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Welcome...

Any minute now, in a small village on the side of a mountain in County Cork Ireland, a semi-retired metal worker by the name of **BILL SANDHAM** is about to get the shock of his life. A lifelong boat enthusiast and long-term subscriber to *Motor Boat & Yachting*, he enjoys nothing more than settling down for a few precious moments to read his favourite boat magazine. So imagine how he's going to feel when he turns to page 70 and finds his own face staring back at him!



The reason it will come as a surprise is because his son Adrian contacted me before Christmas to say that he wanted to share his father's remarkable story. It turns out that after eight years' hard graft and an ongoing battle with cancer, his father is now on the verge of completing the ultimate DIY project – a **55FT STEEL TRAWLER** he has built from scratch. To keep it a surprise Adrian set about gathering photographs and quizzing his dad on how he'd built it before writing up the story and sending me the result. It is without doubt one of the most amazing and heartfelt articles we've ever published. I urge you to read it. With a box of tissues in hand.

DON'T MISS OUT!

Given that we're all likely to be staying closer to home for a while yet, can I urge anyone who is still buying our magazine in a shop or newsagent to take out a subscription instead. Not only will you save yourself a small fortune and never miss an issue but it will be delivered directly to your door every month. In return we promise to keep you informed, inspired and entertained so that you'll be raring to get out on your own boats once again. And with prices starting from just **£20.49 FOR SIX MONTHS** it's a lockdown treat you really can afford. Turn to page 50 or visit www.magazinesdirect.com for more details.



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WORDS AND PICTURES Adrian Sandham

THE FATHER OF ALL HOMIEBUILDS

Adrian Sandham's father, Bill, has boat-building in his blood but his latest project, to build his own 55ft steel trawler yacht, tested him to its limits

Bill Sandham standing next to the 52ft steel trawler yacht he has built from scratch



LEFT: Bill's first home built steel yacht - a 42-footer named *The Endeavour*

BELOW: Turning the new 55ft hull using a temporary cradle



I

'd like to tell you a story about a man and a boat on a mountain. That unlikely combination of words paints a picture of my father in more ways than one. Put bluntly, he is a man who due to age, health, location and sanity probably shouldn't be building any kind of boat let alone one as ambitious as a 55ft steel trawler yacht but is too stubborn to recognise it and too determined to fulfil his dream. To be fair it's not the first time he's done it. He has already restored or built three boats of 22ft, 28ft and 42ft respectively but

this latest 55-footer is in another league and after seven years work is only now nearing completion.

But first let me tell you a little bit about the kind of person he is. A welder by trade, who set up home with my mother in the late 1980s, he went on to build a house, a business, a family and finally four boats on the side of a mountain in Cork, Ireland, relying on his own self-taught skills and a basic set of tools. The family's love affair with boats started with a 22ft Birchwood on the Shannon. It was pretty cramped with my two parents and the three of us children on board so my father swiftly upgraded to 28-foot Colvic, called *Friends*. Bought after it had been sunk, it was his first real project. He stripped it bare, installed twin Perkins 4108s, wired it, plumbed it and built an entirely new interior out of mahogany ply. We had many great years on *Friends* made even more memorable by its unlikely tender, a fabulous Glastron CV-16SS as featured in the James Bond movie *Live and Let Die*.

It wasn't until years later in 2005 that the notion of upgrading to something bigger entered Dad's mind. It was different from his previous 'notions' because it involved building the whole thing from scratch, hull and all. By this stage his metalworking business had grown substantially, meaning he had access to guillotines, press breaks and most importantly a CNC plasma cutter. Based on a 42ft Bruce Robert design called a Waverunner 342, it was an immense undertaking that took three years from

start to finish and involved taking the roof off the shed to get it out! Only later did he admit that he had history in this department, having once had to remove the living room window of his childhood home to extract a dinghy he'd built himself.

Launching *The Endeavour* into Lough Derg in 2008 was a phenomenal achievement for Dad and an emotional event for all of us. It gave us huge enjoyment for many years to come but it also proved to Dad what he could achieve. Having already successfully completed one major build, perhaps it was inevitable that another project would one day rear its head.

