

INVICTVS

RESTORATION



INVICTVS

RESTORATION

RESTORATION

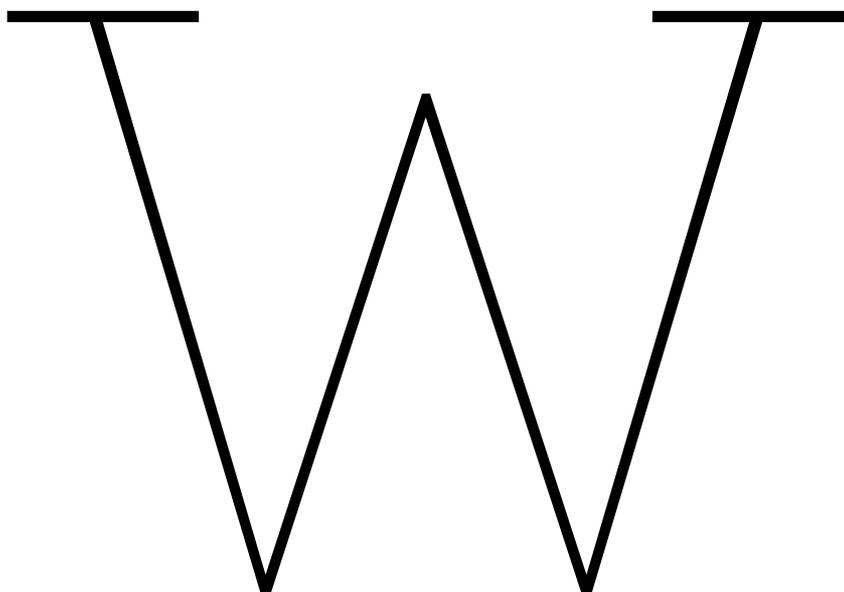
Remaking Mariska

Launched in 1908 and one of a quartet of 15-Meter Class yachts designed by William Fife currently sailing in the Mediterranean, Mariska's history is lengthy and colorful. Her restoration to former glory was a labor of love for owner Christian Niels... who describes himself as simply 'a custodian' charged with the preservation of Mariska for the appreciation of future generations.

BY: NOËLLE DUCK
IMAGES: THIERRY SERAY AND BEKEN OF COWES ARCHIVES



On sighting Mariska for the first time, Christian Niels confesses he was shocked and almost didn't get out of the car... after a 1,500-mile drive to see her.



When Mariska arrived at the yard of the Charpentiers Réunis de Méditerranée in La Ciotat, despite her mutilated stern and lack of rigging, it was immediately evident that this was a yacht made for racing. The fine lines, the narrow beam, the deep keel, the sweeping overhangs.... There was no doubt this yacht had been one of the finest racing yachts on the water at the start of the 20th century.

