



RE-MADE IN JAPAN

CYNARA WAS ONCE A YACHT TO SEE AND BE SEEN ON,
BUT IN RECENT YEARS SHE HAS BEEN OUT OF THE
LIMELIGHT, UNDERGOING AN EXTENSIVE
RESTORATION IN JAPAN.
NIGEL SHARP REPORTS

'Cynara's most high profile years were in Monaco in the 1960s'

An extensive restoration of a yacht not far short of 100 years old and 100ft long would provide a mighty challenge for any established boatyard, no matter how skilled and experienced its labour force. The difficulties of undertaking such a project in a country with no previous experience of wooden superyacht restoration are on another level – yet the astonishingly successful refit of the 1927 Camper & Nicholson ketch *Cynara* is proof that nothing is impossible.

Cynara's original name was *Gwendolen*, commissioned by HG Nutman to a Charles E Nicholson design and built at Camper & Nicholson's Gosport yard. *Gwendolen* was built with teak planking on oak frames, an elm keel, an oak stem and sternpost. After she was launched in March 1927, the *Hampshire Telegraph* described her as 'a fine specimen of modern yacht architecture, being up-to-date in its general design, accommodation, and equipment.'

That summer Nutman cruised *Gwendolen* extensively, mostly along the English south coast. But the following winter – following Nutman's death, so it is believed – she was sold. Her subsequent owners included Valdemar Graae, a Danish businessman who also owned the Morgan Giles 6-Metre *Dana*. Graae sold her in 1930 to American Herbert H Warden who renamed her *Easy Going*, took her across the Atlantic and kept her in Philadelphia. She was purchased by Sir Howard Frank who brought her back to the UK and gave her the name *Cynara*, but died soon afterwards.

Her next owner was the Marquess of Northampton who'd keep her for almost a quarter of a century. Not much is known of her history in that period, though she dabbled in racing, finishing 2nd in Class 1 in the Coronation Race (from Southsea to Torbay via Cherbourg and the Eddystone lighthouse) in 1937, and took part in Cowes Week the same year and again in 1939.

Her most high profile years came after a couple more owners, when the racing car driver Duncan Hamilton took custody of her for four years in the 1960s. During this time she was based in Monaco where star drivers such as Graham Hill and Jackie Stewart would be entertained on board. *Cynara* even made a brief appearance in the 1966 film *Arrivederci Baby* starring

Tony Curtis and Zsa Zsa Gabor. Towards the end of the decade her next owner, Warren Eve, took her to Bermuda and she spent a few years sailing between the east coast of the USA and the Caribbean before returning to Europe.

It was then that *Cynara* came into Japanese ownership and in January 1973 she set off with 13 crew to sail across the Atlantic, through the Panama Canal and then across the Pacific, arriving at Misaki (about 50 miles south of Tokyo) after 195 days at sea. She spent many years cruising between the most northern and southern of Japan's islands. In 2001, Japanese resort and leisure company Riviera acquired three Japanese marinas, and with one of these – Seabornia Marina, about a mile from Misaki – came the ownership of *Cynara*. The yacht remained in commission and continued to cruise locally, but after a while it became apparent she'd benefit from a major restoration.

SEARCHING FOR SKILLS

In 2015 the decision was made to start a refit. There was one problem: although Japan is one of the world's leading shipbuilding nations, companies or individuals with the skills and experience necessary to restore a yacht such as *Cynara* were nonexistent. The sensible plan would be to ship her back to an established yard in Europe, and this was initially considered, with yards in Palma and the UK investigated. But then Riviera chairman Mr Noboru Watanabe decided there was an opportunity to do something very special: to restore *Cynara* in Japan.

As a result of Riviera's research into European yards, Noboru made contact with two highly experienced British shipwrights, Ben Hobbs and Paul Harvey, who'd been based in Palma for about 20 years. After a couple of visits to inspect the boat, in February 2017 they were asked to take on the project. They later discovered that their Japanese visas were the first ever to show 'shipwright' as an occupation for entering the country.

The restoration was carried out at Riviera Seabornia Marina, within sight of Mount Fuji and just an hour or two's drive south of Tokyo. Initially there was absolutely no relevant infrastructure there.

"The first six months was really difficult," Harvey told ►



All new masts and spars for the gaff rig are in Douglas fir



Attention to detail on all of *Cynara's* hardware, fixtures and fittings is impeccable



Left: hull was stripped back to the bare bones. Right: Mr Watanabe (right) and *Cynara's* Japanese crew

‘The first significant issue to be tackled was that the hull was hogged’



Above: original bronze fairleads on the finely sculpted stern

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 some time to get going.”

During the course of the restoration, other European-based experts were recruited: project manager Feargus Bryan, who visited Japan for a few days every couple of months but otherwise remained involved from his base in Nice; Paul Spooner, who worked on naval architectural issues and layout changes, and produced detailed designs for a multitude of deck fittings; Chuck Demangeat, who was responsible for the rig; a team from Centreline Marine to lay and caulk the deck; another team from Stirling and Son mainly to caulk, spline and fair the hull; and 14 skilled boatbuilders from a variety of European countries. In total, almost 50 people from a dozen countries outside Japan made significant contributions to the project.