A BIGGER DREAM TAKES SHAPE

Five years after *The Endeavour* hit the water, that nagging itch began to grow. Another Brucoy was in the oven but this time a 55-ft trawler style motor yacht. The bigger boat meant fewer

limitations on interior comforts and the opportunity to move away from marine components to domestic ovens, aircon systems and more. The new boat wouldn't just be a hobby it would become a floating home, fulfilling a long held retirement dream of both Mum and Dad's.

In 2012 Dad finally pushed the button on the new project. He had sold the business a few years before but carried on working for the new owner

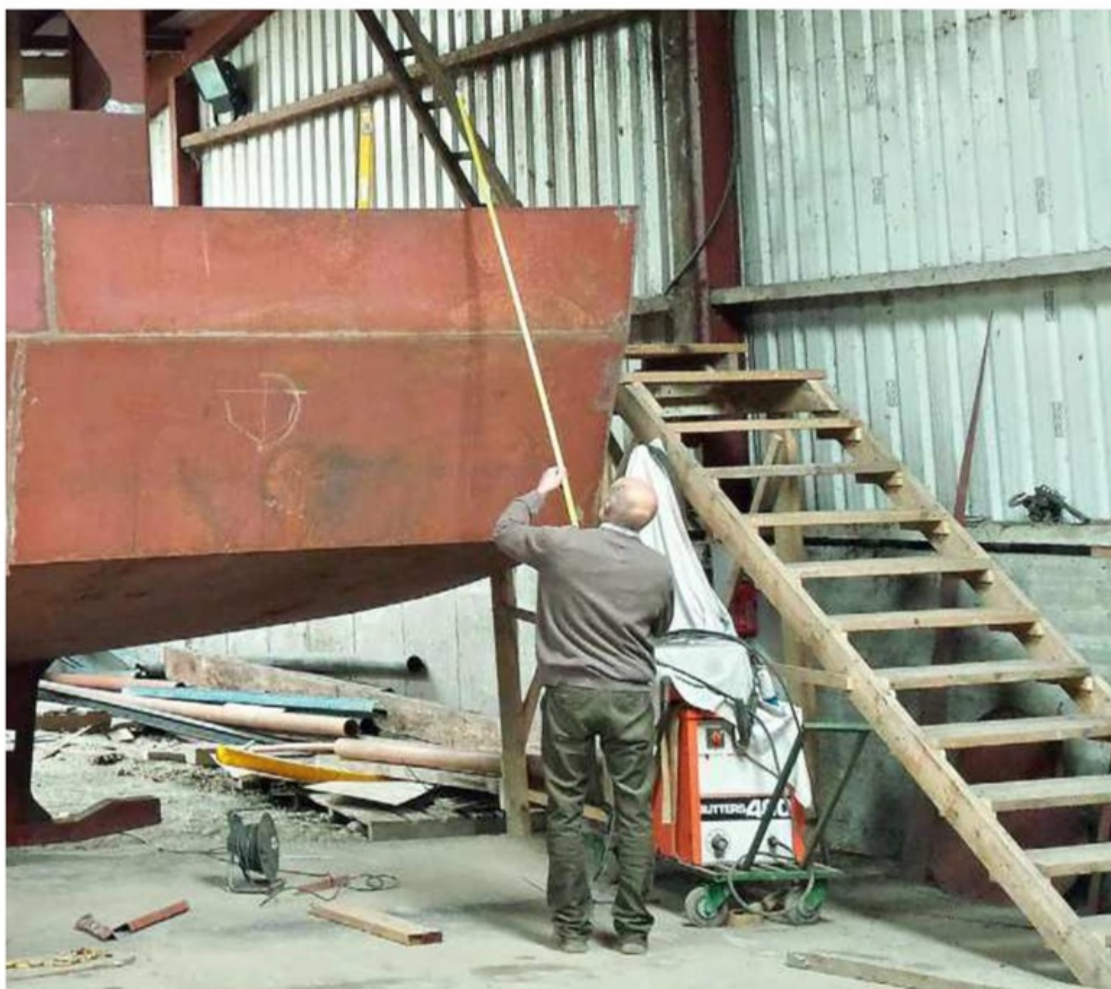
three days a week, meaning he still had access to the plasma cutter and more time to work on the new boat. As luck would have it some good guys in the new company also offered to help out with the build at the weekends.

