

# NEXT GENERATION

The new Down East-style launch from East Passage Boatwrights sits at the crossroads of traditional craftsmanship and modern demands

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There seems nowhere more apropos to test a new, traditionally built wooden boat than steps from the International Yacht Restoration School (IYRS) in Newport, Rhode Island. The coastal enclave's maritime legacy is unparalleled in this part of the US, and its decades spent hosting the America's Cup empowers Newport to bill itself the 'Sailing Capital of the World,' though other ports, both foreign and domestic, might dispute such a declaration [Coves?! – ed]

Regardless of self-appointed accolades, Restoration Hall, the heartbeat of IYRS's three-acre harbour front campus, is buzzing literally and figuratively, as students sand rough wooden planks, one of the countless steps toward completing a vessel by the school's annual launch day. In its shadow, Beetle Cats, dinghies, skiffs and sloops bob alongside the school docks, as well as a new power boat built by East Passage Boatwrights led by IYRS alum Carter Richardson, patiently awaiting a good day on Narragansett Bay.

"I think there's an intricate beauty with something being simple," says Richardson as he walks briskly down the dock. "It's not easy making something simple. To pull it off, you have to do it

elegantly, and I think we did," he says about his first East Passage 24, a timeless down east-style launch inspired by the iconic fishing and pleasure boats of New England's waters.

Richardson graduated from the Boatbuilding & Restoration programme at IYRS in 2004, an unlikely path for someone born and raised in landlocked Arizona. But annual summertime visits to see his grandparents on the coast of Maine planted the seed for a love of the sea, leading him to the US Naval Academy and serving the Navy immediately after. IYRS was his first foray into earnest woodworking, and he soon was seduced by the thrill of mastering centuries-old skills like lofting lines, steam-bending oak frames and learning the art of complex joinery.

When he opened East Passage Boatwrights in 2006, the full-service marine yard was dedicated exclusively to comprehensive wooden boat restoration and maintenance. Projects were long and lucrative, and their meticulous work didn't go unnoticed. They were tasked with restoring two lauded, historic S&S yachts: *Sonny*, winner of regattas around the world, and the 1937 *Skylark*, built in 1937. But it was the restoration of a 1935



S&S yawl formerly owned by Humphrey Bogart, *Santana*, that took them two calendar years to complete, earning them the 2017 Restored Sailing Yacht over 40ft award from this magazine. Projects like this, though rewarding, were inconsistent and Richardson, a family man with a shop full of employees eager for steady work, came to a crossroads.

“We were out sailing at the Opera House Cup in Nantucket in 2017, and Woody said, ‘What are you doing? Why are you wasting your time? Do it. You got the talented crew. It’s time to make the move.’” Woody Metzger has found success building wooden boats with a partner at First Light Boatworks in Chatham, Mass, a sleepy seaside town at the southeastern tip of Cape Cod.

Richardson rethought the future of East Passage Boatwrights and what they needed to do to stay busy, stay afloat. Sailing boats are a dime a dozen in these parts, with no shortage of sailors loyal to their favourites, while power boats? Well, there he saw an opportunity.

“One of the reasons we picked a power boat over a sailing boat was because sailors are very particular about their boats, and if they are racing, they want to be in a class. You’re in a Shield, or an Ensign, and you’re racing other Shields and Ensigns, or a J-boat,” explains Richardson. “I thought I had a better opportunity to find something that was marketable if I did a powerboat. Everyone enjoys a powerboat. It’s a pleasure boat... a boat to go out and have fun in.”

Walking the docks in the fall of 2018 at the Newport International Boat Show solidified East Passage’s pivot. “I noticed there were no classic or traditional boats whatsoever. I said, ‘Someone out here wants classic boats.’ You have all these people putting money into restoring classic sailing yachts and they’re on the harbour; you see it, but you don’t see anything new. It’s all old and restored.”

There were two clear buyer demographics this new boat would cater to: folk who want to leisurely cruise the harbour and/or, as Richardson puts it, those with a desire to “get out on the water, throw an anchor, have lunch, go swimming and then come home.” And there are the boaters with a larger vessel unable to move quickly. “Someone who owns a 120ft sailing yacht can’t motor around the harbour in that,” says Richardson. “They’re unable to get out on the water on a whim. At that point we put our chips in and develop a production boat... something people will want to replicate over and over again,” explains Richardson.

Richardson turned to Walt Ansel, a former IYRS instructor, senior shipwright at Mystic Seaport Museum and long-time fixture at WoodenBoat School. The son of a boatbuilder, there’s hardly been a time when Ansel hasn’t been on or near the water, including working as a commercial fisherman for a time and even helping to restore the *Charles W Morgan* – the only surviving wooden whaling ship in the US.

