History repeating

The 1930s classic motor yacht Malahne was rendered almost unrecognisable by a 1980s refit; to restore her classic lines, the owner went right back to the beginning.

Words – Marilyn Mower
Photographers – Jeff Brown/Breed Media, Dan Annett, Andrew Weight
Fully restored to her original lines, gleaming and regal, Malahne at sea off the Pendennis yard, Falmouth. Below: her Gil Watson-designed mahogany and spruce launch is the perfect accessory to a classic superyacht.

Compare and contrast: proud crew aboard the restored Malahne, sporting her original 1937 shape, while (below) during her dark days after an unflattering refit during the 1980s.

Left: the main deck aft is a fine spot for an alfresco lunch.
S
ome refits of classic yachts are transformations, some are restorations and some are restorations, depending upon the owner’s views towards preserving historical context. When it comes to 50 metre Malahne, built to represent yachting perfection in 1937, the term restoration doesn’t go nearly far enough. Before she could be entered into the pantheon of pre-war classic yachts, first she needed a structural exercise to remove a controversial modernisation done in 1983.

As has been the case with a number of British yacht restorations, such as Blue Bird and Naboth, Nicholas Edmiston, chairman of the eponymous firm, has been both broker and enabler of what are complex and costly rescues. “I live in a Georgian building, I have been sailing since I was four. Yachts like Malahne are part of my life,” he says, his gruff voice and clipped accent hinting at a romanticism and veneration for days of manners and elegance. “I watched the 1983 refit with tears in my eyes,” he recalls. “I kept hoping that owner would sell it while it was still afloat. I’m so happy and fortunate that the yacht graced the cover of Life magazine’s 9 July 1965 edition promoting a feature on ‘Riviera yachting’. In her 2003 biography of Spiegel, fashion writer Natasha Fraser-Cavassoni wrote: ‘In many respects, Malahne became a never-ending Spiegel production. The boat was old fashioned by today’s standards, but possessed a majestic charm’. Stepping onto Malahne was like stepping into another era.”

As Spiegel’s star eventually faded in Hollywood, so did the maintenance on the yacht; she fell out of class. In 1983 she passed into the hands of Saudi Sheikh Adel Al Menji, who rendered her unrecognisable as Adel XII with a new bow, stern and superstructure.

Edmiston kept an eye on the boat throughout the subsequent years, and then in 2009 sensed his chance. He asked Dr William Collier of classic yacht experts GL Watson & Co to prepare a design proposal for a restored Malahne to make her a showpiece of the Golden Age of yachting. “These [projects] are daunting at the beginning,” says Collier, “but having already prepared preliminary designs it was more a case of, ‘Here it is, here is what it can be and here’s a map of how to get there.’ Nick and I were well prepared.” These drawings and a stack of photos of what she had been and could become were Edmiston’s proposal in 2012 to a potential owner who had chartered the smaller and older but elegantly restored Fair Lady.

“He immediately grasped the potential beauty of the yacht and the concept of bringing something back from the edge. He was interested in polishing a jewel not creating a replica,” says Jacqueline Lyne, director of Edmiston’s recently formed Yacht Management division, which co-directed the project with Collier. It was to be a project to highlight “Made in Britain”, and thus Pendennis Shipyard in Falmouth, Cornwall (which had also restored Fair Lady) was the logical yard for the task. Pendennis Shipyard had proposed to restore her in two parts: the only cruiser, she saw action in the evacuation at Dunkirk and later took part in torpedo target practice in Scotland.

Unlike most of her kin, Malahne survived the war years and bounced back from the edge. He was interested in polishing a jewel not creating a replica,” says Jacqueline Lyne, director of Edmiston’s recently formed Yacht Management division, which co-directed the project with Collier. It was to be a project to highlight “Made in Britain”, and thus Pendennis Shipyard in Falmouth, Cornwall (which had also restored Fair Lady) was the logical yard for the task. Pendennis Shipyard had proposed to restore her in two parts: the only cruiser, she saw action in the evacuation at Dunkirk and later took part in torpedo target practice in Scotland.

Unlike most of her kin, Malahne survived the war years and bounced back from the edge. He was interested in polishing a jewel not creating a replica,” says Jacqueline Lyne, director of Edmiston’s recently formed Yacht Management division, which co-directed the project with Collier. It was to be a project to highlight “Made in Britain”, and thus Pendennis Shipyard in Falmouth, Cornwall (which had also restored Fair Lady) was the logical yard for the task. Pendennis Shipyard had proposed to restore her in two parts: the only cruiser, she saw action in the evacuation at Dunkirk and later took part in torpedo target practice in Scotland.

