

about every job that I did on the boat and how long it took, rounded to the nearest half-hour. I discovered that even the simplest job could take much longer than I expected. As I would complete jobs, I would discover other areas that needed attention, so my plan was continually under revision. The general plan (fix the boat as best you can, and then go sailing) never changed, but the fine points of my plan did... when is the best time to do a certain job, extent of the rebuild, this piece looks better than I thought, maybe rebuild it instead of replace it, etc. My log became filled with side notes, like the location of original hardware, and design ideas that might work.

I also took lots of pictures, both digital and analog. I very rarely found myself saying “Gee, I wish I’d have saved more film...” Usually the opposite was true. I especially wish I’d have shot more of the boat as it was originally found.

### **Getting started**

The first thing that I did on my boat was to strip it down to the bare hull. There was much on the boat that needed to be removed and discarded, especially all the custom exterior woodwork. Almost all of this was rotten to the point that it came off with a gentle tug. Since I wasn’t planning on copying any of this for replacement, most of it went directly into the trash. But before it was tossed, each piece was examined for hardware. Anything that was stainless or bronze was removed and tossed into a box. Even small fender washers and screws. I strongly recommend that (should you decide to embark on such craziness) you do the same. There were a number of times when I needed just one small screw or washer for a hidden part as I was assembling the boat. The “stainless hell box,” as I like to call it, saved me several trips to the hardware store for one little screw or bolt. As it was, I’m sure I

**13. Our new yard decoration, the day after it arrived at our house**





**14. The interior as the boat was found... it's the picture of neglect. I wish that I'd taken more "before" shots, but I think that I subconsciously wanted to deny that I'd actually paid money for this mess.**

tossed quite a bit of useful hardware that I wish I'd taken the time to save. So be anal about it and save those screws.

If there is even the remotest chance that you might recondition and reuse the part, then a different strategy is required. The best method for keeping those bolts and screws where you need them is to remove the part, put the hardware back into the holes, (on the part, not in the boat) and loosely spin on the nuts. This is less secure if you've removed a wood screw, but a piece of tape will keep the hardware in place.

Most boat restorers develop the habit of thinking out loud, or talking to themselves. If you find yourself saying "There's no way I'll be reusing this thing..." and are heading to the trash, stop for a moment. If the part's problems are cosmetic, DON'T throw the part away! Put it in a box, squirrel it away in the corner of the garage, stick it under the bushes behind the house. It could come in handy later as a pattern, or you could use it as a hole drilling template. You could very possibly run out of money and have to refinish the piece and replace it a few seasons down the road. The economics of trailer-sailer restoration demand that you restore and reuse anything that you can. A quick look through a boating catalog will show you that the cost of the parts can easily exceed the value of the boat, so ask yourself, do I *have* to buy a new one, or can I fix this?

On my boat, there were many cases where I obviously had no choice... many parts simply *had* to be replaced. All of the exterior woodwork was made of walnut, and it turned to compost in my hands. The boat had "eyebrows," which are thin battens of wood screwed to the deckhouse (the part of the boat that's above deck level, sometimes called the "doghouse" on old wooden boats, or just plain "house") just below its upper edge. They are designed to visually lower the look of the topsides, and to

channel drips of water away from the portholes. I removed these and tossed them, since I had no plans to replace them (they are a bear to properly varnish). All of the sailing hardware was marked for location (port or starboard, fwd, stern, etc) on the underside with a Sharpie™ and kept in a milk crate. I also did a detailed drawing of original hardware locations in my restoration log. Even so, I still ended up with a few pieces of mystery hardware... I had no idea where they went.

Although I knew that I was jumping ahead of myself, I started doing the same thing down below... dismantling, assessing, cataloging, and cleaning. This isn't necessarily the best approach. It's usually better if you can concentrate on one job at a time, but I just *had* to get all that rot out of my boat. Like I've mentioned before, I'm a very unmethodical, right-brained, short-attention-span kind of person. I often *have* to jump from job to job in order to get work done, and if that works for you, fine. If you *can* stick to one or two specific projects, though, you'll have more success. Parts will have less time to get lost, and the way things came apart and go back together will be fresh in your mind. But I'm not like that, so I went for it.

As I removed interior parts, there was a bit less that found it's way into the trash can. The front-loading icebox went, as did the (hopelessly rusted, and subsequently dangerous) propane camping stove. Other parts, especially plywood panels, were saved for patterns.

