

Introduction / Foreword Rita IV book

Welcome to the story of the Royal Yacht Rita IV. The story told in this book covers the first 95 years of her life, of how a yacht built for the King of Denmark became the Queen of Lake Geneva.

Just like cats, boats have more than one life but rarely are these successive lives as interesting as with Rita IV. Let me take you back to 1925 when His Majesty King Christian X of Denmark commissioned William Fife III from Scotland to design him a new International 10-Metre yacht. Mr. Fife was among the successful and admired naval architects of his time, his designs were never anything but exquisitely beautiful and the craftsmanship at his yard at Fairlie was simply unmatched. Safeguarding his name and reputation for excellence, rarely if ever, would Mr. Fife allow his designs to be built elsewhere. But, King Christian left Mr. Fife little choice, Rita IV was to be built at the Thornycroft's shipyard in Copenhagen's South Harbor and so it happened. With The King at the tiller, Rita was raced hard until in 1930, the year he ordered his next 10-Metre, Rita V. He sold Rita IV to ship-owner A.P. Møller. who kept her for almost 20 years until he sold her to the USA. There she started her second life under the Californian sun, racing and cruising along the coast finally ending up in Seattle where she slowly degraded and fell out of her former glory. She was rescued by an Italian gentlemen who brought her back to Europe but it turned out that Rita needed a total rebuild, a dream that was beyond his means.

Despite her pedigree no-one was ready to take over a large yacht in such desperate state, that is, until Fred Meyer came to her rescue. And so Rita IV embarked on her third life. In a way, that story started back in 1996. At that time I was secretary of the International Eight Metre Association. Fred Meyer, who had just given himself Catina VI, a very beautiful Int. 8-Metre for his 60th birthday, was destined to become the longest serving president in the history of the International 8-Metre Association. At that time we had not met, but later that year there was a meeting in Norway of classic boat enthusiasts and it all came together. Kindred spirits met and we both got introduced to David Vieira from Portugal. He was a young, passionate and incredibly talented naval architect who had just started a small boat yard in Setubal to restore Emily, a 1924 William Fife 8-Metre. Enough to get Fred and myself excited and so we booked our flights to visit him in Portugal. From that moment on, life would never be the same again. Soon after, David restored the 8-Metre which Fred & I bought in Sweden. For the first project meeting I felt the urge to get everyone in the Swedish spirit and so I brought over a bottle of Absolute Vodka. That evening we talked about the yard and at some point Fred asked David if his yard had a name. Well, that wasn't the case, simply because he had not come up with something suitable. Of course Fred took charge in his usual fashion and ideas flowed freely, until.. we looked at the bottle of Absolute Vodka...what about .. Absolute Restorations ? And so it happened, Absolute Restorations was founded that night and in the following 25 years it would make name as the yard which restored and built some of the finest yachts in the world.

It was many projects and moons later that Fred started dreaming about Rita IV. It was to be a major project, major in every sense of the word, especially major fun and exciting. Fred told two close dear friends, Dietmar Völker and Christian Prünke about the project, and of course his affectionate enthusiasm lead to the inevitable conclusion that they had to be part of it all.

And so a syndicate of friends was formed, one that would change Rita her life for the better. The first decision was to where she should be restored. That must have been a discussion just short of one minute; of course the team opted for Fred's home away from home; The Absolute yard in Portugal. There was no second choice and of course on board the project team came Nicolas Berthoud. Better known under his nickname Canard, this Whitbread veteran and multiple world champion sailor knows the ropes like no other. For decades he has been a close friend, advisor, crew member and trustee for just about anything afloat in Fred's life.

In Portugal the dream team was lead by David Vieira, the gentle giant behind the design and engineering of the project. David's drive for authenticity and his encyclopedic knowledge on the history of yacht construction ensured the integrity of the project. His goal was to have Rita IV running down the slipway as she did in Copenhagen in 1925. Projects like these requires an architect to who cares more for the signature of the original architect than his own, a role in which David was born. His deep rooted knowledge shaped the vision needed to transform the wreck that came in to the yard to one of the most stunning yachts ever. Of course David in turn has his own dream team lead by Miguel Ministro, the lead shipwright at Absolute Projects. Rarely have I met a boat builder more natural, more efficient or anyone able to plank a boat to a higher perfection than Miguel. Planks and boards are joined with routine, confidence and without second guessing, fitting tight as if grown together. And Miguel has a right hand man from his own making. His son Carlos works with him, keen to develop his own skills and talent.

The complexity of a yacht if this size is immense. It requires careful planning and a natural sense of anticipation, it is all about sequential decisions, to know what needs to happen when. The word management really does not cover what needed, to my mind choreography comes much closer.

The assembled photos in this book will tell you the story of how Rita was rebuilt. Step by step, you will witness the re-creation of a yacht of exceptional beauty. Thanks to the genius of William Fife III, she was, is and will always be amongst the finest examples of functional art. When Rita IV left the yard, she was born again, as good as new and, ready for her next life as The Queen of Lake Geneva.



John Lammerts van Bueren