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Mr. Renovation

**Marine surveyor
Tim Lackey
makes a name for himself**

by Al Lorman

HOW PUFFED UP WOULD YOU FEEL IF almost 3,000 people a month admired your handiwork? Tim Lackey's boat projects get at least that many admiring glances and he still manages to be a pretty humble guy.

Most of us don't have more than one or two good old boat restorations in us; Tim is planning his fourth. He Awlgripped his first sailboat, a Pearson Ensign, in 1999. It was the success of that experience, he says, "that has led to all this silliness." The "silliness" includes a much-admired restoration of a Pearson Triton, completed in 2001.

Three years ago he bought a 1963 Lyman 23 sleeper in need of some work, and during the winter of 2004-05 he spent most of his free hours turning the gutted hull of another Triton into an elegant daysailer of his own design. And to make sure that there's another project in the pipeline, he recently bought a fire-damaged 1964 Allied Seabreeze 35 yawl as a "long-term project."

Amid all of this, he built a two-boat "boat barn" in his North Yarmouth, Maine, backyard, meticulously documented all of his work on several websites of his own design, and also found time to earn a living as a marine surveyor in the summer and run a

snowplow in the winter. And he's already started work on what he calls Version 2.0 of the boat barn. Tim also does most of the cooking and cleaning around the house in which he and his wife, Heidi, live.

Tim, 38, is well on his way to doing what most of us can only dream of doing: turning his hobby (obsession?) into his vocation. In fact, he now has an umbrella organization, Lackey Sailing, LLC, and a website, <<http://www.lackeysailing.com>>, that serves as the portal to his various sites and endeavors. If Lackey Sailing, LLC, gives the impression that Tim is on his way to becoming a sailing conglomerate, that may not be much of an exaggeration.

A lifetime in boats

Tim has been sailing since he was 10 years old. Originally from the greater New York area, his family moved to Portland, Maine, in 1976 to "escape the rat race" for the "cleaner, more relaxed lifestyle in Maine." Tim relates that "shortly after settling in Maine, my parents bought a new Pearson 30. My mother had sailed on her parents' cutter as a child, but otherwise the whole boating experience was new to them. I was enrolled in a junior sailing program and learned to sail on Turn-

abouts and Widgeons. I never took to dinghy sailing, in general, and always preferred the sailing experience in larger boats."

The seeds of his conglomerate can be seen even at this point. "I used to build crude wooden sailboats and powerboats and would float them on moorings in our swimming pool," he says. "I had a whole fleet and even had a little boatyard on one side of the pool where I would haul out and 'maintain' these boats. Later, I took it upon myself to renovate (several times) an 8-foot fiberglass dinghy that we had. I experimented with a few different paint jobs, inside and out, which, I suppose, was a hallmark of things to come.

"After several years of successful racing and cruising in the P-30, my parents made the bold move to step up to a 1980 C&C 40, a dealer demo boat that was basically brand-new. This boat remained in the family for nearly 20 years. It was on this boat that I spent most of my formative years, racing and cruising extensively



with my family. I always enjoyed this, and by my mid- and later teens was frequently taking care of the boat myself between weekend races. This was probably the start of my love for boat maintenance and projects, though I doubt I knew it at the time.”

Indirect path

Tim says he knew fairly early on that he would spend his life with boats, but here, too, the path was not always direct. After high school he enrolled at the Maine Maritime Academy because it offered classes in naval architecture, “a career in which I thought I was interested,” he says. “Interestingly enough, I never ended up taking a single naval architecture course; at some point I decided that this was too heavily involved in mathematics and engineering, subjects which didn’t particularly interest me. I never really wanted or intended to ship out as a merchant mariner either, though I seriously thought about doing it for a few years just to get a start at something.”

After graduating from the academy, Tim spent several years as a launch operator, a year working in the glass shop at Hinckley Yachts (which he credits with his knowledge of fiberglass even though he recalls it as a difficult and challenging year), and then working on the management teams at two local marinas, one with a working boatyard attached. He readily concedes that “it soon became clear that what I didn’t like was working at the behest of others: under their schedules, deadlines, and rules.” Tim says that this combination of experience, coupled with his overall boating love

and knowledge, eventually led him to the marine survey option as a career. He started the surveying business as a part-time job but soon jumped into self-employment full time, even though he wasn’t sure he was ready for it. “Fortunately,” he says, “I managed to survive.”

