

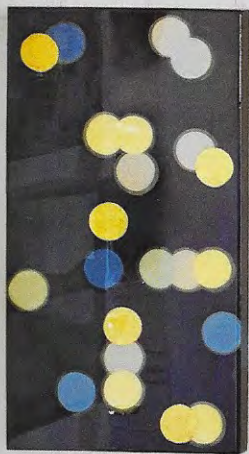
# VERANDA

## SUMMER ON THE WATER

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The bow's original bronze filigrees were lost, then replicated in aluminum. The exterior joinery is sapele mahogany.

# A RETURN TO GLORY

The 1920s Mathis-Trumpy *Freedom* is restored to her original splendor, recalling the lavish era of classic motor yachts.



The original painted decking was replaced with natural teak. RIGHT: A 1930s magazine advertisement for the sale of *Freedom*. FAR RIGHT: The yacht's original owner, Jessie Woolworth Donahue

SHE MUST HAVE BEEN IRRESISTIBLE. What wasn't to adore along the 104 feet of this regal watercraft? To Jessie Woolworth Donahue, daughter of retail magnate F.W. Woolworth and then one of prewar America's wealthiest women, the vessel was indeed perfect. A slender beam ideal for gliding the intracoastal waters surrounding her Palm Beach house. A plumb bow that rose straight up from the waterline like the aquiline forehead of an aristocrat. A divinely proportioned counter stern with an elliptical fantail that curved gently up and aft with the grace of a ballerina's gesture. Bronze scrollwork that glowed in the sun. A low, sturdy stack nestled alongside one heaven-reaching, raked mast. Behind, the romance of sail. Ahead, the power and promise of engines.

And within, the ultimate expression of how one lived: a trio of expansive double staterooms (plus one single), three baths, lounging and dining saloons (with mahogany walls, beams, and deckhouse), and interiors decorated in grand style by famed retailer Wanamaker (the decor alone was advertised to have cost \$30,000).

Irresistible.



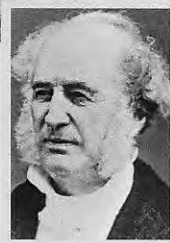
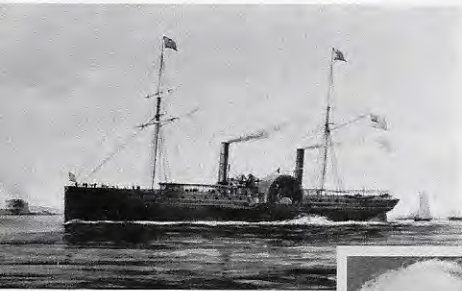
MAIN IMAGE: ALISON LANGLEY; JESSIE WOOLWORTH DONAHUE: GETTY IMAGES; MOTOR BOATING MAGAZINE: COURTESY OF MCMIKEN YACHTS.

Wealth. Opulence. Assurance. And perhaps most symbolically, a signal of one's freedom to roam from enclave to enclave, from season to season, in high luxury. Sold, then, was the 1926 Mathis-Trumpy *Freedom* to Donahue. She was, of course, a member of the Gilded Age class that commissioned or acquired yachts with the same alacrity they built mansions and seized the goldenmost layer of the American dream.

"In these days, newly minted millionaires had their list of things to acquire, to check the box to be a proper

# YACHTING'S GILDED GIANTS

*A look at the lives and times of the women and men who commissioned some of the world's most stunning vessels.*



## The Vanderbilts

Dubbed the country's preeminent yacht-building family by author Ross MacTaggart (see far right), the legacy began with **Cornelius "Commodore"**

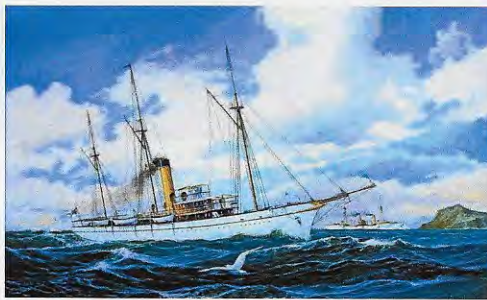
**Vanderbilt** commissioning **North Star**, the first American steam yacht, in 1853 for \$500,000 (about \$16.5 million in today's dollars). His descendants carried on in grand style, including great-grandson Harold Stirling Vanderbilt and his exploration-minded brother William K. Vanderbilt II, who circumnavigated the world on the 264-foot steam yacht, **Alva**.