As with the previous boat, the hull was initially built upside down. The frames and stringers were assembled upright so the metal sheeting could be bent and welded onto it. The process was slow, taking thousands of hours to weld and grind into



ABOVE: Another of the family's toys was this renovated Glastron CV16

Deliberately inducing a slight curve in the sheets eliminates the possibility of sporadic warping and results in a prettier, more modern shape

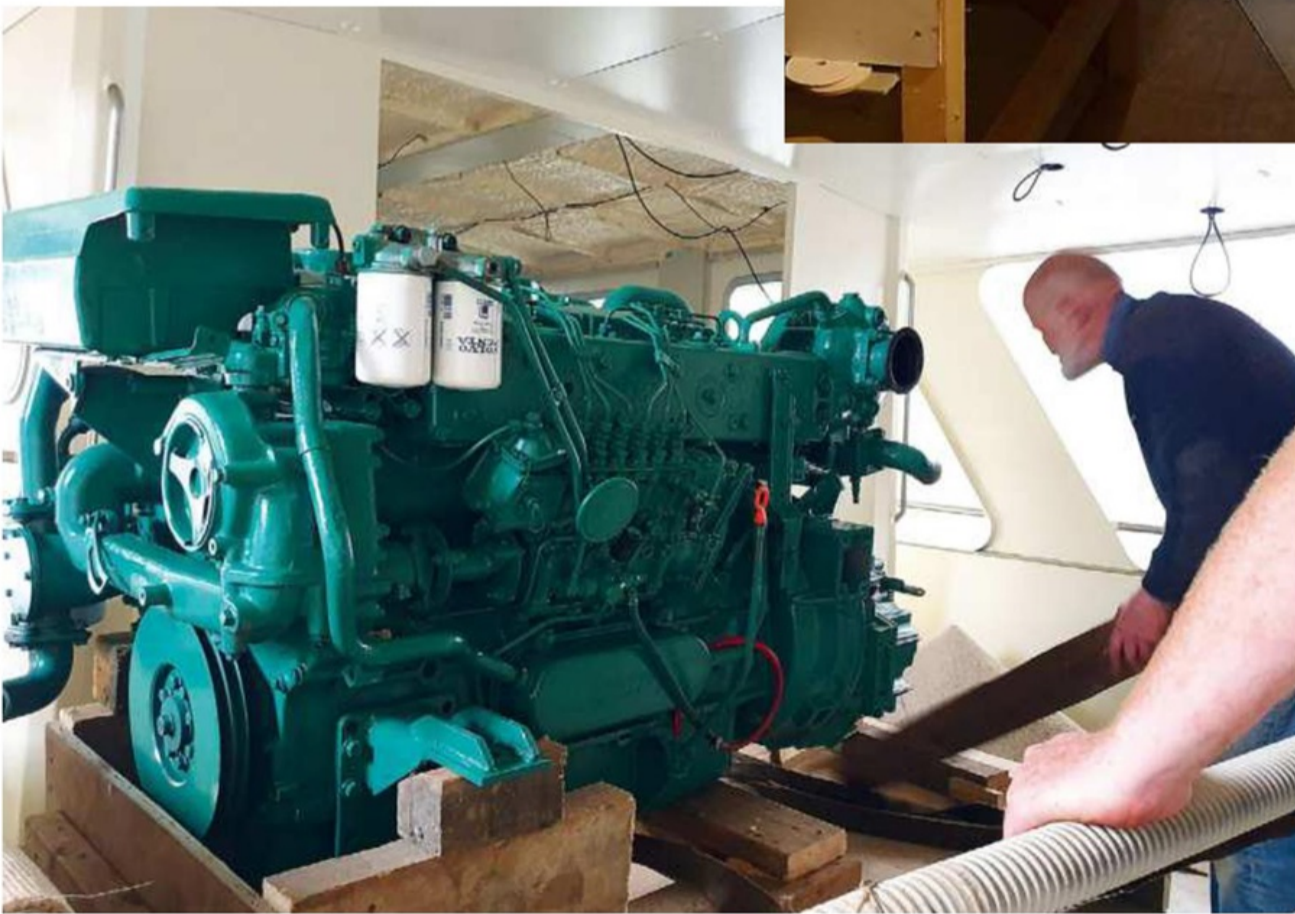
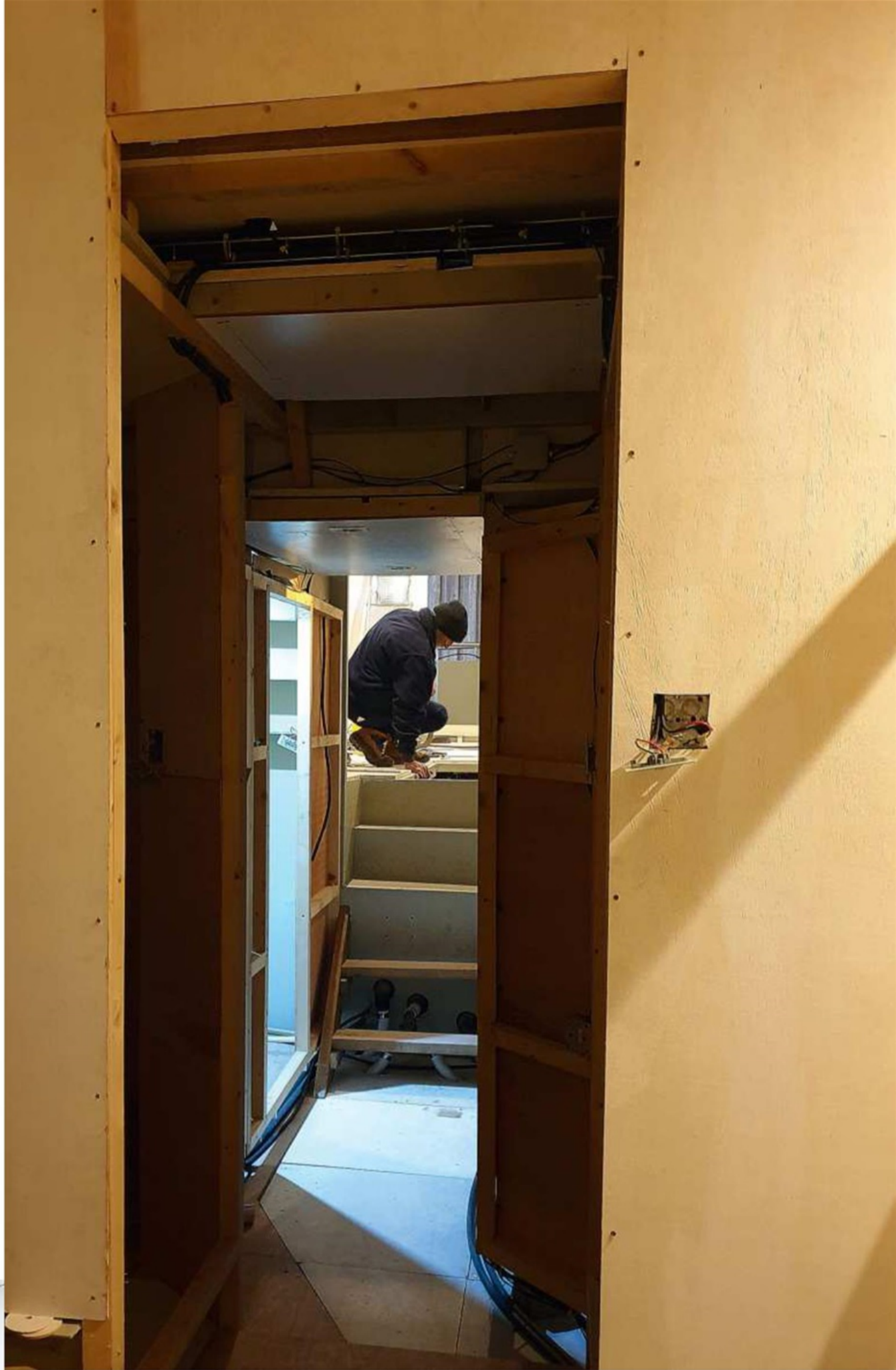


