

GOOD OLD BOAT™



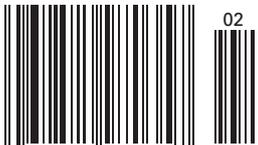
THE SAILING MAGAZINE FOR THE *REST* OF US!

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About the cover . . .

Massachusetts photographer Paul Rezendes captured this scene in Pepperell Cove near Kittery, Maine. Early summer along this coast means fog and plenty of it. Paul frequents this cove, close to the New Hampshire border, as a nice stop between his home port in Long Island Sound and the Maine coast. Paul's site: <www.paulrezendes.com>.

Learning what you love

A project boat helps a young man set his life's course

by Kegan Ambrose

Occam's Razor, a Sailstar Corinthian, tugs at her mooring after Kegan successfully restored her to sailing condition.

For as long as I can remember, I was scheming to buy my first sailboat. I spent many hours of my childhood poring over classified ads searching for free fixer-upper sailboats. I first wanted a simple 8-foot sailing dinghy, but as I grew older and larger, my vision grew too. I started looking at boats in the 16- to 19-foot range. During this search, the “ultimate” boat on my mind was the Cape Dory Typhoon. If you’ve spent any time shopping for boats, you know the Typhoon isn’t a boat a kid can afford on income earned mowing lawns.

Once I left home for the Maine College of Art in 2006, my focus switched and sailing wasn’t on my mind as much. This lasted until 2007 when I landed a summer job working as a deckhand on the schooner *American Eagle* out of Rockland, Maine. I was 20 and had a desire to be on the water

and to see how a schooner worked. Little did I know this was going to be one of the hardest summers of my life. Sailing a schooner is nothing like sailing my family’s 25-foot Catalina. But the schooner taught me a lot about what sailing means to me. I once again began the search for my own boat.

In March of 2008, I saw *Occam's Razor*, a 1964 Carl Alberg-designed Sailstar Corinthian. Shrink-wrapped and sitting on jack stands, she looked a lot like a Cape Dory Typhoon. Unlike a lot of “fixer-uppers” I had looked at, *Occam's Razor* hadn’t yet lost her soul and I believed I could complete the project. The boat was surprisingly original. There were no crazy modifications, such as portholes below the waterline or “custom” motor mounts on the transom. The original light-blue gelcoat, although faded, was in pretty good shape. The decks seemed solid (in

reality, the rotten parts were just frozen). Most important, this boat had decent sails and overbuilt standing rigging.

The boat needed work — lots of it. All the wood needed to be replaced but I felt I could accomplish these repairs myself. Everything seemed right, even the price. While working on the schooner, I had saved some money and \$900 seemed reasonable. A few days later, I signed a bill of sale, paid the money, and became the owner of my first sailboat. In the middle of May, she was transported to my parents’ house in Denmark, Maine, and the restoration got under way.

Expectations meet reality

When calculating how long a boat project is going to take, I’ve learned to take whatever arbitrary number seems to be about right and multiply by three or four. This was a common theme

throughout my restoration. I spent more time looking for tools than actually restoring the boat.

Early in June, demolition began. I removed the old wood — cockpit seats, main bulkhead, and cockpit support beams. My original plan was to remove the seats, add some extra support to the cockpit, and patch the main bulkhead. But the project grew bigger and bigger. As I took things apart and realized how difficult demolition was, I kept saying, “Well, I might as well replace this rotten piece of wood right now because the boat isn’t going to be taken apart like this again anytime soon.” Before I knew it, I was doing a complete rebuild and spending a lot more money and time than I had anticipated. The \$900 price tag started to look a little high, considering the boat’s true condition.

Creative financing

Since the jobs I was working at the time paid just a hair above minimum wage, I had to be creative with how I earned money to acquire parts. My boat came with only a 135 percent genoa and no furling unit, so I was going to need a working jib. As there was no way I could afford a new jib, I contacted Michael Chasse in Freeport, Maine, who owns Northeast Sailboat Rescue. Michael travels all over the East Coast picking up unwanted sailboats, then fixes them up and finds good homes for them. As a result, he has a lot of extra sailboat parts kicking around in his barn. I sent him an email offering to



It took considerable elbow grease to buff her oxidized gelcoat back to its original powder blue.

help around his boatyard in exchange for a used working jib. This started a great relationship. I could trade work for boat parts, as proposed by the T-shirt sold by *Good Old Boat* that states, “Will work for boat parts.”