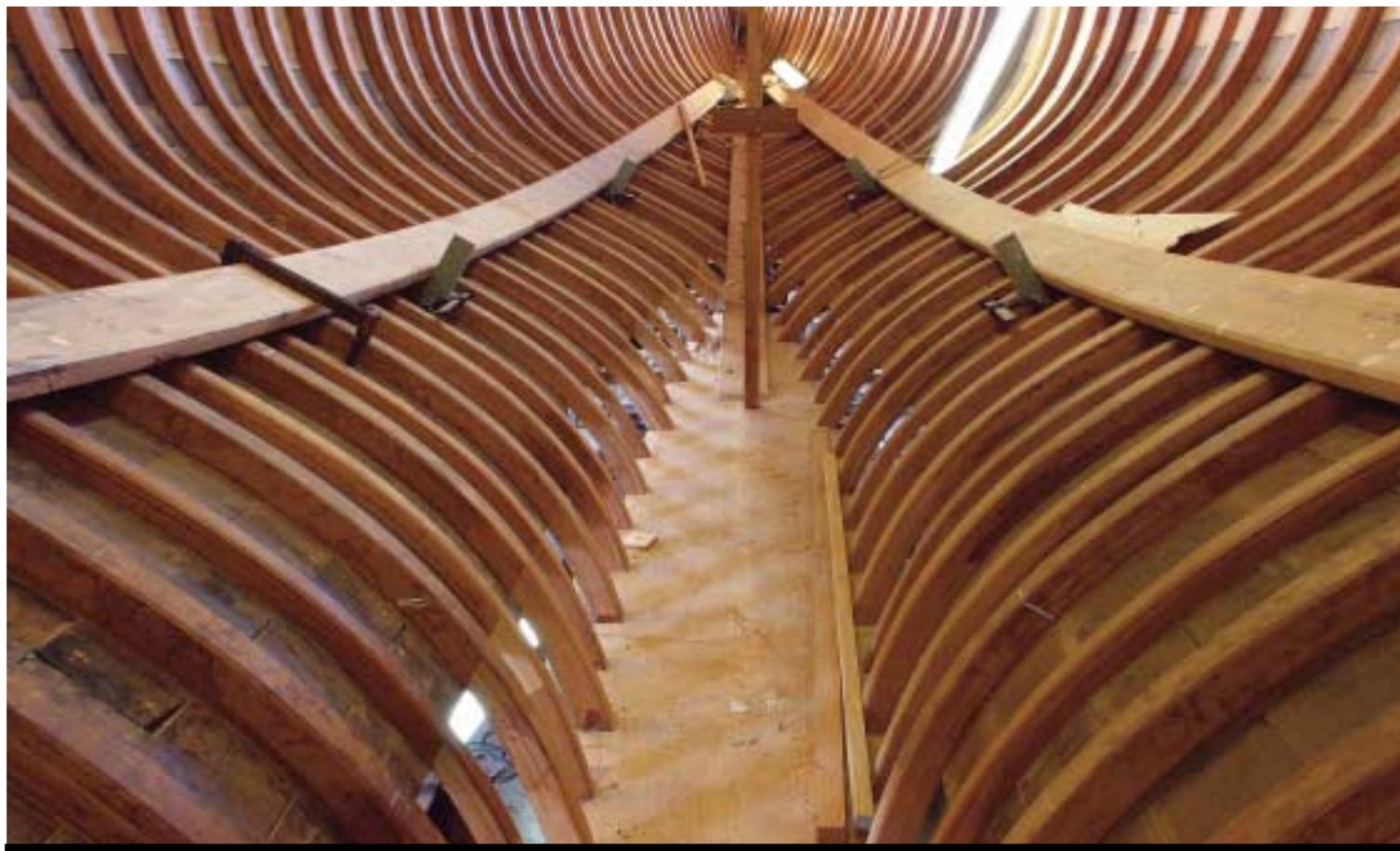
Mariska was the second 15-Metre Class yacht to be designed and built by William Fife, hitting the water one year after the launch of Shinna in 1907. A.K. Stothert, one of the era's most prominent yachtsmen originally commissioned Mariska. In his collection of fine racing yachts, Stothert been notching up victories since 1894, commissioned Mariska.

A PLACE IN HISTORY

In the early 1900's the English racing season ran from the end of May to the end of September and in 1908, after modest beginnings at Port Victoria on the Thames, Mariska was one of two 15-Metre Class (49') yachts taken to Scotland at the end of June to race on the Clyde. Carrying 400 square feet of canvas - more than the 52' Britomart - she



INVICTVS



won easily in light airs. On 28th and 29th July she was to be found racing in Le Havre, France, where she completed the 21-mile first race in 2 hours, 34 minutes and 55 seconds. The next day however saw her bowing down before Shinna. Records of the race describe the spectacle as one of great beauty as the two 15-Metre Class yachts had chosen to carry the same canvas as the 23-Metre yachts: mainsail, sharply angled topsail and small flying jib. Mariska won the Le Havre regatta with a first and a second place.

At the start of March 1908 Philippe de Vilmorin, a seed merchant and Commodore of the Cannes Regatta Association, christened his Anémone II. Vilmorin's 15-Metre Class yacht was designed for him by the French naval architect C.M. Chevreux and the same year King Alfonso XIII of Spain took delivery of Hispania, designed by Fife but built in Spain by the Carraso yard in Karpard. Meanwhile the King's friend the Duke of Medinacelli acquired her sister ship Tuiga, so the 15-Metre Class yachts were all the rage in Spain. Encarnita, designed by the French naval architect Guédon, was also launched, while Shinna was sold to a Spanish owner by J.R. Payne, for whom Fife was already building Vanity. Meanwhile Alfred Mylne was designing Ostara.

Hispania, Tuiga and Anémone II were brought by freighter to the French Channel coast to sail across to race on the Thames and at Cowes, but Tuiga took four days to reach England due to bad weather. Meanwhile on Wednesday 4th August Mariska won the 15-Metre Class in the Cowes International Cup.