TOP Bill's skills as a metalworker enabled him to build the entire hull from scratch
ABOVE He made the wheelhouse roof removeable so it can be moved out of the shed
LEFT: Much of it was done using old school skills and craftsmanship honed over years of experience



ABOVE AND RIGHT: After painting and insulating, work on fitting out the interior could begin in earnest

BELOW: Bill helps lower the trusty shaftdrive Volvo Penta TAMD 61 into the engine room



ABOVE: Safely installed and ready to go with a wing engine as a back-up

The treatment knocked Dad for six, but being the ridiculous character he is, he tried to keep the boat build going even if it was at a much slower rate

shape. It's a beautiful looking hull, selected on the basis of everything he'd learnt from *The Endeavour*. Metal sheets warp during welding so *The Endeavour's* design relied on using flat sheets to avoid any wallows in the hull. The 55's design is based on the principle that sheet metal only bends one way. Deliberately inducing a slight curve in the sheets eliminates the possibility of sporadic warping and results in a prettier, more modern shape. The subtle curves found on the hull's sides were exaggerated at the bow to create a handsome flared prow using thin strips of tapered sheeting, many spools of welding wire and a small army of chain blocks to bend them into shape. It was hard graft. Everything was double or even triple welded to ensure it was done right.

Once the hull was complete, it then had to be turned. Dad was relaxed enough about flipping *The Endeavour's* hull but rather more nervous attempting this much bigger one. As before, two large arcs made from rolled channel iron were temporarily welded to the hull so that it could be rolled using chain blocks attached to the supporting beams of the shed. If this seems a little unorthodox, it worked well enough and is a great example of how lateral thinking has enabled him to get this project to where it is today. Other examples include marking out the hole for the bow thruster using nothing more sophisticated than a length of string, a plastic pipe and a pen. Fitted to perfection in a matter of minutes, it left his colleague laughing at how easy he made it all look.

A TURN FOR THE WORSE

With the hull upright, the process of assembling the decks, cabins and pilothouse could begin. Dad got stuck in and made good progress until in September 2014 a more significant and entirely unexpected challenge presented itself.

Dad was diagnosed with a rare, and in his case aggressive, form of cancer called non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma. Treatment started straight away. This changed what had been a project into something altogether more significant. In Dad's mind he had a job to do and no mere illness or debilitating treatment was going to stop him. It became a race to finish something that he had spent much of his adult life building up to, a relentless pursuit of a goal that we worried might compromise his health rather than help it. Thankfully, the arrival of his first grandchild, Haidee, provided a timely reality check. Her presence made him realise that there was so much to enjoy beyond working on the boat.

In time he began to push on again but this time in a more measured, healthier manner. He designed the pilothouse with the final journey out of the shed and down the mountain in mind, ensuring it was detachable to reduce the air draft for road transport. Another nice touch, and a favourite of Dad's, are the electromechanical doors that slide open and shut at the touch of a button. The stainless work like the bow rails and grab handles followed in preparation for the first round of painting.

Then in 2016 Dad went in for a routine check-up. His six months of treatment had gone well but our initial relief that the disease had regressed began to fade when the tests showed signs of its resurgence. The rebound occurred considerably earlier

than we had hoped but the one thing Dad did have going for him was his fitness and a strong heart. This allowed the fantastic team at Cork University Hospital to squeeze Dad onto an alternative but even stronger form of chemotherapy. The treatment knocked him for six as it was only really meant for younger people, but being the ridiculous character he is, he tried to keep the boat build going even if it was at a much slower rate. Mercifully, after almost a year, his strength began to bounce back and he has been firing on all cylinders and getting stuck back into the boat build ever since.

With the windows already fitted, they now had to come back out again for the messy job of sandblasting the metalwork in preparation for the first coat of Hempel primer. The vacuum cleaners really had their work cut out and a few were lost to a dusty death along the way. Then the long process of painting began using an airless sprayer, applying approximately 25kg of paint every 15 minutes. By the time he'd finished, the boat had taken almost a quarter of a tonne of paint. Where steel is concerned, paint and its associated preparation is most certainly an investment worth making.

The floors and decks were swiftly installed without too many issues. The composite material used for the deckheads meanwhile was selected on the basis of it being fireproof and

BELOW: Bill handled every aspect of the design and build himself with a little specialist help from friends and family



could be used in the engine room as well as the accommodation. An extra layer of fireproof insulation was added over the engine room, sandwiched in the floor to maximise its acoustic dampening properties as well.

Then there was the heat insulation. I still have flashbacks about the dreadful Rockwool we used in previous boats – it worked well enough but tended to trap moisture and was horrible to work with. This time we pushed Dad to use spray insulation. It's messier to apply and more expensive but it's far superior in terms of efficiency and moisture resistance. It was completed in a day and transformed the boat.

