

SuperYachtWorld

The global magazine for superyacht owners



Classics SPECIAL

On board the yachts that
make your heart skip a beat



CLASSICS SPECIAL

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G.L. Watson's archive • *Elena* •
John Wayne's cruising life
Wisp: Royal Huisman's modern classic
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Classics

SPECIAL

From modern reinterpretations to genuine old-timers, we celebrate the classic yachts that are more than just museum pieces





ELENA

An elegant charter choice



As a director of the Chicago, Indianapolis & Louisville Railroad Co and the Peninsular & Occidental Steamship Co, Morton Freeman Plant knew a thing or two about getting from A to B as quickly as possible. So when he commissioned designer Nat Herreshoff to build him a racing schooner in 1910, it had to be one that would win races. The elegant steel-hulled *Elena* was sent down the ways in 1911 at Bristol, Rhode Island, embarking on a stellar racing career that saw off pretty much all-comers for two decades.

After that, her fortunes tailed off, ending as scrap in the 1950s. That could well have been the end of the *Elena* story but there was one person

in the 21st Century who knew the yacht's history and appreciated what she had to offer. Steve McLaren is a former captain of *Eleonora*, a replica of another Herreshoff

Westward – one of the schooner rivals of *Elena* from the golden age of gladiatorial sailing confrontations. He was seeking a new project on behalf of an owner, and he soon lighted on the idea of reproducing *Elena*. The aim was to create a yacht that had the same turn of speed as the original, but also offered the modern-day charter guest a level of comfort that wasn't available in 1910.

The recreated *Elena* you see here was launched at Factoria Naval de

Marin in 2009, and she has a busy season ahead, with charter bookings and an appearance at the St Barths Bucket in March. "She's always welcomed with open arms by the modern yachts," says Steve. "The races aren't really set up for us, but we get great compliments, especially from contemporary designers."

When it came to recreating *Elena* there was plenty of archive material available to Steve, including the original plans – the reborn yacht has almost the same 41.6-metre hull length. "The original owner wanted a performance yacht pure and simple. He had his own motor yacht for comfortable cruising, so the accommodation aboard was very

sparse. There was no engine and no mod-cons. This *Elena* is a full-on charter boat, with all the systems you'd expect. There's a large V12 engine and variable-pitch

propellers, three generators and bow thrusters. When you build the boat with that much equipment you can never get quite the same ballast ratio as the original. The yacht had to be on the same flotation marks as the original, but when you factor in all those systems and the weight of the mahogany interior, you have to deduct that from the original lead ballast. This brings the centre of the gravity higher," he says. "We were, however, able to make the spars

CRUISING & RACING







Top: The full-beam salon and dining area, amidships between the guest sleeping cabins aft and the crew quarters forward.

Left: Mahogany panelling throughout follows Herreshoff's original styling.

Right and above far right: Inside one of the two port-side double guest cabins. *Elena* sleeps eight on charter.

Above right: There is a pair of twin cabins to starboard.



hollow, whereas the originals were solid, which clawed some weight back. It would be interesting to have the original yacht to race against to see which is faster."

The sail area is about the same at 1,300 square metres. "We add something new to the sail inventory each season. We just want to keep improving her performance."

So has the yacht mainly been chartered by traditionalists? "You'd expect real sailing enthusiasts to charter *Elena*, and they do, but they don't exclusively make up the charter parties. We've had a number of parties who'd never experienced a boat like this, and they look a little bemused at first but they soon learn to love *Elena* and what she can offer. One Caribbean charter this winter was with a life-long sailor, whose own

yacht is in Europe, and he just fancied a change. Sometimes we have families on board who are happy to sail just once or twice in a week."

Steve is keen to underline that the yacht is well set up for family charters. "We have a container that follows us around," says Steve. "We've just arrived in Antigua, so we're switching now from delivery mode to charter mode, and in March we'll be back in race mode, when we pack away all the deck furniture. Over the years we've improved the comforts on deck, without spoiling the look of the yacht."

The preferred spot for guests is usually the cockpit. "Everyone wants to be outside. There's acres of deck space without any obstacles. Even when it's raining the guests want to be on deck. We put up the awnings

and they stay out there. I'm a true blue sailor so my own favourite place is at the wheel. I love it when we're in race mode, and like nothing better than spending all day there," he says.

Steve normally runs the boat with eight crew, adding an extra body when on charter. They have a big race crew available that boosts crew numbers to 36 on race days. "You can't take this boat racing with half-a-dozen people," he says.

The original *Elena* raced across the Atlantic in 1928 and was then based in Europe for her American owner. When the war broke out, she was gifted to the Admiralty, which

probably didn't have a lot of use for a schooner. They did, however, strip out 100 tonnes of lead – "she'll have made an awful lot of bullets", is how Steve puts it. That meant the boat

lifted in the water and was floating at the wrong level while on a mooring in Hythe, where she served as a quarantine ward for infectious diseases. "You can imagine there was very little maintenance," says Steve. "She was probably just rusting to death." In 1954 the order came to scrap her.

"It was a sad end, but we should remember that it's not a bygone era at all. There are all the revived J Class yachts, with replicas and rebuilds, and there is of course *Elena*. The classic racing fleets are growing. The simple fact is that it's more fun.

"You can commission a modern sailing yacht as the fastest thing afloat, but you can bet it won't be the fastest in a year's time," he says. *Elena* charters through Y.CO from €80,000pw. Website: y.co

"It's a simple fact: these type of yachts are more fun"

