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**EXPLORE
BRITISH COLUMBIA'S
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THE 80-YEAR OLD
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Advertisement



Heesen

55M STEEL
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Adventure Unscripted: Onboard *Pacific Yellowfin*

Captain Colin Griffinson charts you through British Columbia, exploring wildlife, fjords, and the charm of staying onboard a refurbished 80-year-old superyacht. By **Leona Caanen**.

At her helm of the 35-metre motor yacht sits the Irish Captain Colin Griffinson. A fifth-generation painter, Colin and his Canadian wife moved from Ireland to British Columbia in their 20s. There, Colin built up his painting business, turning houses into castles. Yet his passion has always been rebuilding wooden boats, from small yachts to big sailboats. Coming to own the *Pacific Yellowfin*, Colin has spent the last 25 years nurturing her.

Four Decades of Cruising

Before she was a charter yacht, the *Pacific Yellowfin* was a military vessel built in 1943 to carry heavy supply loads and troops. She traversed the globe serving in research expeditions for the US Navy and the California Department of Fish and Game. Later on the *Pacific Yellowfin* was chartered by the United Fruit Company - a front for the CIA - working down in Central America. Eventually, *Pacific Yellowfin* landed in the hands of Pete, who lived on Orcas Island, near Seattle and had traded a piece of his land in exchange for the yacht.

Right before the turn of the century, *Pacific Yellowfin's* new owner hosted a retired tugboat party, inviting about 50 tugboats to come race around. One of the attendees was Captain Colin with his 14-metre boat *Cape Horn*. Although not for sale, upon seeing *Cape Horn*, Pete asked Captain Colin to buy his boat. Many beers later, Captain Colin agreed to trade boats: *Cape Horn* in exchange for *Pacific Yellowfin*.



KALI WEXLER

“When you’re rebuilding a boat like this, you do everything three times to get it right.”



PACIFIC YELLOWFIN CHARTER



KALI WEXLER



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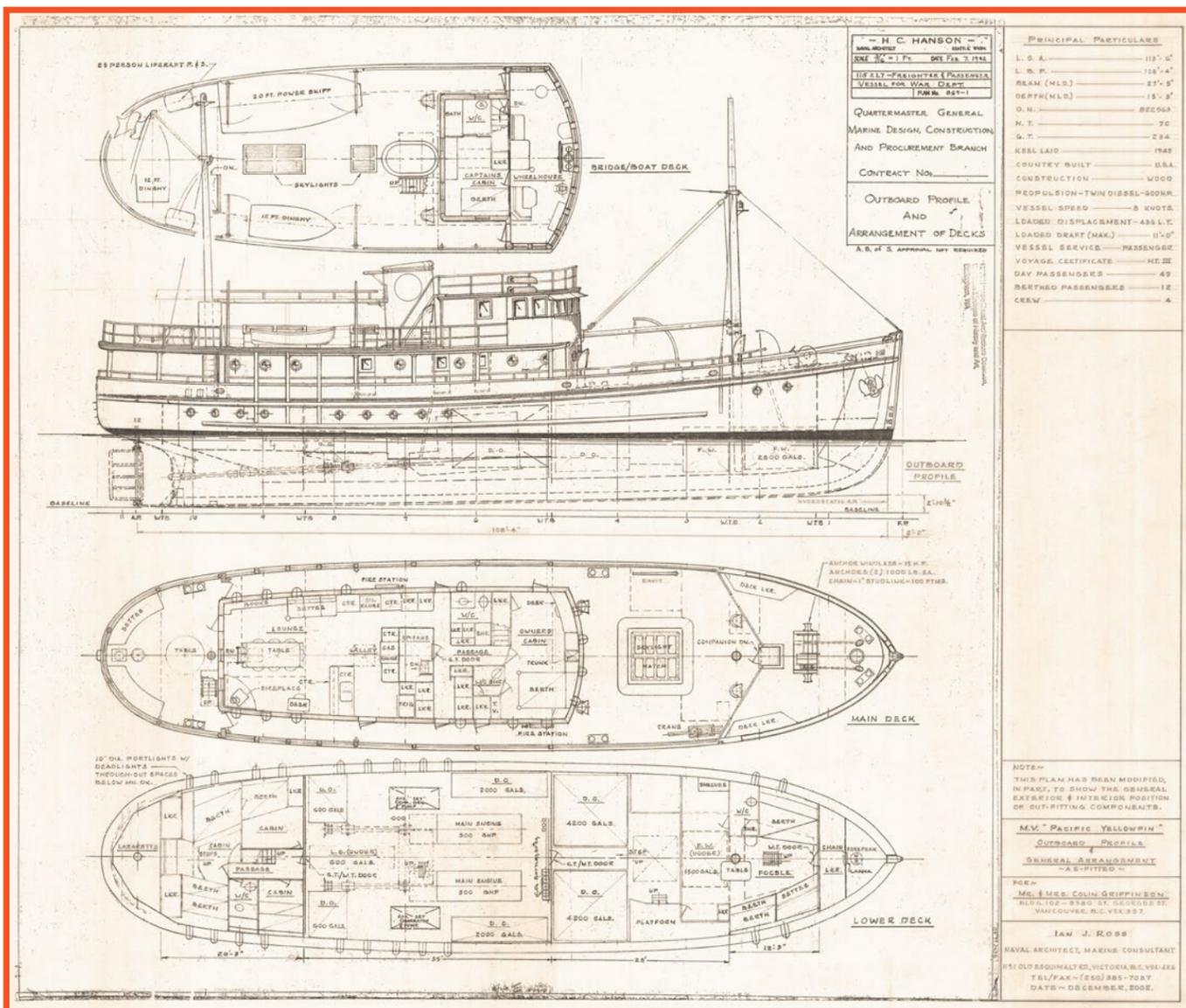
Under Karma's Watchful Eye

