



The
rebuild of
Atlantide



Image: Cory Silken

A century in the tides

There is an inescapable cyclicity to life. And in yachting, this is where passion meets purpose ...



»



BY CONOR FEASEY

When *Atlantide* emerged from Royal Huisman's Huisfit facility on a crisp November morning in 2023 you might have questioned your own perception. The Côte d'Azur icon appeared out of the autumnal mist as a simultaneous embodiment of an enduring present and a storied past. Approaching a century afloat, having supported championship sailors, featured on the silver screen, graced the golden era of Mediterranean yachting and rescued troops from the beaches of Dunkirk, *Atlantide* felt less like a restored yacht and more like a vessel reborn.

What began as a standard refit quickly became a complete rebuild under the stewardship of seasoned yachtsman and Silicon Valley trailblazer Jim Clark. His fleet includes some of the most ambitious sailing yachts of the past three decades: *Hyperion*, *Athena*, *Hanuman* and *Comanche*. The latter set the 24-hour monohull distance record in 2015 with a run of 618.01 nautical miles, then broke the monohull transatlantic record the following year, completing the crossing in five days, 14 hours, 21 minutes and 25 seconds.

When *Atlantide* entered the market, Clark saw potential for a classic motorsailer to complement his J Class. Rather than wait for a yard slot, he sent the vessel to the Netherlands immediately. Once opened, the project revealed far more than anyone expected, ultimately requiring the replacement of almost 40 per cent of the hull, deck, and frames. It was a seismic undertaking. To understand why *Atlantide* resonated so strongly with Clark and why the yard approached the project with such care, we must return to the beginning.

Atlantide's story begins in 1930, although under a different name and in a different era. Originally launched as *Caleta* at Philip & Sons in Dartmouth, the craft emerged from a shipyard famed for dependable naval and commercial builds, so it was an appropriate birthplace for a commission that valued utility above display. The order came from Sir William Burton, a prominent figure on the British yacht-racing circuit in the early twentieth century, having helmed Sir Thomas Lipton's America's Cup challenger J Class *Shamrock IV* in 1920. Burton required a no-nonsense, sturdy, seaworthy vessel to operate as a support vessel for his 12-Metre

races – one that was consistent enough to form the infrastructure behind competitive sailing, knowing first hand the demands of a serious campaign. A 12-Metre does not operate in isolation, of course.

The design was penned by Alfred Mylne, who had established himself as one of Britain's most exacting naval architects in the interwar years with a portfolio that stretched from racing yachts to auxiliary craft. His work balanced a timeless class with pragmatism, favouring clean lines, structural integrity and efficiency over complete luxury, principles *Caleta* reflected. The 37-metre motorsailer that took shape in the south of England had a slim steel hull and a functional rig that allowed the vessel to make around seven knots under sail when needed. The accommodation was restrained too, focused on operations. That clarity of purpose would echo through the decades, long after the name changed and long after the yacht found itself in far more dramatic circumstances.

A decade on from its launch, *Caleta*'s transition from racing support vessel to wartime asset came with little ceremony. Like many private craft of the period, the yacht was requisitioned by the Royal Navy at the outbreak of the Second World War. In May 1940, the Admiralty issued an urgent call for small vessels to join the evacuation of Allied troops from northern France – *Caleta* was among those that answered, and on 31 May, the vessel set out for Dunkirk in company with two other craft, *Glala* and *Amulree*.

Crossing the channel was fraught with smoky horizons, aircraft whirling overhead amid the low percussion of artillery drumming ever closer, but *Caleta* and its crew continued operating off the beaches for the better part of a week. The defining episode occurred mid-operation, when the crew encountered a damaged landing craft still carrying 35 British troops. With the beaches under fire and evacuation routes narrowing by the hour, the yacht took the men aboard and attempted to tow the vessel back to England. But the state of the sea, strain of the tow and the sheer volume of traffic conspired against the effort to save the landing craft. The tow repeatedly failed; the crew of *Caleta* attempted to salvage whatever they could from the battle as the line kept breaking. But as air attacks persisted,



Jim Clark did not wait for a yard slot or a feasibility sequence when he saw the yacht on the market. He acquired *Atlantide* and almost immediately shipped it to the Huisfit facility in the Netherlands.

so too did the resolve of those on board until all aboard, and the damaged landing craft, reached the shores of old Blighty. It was a role in one of the most extraordinary yet most poignant escapes of British history and an act that earned *Caleta* the right to fly the St George's Cross, a distinction recovered for vessels of Operation Dynamo.