Unlike most of her kin, Malahne survived the war years and bounced back from the edge. He was interested in polishing a jewel not creating a replica,” says Jacqueline Lyne, director of Edmiston’s recently formed Yacht Management division, which co-directed the project with Collier. It was to be a project to highlight “Made in Britain”, and thus Pendennis Shipyard in Falmouth, Cornwall (which had also restored Fair Lady) was thelogical yard for the task. Pendennis Shipyard had proposed to restore her in two parts: the only cruiser, she saw action in the evacuation at Dunkirk and later took part in torpedo target practice in Scotland.
"The new owner immediately grasped the potential beauty of the yacht and the concept of bringing something back from the edge. He was interested in polishing a jewel not creating a replica."
The interior fit-out alone took a year, using the motto “always lived-in and loved.” Sourcing and working with original items and materials took its time, but the final, very grand, results have been worth it. Even the phones are rotary dial (wall versions from the 1950s, above, and below, and 1930s desk phones elsewhere). Many areas, such as the upper salon (previous spread) and the main salon (left), feature soft drapes and down-filled settees, timber floor, pleated curtains and nickel. An art deco design sensibility is also evident, as opposite.

“I wanted to create for the owner what looked like the original space but would offer comfort and service impossible back in the day”
way. “Part one was the job of taking the yacht apart so we could find out what we had,” says Pendennis’s project manager, Mike Carr.

“Part two was to rebuild Malahine out of it.”

After the deconstruction, evaluation of Malahine’s bones went frame by frame – a nearly six-month process of determining what to save, what to scarp and what would need to be refabricated to meet the modern codes. “We went right to the fast sail,” says Henk Wiekens, Carr’s fellow MD. “This is the most intense refit project we have ever done.”

Assessing integrity was one thing, but figuring out how to best use her volume for the new owners, crew and necessary machinery was quite another. The original double-height engine room was one area mined for more guest space as was the original owner’s dining room on the lower deck – now the crew mess. The yacht’s new main deck dining room was originally occupied by engine exhaust trunking. The crew and galley areas are among the biggest physical changes to the original yacht. In the 1930s there was a marked difference in the accommodations of officers and crew – they even had separate entrances from the deck.

GL Watson & Co styled completely new crew quarters for GL, including two single officer’s cabins plus a captain’s cabin and a new galley reusing period Camper & Nicholsons joinery details. The machinery for modern living such as air-conditioning and refrigerator compressors, fire suppression, electrical distribution panels, laundry and water-makers is squirreled away in all sorts of places to make incredible use of the relatively narrow forward sections.

For Pendennis, the biggest concern was achieving modern stability criteria, which in the days before stabilisers was achieved by drought and weight. A lot of weight came off the hull, but lots would be going back in with all new hull plate and safety features not imagined in 1937. Fortunately, materials were available to Pendennis that were similarly not available to Camper & Nicholsons in 1937, such as the aluminium used for the bridge bulwark and superstructure, and composites for the replacement funnel, which hides the communication domes. Even replacing the hull steel was a challenge when fitting old and new pieces together, because modern steel has less carbon, fewer inclusions and is easier to weld. The new plate was applied in the same staggered pattern as the original.

The rebuilding process took a further two years: one for structure and systems and one for the fit-out of interior and decks. The prime directive was to make Malahine look as if she had always been this way, always lived in and loved.

“He’s (the owner) been in grand homes and Claridge’s, where there is a real focus on the art of the brush stroke. So the idea is to respect and use that.” says Pendennis’s managing director, Mike Carr.

“Part of Oliver’s big decisions was not without risk: he wanted everything hand-finished on site to avoid finish defects that looked plastic.”

“You want a sense of brush stroke. Luxury is about bespoke and unique and being made by people not machines.” It was a decision that involved extra time and scheduling as well as careful preservation as each bit of joinery or furniture was completed. The result of this work is magical: colours and a softness that make the yacht look like an authentic collection of desired, acquired objects rather than a design montage. Soft chenilles and down-filled cushions in just the right mix of prints and solids, beautiful timber floors and rugs, balanced, pleated curtains and elegant nickel hardware create a smart deco-style environment that lives like modern comfort.

Meanwhile, GL Watson & Co was doing the same thing with exterior design. Replica deck hardware was researched and redesigned, the original John Roby portholes were recast to meet current code and other items were remade from original drawings in the extensive GL Watson & Co archive. The original binnacle had been checked in the 1983 modernisation and try as he might, Collier could not find another 1932 binnacle, but he did locate one from a 1934 Camper & Nicholsons motor yacht that makes him almost as happy.

For the interior joinery styling by Ruitter Quality Interiors, Collier studied the art deco-style house at Eltham Palace, which was built at the same time as Malahine and would have presented a similar design language. It was a time when designers mixed exotic woods or unique cuts for interior interest. For example, the bookcase backgrounds are retro-cut Japanese same ash, while the master suite features eye-catching veneers in a chevron pattern. European tiger oak defines the dining salon and macassar ebony with brass inset makes an eye-catching bar.

Electricians had to go back to basics to hook up the onboard telephone system as the phones are rotary dial. A pair of original 1930 wall phones are in the master suite and conditioned 1930s desk phones are used through the rest of the accommodation. Whole12 of the overhead lights on board were custom designed by Oliver as yacht-sized adaptations of deco originals, a pair of Queen Mary reading lights with quarter 14 watt French bulbs, had to be accommodated.

