



## Reconciling Romance and Reality

There is no denying that *Practical Sailor* is a publication preoccupied with the material world. Our very existence depends on hulls, spars, sails, cordage, and all the other gear and gadgets that go into boats. One of the great ironies of my own fascination with boats and gear is that it is so far removed from the notions that first led me to land's end. Each sailor has his own reasons for going to sea, but I like to believe that there's a common impulse behind that choice.

As Ishmael ponders in Melville's *Moby Dick*:

*"Why is almost every robust healthy boy with a robust healthy soul in him, at some time or other crazy to go to sea? Why upon your first voyage as a passenger, did you yourself feel such a*

*One of James Wharram's Polynesian-inspired catamarans plies the waters of western Fiji.*

*mystical vibration, when first told that you and your ship were now out of sight of land? Why did the old Persians hold the sea holy? . . . Surely all this is not without meaning."*

I tend to think that boats like the James Wharram-designed Tiki 30 featured on pages 9-12 bring us closer to that meaning than more "civilized" craft. There is no plush upholstery on Dave and Jaja Martin's home-built boat; no big-screen TV; no hot pressure shower; no generator. And, until the interior is finished, no soft bed. The Martin's *Finn* is, without exaggeration, a finely crafted, sea-going tent.

Going to sea in *any* small boat is an act of rebellion. Not only does it run contrary to our landlubber instincts, but it entails—to varying degrees—breaking away from conventional society. As the philosopher-circumnavigator Bernard Moitessier put it, the sailor is "free on the right, free on the left, free everywhere."

But this escape is also an act of communion. The sea is the last true wilderness, and for a modest investment, a small boat can carry us right in the heart of it. With only a thin veneer hull holding out the sea, the "wave-walking" Wharram Tiki transmits the Protean pulse that beats through all living things.

There is, of course, a more practical view of these boats.

Years ago, in the islands of Fiji, I spied a yellow Wharram cat anchored off the coast of idyllic Nomotu Island. On board, I met a happy-go-lucky Brit whose civilized demeanor belied his rough living quarters. A former accountant retreating to a feral existence, he was Tarzan, Lord Greystoke of the sea.

"Come aboard, and have some saki," he said with a smile. "I've got a batch that is ready to bottle."

"Now there's a self-sufficiency," I thought, a British seaman who can brew his own booze.

My tongue well lubricated, I pitched Melville's line into the night. Here, on this boat, inspired by the twin-hulled craft that sailed for millennia on these same waters, did not my new friend sense some primordial spirit? Did he not feel those "mystical vibrations" as the ocean swell heaved beneath his twin hulls?

He lifted his glass and thought for a moment: "No vibrations," he answered, a glint in his eye, "just some creaks, but you soon get used to them."

A pragmatic romantic with a good sense of humor, he was the perfect match for a Wharram.

*Cover photo: A Tiki 30 built by BoatSmith of Jupiter, Fla., nudges up to a Bahamian Beach. (Photo by Onne van der Wal)*

## Practical Sailor

November 2010 • Vol 36 No 11

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Belvoir

*Practical Sailor* (ISSN #0161-8059) is published monthly by Belvoir Publications Inc., 800 Connecticut Ave, Norwalk, CT 06854-1631. Robert Englander, Chairman and CEO; Timothy H. Cole, Executive Vice President, Editorial Director; Philip L. Penny, Chief Operating Officer; Greg King, Executive Vice President, Marketing Director; Ron Goldberg, Chief Financial Officer; Tom Canfield, Vice President, Circulation. Periodicals. Postage paid at Norwalk, CT, and at additional mailing offices.

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Subscriptions: \$84 annually. Single copies, \$7.50 (U.S.). Bulk rate subscriptions for organizations and educational institutions are available upon request.

Postmaster: send address corrections to *Practical Sailor*, PO Box 420235, Palm Coast FL 32142. *Practical Sailor*, P.O. Box 39, Norwich ON, N0J 1P0 Canada. WDS return address in Canada: Station A, P.O. Box 54, Windsor, Ontario N9A 6J5.

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