Caleta returned to civilian ownership in 1946, when the vessel was sold to a Greek yachtsman,

who renamed it *Ariane*; the transfer marking a major two-year rebuild at Vosper Thornycroft in Southampton. The work ultimately modernised the vessel by overhauling the steelwork and reconfiguring the accommodation, resetting the yacht for a new chapter after the strain of wartime service. By the early 1950s, *Ariane* had settled into a long Mediterranean life. For nearly 50 years, the vessel cruised between the South of France and the eastern Med, becoming a familiar presence in Cannes, Antibes and Rhodes during what is fondly referred to as the golden era of yachting. And while it might not have been the headline act, it was easily recognised by its proportions and white hull, which became a visual signature throughout this period.

In 1960, however, the yacht was renamed *Corisande*, only to appear on the screen two years later in the 1962 adaptation of *Tender is the Night*, featuring in sequences filmed along the Riviera. It was a brief role, but it places the yacht in the wider cultural memory of the era and offers a rare, fixed point in an otherwise lightly documented chapter of its life – there are no small roles, only small yachts, after all. The next noteworthy change came in the late 1980s when Venetian aristocrat Count Nicolo dalle Rose acquired the vessel. He restored the white hull once more and named it *Atlantide*, which the yacht has carried ever since. Under his ownership, the vessel was based in Monaco. Then nearly 70 years old, *Atlantide* entered a new phase in 1998



Image: Tom van Oossanen





Atlantide
during
rebuild at
Huisfit.

when Silicon Valley venture capitalist Tom Perkins acquired the vessel. Perkins already owned the 1915 Herreshoff schooner *Mariette* and would later go on to commission the DynaRig pioneer *Maltese Falcon*. *Atlantide* fitted neatly into the lineage of a historic yacht with strong fundamentals and the potential for an extensive rebuild.

Perkins sent the vessel to Camper & Nicholsons in 1999 for a major reconstruction. Around 90 per cent of the hull plating was renewed and the superstructure was replaced with a new deckhouse designed. The interior was completely reimaged, too: Perkins commissioned a highly detailed art deco scheme featuring quilted maple, ebony, padauk and abalone inlays, combined with Lalique glasswork and custom metal fittings. The effect was a deliberate, period-inspired interior executed in a contemporary context, part of Perkins' broader philosophy of combining heritage with advanced

“It appears that some early work may have been more about cosmetics or meeting a deadline than longevity of the vessel. Everything that Royal Huisman replaced was done with the highest quality.”

engineering for the time. Once complete, *Atlantide* became a travelling companion to *Mariette* and an active cruising yacht in its own right, crossing the Atlantic, cruising the fjords of Norway and ranging along the Pacific Northwest as far as British Columbia. Its supporting role as a tender to *Mariette* returned the vessel to something close to its original purpose until it was eventually sold in 2012.

So by the time *Atlantide* resurfaced on the market, the vessel carried nearly a century of accumulated history from racing support, wartime duty, to half a lifetime in the Mediterranean, a significant late-century rebuild and the highly individual stamp of Perkins. It was a craft that required a particular kind of owner – someone with both the appetite and the infrastructure to take on a storied project that mattered. Jim Clark is one of the few individuals who fit that profile. Clark did not wait for a yard slot or a feasibility sequence when he saw the yacht on the market. He acquired *Atlantide* and almost immediately shipped it to the Huisfit facility in the Netherlands, with the initial intent of refreshing the structure, correcting obvious issues and then evaluating longer-term potential. It was only when the steel went back to bare metal that the full picture emerged and it wasn't a pretty one. Distortions in the plating, uneven stress patterns and inconsistent repairs revealed a vessel that may have been maintained in good faith, but not in good method. In several areas, the team discovered filler laid nearly two inches thick, applied over time to disguise movement and/or compensate for ageing steel. When the deckhouse windows were removed, they had been set into shaped filler, pointing to the improvisations of decades past.

“The previous owners did not keep a full-time crew on the boat as they tended to use it only in summer and it suffered a bit for that,” Clark recalls. “And it appears that some early work may have



Above:
Atlantide's
wheelhouse
during
rebuild.

been more about cosmetics or meeting a deadline than longevity of the vessel. Everything that Royal Huisman replaced was done with the highest quality."