## Sir Thomas Lipton

Like other millionaires of the time, this Glaswegian tea merchant of renown came from humble origins. But he took full advantage of his wealth onboard **Erin**, a 1,240-ton steam yacht he purchased in 1898. Though the charming bachelor was known to entertain lavishly, he was also a well-known philanthropist and humanitarian, even loaning the use of **Erin** to the British Red Cross Society as it worked to control a devastating typhus epidemic in Serbia during World War I.



Sir Thomas Lipton aboard **Erin**, circa 1920, headed for Newport, Rhode Island



## Jay Gould

The ruthless robber baron, financier, and Western Union magnate may have possessed ill-gotten gains, but he poured them into the commissioning of **Atalanta**, the 228-foot, three-masted steam yacht whose launching in Philadelphia in 1883 made the pages of the *New York Times*. Used by Gould for ocean voyages and racing, **Atalanta** was sold in 1902 to the Venezuelan Navy.

millionaire," says Earl McMillen III, a Newport, Rhode Island-based yacht restorer and de facto historian of the period. "You'd have a house in Palm Beach, Newport, or Bar Harbor in the summer," he continues, "a shooting plantation in South Carolina or Georgia, and on that list was a proper yacht. It was a lifestyle that everyone saw."

This maritime striving, according to author Ross MacTaggart, spawned a century's worth of high-profile boats. The wave began in 1830, he notes, with an Englishman who commissioned the first known motor yacht: the steam-driven **Menai**, complete with paddle wheels that made her look like a hybrid of a submarine and a Mississippi riverboat. While the design may have seemed maladroit, the outcome was profound: "For the first time," MacTaggart writes in his book *Millionaires, Mansions, and Motor Yachts*, "an individual could control his or her vessel's

schedule." No waiting for tides, currents, winds. And while the late 1800s saw the addition of luxury rail travel, the promise was more confined than the private yacht: "A millionaire still had to accept the fact that trains went where they *could*, not where you *wanted*," MacTaggart writes. "What was the point of being a millionaire if one could not do whatever one wanted, whenever and wherever? And comfortably?"

As the 20th century opened, and as industrialists and other millionaires like Cornelius Vanderbilt, J.P. Morgan, their offspring, and rising nouveau riche joined the elite rosters, naval architects strove to create vessels that matched those aspirations. Private motor yachts diversified: some built for ocean-going explorations, others—like **Freedom**—for cruising protected waters along the Eastern seaboard, and others still for speedy commuting from one's

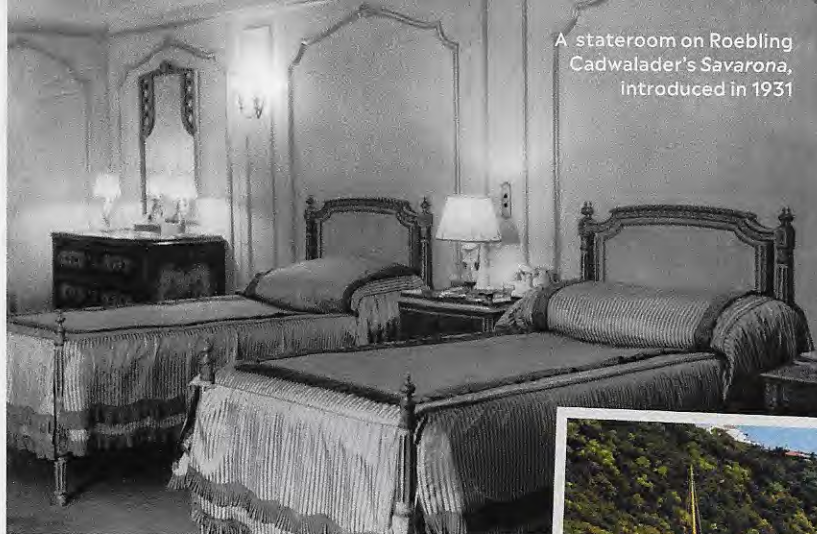
## J.P. Morgan

Both a yachting and sailing enthusiast, the industrialist served as commodore of the New York Yacht Club in the late 1800s and was famed for his three *Corsair* steam yachts (one of which was pressed into service as a gunboat during the Spanish-American War). His son, J.P. Morgan, Jr., emulated his father with commodore status at the renowned yacht club from 1919 to 1921 and the commissioning of *Corsair IV*. It was built in 1930 at 343 feet, the largest yacht at the time.