One of the particularly disgusting aspects of my boat was the overuse of fabrics on board. Practically everything was covered in some sort of fabric... indoor outdoor carpeting on the cabin sole, some sort of canvas-like material glued to the sides, and



**15. An early image from the stripping and removal phase**

**16. More stripping of the interior. Most of the water soaked fabrics have been discarded, revealing a difficult surface beneath. It smells a little better, though.**



vinyl backed by foam rubber on the overhead. Once these surfaces mildew, and they nearly always do on a boat, it is difficult– if not impossible– to clean them. In my case, it wasn't only mildew, but rot that I had to worry about. Nearly all of this stuff was ripped out and thrown away, with no attempt to make patterns. I didn't want that much cloth on my boat anyway. The exception, of course, are the cabin cushion covers. They were the original cushions that were sold with the boat nearly thirty years ago. Considering their age, these weren't all that bad. While both the foam and the fabric need to be replaced, they can be placed low on the priority list. I did replace them, though, since some were missing. This is a good job to tackle in the winter months, when it's freezing cold in the boat.

Hopefully, most boats won't have interior problems that are this extensive. I've pre-

**17. Removing a covering panel revealed this view of the winch. Here are a host of problems, including rot, faulty repairs to the winch support, and a concealed "electrical system" that was humorous at best, dangerous at worst. Note the location of the fire extinguisher bracket... totally inaccessible in an emergency.**



viously discussed the issue of hull liners, and if you can find a boat with an interior liner that's in fairly good shape, you can save yourself a great deal of restoration time and hassle. Being protected from the elements, the gelcoat on the liner is usually in much better condition than the exterior gelcoat, and will respond very well to hard scrubbing and waxing. The drawback is that the liner can hide structural defects, and often sections must be cut away in order to make an effective repair.

Sometimes this situation can be used to your advantage. Depending on where you need to cut the liner, you might be able to conceal the hole with a nice teak covering

**18. Rot in a plywood berth top. This was a result of a poorly located front-opening icebox. It also shows how an icepick or small screwdriver can easily locate rotten sections.**



board, hinged to provide access to stowage. Net or canvas bags can be used to restrain items in irregularly-shaped areas. Move the bags out of the way, and you can inspect critical areas of your hull, gain access to wiring, etc. It isn't always possible, but it isn't a bad idea. Of course, you can always use the commonly available plastic inspection port covers... Beckson Marine makes several different shapes and sizes.

The 72 model Venture didn't have a liner. Older boats such as mine had an interior that was pieced together from individual plywood panels and bonded to the hull. This method of construction can result in a stronger structure, but more plywood means more chances for rot. Fortunately, it appeared that MacGregor had used either some form of marine grade plywood or at least a good grade of exterior plywood, since I found remarkably little rot in the basic structure of the boat. The front loading icebox that the previous owner installed had leaked over the years, and the constant cycle of dampness and drying (and dripping condensation) had rotted out the panel directly beneath it, with the worst areas near the bolt holes. (This area was

#### **ABOUT ICEBOXES**

Front-loading iceboxes are not a good idea. Cold air sinks, and every time the door opens you lose precious cold air. Top loaders, though less convenient to organize, keep ice better. Insulation is paramount, and on stock boats, always inadequate. Four inches on all sides isn't too much. A conventional cooler can be modified by adding extra foam, but it needs to be carefully sealed to prevent becoming a mildew farm. A workable option might be by nesting a soft cooler inside a larger rigid one, if you can find a pair that fit closely together.

**19. Stripping the exterior. This image also illustrates the “mud line” that resulted when the cockpit was left full of rainwater. It also illustrates evidence of minor alcohol consumption, a necessary by-product of the work’s magnitude.**



repaired later by enlarging a locker lid... a discussion of this process is under “Structural woodworking.”)

### **Scraping the Exterior**

The goal was to get the boat down to a nearly bare hull and deck. Since the boat obviously leaked badly, all the fittings needed to be rebedded. I planned to strip off all the old paint, apply new paint, then reattach all the parts with new bedding compound. This always looks better than trying to paint around fittings and wooden parts, and most of the fittings needed reconditioning anyway.

**20. Starting to scrape the hull. The yellow automotive paint came up easily in some places, but stuck tight in others. The green layer was probably an earlier paint job, and the original factory gel-coat was probably a thin layer of light blue that was underneath the green.**