Connecting with Richardson was serendipitous, as Ansel was completing the Yacht Design and Naval Architecture course at Westlawn Institute of Marine

Technology and was keen to put his skills to use. Ansel’s daughter Evelyn was the instigator – she’s the curator of the Herreshoff Marine Museum, also in Bristol. As happens in small New England towns, she caught wind Richardson was looking for a design for a classic launch.

“I said to Walt, ‘I need something classic; something that will perform well and be functional.’ I gave him a pretty wide berth in terms of what to design as I did not have a clear idea in my head of the 24; I just had a general parameter of the kind of boat I was looking for.”

## ANSEL DELIVERS THE DESIGN

“We had a 22-footer I first drew with very classic lines, nice sheer and tumblehome; a real New England launch you’d see from maybe the 1930s, and Carter really liked the look of it,” explains Ansel with equal arts humility and pride. “He wanted something a little bit longer, so I expanded the 22ft cartoon as we call it, by two feet, and then I developed a 3D model in CAD, using Rhino, then I went back to Carter with the 24-footer.”

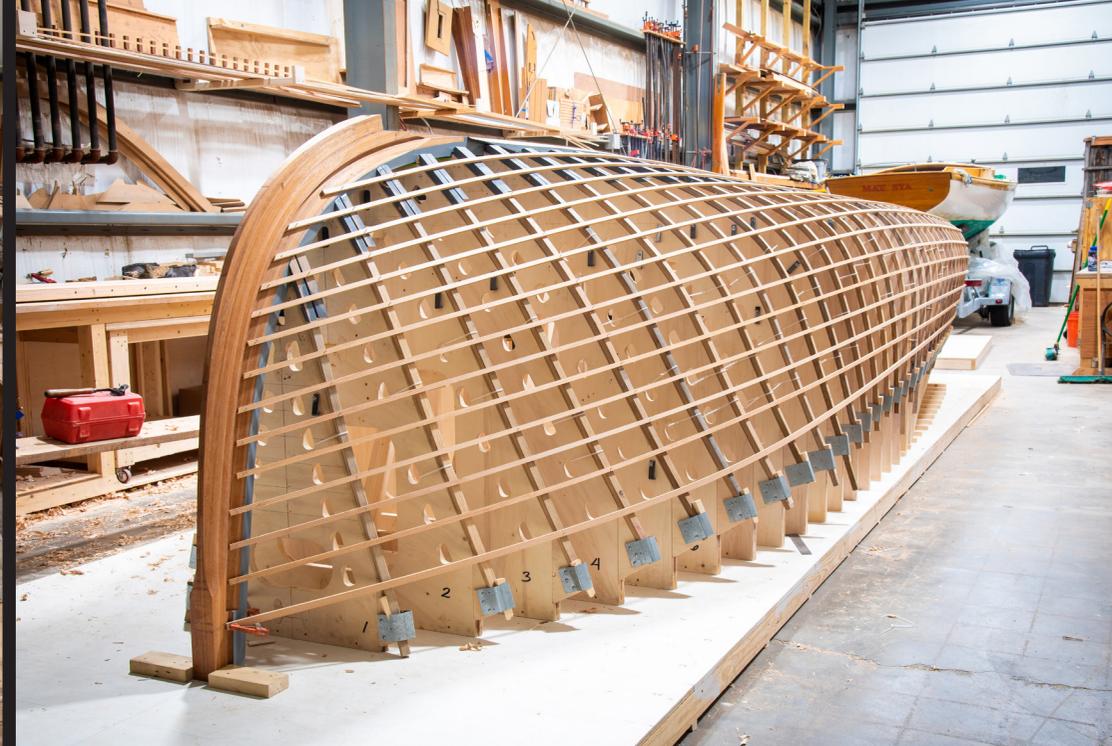
Ansel said he was influenced by a 23ft Fred Bates Pogo he built with a fishing partner in the early 80s, where he racked up considerable sea time, and a Weston Farmer utility skiff lapstrake round bottom. “So I had pretty firm ideas about what constitutes a good, seakindly hull. Of course, working with Carter on this particular boat, looks was an important thing; a high premium on the aesthetic look of the boat.”

Says Richardson: “He nailed it first time. What I saw then is almost exactly what we’re seeing now. There are very few modifications from that first model.”

East Passage Boatwrights dived into making the first boat a reality just as the world began to hold its collective breath as the pandemic bore down. It was a good distraction, as they took a cue from fellow Bristolean, the legendary naval architect Nathanael Herreshoff (1848 – 1938), who dominated American yacht design for more than 75 years. The prowess of the Herreshoff Manufacturing Company was unmatched and ‘Captain Nat’ was considered a genius in building hulls and fittings. “We build it the same way Herreshoff built,” says Richardson. “They had a mould for every frame and it led to a better product down the road, easier to fair, easier to build on, easier to replicate. That’s the idea here: to build hull 200, 250 at some point.”