Dad isn't one to take any chances with electronics and called in my uncle Jack to lend a hand. He has been working with marine electronics for years and over two weeks the pair of them did the lot while Mum fed them a continuous diet of tea and the occasional whiskey. My uncle's knowledge stopped just shy of fitting the engine's 24V systems but everything else from the Victron isolators, invertors, lights and sockets are his work with every cable run meticulously drawn, laid and labelled.

Then came the engine, a trusty Volvo TAMD 61A linked to a Borg Warner gearbox. The shaft itself runs through a thrust bearing mounted to the hull to reduce wear on the gearbox and engine – Dad never does anything by halves. A small generator with a hydraulic power take off adds resilience and versatility. This drives the hydraulic bow and stern thrusters and serves as an auxiliary power source in the event of engine

failure. A hydraulic motor with a simple belt drive next to the main thrust bearing provided an admirably simple solution.

The planning of the pipework, be it for waste, fuel, heating or otherwise, always requires planning and this is where my mum's skills come into play as she's good with ergonomics. As with many boats Dad wanted to fit the tank under the beds, so positioning the beds was key and they both continuously questioned and reworked the layout until they were 100 per cent content.

This also affected the timberwork, an aspect of the build that Dad takes great pride in. On previous boats, solid oak and mahogany profiles were the go-to materials. However, this time he wanted to achieve a higher standard of finishing. He invested in new wood planes, routers and a host of other professional-grade tools before even starting work. This not only enabled him to design and build customised cabinetry that would have been impossible to match with off-the-shelf products but everything from the beading on the ceilings, doors, and frames to the grab handles is smoother, neater and more detailed. Even the doors have a stainless-steel profile within them to allow for expansion – another lesson learned from working on *The Endeavour*.

One unexpected challenge was finding a suitable supply of wood. The real stuff is hard to find and isn't a patch on the beautifully grained timber of old. It's easy to see why the likes of Fleming, a big inspiration of Dad's, has invested in securing these vital resources. Thankfully, Mum's eye for design combined with Dad's skill, enabled them to reclaim and recycle old timbers for much of it.

ON THE CUSP OF LAUNCH

Now, thousands of hours later, the interior is almost complete. The sturdiness of the work and quality of materials far exceed anything previously attempted on *The Endeavour*.

Some components such as the Raymarine MFDs and Vetus fly-by-wire throttles still lie in their boxes, anxiously waiting their turn to be installed but it's clear we're now on the

home straight and Dad's dream will soon become a reality.

As many seafarers say, a boat is never really finished. There's always something else to be done. But here we are with a boat that is 90 per cent complete and the end in sight. To date it has taken 15,000 man hours and involved Dad overcoming immense challenges along the way – personally, technically, physically and mentally. This is the year when that long held dream will reach fruition and I don't think any of us will be able to handle the day we introduce it to its home in the Atlantic.