Working alongside the European specialists were a number of Japanese workers, none of whom had any previous experience of working on this sort of yacht – or, in fact, any sort of boat in most cases. The team included house builders (almost all houses in Japan are timber framed), a fruit farmer, a fisherman and a gardener. Unsurprisingly, Harvey and Hobbs had to devote a certain amount of their time to training them, although Harvey says, “They already had exceptional skills.”



The beautifully restored Cynara under sail in blustery conditions



Left: refurbished saloon.
Top: wood pannelled passageway leading forward from the companionway.
Above: original fittings

“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.”

Although the engineering work was led by Hobbs, much of it 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 had been working mostly as a baker ever since. “Every project should have a resident baker,” recalls Harvey. “We had great snacks all the time.”

GETTING THINGS STRAIGHT

The first significant issue to be tackled was the fact that the hull was significantly hogged, by about 6in (150mm) over the length of the boat. To address this, the boat first had to be significantly dismantled before a large H-section girder was placed under the wood keel and, by an elaborate system of jacks under this and in other parts of the hull, the problem was resolved. Although most of the oak frames needed to be replaced, about 90% of the 2in (50mm) teak planking was found to be reusable – with some minor local repairs. The deck was completely replaced with the new beam shelf and laminated beams in English oak and carlins in teak, over which 3/8in (9mm) Canadian cedar planks were laid followed by 3/4in

(18mm) plywood and 3/4in (18mm) swept teak planking.

Great efforts were made to save as much of the deck furniture as possible, and so only the round hatch for the sail locker aft had to be replaced with the remainder undergoing subtle repairs and modifications including renewal of the glazing. Similarly, many of the original deck and hull fittings were refurbished and refitted.

A new main boom gallows was produced, with a bit of help from a scene in *Arrivederci Baby* which clearly shows its previous position. Nine new Lewmar bronze winches have now been fitted, four of them electric, replacing just two non-original winches.

From the companionway moving forward, the interior layout consists of four cabins, two each side. There's a full beam saloon with a dining area to starboard and comfortable seating; the galley to port and skipper's cabin to starboard; a heads and shower to starboard; and then six pipe cots and a large table for the crew.

A few modifications have been made to the layout including the addition of ensuite heads and shower for the owner's cabin to starboard and a guest cabin to port, and also a new day heads.

The vast majority of the original Honduras mahogany panelling and furniture was saved, repaired and refitted. Among the areas which benefited from new joinery



Left: *Cynara*'s mizzen was probably originally Bermudan, but gaff seems to suit her better. Below: Noboru Watanabe at *Cynara*'s helm

are the panels around the saloon portholes, which had suffered from freshwater ingress, and a heads vanity unit. Corner seats for both forward guest cabins on the original drawings needed reinstating, while the crew cabin hull linings also had fresh water damage and the cabin soles were renewed in Japanese oak.

In terms of engineering systems, *Cynara* was something of a time capsule at the beginning of the restoration. Her riveted iron tanks and lead piping – all presumed to be original – were still plumbed in and in use; lead insulated wiring was all still in place, albeit redundant and with newer wiring retrofitted over the top; while the engine room was “Like the entrance to hell,” says Harvey, “dark, greasy and gloomy.” The 115hp Yanmar engine – which is about 25 years old – was sent to Yanmar to be rebuilt, but almost everything else was renewed. She now has a Cummins Onan MDKBH 5kW generator, a Schenker watermaker, Dometic air-conditioning (previously there was none), a full height Virifig fridge/freezer, a Force 10 electric oven and hob, and Dometic electric toilets.

Cynara has always had a gaff mainsail. At the beginning of the restoration it was thought she also originally had a gaff mizzen, which had been subsequently changed to Bermudan. On that basis, it was decided the new rig should be all-gaff. Towards the end of the project, evidence was found to indicate that the mizzen may have originally been Bermudan, but by then plans were too far advanced to change, besides which, the general consensus is *Cynara* looks better and performs better with the gaff mizzen. All the spars – which had varying degrees of rot at their ends and under fittings, and which had had multiple repairs over the years – were replaced with new ones made in Douglas fir by Noble Masts; and almost all the spar fittings were replaced with new ones fabricated in steel,

bronze and stainless steel by Kinza Nautic in Mallorca. Demangeat renewed all of the standing and running rigging, and a new suit of sails was made by Ratsey and Laphorn (who almost certainly made the originals).

The restoration team had difficulty sourcing timber and other materials, or at least initially. They imported various items from Europe at first but then began to discover local suppliers. “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,” said Harvey. Among other difficulties were those triggered by natural events including minor earthquakes and typhoons which caused significant damage to the shed roof half a dozen times.

Mr Watanabe, who made a point of visiting *Cynara* almost weekly throughout most of her restoration, is delighted with the result

“We are proud of the fact 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.”

Restoration complete, *Cynara* was due to be used as an official VIP vessel during the Tokyo Olympics sailing regatta before Covid restrictions put a stop to that. However, she'll have another significant role in 2028 when the Olympic golf tournament will be held at Los Angeles's Riviera Country Club, owned by Mr Watanabe's company and where golf was first played in 1927, the year *Cynara* was built.

From there she'll hopefully return to Europe, to her 'birthplace' in the Solent and to the Mediterranean where Mr Watanabe is particularly keen to race her at Regates Royales in Cannes. “I cannot wait to show the beautiful *Cynara* to the people of the world and to tell them her story,” he said. ■

