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Noble LADY

The 1927 schooner *Xarifa* has been owned by royalty and by fishermen. Today she benefits from a thoughtful modernisation



Above: modern fittings join original features amid immaculate woodwork, much of it covering steelwork beneath

When the three-masted schooner *Xarifa* was launched at Cowes in 1927 from the yard of J Samuel White & Co, it's unlikely her build team, or anyone watching, ever imagined her one day flying a sail of 600 metres squared. It is equally unlikely they'd imagine her carrying a system by which at the touch of a button, a single person could bring in all of her massive sails quicker than the entire 1927 crew. Or that down below she'd one day carry 32.5km of wiring. A 2014 restoration of *Xarifa* aimed to preserve the yacht's classic style, while equipping her with the most modern luxury amenities. It's a task achieved plenty of times with other boats. Yet *Xarifa* was renowned as one of the most elegant yachts of her day. The owner and his Spanish restoration team had a fine line to walk.

Xarifa was designed by engineer JM Soper for Franklin Morse Singer, one of the sons of the multimillionaire Isaac Singer, of sewing machine fame. Singer jnr was a well-known American yachtsman and as he did with all his previous yachts, he named her *Xarifa*, an Arabic word meaning 'noble, honest'. She was launched to some fanfare, with yachting magazines of the time praising her lines and particularly her magnificent interior. But just three years later, Singer ordered his next new yacht and *Xarifa* was sold, beginning decades of name changes and shifts in fortune that saw her at different times visited by high society (the Duke of Windsor and Wallis Simpson among others), being used by the Danish Resistance during World War II (as carriage between Denmark and neutral Sweden) enjoying a period as a film extra (appearing in *The Sailor from Gibraltar* in 1967, with Vanessa Redgrave and

Jeanne Moreau) and even putting in an unlikely stint as a North Atlantic fishing vessel. Her current owner acquired her in 2012 and began a no-holds-barred refit at the Vigo shipyard Metalships & Docks, normally responsible for the build and repair of large commercial vessels but well-acquainted with old steel boat building.

Naval architecture and project management responsibilities were initially in the hands of Barracuda Yacht Design, of Madrid, which has designed a wide range modern and classic sailing and motorboats, as well as being involved in several Spanish America's Cup projects. Iñigo Toledo, of Barracuda, said: "What was exciting for me was the challenge of working with something so old – respecting the past while handling modern requests. We'd seen that this boat had been abused in some of the modifications over the years, and we wanted to bring things back to how they were."

As well as a new interior layout, *Xarifa* benefited from an extended rig, strengthening of the hull and much work to meet classification society requirements. All the while a close eye was kept on her overall aesthetic and her heritage.

Much work went into researching the boat's history and the team found the original survey report, dated October 1926, and other documents from her launch, at Lloyd's Registry in London.

Adam Fiander, one of the UK research team, said: "The jewel in the crown was our discovery and unearthing of many of her original 1920s plans and drawings, which were a combination of blueprints and linen, some exceedingly fragile, that were recovered from a skip just before the Whites yard was disbanded. Thankfully, Isle of Wight Heritage let us have access to these and we got them scanned in ultra-high-resolution at the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich at some





cost, as paid for by the owner. The quality, accuracy and sheer beauty of these hand-drawn plans by JM Soper and his staff are absolutely staggering.”

Just before the refit at the shipyard started, the project was taken on by engineers Javier Pamies from Cypsa and Alejandro Hompanera from Ership, both in Spain. Initial work at Metalships centred on the hull. The riveted steel plating was renewed, as were the steel frames. The original teak deck was leaking badly. In order to preserve what was to be an immaculate interior, the deck was completely removed and a new welded steel deck was installed. Mid-deck sound-proofing further increased watertight integrity and over the steel deck was fitted a new layer of Burmese teak.

Corrosion was found in the deckhouses, so new steel structures were built and covered with teak, a theme throughout the project to enhance the aesthetic and give a wooden appearance. The original deckhouse windows were kept.

There was a new teak helm but the interior mechanism remains the original, perfectly maintained bronze rods. Unsurprisingly, *Xarifa* in 2016 is fitted with an autopilot, as well as manual helm.

The rig has seen significant changes, with each of *Xarifa's* three masts extended by Metalships to take into account the weight increase post-refit, compared to her sparse interior at launch. The fore mast was extended by 13ft 2in (4m), the main mast by 14ft 5in (4.4m) and the mizzen by 5ft 3in (1.6m). Originally *Xarifa* carried a gaff rig. Her sail area at launch is unknown, but it will have been greater than the subsequent marconi conversion. The new rig extension gives her a huge sail area of 1,386m² (14,918sq ft), still not quite as much sail as at launch, but more effective. Her cream sails were by North. Interestingly, there is an ongoing project run by Dykstra Naval Architects that will see *Xarifa* revert to her original gaff rig in the near future.

Down on deck, the Lewmar hydraulic powered winches (in bronze) offer a whopping pulling capacity of 7000kg. (For those used to the manual kind, this means that each one can pull a load of 7 tonnes in first gear.)

Above left to right: the new deckhouse was covered with teak; the owner's architect wife did much of the interior design



There are two winches at each mast base for halyards, reef lines and topping lifts, and two at each side for sheet handling. The blocks have also been renewed, using wooden blocks with a bronze body and roller bearing sheaves, made by Ording.