By 1909, two 19-Metre Class yachts under construction at Fife's yard. The second of these was to be christened Mariquita. She was also commissioned by A.K. Stothert, the owner of Mariska, and sold in 1911 to Capt. the Hon. F.E. Guest and her homeport became Glasgow. A year later, Mariska passed into the hands of J.W. Cook, who sold her on in

Working at the CRM shipyard in France is a co-operative partnership of 30 passionate craftsmen. Mariska was entrusted into their care.



INVICTVS

1913 to Carl Krüger, a German living in Gothenburg in Sweden, where the yacht was based from 1914. In 1923 she was bought by Carl Mathiessen, who lived in Stockholm; he brought the boat there and converted her into a yawl. This marked the end of Mariska's racing career, which had lasted from 1908 to 1923. A 1933 entry in Lloyd's Register states that Mariska had been "built in accordance with 15-Metre Class rules". She was now a cruising yacht, in the hands of owners who saved her from the vicissitudes of World War II.

THE RECENT PAST

Until found by Christian Niels, the person who cared most for the yacht was perhaps Mr De Jong, her first Dutch owner, who bought her in 1983 and sold her in 2001 to another Dutchman, Edgar Holtbach. By this time Mariska was rigged as a ketch; the whole of her stern had been amputated, and the remaining horn timber butchered to take an enormous propeller cage. However, as Mr De Jong reports, "She was an excellent boat for family cruising, very safe, and we sailed her in the Baltic Sea and North Sea every summer. I have nothing but good memories of this boat, which remains dear to my heart. But in the end she needed major

As a "restoration not a reconstruction," every salvagable original part was reused and period construction methods were employed.

repair work that I was not able to undertake, so I sold her."

Mariska's new owner Edgar Holtbach was well aware that he was in possession of a real rarity; all the more so because classic yachting was now all the rage. He intended to do well out of selling the yacht. But his asking price was far too high because, as much as everyone wished to own Mariska, the extent of the restoration work required on her meant that the purchase price had to be reasonable. There were many yachtsmen who dearly wanted this boat in England and in Spain. But it was a Niels, a Swiss property promoter with an obsessive passion for classic yachts who became the owner of the most highly-coveted yacht of the moment. Discussing the circumstances of Mariska's purchase with INVICTUS, Niels tells us he was seeking a classic JI regatta yacht, but one slightly smaller than the one he ended up with. "I was actually looking for a classic 12m JI regatta boat, but during this search I discovered the last 15m JI available. I knew this project would be much more difficult and costly, but I fell "head over heels" for this boat which was one of the 'stars' of the reigning class of her time. I knew she had won the Cowes regattas in 1911 and she had incredible pedigree." Travelling to Holland to view Mariska, Niels described his initial reactions on sighting her was



The restoration was a painstaking process but one that resulted in owner Christian Niels and his two sons 'welcoming a new member to the family'.

one of shock. "To tell you the truth I almost did not get out of the car and was calling the seller a crook! But since I had driven 1,500-miles to see her, I went aboard and visited. The moment I boarded I know instantly that she was indeed a 15m JI. When your bare feet touch the wooden deck of a boat like this there is a very physical and emotion reaction. I truly felt that we were made for each other."

It was at this point, before a deal had even been struck that Niels realized that the road to restoration would not be an easy one. "The asking price was much too high due to the heavy works required. It was a late Friday afternoon and I told the seller that banks closed at 4:30pm, so he had an hour to accept my offer or I would leave. When he told me 'yes', I understood I had paid too much! From that moment I had only two worries to the challenge I'd set myself: firstly to achieve and exemplary restoration and secondly, to ensure Mariska regained her past glories by winning races."

With Mariska now secure Niels set about selecting a shipyard with

whom to entrust the restoration project. "I wanted the restoration to happen in France as they have exceptional craftsmanship and a deep nautical culture. I then chose CRM in Marseille, which at the time employed 30 or so craftsmen, each with their specialty, regrouped in a partnership. As this was not a purely commercial oriented company, but populated by passionate restorers, I felt comfortable and confident they would do Mariska justice."

DOWN TO BRASS TACKS

Mariska's hull was built in the composite materials of the period, with ribs of mild steel and white elm on metal floor plates. It was apparent that the planking had been replaced at least twice at different times, because iroko and older mahogany were found in the upper works and 193 linear feet of pitch pine at the level of the garboards; these, the yard was almost certain, date back to the yacht's construction, as their pegging was original. The floor plates between the steel ribs were simply made of sheet metal, with just a curved piece of steel at the foot of the wooden ribs. The skins are 1.7" thick, while the planking over the whole hull varies in thickness from 1.2" to 1.7". This is quite considerable when one adds back on the layers planed and sanded off every time the hull was maintained. The replacement planks that have been used are 1.6" thick and around 16' long, while the original ones were 23' long.