Now that the yacht was Colin's, he went full-throttle on fixing her up, and has, over the last quarter century, completely rebuilt the original boat. From re-caulking to re-fastening, changing planks and redone interiors, there's little that hasn't been renewed. Captain Colin has been adamant to keep *Pacific Yellowfin's* original look - after all, she is a heritage vessel. By now, Colin knows the ins and outs of the entire yacht, "When you're rebuilding a boat like this, you do everything three times to get it right."

Throughout rebuilding the *Pacific Yellowfin*, it became clear that she has some good karma. So much so, that Captain Colin's kids claim he should write a book about it. One example of that is when Captain Colin found a crack in their 27-foot drive shaft during an annual haul out. While most drive shafts come in standard sizes, anything above 24 feet needs to be custom-made. Colin's long-time engineer was having coffee with an old-timer who used to work at the shipyard, and he explained what was going on with the drive shaft. The old-timer knew for a fact that there should be something that fit *Pacific Yellowfin* at the yard. After some searching, hidden under thorny blackberry bushes, was a 30-foot drive shaft. Captain Colin took it down to the machine shop and got it tailored to fit *Pacific Yellowfin*.

Another example of the *Pacific Yellowfin's* good karma is when Colin stumbled upon her original plans in Bellingham, Washington State, where war ships were built. At the time, the yacht was in need of a rebuild, but the team had no plans and making new ones would be incredibly expensive. A week or two later in Bellingham, walking into a random store, there, on the wall, sat a print diagram of a few wooden boats. One of them was the *Pacific Yellowfin*. The clerk redirected them to the museum, where the curator organised to get them copies for the original plans. Two weeks later, with \$1,000 in his pocket, Captain Colin went to pick the plans up, expecting it to cost a fortune. The curator charged him a mere \$29 to cover printing costs.

While she has been meticulously maintained since Captain Colin took on ownership, there have been no big structural changes to her design. Her state rooms and cabins are quaint, just like they were when part of the military fleet. The rooms have, however, been upgraded, including bigger beds and private ensuites. The yacht can host 12 guests, although some rooms can be transformed slightly to fit a family of three. Including the captain, five crew fit onboard. Now, with an updated interior and a refurbished exterior, the *Pacific Yellowfin* shines as she glides through the fjords of British Columbia.



PACIFIC YELLOWFIN CHARTER

Chartering the Fjords of British Columbia

It's not just her good karma or adventurous history that make the *Pacific Yellowfin* so special. Nor that she's the last one left of the original 75 builds. It's the experience offered on charter routes that connects people with the yacht and has them coming back year after year.

One of the only complaints about the *Pacific Yellowfin*, especially by brokers, is that she's never available: A fault of the clients coming back year after year. Yet becoming such a well-loved charter hadn't been a part of Captain Colin's plans. It was Diane Fraser, from Fraser Yachts, who managed to convince the captain to charter the historical beauty. When the Captain's teenage daughters didn't think it was cool to cruise with dad, Colin finally caved to Diane's request.

After taking the Fraser team out on the water, the only suggestion Diane had was for the crew to wear uniforms. The rest should stay exactly as it was. While international tax laws eventually made collaboration with Fraser impossible, Colin has continued to charter *Pacific Yellowfin* through British Columbia for the last 22 years.

During the summer season, *Pacific Yellowfin* charters to Desolation Sound, a more family-oriented route. When cruising through one of Canada's best-kept secrets, the route takes guests along mountain ranges, pristine forests and crystal-clear waters, ideal for spotting orcas or bears. There are plenty of water and land toys onboard, like eight 50 cc motorbikes, kayaks, waterskis, fishing gear and more. Instead, during the autumn season,

Captain Colin likes to charter guests through the Great Bear Rainforest, located just below the Alaskan border. The trip is a safari expedition that explores Canada's wildlife, with guests often getting to see the rainforest's Big Five: bears, wolves, whales, sea lions, and eagles. The animal sighting doesn't end there, the waters are filled with dolphins, orcas, porpoises and whales. Yet what guests might look forward to most is seeing the incredibly rare Spirit Bear, native to the rainforest. The local Gitga'at Spirit Bear Keeper, whom Captain Colin has befriended, will guide charter guests through the Spirit Bear's natural habitat, while simultaneously getting to explore the world's largest coastal temperate rainforest.

Yet it's Captain Colin's crew that helps make these charter trips so magical. Colin emphasises that the entire crew are local islanders; they know the place inside-out. The bulk of Captain Colin's current crew has been with him for 12 years, and feel more like family than crew. The feeling seems to be mutual because, on the rare occasion that someone does leave, Colin never has "to hire anybody, because they always have someone to recommend for the job."

While the *Pacific Yellowfin* has been cruising the world's oceans for more than 80 years, and has been rebuilt and maintained many times, she charters as though she's brand new. Whether it's her good karma, her passionate, local crew, or the amazing charter location, *Pacific Yellowfin* is truly a one of a kind yacht, whose magic remains after more than four decades. In the words of Captain Colin, "if you want to keep something alive and well, just keep using it." ●



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