On the foremast, two hydraulic furlers take care of the jib and yankee, while the two halyards are fixed to hydraulic tensioners in order to release the luff when not in use.

Stainless steel standing rigging has been renewed. The mizzen mast had been supported longitudinally by one backstay but, as the mizzen sail leech interferes with the backstay, new running backstays have been added that can be used during races. Dyneema ropes with classic appearance have been used for the running rigging.

The original wooden booms have been peeled and varnished. The Oregon pine used to build them was in immaculate condition. The bowsprit appeared to be in good condition but had deteriorated badly. The new one is steel covered with wood. The boat's length was maintained, to achieve an LOA of 163ft 9in (49.9m), which is good for superyacht mooring spaces that are often up to 50m.

Down below, today *Xarifa* can accommodate 12 guests, with nine crew, all cabins fitted out to the most luxurious standard, including internal phones, satellite television, full climate control and en suite bathrooms. The owner's wife, an architect, played a key role in the interior design and was able to make specific requirements at an early stage that made life easier for the refit team.

Barracuda's Toledo said: "When *Xarifa* was built, she was very practical. Down below, there were a few officers' cabins, but the rest was an open space for crew and sails. The image of the classic yacht today, with glossy and curvy woodwork, is not always correct. Back then people were producing very simple, plain white interiors.

"A unanimous decision was made not to overcomplicate her interior or make her too 'rich'. Instead we opted for a look and feel that closely



Xarifa's varied history

Most classic yachts can look back on a colourful history, but *Xarifa's* has taken her between continents, around the world, from private to commercial ownership and from newspaper front pages to near dereliction. Her first owner, Singer, sold her in 1930 to British newspaper magnate Edward Mauger, who three years later was to become Baron Iliffe. He changed the port of registry from New York to Southampton and raced her regularly. She became the platform for many society parties of the day. Camper & Nicholson bought her from Mauger in 1934 and sold her on two years later to the Baron Louis Empain, the youngest son of Baron Edward Empain, a wealthy industrialist from Belgium. Again, she was renamed, this time *L'Oiseau Blanc*. She crossed the Atlantic to Montreal and made several cruises around Europe. Ten years after her launch, she was still turning heads. The magazine *Wandelaar et sur l'Eau*, the official organ of the Belgian Yachting Federation, said of her in March 1936: "The yacht is certainly one of the most beautiful afloat. By acquiring this beautiful craft, Baron Louis Empain definitely moves at the head of Belgian yachting."

But he didn't hang on to her for long. Around 1938, the yacht was sold again, this time to Georgette Malou, who now called her *Georgette*. The following year yet another new owner renamed her *Capitana*, in honor of Columbus' flagship, and re-rigged her as a barquentine, using her to recreate Columbus' voyages to America, setting off days before the outbreak of the Second World War. *Capitana* was registered for trade use between New Bedford and Cape Verde in what was known as the Brava Packet Trade routes, before falling into disrepair. In 1943 she was acquired by an Icelandic merchant called Magnus Andersson in New Bedford, who took her to Reykjavik to be used for the glamorous task of fish transportation between Iceland and Europe. He later converted her into perhaps the most handsome fishing vessel of all time.



BEKEN OF COWES

Research suggests that in the final year of war, she was used on the *sikre ruter* (secure routes), in a pact between the Danish Resistance and the Germans, shipping German goods and weapons for the Resistance from neutral Sweden. Things were about to become more settled and perhaps one of the happiest periods of the boat's history began in 1951 when she was bought by Austrian scientist and voyager Hans Hass, known by some as the Austrian Cousteau. Haas bought her for 120,000 Swiss Francs and spent another SFr600,000 restoring her. He gave her back her original name and used her on marine research trips around the world, especially through the Pacific and Indian oceans. After a life circling the globe, she was taken to Italy for a refit by new owner multimillionaire Carlo Traglio in 1960, then to Port Hercule, Monaco, where she remained until 2012. It was then that *Xarifa's* current owner acquired her and set about a full, no-expense-spared refit.



XARIFA

DESIGNER

Joseph M Soper

BUILDER

J Samuel
White & Co

BUILD/REFIT

1927/2014

LOA

163ft 9ins
(49.9m)

BEAM

29ft 3in (8.5m)

SAIL AREA

14,918sq ft
(1,386m²)

GROSS TONNAGE

270

resembled her original style, comprising dark mahogany furniture set against simple white planking and cabins that are symmetrical in shape and size. We had to merge the needs of a luxury megayacht with a respect for her original design and I think that has been achieved."

Varnished wooden floors have been fitted throughout the vessel and teak furniture was built according to the original design.

The original portholes have been modified to be fixed instead of opening. To meet new class requirements, some new portholes, similar to the originals, have been installed at the forward area.

Would the onlookers in 1927 have approved of her modernisation? Would they have recognized her still, nodded at her beauty in the same way they did as she slid down the tracks on her launch day and settled into the waters of the Medina for the first time? They might pause over the new materials, they might scratch their heads over the fact that she boasts onboard wi-fi and a 14ft tender with something called a waterjet. They might raise an eyebrow, or even two, at her charter price of \$80,000 per week in low season. But they would surely celebrate the yacht's immaculate refit and her return to sailing form, in the hands of a passionate owner who has ensured her survival for many years to come.