

BONE YARD BOATS



Possible liveaboard budget boat from the bone yard as listed in the Bone Yard Boats newsletter. This 1963 Chris Craft listing stated, "Perfect liveaboard. Lovely original interior; not hacked up. Needs new exterior paint, starboard engine has a knock, aft cabin A/C needs replacement. 2005 survey available upon request. Leaving the country, looking for a good home for this boat. In water now. Fuel tanks are full. Asking: \$1,000."

by Susan Peterson-Gately

Looking for a bigger boat to live aboard? One possible resource is David Irving's Bone Yard Boats newsletter and website.

A few weeks ago I received an e-mail from a fellow sailor proudly announcing the purchase of a 79' hermaphrodite

brig built of wood. For that minuscule minority out there who don't know the rig, it's a two-master that crosses yards on the fore and has a conventional schooner-style mainsail back aft.

"It's the *Black Pearl*, a famous boat, and we're going to bring it up next spring," she told me when I followed up

for details. A Google search on *Black Pearl* soon revealed that this classic little vessel (not to be confused with the Disney pirate movie boat) was another Bone Yard Boats success story. She had been listed for sale in the fall newsletter for \$5,000 in storage fees.



This 39' Consolidated was afloat two years before the photo was taken (summer 2008). The listing stated her twin engines were operable, but the boat was in need of new ribs, floors and deck.

Bone Yard Boats is a rescue operation that seeks to find homes for unwanted boats. The project was launched in 1996 by a woman named Ginger Marshall Martus, who hated to see a good boat die under the chainsaw. David Irving, another boat owner with a love of history and heritage, took over the helm in 2005 and brought the newsletter into the digital age with a website. He also continues to issue the quarterly newsletter.

Now, I personally am *not* in the market for another boat (I have three too many right now), but I love looking through this newsletter. Each issue contains an assortment of perhaps two dozen or so power and sail boats. They range from small trailerables to 70-footers. The spring 2007 issue listed a 55' and a 92' schooner.

Bone Yard Boat listings have hulls of steel, ferrocement and (especially for the biggest boats) wood. Their conditions range from fully functional, usable and ready to go, to basket cases best described by this entry: "She is still available but will not be long for this world." There are a lot of listings for big old wooden powerboats, some of which are still operational and sound enough for liveaboard and coastal cruising life. One recent listing described a 46' Chris Craft that had been used for a mother-in-law "apartment" by a liveaboard. And there are occasionally a few fiberglass hulls as well.

I enjoy browsing the newsletter listings, as frequently they detail considerable drama and or hints of intense life-changing events in the lives of the sellers and buyers. Some of the brief

listings are poignant short stories, often including mention of death or divorce, others are inspirational and heart warming. A few are cautionary tales that leave me deeply grateful for having avoided a similar fate.

Typical entries include: for a 43' wooden cruiser, "I have owned her for 16 years. I do not want to see her rot away so make me an offer"; or, for a 36' Hinkley yawl, "If you can prove you have the ability and or the money to restore her, then she's yours for the taking."

There are project boats started but never finished, project boats that need to be started right away, and then there are some beyond hope. One fairly typical listing read, "I figured I'd rebuild the boat, and then I would go messing around the world until I ran into Joshua Slocum somewhere." But then, the writer continued, life got very full very fast and there was no more time for the boat. . . .



The 42' Winslow sloop was described thus: "She'll need road transport from Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin, to her restore berth unless it's close by. We can get her worthy of fair weather motoring in protected waters as is. Lots of extras including fittings, doo-dads, berthing gear, possible Furuno Radar.

Needs refastening and framing repair and much cosmetic attention. Also main deck needs repair. Major restoration project. But, as they say in Lake Wobegone, 'she's not too bad, could be worse.' Boat named Erinea, ex Ebony Queen. Asking \$5,000."

One newsletter subscriber wrote to the editor, "Bone Yard Boats is a service to a strange and tiny band." He also suggested that Irving seek sponsorships to help underwrite his production costs from some divorce lawyers for whom the publication must be a boon. The newsletter's general policy is to list boats priced at under \$10,000, although occasionally exceptions are made. Paging through the brief but vivid life-and-death sagas you wonder — Did this one make it? Did anyone step forward for that one?

Sadly, not all of the stories have happy fairy tale endings, but then, that's what makes this endeavor a slice of life. It's not a fantasy tale out there on the hungry sea, and shoppers should be realistic in their expectations of any boat they buy. But depending on your plans and needs, the newsletter is well worth

a look. There are brave hearts out there bringing boats back to life. Irving writes that one of his favorite outcomes was that of a man who purchased a large Chris Craft cruiser for a dollar and spent three years restoring it. When complete, it was, he said, "an episode that added to my life and realized a childhood dream."

I first encountered the Bone Yard Boats website (www.boneyardboats.com) while doing research for my e-books on buying a boat on a budget and sailing on a shoestring (for more on my own adventures with bone yard boats visit www.chimneybluff.com). I e-mailed the webmaster to learn about this ambitious recycling effort, and found it was a labor of love by David, who makes no money from the sale of any of the boats. He wrote, "I love history and I love

craftsmanship" and noted that, while perfectly well built, many of the modern boats out there "totally lack the element of nautical charm."

I've owned and sailed two wooden boats that came perilously close to being junked, one of which, an elderly schooner, has nautical charm right up to her two mastheads. These old timers have given me and many others great pleasure over the years. In an age of instant gratification and throw-away consumption, Irving's Bone Yard Boats rescue effort is both heartening and inspirational.

Subscriptions to the *Bone Yard Boats* quarterly newsletter cost \$19.95 for a year, and subscribers get to list boats for free. Most issues have at least a couple of free boats. Check www.boneyardboats.com for more information and for past listings.