They sourced native white oak, just as Herreshoff used, from New England Naval Timbers in nearby Connecticut. “We go through and look at every piece of wood and say, ‘That’s perfect for frame stock, perfect for floor stock, this is a keel right here,’” he says, and they got to work building out the backbone and framework on CNC-cut moulds. The hull is double-planked with an inside layer of Atlantic white cedar, chosen for its strength, durability and rot resistance, and an outer topside layer of solid mahogany planking. The unfinished teak trim is emblematic of the boat’s simplicity, and will create fewer maintenance demands.

Ansel was a regular visitor to East Passage’s humming workplace, where he’d check in on the shipwrights’



*Clockwise from top left:* The hull is double-carvel, with a mahogany outer layer and an inner layer of Atlantic white cedar; Every frame has its own mould for accuracy and repeatability; Detail from the centre console; Out on Narragansett Bay; U-shaped seating in the bows; EP24 in build at East Passage Shipwrights





progress. “We had to tinker on some things as it went together because it’s one thing to do a design, but the then components you buy to fit into it – the engine, exhaust system; it always takes a little bit of tweaking to make things fit, particularly with a boat that size and a wooden hull. You don’t have a tonne of room to spare, so you have to put a fair amount of thought into making everything fit... but he stayed very close to the plans I developed.”

Comfort was also critical to Ansel’s design. “On the underwater lines, I put a little bit more of a modern lobster boat shape into it for performance, and I figured those boats that guys spend 10 hours a day on – on their feet – are very good models for coming up with boats that are easy in seaway and perform well,” explains Ansel, who knows a thing or two about days spent on working on deck. “It’s not super wide as some of the motorboats are today. The beam is a third of the length. That was an old classic rule of thumb.”

Richardson says it took around 6,000 hours to complete number one, and the result is a classic, traditional, ultra-functional launch with elegant lines that turns heads even in waters accustomed to impressive vessels, and performance that has exceeded expectations. Hull number two is already underway, taking less time, and has a buyer making customisations, just as Richardson envisioned.

## UNDER WAY

Back at IYRS, we toss the lines and motor out of Newport Harbor, making way to the east passage of Narragansett Bay at a steady clip. There’s ample room to roam about the plywood deck, protected by fiberglass cloth and clear resin so impeccable it speaks to the boat’s newness. I take a seat on the nearly full-width bench in the aft cockpit as Richardson navigates from the teak-trimmed centre console. Rounding the corner at historic Fort Adams, the largest and most complete 19th-century coastal fortification in the US, I move to the console seat as we accelerate to 15 knots, powered by a Yanmar 150hp turbo diesel, effortlessly cutting through medium-sized swells. With a hunger for adventure and eagerness to see the EP24 at full throttle as we head south toward the mouth of the Atlantic, I welcome the

*Above and below: The EP24 was not built for speed, so the 24-knot top end was a lovely surprise*

slighter larger swells in the near distance, reposition to the bow, and relish the rare good fortune of salt spray hitting my face.

The EP24’s speed capacity has come as a surprise to more than just Richardson. “It’s a tough boat to make go quickly and ride very nicely. Those down east-style hulls were really made to be displacement boats, and they’ve been pushed to plane with higher horsepowers over the years,” explains Scott Gifford, a lifelong waterman from Westport, Massachusetts, who has built boats in wood and glassfibre for more than 25 years, among them the Trip Anglers, built with the same hull shape of the EP 24. “Walt’s done a great job designing that, and Carter did a really good job building that, to make it perform above and beyond any boat of that hull shape that I’ve ever been on.” Shocked, is how he describes the ride. “The boat maintains its stability through all RPM ranges, through all speed. It corners very well. It doesn’t pound when it gets up on a plane, something that we had trouble with in the Trip Anglers, which were a direct splash, we call it, from a wooden hull... The boat performs so well. It was a joy to be in.”

Being able to go 24 knots so comfortably was a delightful discovery, says Richardson, who was aiming for the boat to cruise at 20 knots. “This boat was never about speed. This boat was about looking good, it really was. It was meant to be classic, like an old Porsche; she doesn’t need to go 90 miles per hour; she goes 65 and looks really good doing that.”

This past summer, the East Passage team tested that speed en route to Mystic for the annual WoodenBoat Magazine Boat Show, hugging the coast as they cruised 35 nautical miles south, her graceful lines cutting through the sea at top speed. It was worth the trip as the EP24 snatched Best in Show for Professionally New Built Powerboat, but the true prize for Richardson was seeing his vision come to life. Scott Gifford perhaps summed it up best.

“You get in the water and get it all together and the weights that you planned come out to what you planned them to be, and then you hit the throttle; it’s a feeling not many people get to have, and I saw the look on Walt’s face, I know he was having that feeling, and Carter too. You could tell. They were all smiles, ear to ear.”

