

Labour of Love:

BY TONY MIRÓ

An Interview with Puerto Rico Sailor Paul Exner, Owner/Builder of Solstice

TONY MIRÓ

In preparation for Hurricane Omar's visit to our beloved Caribbean I was walking through the docks at Puerto del Rey Marina when I met Paul Exner. Paul is an avid sailor and the proud owner/builder of *Solstice*, a Cape George 31 cutter, a beautiful classic-looking sailboat he built in a dairy barn in Madison, Wisconsin.

Paul is so passionate about sailing and his beloved *Solstice* that I decided I needed to spread the news about his amazing story...which began with a childhood dream...

How did you get started?

"I had a dream to build my own oceangoing sailboat and sail it non-stop from 'somewhere' through the gun-sights of Fort El Morro in San Juan, Puerto Rico. In 1990, while working for Steve Colgate at his Offshore Sailing School in Captiva Island, Florida, I saved about five thousand dollars in six months. I eventually used that money to buy *Solstice's* hull.

How did you find about the Cape George 31 Cutter & why did you choose this particular sailboat?

"In Ferenc Mate's book "From a Bare Hull," he lists several companies who would supply a Bare Hull. The design I liked best was the Cape George 31. After phoning Cecil M. Lange & Son and talking with them, and seeing the boat yard, the boats, and meeting them and the current owner of now Cape George Marine Works, Todd Uecker, I was convinced these were the people to partner with in a boat building project.

What other boats did you consider?

"I considered Morris, Pacific Seacraft, Bristol Channel Cutter, and a couple other designs. All the other designs lacked robustness in construction of the hull and the ability to attach other structure reinforcing components.

Who helped you during the building process?

"I managed the project and did a majority of the construction, but I could not have done it without Todd Uecker, Mike Barnet or Jo Reis. I literally did not sleep for YEARS!

Tell us more about Solstice.

"Her hull is built of solid woven-roving glass using 100% Vinylester Resin. *Solstice's* hull is 1/2" solid glass at her sheer to 1" thick at her keel. She uses an internal ballast of 7,800 lbs of lead. Her deck is made of wooden laminated deck beams of quarter-sawn Port Orford Cedar, and two layers of marine plywood heavily sheathed-over by biaxial fiberglass and mat. Her cabin house is made of cold-molded marine plywood about 1.25" thick. Her wood interior is of teak, Honduras mahogany, and various other woods and also fittings of stainless steel, silicon bronze, and brass. She's a classy little yacht and looks like a wooden boat from below.

"*Solstice's* hull was drawn by Tim Nolan and Carl Chamberlin. Their design is based on the great work of naval architect William Atkin. She is a fast boat, despite being heavy, and is designed for offshore passage-making. We have sailed 180 nautical miles in one day! She can be heavily laden with about 3,000 lbs of supplies without affecting her performance.

"Please note that I had a hand in the design and construction of every aspect of *Solstice's* construction except the hull. Even the Mast, the Engine Bearers, the Engine installation, shaft and propeller, rudder, cabin superstructure, ballast, tankage, interior design and construction, and sail design.

How did you get her to Puerto Rico?

"I launched *Solstice* in Lake Michigan, Racine, Wisconsin in July 2002. I sailed it around the Great Lakes from '02 to '06. In April of 2007, I trucked *Solstice* from Chicago, Illinois to Charleston, South Carolina. I then realized my dream by sailing her non-stop from Charleston to Puerto Rico in 8 Days, 20 Hours.

"It took me 10.5 years and 7,000 labor hours to construct *Solstice* from a Bare Hull!"

Paul doesn't know what it cost to build her...but it sure was a life sacrifice and a Labour of Love...👏

Capt. Tony Miró is a life-long sailor, photographer and web developer who currently lives in Puerto Rico with his family, where they sail aboard their Hunter 376 ¡Nada Mas! He supports two sailing web sites, www.sailboatspecs.com & www.caribesailingadventures.com



Construction