I also needed an outboard, and with this I got lucky. A family sailing friend offered to give me a 1980-something Mariner 4-hp long-shaft that came off one of his first boats. There was one stipulation, though. He told me the motor hadn’t been started for close to 20 years and, if I took it, I couldn’t return it. This was music to my ears. I showed up the next morning and grabbed the motor.

That evening, with some fresh gas in the tank, the little outboard roared to life in a 55-gallon trash can. But while the engine purred like a kitten, there wasn’t much cooling water coming out. That meant it probably needed a new impeller. The local marine mechanic wanted more than \$100 to do the job, so I did some research at the library. I found books on outboard motors but the information on how to replace an impeller was vague. A librarian suggested I try the library’s online small-engine database. There, I found a complete 1980 Mariner 4-hp shop manual in PDF. It provided precise



By the time Kegan had removed all the decayed wooden parts, the boat was looking rather bare, at left. At last reconstruction began, with the base for the main bulkhead, at right.



Kegan spent an entire summer working on the boat and launched her the following spring, by which time she was gleaming, at left. The venerable Mariner outboard, at right, was a gift — Kegan just had to get it working. All it needed was gas and a water-pump impeller.

instructions for replacing the impeller. Problem solved. I found the part online for \$16, and after an hour of somewhat stressful engine work, I had an outboard that pumped water the way it should.

As summer came to an end, my boat project was 99 percent done. I had replaced the upper and lower bulkheads, the cockpit seats, and the cockpit support beams. I had redone all the wiring and installed a new compass, automatic bilge pump, solar panel, and electrical panel. (The list may not look like much on paper, but you have to remember that projects take four times longer than originally expected). All that was left was to put on some trim pieces, apply bottom paint, and install a battery. My father helped me build a winter frame to shed the 7 feet of snow we were about to get that season and *Occam's Razor* was zipped up until late April 2009.

Winter and doubt

My senior year of college felt like the longest school year I've ever had to endure. All I wanted to do was get the boat in the water and go sailing. After the summer occupied with working on the boat, I began asking myself a lot of questions about my life and what I wanted to do with it. I spent that school year wondering where my place was in the world of graphic design and whether I even wanted to commit to design as an occupation. A feeling in the back of my head told me I wasn't going to be happy sitting at a desk staring at a computer screen all day.

In spite of my misgivings, I made some of my best work ever. I won a beer logo design contest, built giant cardboard letter-form furniture, wrote my thesis, did my senior independent project, had my heart broken, and got into great physical condition . . . all while surviving on saltines and hummus. I don't want to live another year like my senior year at Maine College of Art but, when pushed to my maximum, I started to see things differently. Even though I was making decent work, I was learning that design wasn't my calling.



With new cockpit seats and the sole refinished, *Occam's Razor* began to look like a proper yacht once more.

In early spring, I began my search for a summer job. I knew I should look for a job with a future, but soon realized there really aren't many jobs in the area other than washing dishes. One day, I came across a sailing-instructor job on Craigslist. I sat down and wrote out all the pros and cons of staying in Portland and washing dishes or taking the job at Linekin Bay Resort teaching sailing on their fleet of 20 Rhodes 19s. I chose to sail. I had just one stipulation: they had to give me a mooring for my Corinthian, and this they did.

Post-launch stress

Occam's Razor was launched May 2, 2009. I was incredibly excited. I was so excited, in fact, I forgot to bring clevis pins, so I couldn't raise the mast on launch day. One thing I've learned through this whole good old boat restoration thing is that while you can try to be prepared for everything, on launch day, something will always go wrong. In my case, things went wrong for a few weeks after launch day.