→ SPECIFICATIONS

LOA: 90' 6" (27.60m)**HULL LENGTH:** 76' 8" (23.40m)**BEAM:** 13' 8" (4.20m)**DRAUGHT:** 8' 8" (2.70m)**CONSTRUCTION:** Hull steel/wood composite**RIG:** Gaff cutter**LOWER MAST:** 64' 10" (19.80m)**GAFF MAST:** 23' 6" (7.20m)**BOOM:** 53' 1" (16.20m)**MAIN GAFF:** 11.20 m**BOWSPRIT:** 4.20 m beyond bow**TOPSAIL YARD:** 9.5 m**TOPSAIL GAFF:** 8 m**SAIL AREA:** 1355.75 m²**RESTORATION:** Charpentiers Réunis de Méditerranée (La Ciotat)**ARCHITECT/DESIGNER, YEAR OF BUILD:** William Fife, Scotland 1908

Were past modifications done so that the yacht could moor hard up against the quay stern on, or because the long horn timbers were rotten and noone could face undertaking the necessary repairs? For whatever reason, the hull was cut off at rib no. 63 of a total of 72 ribs, and the operation took away almost 10' of deck at a stroke! But that is not all: a rough hole had also been cut through the sternpost for a large propeller cage and, because the wood was rotting, it had been reinforced with a strip of oak at the same time. Unfortunately nobody has been able to identify the glue used, which would have made it possible to date this rough and ready repair. In any case it is not Resorcine, the glue most commonly used, so the assumption is that the modifications were carried out before the Second World War. It is evidence that shipwrights were already in the habit of using glue in boat building at this time.

Another major modification was found when the boat was dismantled: the ballast, just a 40 mm thick sheet metal shell packed with various materials coated in a layer of cement, was not original. The lead for the new ballast comes from the keel of one of the yachts in the Alinghi team built for the last America's Cup in Valencia. By then Mariska's deck plan also no longer bore the remotest resemblance to the one designed by William Fife. It had been completely altered and topped with a very large deckhouse measuring almost 2' high, 8' wide and 16' long. The original beams were made of pitch pine, but when the boat arrived at La Ciotat, the decks were simply covered over with plywood. As this was not joined to the gunwales, water had poured in and rotted the ribs.

**RESEARCH ACHIEIVING
FORENSIC LEVELS
DETERMINED THE DATE
OF MODIFICATIONS;
ALL OF WHICH WERE
CORRECTED BACK
TO ORIGINAL.**





All of the rig had completely disappeared of course: all that remained were the two mast steps from the yacht's incarnation as a ketch.

It was unanimously decided that everyone would do their utmost to preserve as many parts of the original as possible, starting with the oak keel. The stem, on the other hand, had to be replaced. Its upper section was rotten, as was the area beneath the mast step. As for the deck beams, those that were still mostly sound were reused with their rotten ends removed. The new beams around the foot of the mast are made from Oregon pine. All the spars are made out of spruce except for the lower mast, which is in Oregon pine. This choice is justified by the fact that the latter's greater density makes it much harder and more rigid than spruce. The plywood ribs were made entirely at the yard in sipo, a type of African mahogany, 880 cubic feet of which arrived at the yard in billets. That may sound an enormous quantity of wood, but a lot - almost 80 percent - is lost due to the curved shape of the ribs. The making of these was a colossal task that took many long weeks. All of the hull pegging was replaced with pegs made of stainless steel: "We would have liked to replace them all with bronze pegs like the original, but it proved impossible to find a manufacturer" say the yard. "What is more, Mariska's already had all stainless steel pegs when she arrived here."

When asked if there were any difficult decisions to be made regarding conservation, Niels replies: "The first goal was to make a restoration, NOT a reconstruction. This was possible as 80 percent of the hull was still original. The interior structure though was redone in stainless steel and the ribs in laminated timber. This was done to guaranty maintenance and longevity for future generations. The

**"THESE WERE
EXTRAORDINARY
MOMENTS, WE
WERE TRULY
WITNESSING THE
REBIRTH OF A
MONUMENT...
EVERY VISIT TO THE
SHIPYARD WAS A
REVELATION."**



deck, masts, and all the interiors had been already modified during the 1950's and were no longer original, so we rebuilt everything according to the original plans. With regards changes, structurally classic sailboats are more "supple" boats but we wanted maximum rigidity. This in turn forced us to adapt the rigging to these new constraints. We also installed for reasons of security and functionality an engine, which is today accepted by the Jauge."

