them." Todd must have had a similar experience as he vowed to, one day, have the *Gerry Lo* for his own. Years later, in 1976, at the First Annual Land O Lakes Rendezvous that Todd founded, he presented Frank Griswold and the *Gerry Lo* with an award for the "Longest Marriage Between Boat and Skipper".

Some thirty years after his first sighting, Todd's dream of owning the *Gerry Lo* became a reality. Frank Griswold died in 1992 at the age of 96. He had owned the boat for over 60 years and had always kept it on Lake Minnetonka. He, and it, remained active until his death. Griswold was also known to have been riding his Harley Davidson well into his seventies. In 1993, the Griswold family decided to put the boat on the market. Todd always had an understanding with the family that if they ever elected to sell, he wanted to be first in line. Somehow, that communication got lost in the shuffle over time.

One Sunday, Todd happened to notice an ad for the boat in the local newspaper that the *Gerry Lo* was for sale. He immediately responded by writing a letter reminding the family of their earlier understanding and included a deposit check to solidify the deal. A few days later, the family returned his check along with a note indicating that he had failed to read the ad closely enough. They pointed out that the

ad included the phrase: 'or best offer'; it was their intention to get top dollar for it. After all, the boat was legendary and the fact had not escaped their attention. Subsequently, a bidding war ensued. Todd and a gentleman named William Hawks, a nearby Minnetrista teamed up to acquire the boat and ultimately came up with the winning bid.

After being acquired by Todd and his partner, the *Gerry Lo* underwent her first, full restoration. She'd had a cosmetic makeover in 1955 which involved selected surfaces being stripped and re-varnished, however, she was found to be in 'much better than expected' condition after 60 years of use. Her original Curtiss D-12 had worn out years earlier and had been replaced with a 440 Chrysler, 335 horsepower V8 with two four-barrels.

Though the replacement engine seemed impressive on the surface, upon opening the hatches, the engine occupied only a fraction of the available space for its true capacity. This, quite naturally, prompted the question... "Where's the beef?" Despite its respectful size, the Chrysler appeared as a single star in a vast universe. Subsequently, part of the restoration process included equipping her with something similar to her original capabilities and design. But what?

After long deliberation, consideration and calculation, Todd realized that the original Curtiss was the same size and weight as the 1650 cubic inch, 628 horsepower, V-12 Meteor by Rolls Royce. The Meteor was a 'de-tuned' version of the Merlin which was used in the P-51 Mustangs of WWII. The Meteor had the same block but was not as 'tweaked' as the Merlin. In fact, the Meteor was used in many of the Sherman tanks during WWII.



The New Engine

'Same Engine Used in Sherman Tanks of WWII'

The overall restoration of the *Gerry Lo* took approximately 3,000 hours. One aspect was replacing the double-planked bottom with a seven-layer composite consisting of four layers of wood and three layers of Kevlar, thereby making it a 'bullet-proof' bottom system. Why Kevlar? In the tradition of the original construction and design of the boat, 'over-engineering' was a key ingredient to ensuring longevity.



Rolls Royce 'Meteor' – 1650 Cubic Inch – 628 hp.

Therefore, for strength and durability (and taking in to account the weight and power of the new Rolls Royce engine), it only made sense. Besides, one of the on-staff restorers who assisted on the project, Fred Goughnour, had written his thesis on composite construction, which greatly contributed to the decision to go forward with Kevlar as a viable component in replacing the bottom.

Fred Goughnour has worked with Todd for 10 years and graduated from Minnesota College of Art and Design with a concentration in industrial art. Fred refined his studies to focus on boat building and design. Previous to his association with Todd, he worked for three years as a restorer in and around the Lake Tahoe area.

Other elements of the restoration process involved replacing the arches in the engine hatches along with several 'short planks' that had been incorporated into the hull sides (the reason for which will become apparent shortly). Many people have commented on how unusually dark the stain is on the boat. Originally, the *Gerry Lo* was stained in a very dark, reddish-brown color.

It is interesting to note that, after 60 years, the trim boards inside the cockpits had never been stripped and were in the

original dark stain which could then be matched. Furthermore, underneath the burgundy upholstery, they found pieces of red leather that were subsequently matched to the original button-tufted style that went from big, to medium, to little from the front cockpit to aft. So, as you view the interior, the size of the button tufting diminishes as the boat gets narrower and goes aft.