Huisfit recast the entire programme. For the next six months, the team studied, scanned and redesigned the boat in 3D. They noted that they had to use "sailboat thinking" to plan for fitting new equipment, systems and lights, as there was almost no space behind the walls or above the overheads. Designing solutions as they dismantled became its own discipline. One of Huisfit's managers described the process as "an interesting puzzle", adding that the yard is rarely forced to redesign a vessel mid-refit: "That's what took time. We rarely get involved in designing because it is usually already designed before a yacht comes in for a refit."

What followed was one of the most substantial restorations the yard had taken on. Close to 40 per cent of the hull, deck and internal framing was recreated entirely with the precision expected of a new build. Where the steel remained fundamentally sound but had lost form, the plates were heat-straightened rather than cut away, a time-consuming but sympathetic technique that allowed the vessel to retain as much original fabric as possible. The teak deckhouse was lifted off in one piece and moved intact into the workshop, where it was dismantled and rebuilt under controlled conditions. The skylights were also re-engineered to match their original geometry and any areas affected by galvanic corrosion were cut out and reconstructed too. Wherever possible, Huisfit chose conservation. Much of the original exterior teak – including the massive cap rails – was removed, restored and pieced back into the rebuilt structure. Even the 60 to 70-year-old winches were retained where feasible,

stripped and brought back to working order. Old and new hardware alike received an aluminium-bronze chemical treatment that delivered a smooth, satin, subtly patinated finish, allowing the yacht's exterior to read as coherent rather than partly renewed.

The engineering programme was no less extensive. *Atlantide*'s original Gardner diesels – the crown-jewel heritage machinery, each weighing around three and a half tonnes – had to be extracted through a two-and-a-half-metre opening cut into the hull. They were sent to the UK for a full refurbishment, returning with new twin-disc reversing gearboxes and a working lifespan measured towards the next century. With the machinery space empty, Huisfit installed new generators, a fresh electrical system, new plumbing, new watermakers and new control infrastructure. The HVAC system required custom square-section ducting so that it could be fed through limited voids without disturbing the

Below:
And after
rebuild.



Image: Cory Sijken

What followed was one of the most substantial restorations the yard had taken on. Close to 40 per cent of the hull, deck and internal framing was recreated entirely with the precision expected of a new build.



“It’s a work of art. What I like is the historic quality of this boat; nothing is plastic. I’m a classic boat snob. I like the old wood look; big modern boats do nothing for me.”



Right and below:
Atlantide
after rebuild.



rebalanced interior. Performance was addressed with equal rigour as the rudder surface area increased by roughly 20 per cent. New stabilisers were fitted with fins around 18 per cent larger than the previous units and Naiad AtRest controls were added to give stability at anchor, suitably important given the nature of her newly assigned brief. The rig, too, was brought back to its roots. A new mast and sails were constructed to the vessel's 1930 Alfred Mylne plan, retaining the original sail geometry and restoring the motorsailer's ability to make around seven knots under canvas.

The interior was rebuilt from the ground up. DeVosdeVries Design created a layout that honoured the vessel's 1930s origins while avoiding pastiche. French walnut joinery, finished using architectural renovation experts Acanthus's 14-step antiquing process, anchored the aesthetic. The saloon and forward accommodation were reconfigured for practicality. A new staircase was built, the wheelhouse retained its varnished teak and the aft deck was formalised as the primary dining area beneath. The result? *Atlantide* now reads like a book deserving of its storied past. "It's a work of art," adds Clark. "There were parts of the yacht [both the interior and the mechanical spaces] that were not well thought out before. Now it is. What I like is the historic quality of this boat; nothing is plastic. I'm a classic boat snob. I like the old wood look; big modern boats do nothing for me."

There's a twang of irony when you consider that when *Caleta* left Dartmouth all those years ago, people were entirely sceptical of a boat running solely on diesel engines. Some things do change, but there is also an inescapable cyclicity to life. It's not surprising that the rejuvenation of the J Class has also given rise to a reverence for these classic dayboats – a classical call-back to a romanticised era in the not-too-distant past. *Atlantide*'s emergence from Huisfit that November morning felt like a culmination, as if the vessel left that shed finally made sense of its own story.

The steel carries the imprint of a racing tender; the lines still hold the memory of Côte d'Azur summers and the structure bears the authority of war and curiosity in equal measure of those who imagined and reimagined from Dartmouth to Southampton, to Monaco and Vollenhove. Almost one hundred years after *Caleta* was built to shadow a 12-Metre, *Atlantide* once again supports a racing yacht. Its rebirth at Huisfit by Royal Huisman draws on chapters of original practicality, cultural ease, the confidence of the Tom Perkins era and Clark's ambition to pair passion with purpose. **CF**