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CYNARA PART 2

FIRST BIG-YACHT REBUILD IN JAPAN



The biggest yacht restoration in years took place in the shadow of Mount Fuji, under a team of Japanese craftsmen and international boatbuilders

WORDS **NIGEL SHARP**
PHOTOGRAPHS BY **PAUL HARVEY** AND **YOICHI YABE**

The decision by *Cynara's* owner, Riviera chairman Mr Noboru Watanabe, to restore her in Japan was a particularly brave one as no such work had ever been carried out there before.

In total, sixteen skilled European boatbuilders – in addition to the teams from Centreline Marine and Stirling & Son – worked on the project. Typically there were half a dozen of them at a time (and never more than nine) with various people coming in and out for three-month periods.

The first of these were Paul Harvey and Ben Hobbs – both British but long-term Palma-based – who started work in May 2017. They later discovered that their Japanese visas were the first ever to show “shipwright” as an occupation.

The restoration was carried out at Riviera Seabornia Marina – within sight of Mount Fuji and about two hours’ drive south of Tokyo – which is where *Cynara* had been based for some years. But there was initially absolutely no relevant infrastructure there. “The first six months was really difficult,” Paul told me. “We basically had to build a boatyard from scratch. We had to set up a shed, buy machines, build benches and so on. It took us a while to get going.”

They had great difficulty sourcing materials – “really basic stuff that we don’t normally give a second’s thought to,” said Paul – or at least initially. They imported some of these materials from Europe at first but then began to discover local sources. “It took a while to find industrial quantities of sandpaper, for instance, rather than a few sheets from the hardware shop.” Single-component paint and metals such as naval brass

and bronze also presented challenges. They were banned from importing lead products, but they found that white lead was used in the pottery glazing business and red lead powder for grinding engine valve heads. Linseed oil was freely available and a local window company was able to supply sacks of washed crushed chalk so they made their own putty using the lead products. “It took a while to find it but once we did, there was plenty of it.”

At an early stage of the project, significant quantities of timber were ordered from UK companies – teak for the decking and oak from Stones Marine Timber and oak from Somerscales – because at that time it seemed it would not be available in Japan. Subsequently, however, Japanese suppliers materialised including one with “huge teak boards that had been sitting there for 30 years” and a local timber merchant just a couple of miles away who was able to supply Honduras mahogany. “I don’t know if they know how lucky they are that they have this amazing wood here,” said Paul. “We soon realised that everything we needed was here but we just had to learn where to find it and how to ask for it.”

Among other difficulties were those caused by natural events including “several minor earthquakes” which particularly caused problems while the hull was being de-hogged. “Everything had to be well bolted to the concrete floor and measurements had to be checked regularly,” said Paul. There were also several typhoons causing significant damage to the shed roof “at least a half dozen times.”

Working alongside the Europeans were a number of Japanese, none of whom had any previous experience of working on this sort of boat, or any sort of boat in most

Clockwise from top: Keji Kawashima with, behind him from left to right, Graham Bailey, Nico Calderoni and Mattis Vos; Restoration of the hull; The engine room bulkhead being removed; Paul and Ben inspecting teak supplied by a Japanese merchant; Pre-restoration in 2017



YOICHI YABE



PAUL HARVEY



PAUL HARVEY



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cases. Recruiting them was no easy task, however, not least because of Seabornia Marina's rural location. One of the first to be taken on was Keiji Kawashima who had previously served an unfinished apprenticeship as a house-building carpenter (almost all houses in Japan are timber-framed). He was involved in the early stages of hull framing, planking and "anything that was going on" and latterly "made some really nice furniture," according to Paul who has recommended that he join the crew as ship's carpenter.

Toshiyuki Tatsumi had previous experience making free-standing house furniture and he too "helped out with whatever was happening" but mostly repaired the hatches and skylights and built interior joinery. When I asked him if he found it more challenging dealing with the irregular curved shapes inside a hull he said "yes, but it is exciting every day." Masaya Hashimoto, too, who has previously made house furniture and some GRP boats, finds boats "more interesting because of the funny shapes."

Shingo Koiwai, Haruyuki Wada and Makoto Usui – having previously had various jobs such as fruit farming, fishing, cleaning, gardening and hauling out boats at the marina – did a great deal of the painting and varnishing but also helped out with other jobs such as raking out seams and laminating deck beams.

Not surprisingly, Paul and Ben had to devote some time to training these Japanese craftsmen. "They already had exceptional skills," said Paul. "It was more a question of teaching them techniques to give them confidence, and we never had to show them anything twice. As time went on they got better and better. And if you think your chisels are sharp, you should see theirs!"

Clockwise from top left:

Sawamura San in his workshop building the engine room bulkhead; Nat Lemieux giving varnish tips to Haruyuki Wada, Hiromi Saito, Takuya Murata and Shingo Koiwai; The launch of *Cynara*; The new aft saloon bulkhead being fitted

Paul and Ben realised that, although they had "grown used to an established restoration culture" over the years, they often found that they had to explain to the Japanese – to whom such a culture was a completely new concept – why something should be done in a particular way. "For instance, telling them to be really careful when taking something apart in the hope that we may save it, even if it looked absolute rubbish," said Paul.

Much of the engineering work led by Ben was carried out by Pascal Chedoz, a French national who originally trained as an engineer in the French Navy before moving to Japan about 30 years ago and mostly working as a baker ever since. "Every project should have a resident baker," said Paul. "We had great snacks all the time."

Of all the Europeans, Ben and Paul have spent the longest periods based in Japan. For much of the time, Ben was joined by his wife and three young children – the eldest of which attended a local Japanese school – before they all returned to Palma in July 2020, leaving Paul as the only remaining European to continue working with a handful of Japanese craftsmen to complete the project. Although Paul went back to Palma on three occasions in his first year, he hasn't left Japan since the early part of 2018.

Clearly Mr Watanabe is delighted with *Cynara's* restoration. "I am proud of the fact that the restoration work was done here in Japan, and that we were able to complete it together with Japanese carpenters," he said. "As a project that has no precedent in Japan, everything was a challenge, and just when you think you have solved one problem, you run into another. It was a continuous process every day."