Powerboat phase

Tim admits to an early detour through powerboating. Before buying the En-

sign, he owned a 25-foot Aquasport center console, a 31-foot Rampage sport fisherman, and a 26-foot Mako. “I got into saltwater fishing for a time,” he explains, “thoroughly enjoying the sport even though I wasn’t much good at it. For a while I contemplated commercial tuna fishing, which at the time was big here in Maine, hence the large 31-footer. It soon became clear that it was way too much boat and commitment for me, and I traded



On facing page, Tim Lackey’s well-known project boat, *Glissando*, a Pearson Triton, shows off on the water after her refit. The inset shows a second Triton in its “before stage.” Tim later converted this boat into a daysailer. He continues to buy and renovate boats, but *Glissando* is part of the family. In the midst of his projects, Tim took the time to build the boat barn, at right, in which to work. *Glissando* waits outside while two others get needed attention inside: the daysailer conversion and a classic Lyman 23.



Tim at work on his daysailer. This like-new boat, based on what was a derelict Triton hull, has a 12-foot long cockpit, a small cuddy cabin, and a brand-new Vetus engine. Tim sold this project boat, which he calls the Daysailor, almost as soon as it was finished.

down to the 26 Mako for a year before I became thoroughly bored with fishing and powerboating and then made the switch back to sail — where I always knew I'd end up."

Tim credits his powerboat years with helping develop his approach to sailboats: "The powerboat years are important because they highlighted for me how important it is to do things myself and also how important it is to maintain relative simplicity. The powerboats were over my head financially and also from a maintenance standpoint, but it's where I really began to learn how to maintain my own boats. The costs involved in hiring work out, which I still did at the time, drove me to this mantra of self-sufficiency that I now herald."

Enter the Ensign

Tim bought the Ensign in 1998. The same year he met Heidi, who would become his wife. They soon decided that a cruising boat, rather than a small daysailer, now fit the bill. He quickly identified the Triton as a likely successor to his beloved Ensign; both, of course, are Alberg designs. They bought their first Triton in 1999 and began what turned into a 21-month-long project, one that created *Glissando*, one of the web's better-known boats and the subject of a website that serves as a virtual how-to guide for most sailboat issues <[\[triton381.com/\]\(http://www.triton381.com/\)>. Tim says he started the website because he found the sites of other Triton owners "incredibly helpful." He and Heidi decided, after they bought the boat, that "it would be nice to put together something](http://www.</p>
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simple documenting my own project, since the other websites I had referred to had proved so instrumental to me. I never foresaw how the site would grow or what a following might arise."

While Heidi had sailed only once before she met Tim, she soon became a willing co-conspirator in Tim's projects. While her labors have been limited to making very impressive cabin and cockpit cushions for *Glissando*, "no one is more supportive of my interests and obsessions than Heidi," Tim says. "It was at her insistence that I built a dedicated boat barn, and she

utes away in Falmouth Foreside.

While Heidi works in the accounting and reporting department of a large local bank, Tim is his own boss and can take off for a sail whenever the weather and his schedule permit. Tim usually daysails several days each week and admits he rarely goes more than a day without at least checking on *Glissando*. Tim and Heidi annually take a several-week cruise along the Maine coast as well as several week-end cruises. Tim claims that he bought the larger Seabreeze so they could take along their two dogs, the dogs having found *Glissando* a bit crowded.

He says the most significant lesson he learned while restoring *Glissando* was that "time is the most important factor in any and all boat projects. A lack of time to spend working is the main reason behind many failures. I was fortunate enough to be able to adjust my boat-working time upward as required to complete the project within the allotted time frame; I had

a launch deadline that I never intended to miss. If I had not been able to dedicate nearly full-

time to the project during many of the months, I would never have completed the project within the time frame."

The time problem

Tim says that he now counsels would-be boat restorers "to seriously and honestly address the time issue from their end. A lack of time for the project (which is natural with family and work commitments) will end up forcing unwanted delays, which in turn lead to a general loss of interest in a never-ending project. Most people have far less time available for a big project than they care to believe, even using their pessimistic projections. Unfortunately, this leads to many languishing — and even abandoned — projects."

On his website, Tim says, "We are sailors at heart, but there is always room in a sailor's life for a small powerboat, particularly one as classic as a Lyman." Tim bought the boat in Massachusetts in early 2004. Although it came with a trailer, Tim decided that

“The costs involved in hiring work out, which I still did at the time, drove me to this mantra of self-sufficiency that I now herald.”

has never once complained about the time I spend involved with the many boats. I am able to balance my time and still get things done at the house, though the house is not my main focus. If I neglected her, things might be different. But I still do most of the housework and cooking and most of the yard maintenance in the summer. I appreciate her support and enthusiasm for my obsession more than I can say."

