



OLD SALTS

They're old, high-maintenance and expensive to restore. But classic wooden yachts have a way of captivating their owners, writes **Kimberley Rothwell**.

Lizzie looks a little worse for wear. She's topless, dabbed with bright orange primer, and bits of old, chipped paint are peeling off her the hull. Sitting on the slip at Clyde Quay marina, Garvin Pascoe and Ben Amor take off her only clothes, a blue tarp. With no deck, you can see deep into her hull, where she has a new spine. Lizzie can be forgiven her appearance; after all, she's 102 years old, and before arriving at Clyde Quay from Auckland last August, she'd been left for dead.

Pascoe says the story of how the 22-foot sloop came to be in his possession is a bit murky. Lizzie had broken her moorings in Auckland, rubbed a hole in her side and sank. The Auckland harbourmaster listed her as derelict and gave the owner two weeks to come and collect the boat or she would be broken up. But the owner didn't step forward.

In Wellington, Pascoe heard about this and appealed to his fellow sailing buddies to help him get enough money to pay the salvage fees – about \$1800. In a day, he had \$6000 to not only pay the fees and truck Lizzie to Wellington, but to start a laborious restoration process.

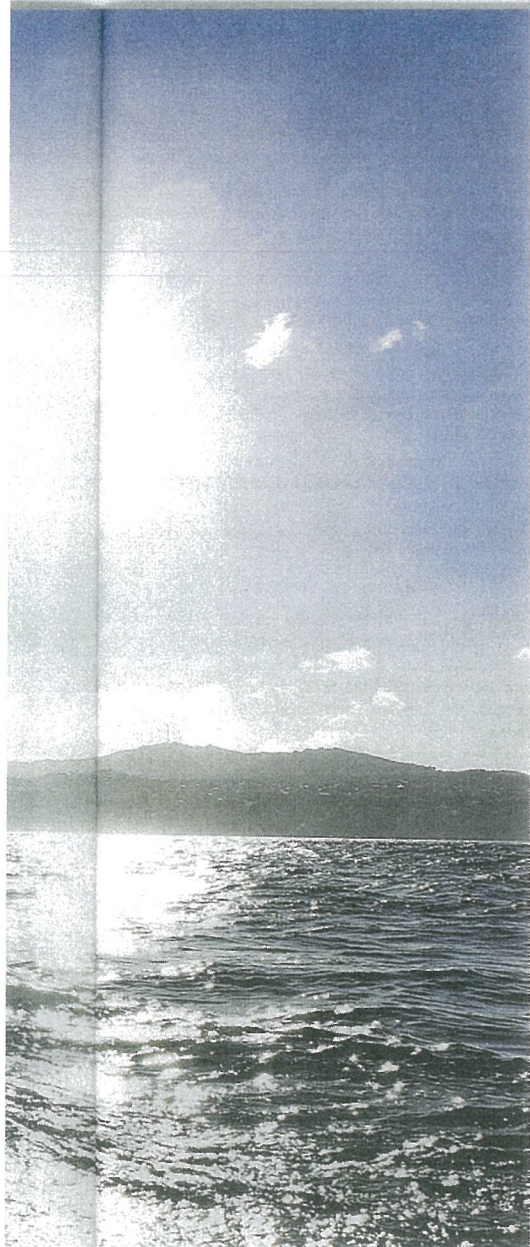


Top and above, Loloma, a 102-year-old keel cutter, is taken around Wellington Harbour by owner Phillipa Durkin.

Pascoe took that \$6000 and formed the Wellington Classic Yacht Trust.

It will be summer before Lizzie is ready. Until then, Amor, Pascoe and other members of the trust will be out at weekends and in the evenings, rain or shine, working on putting Lizzie back together.

Standing by the sheds at Clyde Quay, the two point out other wooden yachts. There's Galatea, a 101-year-old recently restored by owner Mike Hollings; Loloma, an Auckland import; and Pascoe's own 1958 Shemara moored here in the light northerly breeze. Further along is Scauy Sal, a 1930s-built



launch that rescued people off the Wahine. "There's a lot of stories down here," Pascoe says.

And while there have been wooden boats at the quay for as long as anyone can remember, there's a bit of a renaissance in interest in them at the moment. "There's always been an undercurrent. People who love old boats tend to be bolshie individualists and don't want to join clubs and groups, they have their boat and do what they want with it. But there's been an upsurge in people getting together over the last five years or so, getting together and restoring them and helping each other out."

Loloma was restored in the 1990s by Auckland maritime historian Harold Kidd, who says the resurgence in classic boats in Wellington is down to the

passion of Pascoe and other members of the trust. "Wellington has always had a few old boats hanging around, but it's really taken off in the last three or four years," he says. "There's lot of work going on in restoration, it's really tremendous."

Phillipa Durkin has a lovely word for the sound the sea makes as her boat Loloma moves through it. "It effervesces," she says. And it does, fizzing around the edges of the boat, moving and falling gently with the swell. "This is Loloma enjoying herself."

