



NEIL RABINOWITZ

Luxury AHOY

By Glen Young

Marty Sutter exudes confidence and skill at the wheel of his historic motor yacht Canim. The deep-water harbor of Harbor Springs, summer-busy with boats and paddlers, requires a deft hand and a steady manner. Marty Sutter expertly exhibits both.

“I was born to pilot boats,” Marty says, steering the 96-foot mahogany and teak vessel between buoys and runabouts.

Designed by the famed naval architect Ted Geary, Canim, which translates as “Big Chief’s canoe” in Chinook, was built in 1930 of virgin Douglas fir for Seattle Yacht Club commodore and Seattle Times publisher C.B. Blethen. In collaboration with Lake Union Dry Dock of Seattle, Geary designed several fantail motor yachts between 1926 and 1930, three others similar in size to Canim, which came last at 96 feet, 4 inches.

“We always think she was meant to be the belle of the ball,” Marty says as Canim was the final such Geary design.

All of Geary’s boats are particularly special today, like Canim as she approaches her century mark, because of their distinctive origins.

“You could not re-create these boats today,” Marty says, primarily because there is no more virgin fir.

Canim’s lineage is distinct indeed, owing to a succession of owners, famous and infamous. Silent film star Buster Keaton



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Designed by the famed naval architect, Ted Geary, the Canim was built in 1930.



G. RANDALL GOSS

The helm station is all wood and polished brass.

once purchased the vessel as a gift for his wife, Natalie, and both Julie Andrews and Anthony Quinn spent time chartering Canim.

“Think of the people who sat back there and the stories they told,” Marty says, sweeping his hand toward the impressive fantail on the aft deck.

Industrialist Clessie Cummins owned Canim in the late 1950s, and the yacht is now powered by twin Cummins diesel engines.

Some of the less attentive owners sometimes changed Canim’s name and sometimes reimagined her interior, not always adhering to Geary’s first vision. Marty and Lisa Sutter sought to return the vessel to her traditional profile.

Long collectors of nautical antiques and many other boats, the Sutters sought “the ultimate nautical antique,” which they knew was a classically designed and built wooden motor yacht. Marty says, “Trumpys immediately came to mind,” referring to another classic wooden motor yacht design, but that goal was put aside in 2002 when Marty and Lisa unexpectedly spotted Canim in the British Virgin Islands, and Marty realized, “It was everything I dreamed of.”

The couple’s mission to pursue Canim proved well worth the time and investment, Marty says, as they realized, “This is the ultimate nautical antique.”

Historic photographs of the exterior were available, but there were no such images of the interior. The Sutters wanted to re-create the living spaces as much as possible to original, but Marty says, “I



G. RANDALL GOSS

The lounging area of the top deck, with Harbor Springs in the background.



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The galley and dining area just aft of the wheelhouse.

“This is the ultimate nautical antique.”

MARTY SUTTER, OWNER



G. RANDALL GOSS

The forward sleeping area.



G. RANDALL GOSS

Owner and captain Marty Sutter loves his time in the wheelhouse.

wanted to go back into the mind of (original owner) Blethen, so I figured I had to come up with a surrogate.” They found their surrogate in another classic wooden yacht of similar vintage, the Delphine, built in the 1920s for Detroit area auto magnate Horace Dodge.

“Any wood boat should have a teak and holly sole,” Marty says, so the couple set about restoring Canim to her original glory, finding craftsmen in the Virgin Islands who hand-picked pieces of Burmese teak and other exotic woods to reclaim Geary’s original intent.

The current Canim is comfortably configured, with three luxury staterooms, including a full-beam master stateroom, as well as a VIP stateroom. There are also separate quarters for the crew, typically made up of local college students.

The main deck includes a teak and mahogany sole, as well as a comfortable area for entertaining, complete with handcrafted leather furniture, a fireplace, air-conditioning and bar service. This deck also includes a full galley and head. An impressive compass rose, made from bloodwood, ebony, ze-

bra wood and other exotic grains, adorns the forward cabin floor.

The top deck features comfortable canvas seating, as well as wide-open spaces for panoramic views of the harbors the couple favors, including Traverse City, Frankfort and Pentwater, among others.

Marty and Lisa have made many subtle improvements for safety and ease, though they have also retained and restored several original features, including the wheel, ship’s bell and the windlass. Other updates include satellite television and radio, as well as improved freshwater capacity.

Of course, the challenge of any wood boat is maintenance and Marty says the couple had to decide, “What do we do with this boat in the winter?”

Because of her size and construction, Canim is best cared for in the water.

“The challenge of a wood boat is it has to stay in the water,” Marty says.

A stroke of luck brought Marty and Lisa to Brian Reed and his Milwaukee boatyard, which houses Canim through the win-



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Photographer Neil Rabinowitz has been a major influence in marine, lifestyle and adventure sports photography for more than twenty years. His work annually graces more than 50 magazine, book and calendar covers. More of his photos can be found at www.neilrabinowitz.com.

ter in an enclosed dockage where closely monitored water and air temperatures keep Canim in good shape.

The Sutters are understandably proud of the restoration of Canim and intend to keep her comfortably on the Great Lakes.

“We really, really, really want to be the owners when this boat turns 100,” Marty says, which is only another 14 years. “On her 100th anniversary, we’ll have been the owners for 25 years, and she’ll have been in the Great Lakes for 25 years, the longest of any hailing port,” he says. “I think this qualifies her as part of Great Lakes boating history.”

There is no mistaking Canim’s classic profile, as she cuts a distinctive line wherever she cruises, always with Marty at the helm.

When he talks however about what they love most about Canim, Marty says the couple love to take their morning coffee or evening wine on the fantail. More importantly, he explains, “I’m never at peace as much as when we’re on the boat.”

For more information about the motor yacht Canim as well as additional photos, visit the Sutters’ website at www.canim-yacht.com.