First, I fell off the boat while motoring to a mooring. That day, I also ran the boat aground. The following day, I decided I was going to try to bend on some sails and maybe go sail a bit. I had attached the foot of the mainsail to the boom and was raising the main when I heard a little "ping." The next thing I knew, my main halyard was at the top of my mast. In addition to that, my electric bilge pump was malfunctioning. I knew this because

it wasn't pumping out the seawater that was coming into my boat through a small mystery leak.

I was becoming very frustrated. How could a project into which I'd put so much blood and sweat be giving me so much trouble? I had been imagining for so long how the first few days of sailing my own boat were going to be that I somehow overlooked how little I actually knew. My knowledge was secondhand; I had always had someone with much more experience nearby watching out for my mistakes. Now *I* was in charge and it was scary.

Things started to improve, though. I found a faulty float switch in the bilge pump. As it was still under warranty, I just switched it out. The mystery leak was small and came through the motor well. It really leaked only when I was sailing on starboard tack or when I had three or more people in the cockpit. I retrieved the main halyard with some help from my father and a family friend and replaced the halyard fitting with a \$25 hunk of stainless steel that would survive the Apocalypse. I also started to be very careful while walking on deck so as to not fall off again.

I had that job in Linekin Bay, 40 miles away, and I had to get my boat there. The passage from Portland to Linekin Bay is pretty exposed, especially for a 19-foot boat that had recently been restored by an amateur boatbuilder. My father suggested that he take his Catalina 34 and I follow him. That way, we'd have an extra boat if there was a problem with mine.

We picked a day with moderate winds and set out under power from Portland at 6 a.m. At 6:07 we ran into dense fog that socked us in until we reached the entrance to Linekin Bay at 4 that afternoon. Keeping up with my father was difficult. At $\frac{3}{4}$ throttle, I was only able to hold 4½ knots or so while my father, with his Universal diesel basically idling in gear, was walking away from me. We arrived safely and I instantly fell in love with Linekin Bay. It's absolutely beautiful. I couldn't wait to start my summer job at the resort.

Summer and certainty

Work started at the resort in mid-June. I spent the next couple of days rigging boats, fixing small problems, and taking occasional "staff training cruises." The days were long with few days off,

“I learned that working on boats and being on the waterfront isn't just a hobby for me; it's my life.”

but I loved the work. I met some amazing people from many different countries including Ireland, Slovakia, Russia, and England. On our evenings off, we often went out for night sails into Boothbay. It was a summer I'll never forget.

Into everyone's life will come a few days that he or she can honestly say everything was perfect. I experienced one of those days toward the end of that summer. All the sailing instructors had the same day off and we decided to go sailing. I hopped on my boat with a special girl from Ireland. One of the other sailing instructors took out one of the Rhodes 19s with another group of people. We spent the day sailing and rafted together in the late afternoon for music, swimming, and snacks. When the wind died later, I towed the Rhodes back to the resort in the late-evening sun. It was a day I'll never forget.

When summer ended, I had to return my boat to Portland, and this time I was going to do it without an escort vessel. I invited a friend from high school to join me. We motored for only an hour before catching a nice 10-knot breeze.

I put up the main and genoa and we sailed all the way to Portland at 5 to 5½ knots. I was feeling a lot more confident than when I first launched *Occam's Razor* in May.

As I write this, I'm working at a sail loft in Falmouth, Maine, learning to do custom canvaswork. This is a nice way to combine my interest in design and my passion for boats. While restoring the Corinthian, I learned that working on boats and being on the waterfront isn't just a hobby for me; it's my life. If I hadn't bought *Occam's Razor*, I'm not sure I would have applied for the sailing-instructor job and I might still be sitting at a desk.

I could make the argument that the leaf-infested, faded-blue disaster I bought in March of 2008 might have saved my life. At the very least, it taught me what I loved. *▲*

Kegan Ambrose grew up sailing with his family on the Maine coast. He graduated from Maine College of Art in 2009 and is now restoring a good old Pearson Commander.



On a breezy spring day in 2009, *Occam's Razor* hitched a ride to the launch ramp. Her gleaming brightwork and polished gelcoat highlight the work Kegan put into her restoration.