Another interesting feature was that the boat had the steering wheel from a 1961 Pontiac Grand Prix. Sometime back in the late 1970s, Todd found a four-spoke, black steering wheel at a local garage sale that had originally come out of a GarWood. He decided to purchase it for some, yet to be determined, future use. After studying pictures of the *Gerry Lo* from the 1930s, he recognized that the steering wheel he had purchased, some twenty years earlier, was actually the same wheel that was originally used on the boat. In addition, Todd redesigned the dashboard to have the nine functions on an eight-gauge configuration. And, though the original gauges had a scalloped-style design, the decision was made to go with a stepped-plate design and a North, South, East, West pinnacle scroll was incorporated at the edges.



Instrument Panel

Other modifications included a larger rudder and experiments were conducted with various propeller sizes in an effort to optimize speed. They began experimenting with a 20/32 thinking it would enable 60+ miles-per-hour. However, the math didn't support it in theory or in practice. The final prop selection was a 20/26, which achieved an estimated speed, in the neighborhood, of 54 mph (the actual speed is an estimate due to innate limitations and variations in tachometer readings as well as the availability of alternate methods of measurement, i.e. GPS speed).

After a brief respite, the *Gerry Lo* is once again singing the 'sweet song' of the Sirens on Lake Minnetonka. She is still the fastest boat on the lake. The most recent challenge was from a 1995 28' triple cockpit Morgan Hacker, powered by a 454 called *Untouchable*, owned by Jim and Marcia Aamodt of Wayzata, Minnesota. Jim is the current president of the Bob Speltz, Land O Lakes Chapter of the ACBS. He was also the host of the 26th Annual Rendezvous held in Red Wing this year.

The day after the Speltz show, back on Lake Minnetonka, *Untouchable* became visible in the distance. The *Gerry Lo* was out for a spin with seven passengers onboard (two in the forward cockpit, three in the mid and two aft). As each took notice of the other, an aggressive dynamic began to evolve. *Untouchable* changed course and headed toward the *Gerry Lo*.

The *Gerry Lo* immediately recognized her course correction and prepared to engage. As *Untouchable* drew closer, it became apparent there were only four passengers aboard her (two forward and two amidships). The *Gerry Lo* allowed *Untouchable* to close proximity before engaging.



1995 28' Morgan Hacker – *Untouchable* ('Stage Three')

At first, there is the polite, tentative ritual of engagement, which requires a declaration of intent, accompanied by an acclamation of ascent, from both parties as to expectation. Once satisfied, a reciprocal, furtive signal is given and acknowledged to begin. In the first stage, acceleration is modulated until parity is achieved. Stage two is a settling-in process to confirm intent and degree of competitiveness while still maintaining parity. Stage three ignores diplomacy altogether. Despite the difference in weight, length and number of passengers onboard, the *Gerry Lo* comfortably pulled away from *Untouchable* at a steadily increasing pace. Once realized, the engagement charitably ceased.

Among the passengers on the *Gerry Lo* is Jack Koch who is the grandson of Frank Wolcott Griswold. After learning that Todd had bought and restored his grandfather's boat, Jack established contact in the hope of reliving childhood memories. Todd graciously invited Jack for a visit, which he readily accepted. Now in his sixties and living in California, Jack has vivid memories of the boat from his early days on Lake Minnetonka:

I first remember riding on the Gerry Lo when I was 7 or 8 years old. (1945-1946) I remember her as the biggest, fastest, most well known speedboat on Lake Minnetonka.

My grandfather, Frank W. Griswold, and his boat were already a legend on the lake and I was one proud puppy. On Saturday or Sunday Mornings when he fired her up, that big Curtis D-12 World War One aircraft motor (her power plant at the time) roared to life, it seemed like you could hear her for miles. On the weekends, he would roll her out of the boathouse on a railroad track supported cradle into the lake next to the dock and light her up. In those days they didn't have electronics and electronic ignition systems, of course, and she would be a little cranky sometimes. My grandfather, my uncle, my dad, and any other self-appointed expert would always jump in and play mechanic. They always seemed to get her going somehow and we would be off for a great ride. At the time the throttle was on the steering wheel and it also had a manual spark advance for ignition timing.

It was always a major event, as I recall, because he known for being generous (and a show off) about giving ri People who heard he was going out that day were alv eager to go. At the time he had a large mattress cover over engine compartment. He would pile people on top of it, and all the seats as well. It seemed like there were 25 people board some times. One time he pulled six of us water sk behind her through Excelsior Bay with a full load passengers on board. It was quite a show.