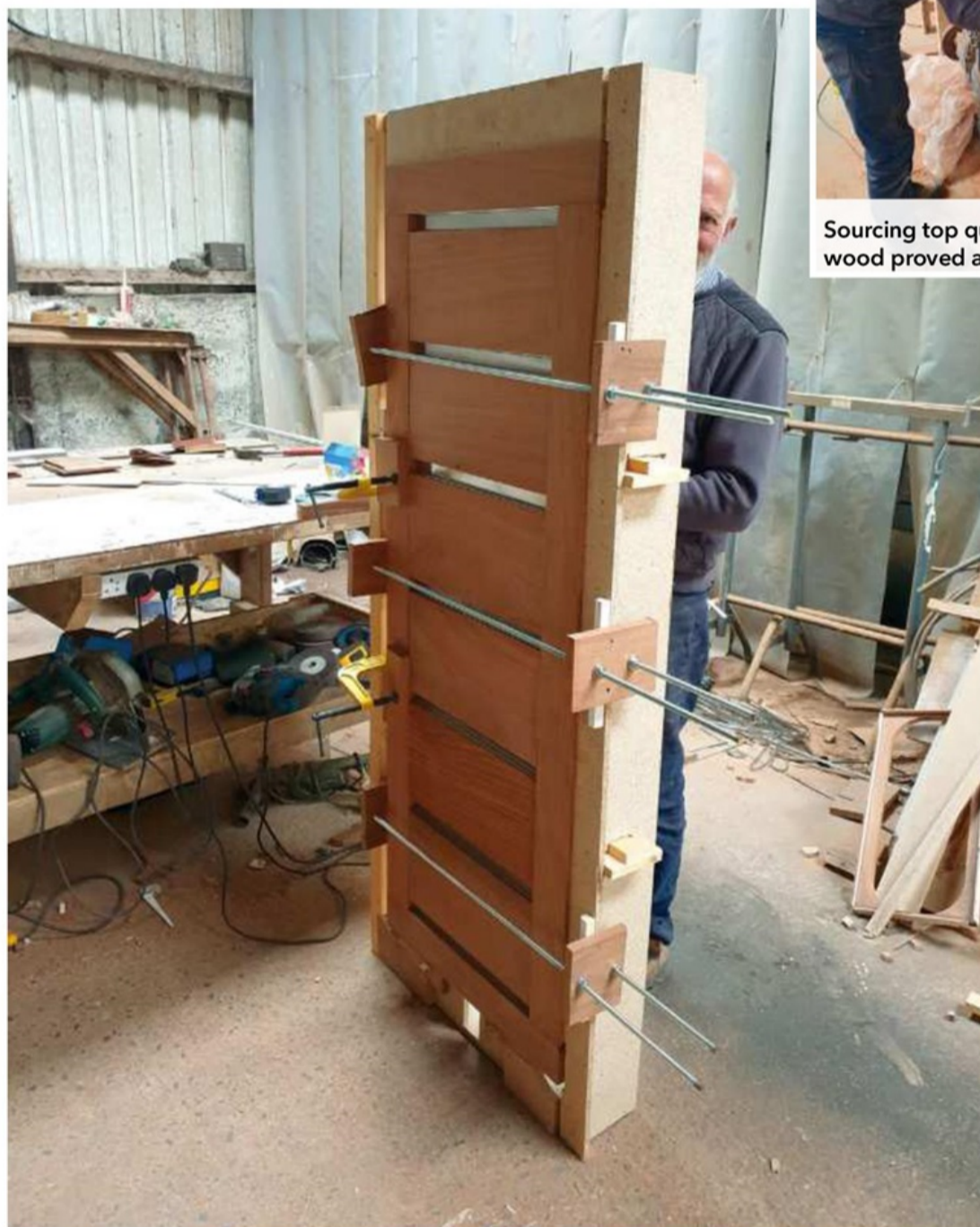
While it would be easy to summarise Dad's achievements as a natural evolution of experience and ambition, there's more to it than that. Every action was a stepping stone towards the destination he set out years previously, a constantly evolving process of setting goalposts then removing any obstacles that prevent him from reaching them. Ever since Dad was the young lad who had to take the front window out of his living room to get that rowing boat out, the goalposts have never shifted and perhaps ultimately he always knew history was likely to repeat itself. His laserlike focus, skillset and relentless dedication are about to culminate in something truly incredible. That's why I felt impelled to tell his story, not just to thank him for the joy he has brought us and the skills he has taught us but to share his achievements with the world. People like Bill Sandham, the man I am honoured to call my Dad, are an increasingly rare breed in today's world. Let's celebrate them while we still can.

To follow Bill's progress on Instagram go to @billsboatbuild

BELOW AND RIGHT Bill takes particular pride in the quality of his woodwork, using the very best timber and finishes available