This faithfulness to the past even impacted the flooring. The hull and outward surfaces are semi-faired, using lightweight, flexible aluminium buttons that follow the shape and existing contours of the hull. The paint is also semi-shiny in an off-white typical of the time. The 70 per cent gloss on the Awlgrip paint took a great deal of sampling to get right. With stainless steel rigging too shiny to match the period, Pendennis found a supplier who would sell the stainless wire pre-finished and unpolished to mimic the galvanised used of the 1930s.

Collier believes that the project’s success stems from the fact that Malahine was right for the doing. Her original lines and her full-beam sections made her suitable to arranging the yacht for a modern family. Fifty metres is a really, really nice size. It gives you good guest accommodations, a good balance of decks to indoor spaces and you can get the yacht into virtually anywhere.”

Carr, meanwhile, is extremely proud of the standard of workmanship onboard. “Over the past two and a half years the team worked incredibly hard to bring Malahine back to life. Seeing the final transformation from her 2000s form back to her original design, her launch marks a proud moment for everyone. Our tradespeople have applied quality, care, pride and passion to every aspect of the project. There have been unprecedented opportunities to showcase their restoration skills, while sympathetically integrating modern systems. Malahine now commands a special place in the Pendennis fleet.”

“Y ou want a sense of brush stroke. Luxury is about bespoke and unique and being made by people not machines”

PHOTOGRAPHS: BEKEN OF COWES; GL WATSON & CO; STUART MEARNS; LINDA DIGGORY; BELINDA COOK
The gentleman’s launch

GL Watson & Co also designed the owner’s launch, a 7.6 metre runabout, built by Cockwells in Falmouth. For this fast gentleman’s craft the hull process used Alaskan spruce strip-planking laid over CNC-cut plywood bulkheads and frames, overlaid with 1.5mm-thick Brazilian mahogany veneer laid fore-and-aft.

As blue is a predominant colour aboard the yacht, a dappled blue Foglizzio leather was selected to highlight the quilted maple cockpit-surround accented with western red cedar.

For vintage hardware GL Watson turned to California Classic Boats for nickel chrome-plated cast bronze fittings.

Because the launch is lifted by traditional davits and stored on the upper deck, weight was a big issue, which Cockwells kept to a reasonable 2,155 kilos. A 258 horsepower Steyr diesel engine powers the craft to a sprightly 35 knots.

For this fast launch the hull process used Alaskan spruce strip-planking laid over plywood bulkheads and frames and overlaid with 1.5mm-thick Brazilian mahogany.

Above: a gleaming Malahne nears completion at the Pendennis yard in Falmouth. Below: work was slow, painstaking and thorough, down to the last nail. Opposite: even her lightning-fast tender looks like a classic – although her lighting-fast speed tells the truth.
Malahne – Camper & Nicholsons / Restoration – Pendennis

**S P E C S**

**Upper deck**
- Happy skipper: aft of the bridge is a large en suite captain’s cabin

**Main deck**
- Good quarters: behind the owners’ aft-facing bed is a large bathroom with tub
- Range at 11.5 knots 3,510nm
- Freshwater capacity 12,923 litres
- Owner and guests 10
- Crew 11
- Tenders 1 x 7.6m Cockwells; 1 x 6.25m Williams Performance RIB
- Construction Steel hull; aluminium superstructure
- Classification Lloyd’s @ 100 A1 Yacht SSC Mono G6 @ LMC UMS; MCA LY2
- Original naval architecture and interior design Camper & Nicholsons
- Restoration naval architecture Pendennis; BMT Nigel Gee
- Restoration exterior design GL Watson & Co e: yachts@glwatson.com w: glwatson.com
- Restoration interior design Oliver Laws Ltd; GL Watson & Co
- For charter Edmiston Monte Carlo t +37 7 93 50 54 44 w: edmiston.com

**Lower deck**
- More space: the original owner’s dining room is now the crew mess
- Book ’em: the upper saloon is also a library, with dining nook aft

**LOA** 50.29m
- Beam 7.89m
- Draught 3.54m
- Gross Tonnage 440GT

**Engines**
- 2 x Caterpillar C32, 850bhp (2015)

**Speed (max/cruise)**
- 15 knots/12.5 knots

**Range at 11.5 knots**
- 3,510nm

**Generators**
- 2 x Northern Lights, MID66A2, 115kW, 400V

**Stabilisers**
- Quantum QC 1500 HD, Zero Speed

**Fuel capacity**
- 42,060 litres

**Book ‘em: the upper saloon is also a library, with dining nook aft**

**Eat hearty: midships is dominated by a large dining area for 12**

**Good quarters: behind the owners’ aft-facing bed is a large bathroom with tub**

**All change: original engine room altered and moved to create extra guest accommodation**