Jack Koch in the *Gerry Lo* (Front Passenger)

He was not a man to treat her gingerly either. He would pi her hard, do fast turns, etc. One of his favorite stunts, was sit up on the side (gunnel?) [sic] of the boat, looking aft a talking to passengers and ignoring where he was going. the while the boat would be traveling at full speed direc towards the shore. At the last minute, he would jump do into the seat, crank the steering wheel hard left. In the mid of the turn, just missing the shore or some dock by a few fe he would then close the throttle for a moment. This wo cause the boat to slow and sort of sink into the water a l causing a huge sheet of water to fly over the boat and soaki everyone on board. He would then give her full throttle a take off again having a good belly laugh. Lots of boats wani to race us and he took them all on, I don't ever recall anyc ever beating us.

I heard through the grape vine that he used to win so ma boat shows with her in the old days, that some officials ask him if he would not enter her some times just to give the oth

guys a chance. He was good enough to defer. I understand Todd, the present owner, does that even today.

Lots of people knew my grandfather better than I, mainly because my immediate family moved to California when I was 10 years old. My mother, Geraldine was my grandfather's oldest daughter. I knew him as I did after the age of 10 through visits back to Minnesota, letters, telephone calls, etc. I used to drive back in the summer once in while all by myself as a teenager because I missed Lake Minnetonka and the big speed boat so much.

He was a man with great sense of humor and liked to play jokes on people. Marriage was one of his favorite targets for humor

I never worked for him, but I heard that, at work and in the business world, he was extremely shrewd and ruled with an iron fist. He was fair but you did not want to get on his wrong side or make him angry. Sort of like Napoleon, I guess. Small physical stature, (5'6" or 7") but mean as hell, when need be, and afraid of almost nothing or no one.

One of Todd's missions is to preserve the heritage of wooden boats on Lake Minnetonka. The *Gerry Lo* is certainly one of the most famous and enduring boats on the lake and can be regarded as one of the great thirty-footers ever built. His intention is to keep her on Minnetonka so future generations will have the opportunity to experience the same thrills that he and others were able to enjoy as children.

If the name Minnetonka has a familiar ring to it, it might be because it's where the famous 'Tonka Toys' came from. The lake is renowned for its history of wooden boats. With approximately 110 miles of shoreline and over 17,000 acres of water, it is a perfect playground for them. The area has long been established and there are many summerhouses along the shore that date to the early 1920s.



English Tudor – Lake Minnetonka

Perhaps one of the most interesting is the English Tudor Todd acquired on the lake a few years ago. Built in the '20s, it was once a Speakeasy during Prohibition. In it, there is a very

large, warm, comfortable room downstairs that is accessed by a massive pair of pocket doors on one side. The room served as the primary entertainment area during its Speakeasy days. It was a favorite hangout for politicians of the day and, on occasion, the Andrews Sisters would perform there.



Old World Charm

Upon entering this special room, down a couple of short steps, you are immediately struck by its old-world atmosphere and charm. An enormous stone fireplace dominates the opposite wall. The room is richly adorned with lighted oil paintings, mounted trophy heads, large scale, magnificently detailed wooden boat models and various other artifacts.

The entire room, as well as the rest of the house, is dripping with artworks and collectibles. Included are vast collections of first edition books, a plethora of exquisite, oriental carpets and tapestries, leather chairs, plush sofas, mahogany tables decorated with a multitude of small, framed photographs and dozens of lamps in all shapes and sizes that warmly illuminate each area. In the downstairs room alone, there are more than a dozen individual low-level accent lights and lamps that greatly enhance the amazingly comfortable ambiance. There is a tremendous sense of history and peace about it that is actually quite difficult to accurately describe.

The two upper floors are equally richly appointed. The upstairs guestroom is one of the most pleasant and unique rooms you could ever hope to stay in. The entire ceiling, and half way down all four walls, is an incredible fresco depicting an evening, starlit sky. The scene is enhanced by beautiful old-style, lace-curtained windows that offer picturesque views of the surrounding wooded area. The extremely comfortable bed is covered with an antique, hand-sewn quilt topped off with dozens of small colorful pillows.