Durkin's having a ball too. The smile barely leaves her face as she guides Loloma toward Matiu/Somes Island and then into Evans Bay, looking for an orca that was spotted that morning. It's a fine,

Gavin Pascoe, top and left, with classic wooden yacht Lizzie (pictured right in her early days), which he is restoring at Clyde Quay. The boat was declared derelict after sinking in Auckland.

Colour photos: ROSS GIBLIN

mild autumn afternoon and there's just a hint of breeze. Small waves slap against Loloma's kauri hull. It's all too glorious.

"It's nice to come out on the harbour like this, especially on a Friday after work," Durkin says. "I probably get out once or twice a week. I love taking people out, they enjoy it so much. I think it's because you get the positive ions from the water."

And what a stylish way to be out here. Loloma is a 102-year-old 28ft keel cutter, all kauri and white paint. Her wood shines. "I'm very happy I got her," Durkin says. "It took me a whole year of agonising. People told me the maintenance was immense, you'll never cope. But I just went 'let's do it'. I secretly went up to Auckland and bought her, trucked her down and launched her." ▷

"It wasn't until I bought her that I thought that I've always wanted to own a boat. I've done lots of sailing but this is the first boat I've owned."

"It was a learning curve, or cliff, and took me a little while to get to know her. But now I am happy enough to take her out, I'm going to practice over winter to take her on adventures next summer to Port Underwood, in the Sounds."

She beams as she talks about a trip across Cook Strait in which Loloma took on 35-knot winds.

"Loloma didn't care that it was 35 knots. She dug her nose into the big green waves and it was really exciting. Coming back it was such a laugh because my crew put on wetsuits."

"We were awash in water across here. It took four hours from Tory Channel to the heads. She romped back."

Then she spins yarns of her and other trust members racing on the harbour.

Classic wooden yachts do require substantial maintenance even once they've been restored, and Durkin rattles off a list of chores she's yet to do on Loloma; there's varnishing, sealing the lockers, fixing handrails, getting new sails.

And when not looking after her own boat, she's down helping out on Lizzie. "It will be wonderful when Lizzie is put back in the water. We might sell her if someone wants to buy her, but on the whole we're just going to keep her so people can take her out day sailing, she won't have a motor because she's only 22ft."

"All of us are sitting underneath Lizzie and pulling out anti-fouling paint and horrible goeey stuff that we're taking out



of the hull. I love it - it's my happy place. People think I'm strange, but it's really satisfying. I don't know what the attraction is to boat slime and the smell of wood and kauri."

Pascoe founded the trust to not only fund Lizzie's restoration, but to acquire as many wooden boats with good Wellington connections as possible. At the moment, the trust is looking at buying the 38ft Ailsa, another yacht with Wellington history.

None of the volunteers are boat builders; Pascoe is a librarian, Amor a computer programmer, and Durkin works at Te Papa. But they love the work and the idea of saving a piece of Wellington's maritime heritage.

"I've seen a couple of other boats from the same period, built along here, just disappear," Pascoe says. "They were for

Phillipa Durkin sails Loloma on Wellington Harbour. "People told me the maintenance was immense, you'll never cope. But... I secretly went up to Auckland and bought her."

Photo: ROSS GIBLIN

sale for like \$4000 or something, I didn't have my own money to buy them. A couple of years pass, and they just get destroyed."

The problem is, Pascoe explains, that old boats fall under the Protected Objects Act, which restricts the sale of boats overseas. So, while a boat may be worth tens of thousands of dollars on the American market, it's worth only about 10 per cent of that here, and many view them as too much work to maintain. "They end up being abandoned."

Which is a great tragedy, he says. "These boats are just sexy, man. You put that in the water and they just look good. And they feel good, too. When you sail these things, they're so much more stable than a boat of modern construction. I've been sailing on Marangi, and you're very close to the water, you feel everything that's going on in the sea around you."

As the sun drops, Durkin guides Loloma from Evans Bay, around the White Lady buoy at Point Jerningham, past the houses at Oriental Bay resplendent in the late sun, and back to the marina.

Durkin shares her Clyde Quay shed with another sailing friend. On the walls are black and white pictures from back in the day when boats like Lizzie ruled the waves.

There's a real sense here that maintaining a connection with that maritime past is important, that these friends who sail together and work on Lizzie together are just caretakers of the boats they own.

As Pascoe says, "We're aiming to get the old girls back together."

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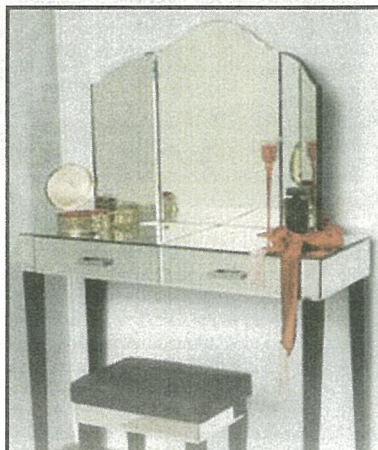


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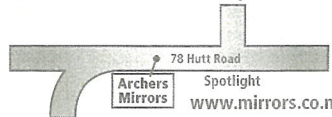


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