Visiting the yard constantly during the restoration and planning ahead as completion approached, Christian Niels describes his input. "I kept the lead of the project and created a team of excellent advisers for the renovation. I then followed exactly the same strategy to create the teams for the regatta's and with that I had a little bit of luck," he smiles. "Edouard Kessi a regatta and classic boats specialist, as well as developer of new technologies now applied in America's Cup boats, is a friend." With each visit to the yard Mariska took shape before his eyes, creating a very paternal emotion within Niels. "These were extraordinary moments as we were truly witnessing the rebirth of a monument, along with the dedication and passion of the craftsmen who had really poured all their heart and knowledge into the project. Today this boat would not exist if it hadn't been for the dedication to excellence these men had."

As the works neared completion Mariska was waterproofed and for the planking, splining was favored over caulking. This method involves the insertion of wooden strips, or splines, which are glued in

place between the planks. The splines, like the planks, are made of mahogany above the waterline and iroko below, as are the caps that conceal the screw heads. Then all that remains to be done is to sand off anything that stands proud. Meanwhile other yard staff were busy inside the yacht positioning the new floor plates of stainless steel, a material widely used as soon as it became available to replace mild steel, which corroded fast. Twenty of the floor plates are made of flat iron, the others sheet stainless steel, bolted onto the ribs and skins. Finally the transversal plates that give the hull rigidity are made of sheet stainless steel, pierced with round holes.

The deck covering is made by the usual method of laying teak laths over plywood, which ensures that it is watertight. The deckhouse is made of mahogany and the sails are hoisted on blocks, as there are no winches on board. The interior of Mariska is light and airy, with the paneling and deckheads painted in Boston white. There are two shower rooms mid-ships (one for the crew and one for the owner) and ample headroom for Christian Niels who walks tall in a literal as well as metaphorical sense.

Age old skills were used in restoring her and Mariska requires century old methods to sail: with no winches onboard all sails are raised by block, tackle and sweat.





Describing the day of delivery, Niels confesses that for himself and his two sons, Axel and Marc, it was “like welcoming a new member to the family.” The timing of Mariska’s relaunch couldn’t have been more appropriate either. “We managed to have the boat in the water just before the Classic Week 2009 in Monaco, so as to be present for the 100th anniversary of Tuiga, flagship of the Monaco Yacht Club and owned by Prince Albert. She’s also obviously a sistership of Mariska. The arrival and reception of Mariska by the Yacht Club was fantastic.” The first day on the water Mariska didn’t just transport the skipper and crew over the deep blue Mediterranean, she transported them back in time. “When we first raised the sails, and especially the topsail without winches, we realized that we were going to have to relearn to sail like the sailors of the early 20th century.”

Allowing Mariska the opportunity to regain past glories on the racecourse was a primary goal Niels had set himself, and they wasted no time. “The first regatta of the boat was the “Coupe du Yacht Club de France”, between Cannes and St.Tropez in 2009. We led the race for about two-thirds of the race which was fantastic, but in the closing stages overtaken by Tuiga and her more experienced crew. Every victory is a memorable day however as they feel like we’re writing new

pages in Mariska’s history. There have been three really significant wins for us: the 2010 PANERAI Mediterranean Classic Challenge, our 2011 victory at the Voiles de St.Tropez and finally, in 2012, my nomination and election as Yachtsman of the Year by the Association Francaise des Yachts de Tradition (the French association of Classic Yachts).”

The shared passions of several yachtsmen dedicated to the preservation of classic yachts and their intention to ensure their legacy endures has resulted in the rejuvenation of a century old association. “We have recreated the 15m JI class association, which allows us, just like over a century ago, to have the last remaining four 15m JI boats race together with no handicap. The races occur in Spain, France, Italy, Monaco, and Mala.” While racing dominates the Niels family use of Mariska, they still use her to cruise occasionally on the Mediterranean. When asked if she’s now a family heirloom or if they would ever part with her, Christian’s reply is remarkably phlegmatic for someone who obviously holds a deep love for the yacht. “Like all things with an important history, Mariska does not belong to me; I am only the custodian for future generations. She has to continue her story surrounded by passionate and competent people.” Thanks to Christian Niels and his family, Mariska’s story continues. 1