*“If you have to ask how much a yacht costs, you can’t afford one.”*

—ATTRIBUTED TO  
J.P. MORGAN



A stateroom on Roebling Cadwalader's *Savarona*, introduced in 1931

## Emily Roebling Cadwalader

Granddaughter of the engineer who designed the Brooklyn Bridge, this Philadelphia socialite made the grand statement of commissioning five yachts in six years (along with her husband, Richard M. Cadwalader, Jr.). Two are of historical status. *Sequoia II*, a Mathis-Trumpy sister to *Freedom*, went on to become the U.S. presidential yacht (and was thereafter known only as *Sequoia*). She also commissioned the largest, most expensive private yacht then built—the 407-foot *Savarona*—at a cost of \$4 million in 1931 (\$66 million in today's dollars).



President and Mrs. Roosevelt aboard *Sequoia*

For more on patrons of the Gilded Age and their yachts, see *The Golden Century: Classic Motor Yachts, 1830-1930* and *Millionaires, Mansions, and Motor Yachts: An Era of Opulence*, both by Ross MacTaggart (W.W. Norton & Co.).

estate, say, on Long Island to the New York Yacht Club's dock at 26th Street on the East River. The costs to build these crafts (in the millions of dollars at the time), not to mention maintain them—all the way down the ledger to stylish nautical dress for every crew member—were monumental. As Morgan is often surmised to have said, “If you have to ask how much a yacht costs, you can’t afford one.”

And in the 1920s, many agree the form reached its design apogee. Designers like Jonah Trumpy were working at the peak of their craft, creating silhouettes of grace and proportion that carved their way elegantly through water and spaces throughout that matched those of mansions and country homes on land. It was a bright era that was snuffed out nearly entirely by the combined economic effects of the imposition of income tax in 1914 and the Depression thereafter, not to mention the rise in the use

of automobiles, the improvement of roads, and finally, the new promise of air travel. As happens to all empires, the glory days of the great private yacht were closing.

But for McMillen, there were survivors to be found, restored, and relaunched. “If they’re lost, they’re lost forever,” he says, recounting how *Freedom*, in fact, nearly suffered that fate. From the hands of Mrs. Donahue, the houseboat (Trumpy’s term for his class of luxury yachts, whose interiors were emulations of all the comforts of home) had been sold in 1939 to a real estate developer in Florida who renamed her *Sunset* to promote his own Sunset Islands development near Miami. A succession of Florida owners followed, but by 2001, the craft was languishing in a warehouse in Jacksonville and slated for demolition. McMillen learned of the boat’s grim, looming fate from MacTaggart and moved quickly. He bought her for one



## A SLICE OF HIGH-SEAS HERITAGE

While restoring classic wooden yachts in Newport in the early 1990s, McMillen saw that “there were a number of magnificent and classic yachts still out there, abandoned,” he recalls. Shortly after, he dreamed up a fractional ownership program, selling shares of the yachts to preservation-minded enthusiasts. Since then, McMillen has restored numerous historically significant vessels, including *Freedom* and her sister ship, *Enticer*.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: A late 1920s photo shows *Freedom*'s starboard deck looking aft from her wheelhouse. The restored *Freedom*. The main saloon as seen in the 1920s. Newport-based restorers Earl and Elizabeth McMillen

and its aspirations. “*Freedom* was the most refined and finest-looking of the boats that [Trumpy] built,” he says. “The joinery, the details, the hardware...everything about her is sort of perfect in my opinion.”

hundred dollars and undertook the near-Herculean process to move her up the coast to his facilities in the greater Newport area (one of the nation's centers of boatbuilding and restoration) and to raise the funds—\$7.5 million—to restore her. In May of 2009, rebuilt painstakingly plank by plank, the yacht returned to service, thanks to a creative fractional ownership syndicate assembled by McMillen, and took her original name back. In 2010, *Freedom* won the World Superyacht Best Rebuilt award in London. “It's the Oscars of the yachting industry,” McMillen says.

It's no wonder. Brought back lovingly in full splendor, *Freedom* represents the very finest expression of the age

McMillen laments a turn away from that balance and proportion among this generation's newly minted billionaires. “Everything I see today, it's glitzy and shiny and big, but you lose me there,” he says. “In my opinion, the billionaire of today is most interested in building bigger. They've lost sight of how to build a beautiful boat.”

“These wooden boats are organic,” he says, returning to the crafts he loves like family. “You get a sense that they're a living, breathing organism. They have almost a human-like attachment. There's something about going to sea on a wooden boat.”

One might almost consider it irresistible. ♦