One amusing feature is the alarm clock; actually, there are two of them. Their names are Moose and Mica. They are Todd's impish black Labrador Retrievers who are brother and sister. Need to get up early? No problem. At about 7:00 AM, you hear the heavy bedroom door squeak open. What happens next is hilarious. Through the door comes Moose. He doesn't just walk in, he races in... leaps up on the bed and literally throws himself down beside you with a thump. Five seconds later, he jumps up and races back out the door.

About a minute passes and you begin to fade back to sleep. Suddenly, Mica comes running in and executes the exact same maneuver. She leaps on the bed, flops down next to you, fully stretches out, looks at you, smiles and, just as abruptly, jumps up and races out the door. Once their mission is accomplished, you would swear you could hear them giggling as they run downstairs together to find some other mischief. It is quite a memorable experience.

A small porch, just off the end of the living room, offers a spectacular view of the expansive manicured lawn that stretches down to the lake. To the left is the boathouse. It too is in the Tudor style, matching the house and is original to the property. The interior single slip is dry but may have once been used as a wet slip. During most winters, the surface of Lake Minnetonka freezes to a thickness of some four feet. As a result, many of the docks and boat sheds are portable. They are actually dismantled at the end of each season, stored and are reconstructed in the spring. There are many such docks around the lake.

Not too many years ago, areas of the Northeast were considered to be the bastions of mahogany boats and, to a certain extent that was true. Michigan, of course, was where many of the great old boats were built including Century, Chris-Craft, Hacker and others. Ohio was famous for the Lyman boats and a host of lesser builders over the last 100 years.

In the last 10 years or so, the dynamics have changed thanks, in part, to visionaries like Todd. He has greatly facilitated the renaissance both in this country and abroad. For many years he has traveled across the U.S., Canada, England, France, Italy and the Scandinavian countries in search of quality boats. In addition to the three restoration shops in and around the Minneapolis-St. Paul area, he has recently been a significant player in the Riva market. Rivas are considered by many to be the Rolls Royces of boats. Recently, there has been a

resurgence of interest in them worldwide. They are beautiful, fast and rare.

In the past couple of years, Todd has traveled to Italy several occasions and has developed relationships with many in the Riva circle there. More recently, he has set up a restoration facility in Italy that is staffed by former Riva employees. Their first project, recently completed, is a 1959 Riva Olympic. Todd plans to keep the shop busy with several other projects and is also exploring the possibility of importing wooden boats, built to vintage designs, from Holland.



1910 Firehouse – “St. Paul Shipwrights”

One of Mahogany Bay's works-in-progress at a restoration shop in west St. Paul, which is actually a converted 1910 firehouse. In it, work is well under way on restoring one of the most famous Rivas around... a 1959 26' Riva Tritone. It is one of 257 built and one of only three to incorporate Riva's rare and sexy zebra-skin patterned upholstery. The Tritone is known for its unusual curves and sleek design lines. It was originally sold for \$15,000.00. Once the restoration work is completed, the boat will be worth nearly a half a million dollars.

What makes this particular Riva so special is that it was originally owned by Prince Aly Khan who, at the time, was married

actress Rita Hayworth. In the late 1940s, Rita Hayworth's promotional photos were spectacular. She was the pinup dream girl to thousands of sailors. The couple originally named the Tritone *Piranha* and were said to have sunbathed on its mahogany decks while cruising the Italian Riviera. Surprisingly, the boat has been around Lake Minnetonka for over thirty years.



Rita Hayworth

In 1967, Todd's father, Frank Warner, became aware of the boat through a business contact in London. By then, the Prince had passed away and ownership of the *Piranha* had transferred to his son Karim who expressed an interest in selling it. Mr. Warner had never owned a Riva and decided to fly to the south of France for a closer look. He subsequently purchased the boat and had it shipped to Lake Minnetonka.

By 1978, Mr. Warner decided it was time to sell and it was purchased by a local businessman named Robert Pond. Pond owned a vintage airplane museum and apparently devoted more of his time to it than he did the boat. It's condition deteriorated over time. When Pond moved from the Twin Cities area, he sold his lake home to Richard Lindstrom and offered to include the Riva in the deal. While unsure what the actual cost of the boat was, since it was folded into the price of the house, Lindstrom is pretty sure it was a bargain.

When word got around that the boat had a new owner, Todd wrote Lindstrom a letter proposing that Mahogany Bay perform the restoration work. Because of Todd's knowledge

and background with Rivas, it was a perfect fit. Todd is supervising and coordinating the work, which is painstakingly done to exact detail. The St. Paul converted firehouse shop is run by Master Shipwright **Mark Sauer** who is responsible for handling the woodwork on the boat.



