

Concordia 31 Secret Is Reborn

Before we get into the floors and frames of it, I need to acknowledge my much better half and co-captain, Kathleen Zvanovec. Without her support, patience, and willingness to ask tough questions, we would not have become the proud stewards of our Concordia 31 SECRET. Kathy and I live in a two-hundred-year-old house. I hunt for ducks with antique shotguns, fish with split cane rods, and tie my own flies with feathers and fur. All that says a lot about why SECRET is now a part of our lives. We'll never know what might have become of her if we'd looked the other way. Indeed, a number of folks before us had taken a peek and elected to keep on walking. Some still think that would have been the best course for us as well. But at this point I'm very happy to say that SECRET is ours. And she has recently been given a new lease on life.

I first saw a listing for SECRET when she was being offered by Brooklin Boat Yard. The next time I spotted her was in 2021, on the Ballentine's Boat Shop website. The photographs by Tyler Fields clearly indicated that SECRET had not been "remuddled." I decided to have a look in person, and was promptly smitten. Yet it was obvious that Secret had many serious issues. The consideration ultimately came down to one key question: was there enough of her left to warrant bringing her back? We decided that the answer was "Yes."



The history of the Concordia 31s has been expertly covered. For those readers not familiar with the design and its background, I recommend beginning with the article in the Spring 2021 issue of *The Concordian*. Beyond that, a fine piece on the 31s by Maynard Bray was published in Issue 48 of *WoodenBoat* (September/October 1982). There is useful commentary as well in the first volume of Waldo Howland's memoir, *A Life in Boats: The Years Before the War*.

Waldo and Wilder B. (Bill) Harris are jointly credited with creating the design for the Concordia 31, from which nine hulls were eventually built. The 31 represented an evolution from the Concordia 28 SHAWNEE II, a 1937 one-off sloop that was ultimately deemed to be a bit small for extended cruising. The plans for the 31 were designated as Concordia Company's Design #12, and the Mystic Seaport archive holds a set of twenty-seven associated drawings, all of them

bearing the signature "W. B. Harris." When I have the time, I'll get down there to take a look. SECRET (Hull #8) was built at Concordia Company in 1967, and launched as SANDPIPER.

A painful event in SECRET's history was a serious cabin fire that occurred in the late 1980s. An old brokerage listing states that the ensuing rebuild encompassed a complete replacement of the deck and cabin structure, as well as a substantial amount of additional work down below. Following this major effort, SECRET was presented with the Phoenix Award at the 1990 Museum of Yachting Classic Yacht Regatta. At the 1992 WoodenBoat Show, she won the Judge's Choice Award for Best Restoration. Though I have yet to discover just who accomplished all the repairs, I'm sure I will learn at some point.

After taking possession of SECRET last year, we planned to sail her up from Cape Cod to our home region of midcoast Maine. But upon her May launch in Cataumet, our newly acquired sloop leaked so much that we quickly decided to haul her out again. She was returned to Steve Ballentine's shop, and a diligent search for problems began. The crew soon discovered various compromised bolts and suspect structural members. Plan B was then formulated, with the goal of having the boat shipped up to Maine by truck. Trying to arrange transport during Covid proved to be challenging! After we encountered a number of dead ends, Aaron Barker of Belmont Boatworks came to the rescue, kindly fitting SECRET into his impossibly tight schedule.

In July of 2022 I met with Alec Brainerd, the founder and owner of Artisan Boatworks in Rockport, Maine. I proposed a scope of work that would include replacement of the entire backbone structure, with additional repairs as needed. Thankfully, Alec agreed to take on the project. Assigned to the job were shipwrights Mike Rogers and Logan Sampson, each a master in the art and craft of traditional boatbuilding.

Mike originally hails from the Chesapeake, and he got his start at the Cutts and Case Shipyard in Oxford, Maryland. Beginning in the year 2000, Mike and his wife Julie rescued and restored the schooner JENNY NORMAN (now the APPLEDORE STAR), the very last bug-eye schooner known to have been built. Mike later served as project manager on the reconstruction of the magnificent William Hand schooner LADONA (originally launched with that name in 1922, and later the NATHANIEL BOWDITCH). He has more recently been involved in a major restoration of the 98-year-old Hand schooner HINDU, with the work taking place in Thomaston, Maine. Mike is also a go-to shipwright for the passenger schooner fleet in Penobscot Bay.

Logan Sampson hails from Lincolnville, Maine, right on the western shore of Penobscot Bay. His passion for wooden boats started early: at age 14, he began shipping out on the schooner AMERICAN EAGLE under Captain John Foss. After graduating from the Northwest School of Wooden

Boatbuilding, Logan went on to employment at North End Shipyard in Rockland. He also worked for some time with renowned builder Peter Kass at John's Bay Boat Company, where traditional Maine lobster boats—designed in house and beautifully constructed in wood—are the specialty.

We're happy to say that Mike and Logan brought it all into focus for SECRET, with Alec Brainerd providing invaluable supervision and oversight. All the respective approaches seemed to align perfectly: the designers' intentions for the Concordia 31, the talents of Alec and the shipwrights, and our own interest in preserving this wonderful sloop's traditional spirit and soul.

