



The Book of Wooden Boats, Volume III

The Book of Wooden Boats, Volume III, photographs by Benjamin Mendlowitz, text by Maynard Bray; Introduction by John Rousmaniere. W.W. Norton, 500 Fifth Ave, New York, NY, 10110. Index, 192 pp., \$60.

Reviewed by Doug Cole

Benjamin Mendlowitz and Maynard Bray have been regular contributors to *WoodenBoat* since 1978—Mendlowitz as a photographer, with the majority of the magazine's covers to his credit, and Bray as Technical Editor. Over time I have become accustomed to the high quality of their work in the magazine, a variety of books, and *The Calendar of Wooden Boats*—which has been produced since 1983. In fact, their standards are so high that I still have every calendar. I simply cannot bear to part with a single copy of these annual works of art. Now comes *Volume III* in their book series, *The Book of Wooden Boats*. You may well ask, “What could be new?” in this latest installment.

To answer this question, I pulled out my collection of previous books photographed by Mendlowitz, the first being *Wood, Water & Light* (with text by Joel White, 1988) and sought to compare its images with those of this new volume. While the layouts are similar, I noticed freshness in the images, now photographed with digital equipment. Many recently restored boats, such as the



SANTANA, 55' Sparkman & Stephens schooner built in 1935.

Q-boat HAYDAY, the Lawley yawl SEMINOLE, and the 74' commuter APHRODITE, are a part of this new collection. If we were to have viewed these boats 35 years ago at the beginning of the wooden-boat resurgence, chances are we'd find some serious neglect and decay. What we now see are the results of this thriving resurgence, boats large and small basking in the loving care of their owners and crew. Bray wrote years ago in the introduction to one of the *Calendars* that he hoped he and Mendlowitz would not run out of subject matter for future *Calendars*. *Volume III* is a celebration of the fact that now they're not even close to running out. Many of the subject boats have been featured in recent *Calendars*, but here we are able to renew our enchantments from years past.

The book is organized into six chapters: Sailboats, Powerboats, Racing Classes, Workboats, Small Boats, and Sailing Yachts. While some boats could fit into several categories, the reader will have no difficulty in choosing one or two favorites of each variety.

Mendlowitz has set the standard for wooden-boat photography with pleasing angles, pristine backgrounds, and soft, delicate early morning or late-evening light—or dramatic mid-day skies. He credits Bray, in many cases, for positioning the chase boat to get just the right pose. Bray's excellent commentary tells us



APHRODITE, 74' commuter built in 1937.

COQUINA, 16' N.G. Herreshoff daysailer built in 2001.

what we're seeing, fills in some background, and, on occasion, offers a touch of whimsy—such as describing a pair of Fife sheerline dragons coming alive or imagining the next moment when a puff is about to strike an already pressed set of sails.

In his acknowledgments, Mendlowitz comments on the transition from film to digital photography. He had some initial resistance, but soon found the results with the digital cameras were exceeding those from his trusted SLR. By 2007 he was shooting all digital, and with confidence that the image quality had become superior.

How best to enjoy this book? If you're a wooden boat owner, then perhaps when your own boat is taking a winter snooze, this could be a time to cozy up around the fireplace in the evening and recall the season past. Looking closely at details might inspire a call down to the yard to tend to a certain forgotten item. Or to the rest of us, it might inspire a trip to our shops or base-ments to start an off-season project. If you're considering the purchase of a wooden boat, then a gaze through *The Book of Wooden Boats* might inspire you to take another look through the listings or perhaps fine tune the idea of a perfect vessel. If you're a shipwright or do-it-yourselfer, then there are ideas galore about how to build or modify certain elements under consideration.



Now this may not occur with your copy of *The Book of Wooden Boats*, but since mine was fresh from the printer, after about a half hour of gazing through the various images, I swear I began to detect the aroma of curing varnish. Could it be in this digital age that it's possible to induce some kind of subliminal olfactory reaction to seeing images of several hundred gorgeous wooden boats?

Doug Cole sails IRENE, his Concordia yawl, out of Bellingham, Washington.