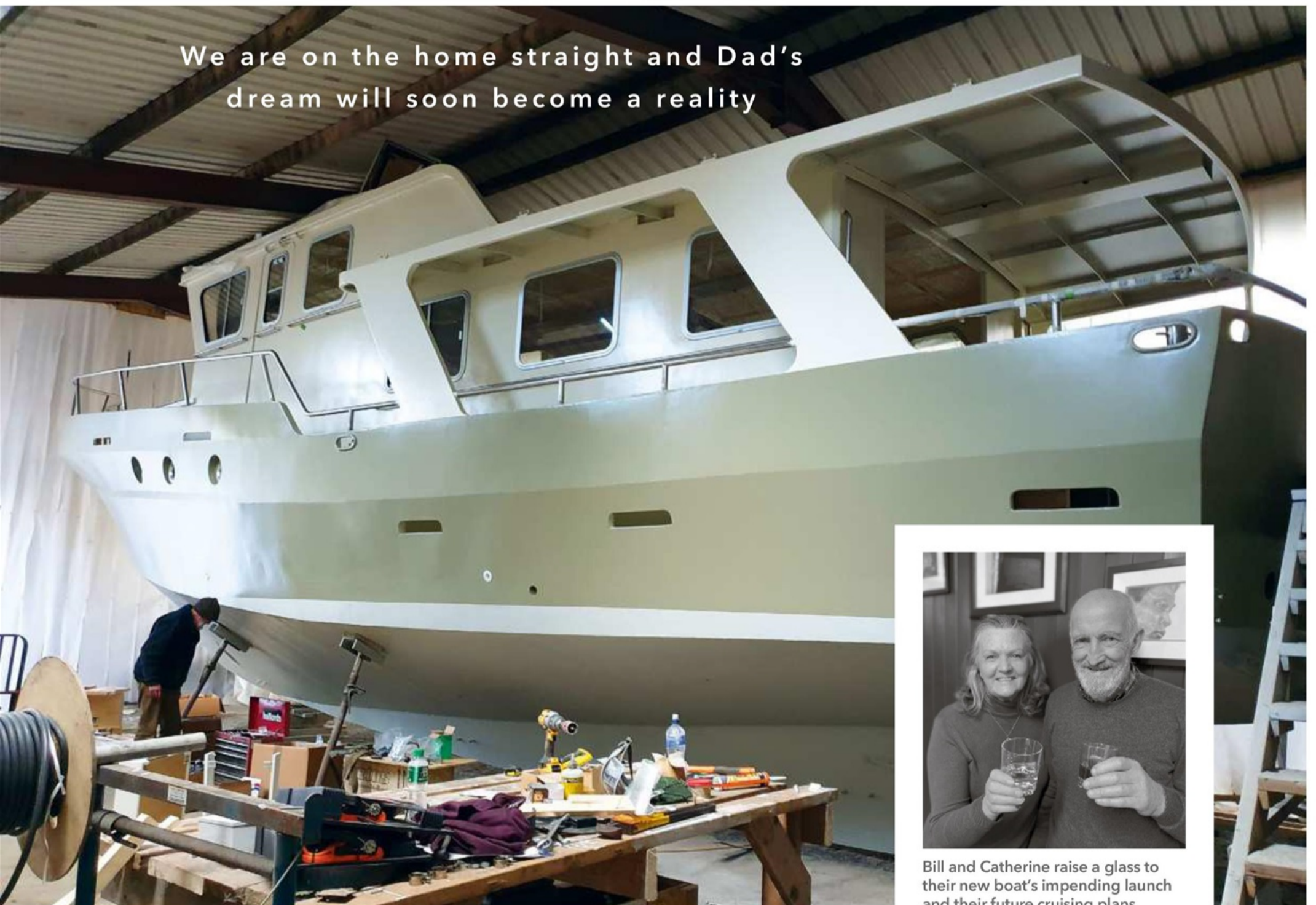


Sourcing top quality hard wood proved a challenge

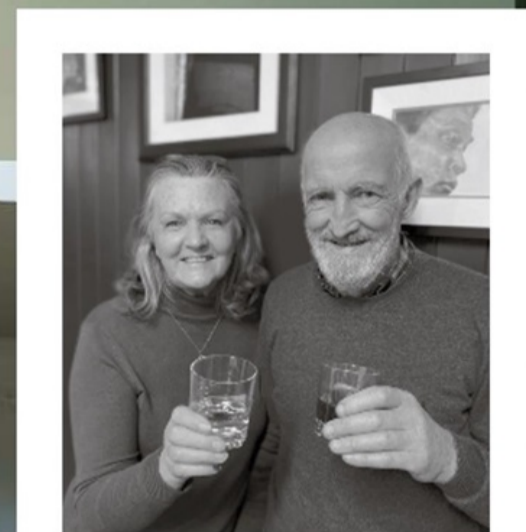




LEFT The couple plan to live aboard the finished boat so every part of it has been designed and built by the two of them to suit their needs



We are on the home straight and Dad's dream will soon become a reality



Bill and Catherine raise a glass to their new boat's impending launch and their future cruising plans