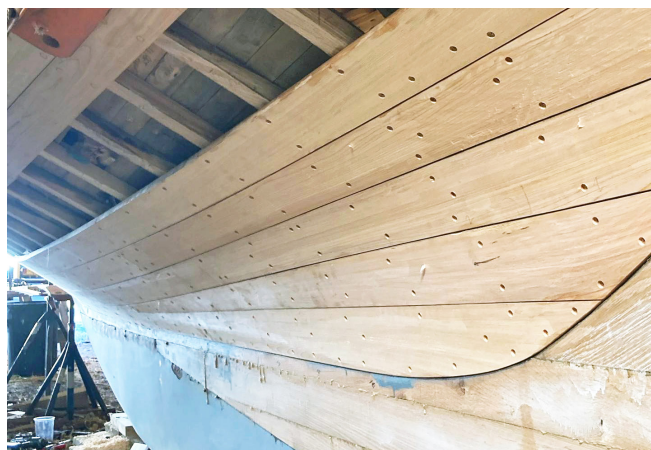
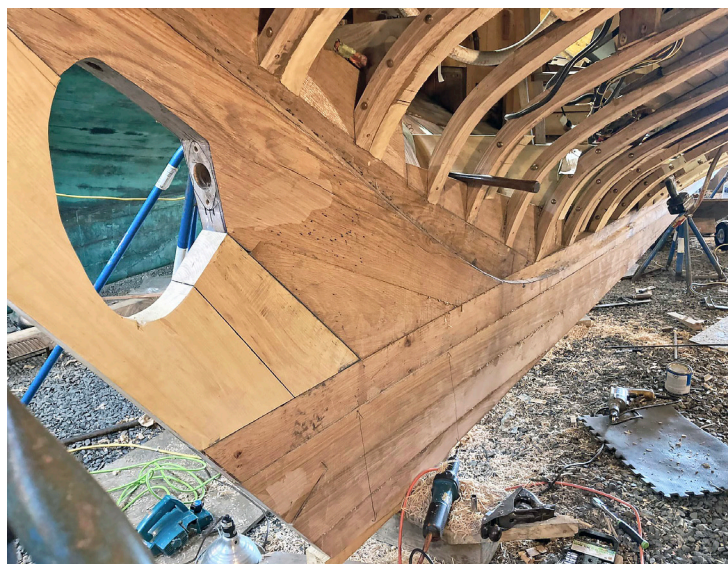
Initial disassembly confirmed that iron bolts in the deadwood had failed, and they had also compromised the surrounding wood. Substantial deterioration in the oak floor timbers was evident. And the timber keel itself was clearly at the end of its life. At this point the real work got under way. The ballast keel was dropped in preparation for sandblasting and epoxy coating. New keelbolts fabricated from 316 stainless steel were duly ordered. Continuing investigation also revealed many frame ends that had failed; some could in fact be broken away from the floors with little effort. The guilty parties here included the iron bolts connecting frame ends and floors, and also the ferrous fasteners used to secure the ceiling to the frames. While the three visible sides of each frame often appeared healthy, many were actually failing from the inside out. Thus each frame had to be sounded and tested from the bottom up until good wood was found, to which the necessary extensions could be scarfed.



The timber keel, deadwood, rudder post, forefoot, gripe, and a portion of the stem all required replacement. The lower portion of the heart pine transom also needed to be renewed. For the keel and deadwood, Alec obtained beautiful six-inch-thick white oak slabs at New England Naval Timbers in Cornwall, Connecticut. Mike Rogers located seasoned black locust, and some of this was used for our new floor timbers, which were fastened with bronze bolts.



A total of thirty floors were replaced, and fifty-eight frames were either repaired or completely renewed. Eighteen frames in the quarters (nine on each side) were replaced with new ones made up from white oak laminations glued with West System G/flex epoxy. Typical of steam-bent oak frames asked to make a hard turn—something oak is reluctant to do—those eighteen had all cracked in more or less the same place. The rest of the replaced frames and frame segments are of sawn black locust. The new rudder post, located outboard of the transom, is also locust. Structural members were given a coat of shellac and bedded with Dolfinite compound. The ballast keel was bedded with tar.



Approximately forty percent of the planking was replaced, the majority of it below the waterline. Alec sourced clear 5/4 live-edge Atlantic white cedar, which was milled up to match the existing 4/4 cedar planking. After their interior surfaces were oiled, the planks were fastened with #12 x 1.75" bronze screws, and the outer surfaces were subsequently faired and then primed with red lead. Judging from the comments of Mike and Logan, that cedar stock was a boatbuilder's dream.

I first developed my love for the watery parts of the world in the Anchor Bay region of Lake St. Clair, Michigan, home to many Chris-Craft and Hacker-Craft boats. Being thus mindful of tradition, I've elected to reinstall SECRET's Gray Marine flathead 4-112. This engine was remanufactured in 2009 by Van Ness Engineering in Ridgewood, New Jersey, and I'm told that there are only around fifteen hours on the rebuilt motor. It's a Detroit thing: think muscle cars and the Woodward Avenue Dream Cruise.

SECRET's tentative launch date falls in the week of May 15, perhaps a bit late but in another sense well timed. Mindful of the nearly ten years that our sloop spent sitting on the hard in sheds, I plan to ease her slowly back into the life for which she was designed and built.

One day when I was chatting with Steve Ballentine, the conversation circled around to what I was looking for in a hull. Referring to SECRET, I told him that we were fully comfortable in taking on a small and heavy boat, a traditional sort of sloop that would perhaps be a bit slower than many. Steve got a twinkle in his eye and responded, "She's going to surprise you. She is anything but slow."

SECRET will be swinging to a summer mooring at the north end of Rockland Harbor. For this our first season, I've laid shakedown boundaries between Portland and Cross Island. From what I already know of that coastline, exploring it should afford a good sense of what SECRET has to teach us. And after that . . .

Tim Higbee and Kathleen Zvanovec
Hope, Maine