Virtual friends

The *Glissando* project gave Tim cult status among many sailors, and his willingness to share his time and experience with strangers by email helped create for him a nationwide circle of "virtual" friends. Tim regularly corresponds with numerous sailors by email. The guest book on *Glissando's* website has been signed by hundreds of visitors, and since 2003 the site itself has received an average of 2,800 hits a month. Tim and Heidi live in North Yarmouth and moor *Glissando* 20 min-

“Most people have far less time available for a big project than they care to believe, even using their pessimistic projections.”

the trailer would not serve his purposes. “We wanted our own trailer, no matter what, since the whole purpose of the boat was to be able to take her places on our own, as well as haul and launch her seasonally ourselves, allowing for extended boating seasons without worry about spring and fall storms on the coast.” So, in a scenario familiar to most boatowners, Tim spent more to have a first-rate trailer built by Loadmaster Trailer Company than he paid for the Lyman (for confirmation of this, see article on Page 13). To save shipping charges, he drove to Ohio to pick up his new trailer, drove back to Massachusetts to pick up the Lyman, and brought her back to Maine. Although she has her own website, the Lyman has not received — nor needed — the attention the Tritons have received.

Custom Triton daysailer

Tim conceived the idea of building a daysailer based on a Triton hull because of his love for the sailing abilities and the lines of the Alberg hull. And because he was also honest enough to admit that “much as I enjoyed the obvious pleasures of sailing *Glissando*, and despite the fact that there were still plenty of smaller projects to complete, I had to face up to the thought that I actually missed having my project boat in the backyard.” While a 28-foot cruiser is small by today’s standards, the Triton hull creates a superb platform for a daysailer keel boat, a type enjoying a recent comeback, although most of the new daysailers seem to start at about 36 feet and carry price tags in the six figures.

Tim’s design for what he calls the Daysailer features a 12-foot long cockpit, a small cuddy cabin, a new Vetus diesel engine and, of course, Tim’s fastidious attention to detail. The boat had been on the hard for at least 12 years and was regarded as a “true derelict.” Tim picked up the boat for a song, had it hauled to Maine, and literally gutted it. Everything else is, or will be, new.

The Daysailer is the first boat that Tim has built specifically for resale. He plans to keep *Glissando* even after the Seabreeze project is complete. *Glis-*

sando will continue to live near Tim in Falmouth Foreside, while the Seabreeze will be moored in a yet-to-be-determined harbor in Penobscot Bay. In fact, Tim identifies the Daysailer as “the basis of my newest enterprise. I have now formed Lackey Sailing, LLC, to serve as the main umbrella under which I operate as a business.” Because Tim is also a marine surveyor, he says he “will never survey a boat on which I work, nor work on a boat that I have surveyed.” Indeed, until Tim created *lackeysailing.com*, the *Glissando* website did not disclose the fact that Tim is a marine surveyor, thus passing up endless free advertising.

Sticking with glass


Although a Maine resident, Tim hasn’t been particularly attracted to the wooden-boat revival largely led by his Maine neighbor, *WoodenBoat* magazine. “My whole background and experience is with fiberglass boats,” Tim explains. “I know that I am more skilled with fiberglass than with wood and, as a man who knows his limitations, I realize that I am best served working in this particular medium. I don’t knowingly resist the wooden boat culture; I love wooden boats and their resulting culture here in Maine. But I prefer for the moment to stick to what I know best. There’s no denying that fiberglass boats require substantial maintenance and eventual repair and, as one skilled in that area, I am happy to continue working with the material.” Nonetheless, he doesn’t discount the possibility of one day working with more wooden boats.

Beyond completing the Daysailer and restoring the Seabreeze for his own use, Tim’s plans for the future are to build a business focused on the preservation of classic fiberglass sailboats. Tim and Heidi also have selected a new venue for the business and

for their home; they’ve just bought 50 acres in Whitefield, a small inland

town conveniently located close to the mid-coast of Maine. There, Tim has already started work on a new boat barn large enough to hold two boat bays, a workshop, and an office. The planned start for their home is spring 2006. “The new land will help offer even greater potential for spec and commissioned boat projects,” he says, “as well as provide us with a quiet, idyllic setting away from the inexorably increasing bustle of southern Maine.”

A big unknown for Tim is whether future boat buyers will be willing to pay him a fair price for a plastic classic that is essentially a new boat. Tim’s Triton Daysailer, launched August 26 and listed for sale at \$89,900, costs less than a new production boat of comparable quality, but more than if the buyer were to do the work him or herself.

Few of us, though, have Tim’s combination of vision, attention to detail, and artistry — and the skill to put all three together in a memorable boat. So if anyone can make a go of rebuilding plastic classics, Tim Lackey is probably that person. Two months after the Daysailer was launched, he had a contract for her sale. 

***Pixie*, an Allied Seabreeze 35, was a fire-damaged wreck when Tim brought her home. *Glissando* will sail out of Falmouth Foreside in Maine; *Pixie* will be based in Maine’s Penobscot Bay. Tim admits to being in love with the sailing abilities and the classic lines of Alberg hulls and others of the same era.**