Rita Hayworth's 1959 26' Riva Tritone - *Piranha*

Mark was raised on the Mississippi River during a time when there were only wooden boats. At the age of 11, his father handed him a varnish brush for the first time. While still in college, he started buying and restoring wooden boats to help offset the cost of his education. Upon graduation, he decided he'd rather spend his time on the water rather than in an office environment. Mark has been restoring, rebuilding and building wooden boats professionally since 1982. He also attended the Northwest School of Wooden Boat Building and has been involved in the restoration of over 150 boats ranging in size from 16' to 65'. In addition, he has been involved in the construction of new wooden boats for many years.

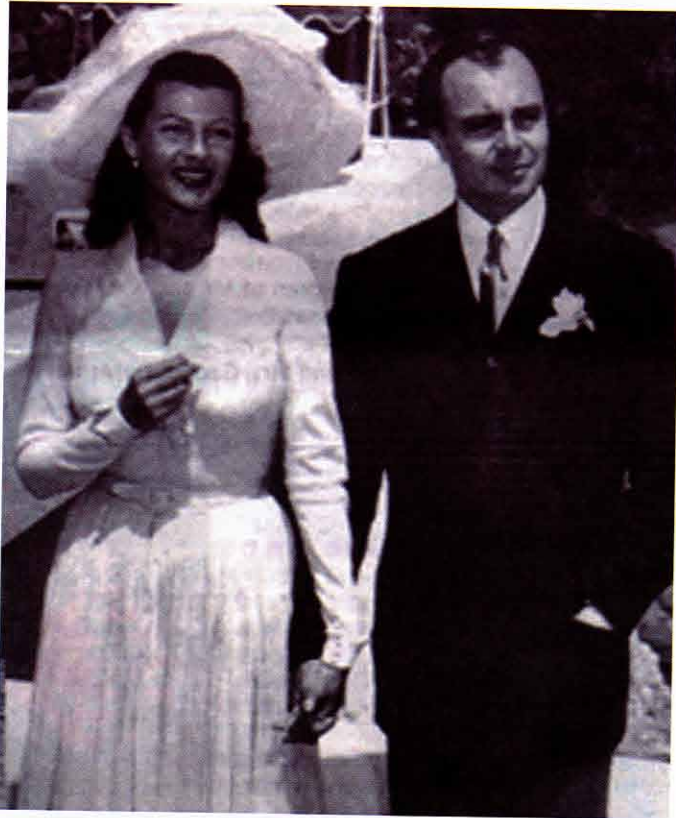


The Tritone's Deck

(*'Returning Piranha to her original grandeur'*)

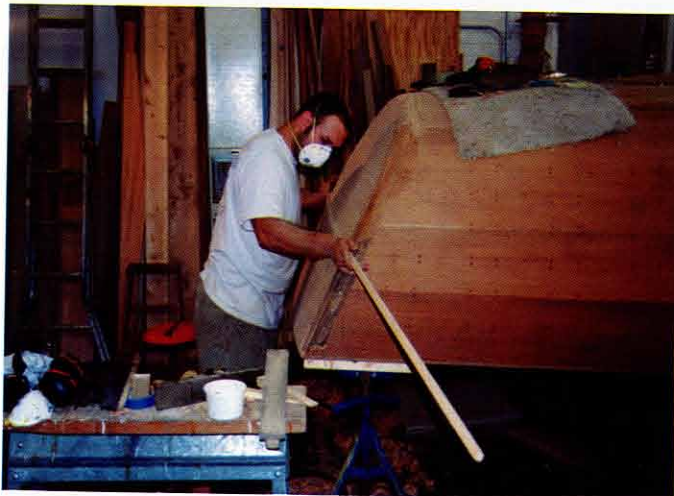
About 75% of the wood will be replaced on the Tritone. The overall goal is to return the boat to its original grandeur in every detail. Each step of the process is fully documented. Dozens of rolls of film have been used to record the

innumerable stages of the work. It is very much like an archeological dig; each phase is done an inch at a time with the utmost care and consideration to detail.



Rita Hayworth & Prince Aly Khan

The restoration team uses the same construction techniques that were mastered by Riva decades ago. In this case, they take it a step further by using specialized wooden planing tools that are actually over 100 years old. With these century-old devices, the exacting task of achieving the precise, uniform convexity of the Tritone's transom will be sculpted to perfection. Watching them work is not just a treat... its an honor. Being in the presence of such dedicated and talented craftsmen is awe-inspiring.



Fairing the Transom to Perfection

When the work is completed, the Riva will feature twin 3 horsepower engines which will propel her to about 46 mph. Todd will unveil the famous masterpiece at the Minnesota Boat Show in January of 2002... 28 years after it's first appearance at the same show. The Tritones were built from 1950 to 1967 and were luxuriously appointed even by modern standards. It affords spacious accommodations for at least 8 passengers. This boat was also one of the last planked Riva built. It is history, archaeology and spectacle combined in one beautiful presentation.

Another restoration shop for Mahogany Bay in St. Paul is located next to the Upper Mississippi River at the Watergate Marina. This shop will accommodate cruisers up to 60 feet in length. There are very few facilities remaining that are willing or capable of performing work on the larger vessels anymore. The shop employs eight restorers who keep the work flowing and on schedule. All of the shops are fully capable of performing keel-up restorations and the exacting work is done to the highest of standards. One of the key distinctions in the quality of the work is the fact that the restorers are formally trained and highly skilled in the traditional methods of boat restoration.



1925 26' Fay & Bowen

Presently in the St. Paul shop is a 1925 26' Fay & Bowen that is in the final stages of a major restoration. In addition to the replacement of some forty-odd pairs of ribs, the bottom planks were replaced incorporating a special type of cotton, in between the seams, as was used in the original construction of the boat. Once completed, the boat will be shipped to Lake Arrowhead, California and will be in 'Concours' condition.

upon its arrival. The quality of the work is so good that she will likely out live us all.



1925 26' Fay & Bowen (With Cotton Bottom Seams)

Perhaps the most interesting and admirable aspects of Mahogany Bay's work is their dedication to restoring boats to their true, original condition. The primary reason for this insistence is the fact that many of the fine, wooden boats that come to Mahogany Bay are, in some cases, 60 to 70 years old. Despite the age of the boats, many are still as much as 80% intact, which is extremely high praise for the work of the original builder. It is remarkable to realize the longevity and durability of these boats, not to mention their lasting beauty. That fact is not lost on Mahogany Bay who takes great pride and satisfaction in preserving these national treasures for posterity.



Quality Workmanship – Using 100 Year-Old Tools

Domestically, Mahogany Bay employs 20 full-time specialists who handle every aspect of restoring boats of virtually any size in three shop facilities in the Twin Cities area of Minnesota. The recent acquisition of the Riva restoration facility in Italy adds a substantial, international flavor to the company. Even the world of cyberspace has not escaped the attention of Mahogany Bay. Their high-tech web site at

www.mahoganybay.net now includes over 3,500 pages of boats, information and history.

The in-house talent is incredible. In addition to **Fred Goughnour** and **Mark Sauer**, there is **Nate Zumach** who attended the Apprentice Shop in Rockland, Maine for two and a half years. He then worked for William Cannell Boat Building for a year where he helped in the complete restoration of a 62' Nickolis Potter Design, Sloop called *Serenade*. Nate moved back to St. Paul last year and began working with **Mark Sauer**. To date, Nate has 20 restorations under his belt.



Todd and Fred Goughnour

Then there is **Ben Carlson** who ordered his first boat from the back pages of *Boy's Life* magazine. One boat led to another until he moved aboard a 70 year-old Tug on San Francisco Bay. The experiences gained from keeping that boat afloat along with doing odd jobs around a local marina got him his first real boat job as an engineer and gunner touring with the tall ship *Hawaiian Chieftain* on the California coast. When the tour was over, he too found his way to Mark Sauer and has been there ever since.

Tim Webber is a more recent addition to the staff. He got his start in woodworking as an apprentice to a woodturner in Marin County, California. His next apprenticeship was at the Arques School of Traditional Boat Building where he developed a taste for wooden boats. He also restored runabouts in California before joining the team.

Mark Colbeth spent 22 years repairing semi tractors and trailers while maintaining a part-time job remodeling houses. He hung up his wrenches to pursue a future in woodworking. In time, he discovered wooden boats and subsequently found satisfaction in building and restoring them as part of Sauer's team. There is also **Gary Couch** who has been building, restoring and working with classic wooden boats since the mid-1970s. He has also worked in Alaska and Washington.



1929 30' Triple Cockpit Dingle Boatworks – *Gerry Lo*