

“So we beat on,
boats against the
current, borne
back ceaselessly
into the past.”

— *F. Scott
Fitzgerald,*
THE GREAT
GATSBY

Born six years after The Great Gatsby was written, the 48ft Huckins Avocette evoked the romanticism of that era for an owner who made the rebirth of this 1931 classic possible, says [REDACTED]





Avocette's lines are very close to the original but her underbelly was redesigned for IPS propulsion by Bill Prince Yacht Design

Picture this. It's 1931 in New York City and the Great Depression hangs low over the city like a thick morning fog that refuses to burn off. For most Americans, these are hard times, filled with baked beans, breadlines and dusty sojourns west in search of work.

But even then, there was the one percent. Enter Fred Voges, a dandy if ever there was one. He was also a shrewd businessman, and his manufacturing business more than stayed afloat despite lean times almost everywhere else. Voges was known for tastefully dancing the line between flash and class, and for swelling about with starlets such as Ginger Rogers and Gypsy Rose Lee. Legend has it that *Ziegfeld Follies* girls dripped off his arms like spangly baubles on a Christmas tree. Perhaps he took one of them with him on his way to the 1931 New York Boat Show, where he first laid eyes on an all-mahogany Huckins commuter yacht

with lines that flirted with femininity while dabbling in militaristic machismo.

Voges was totally smitten – not that he would let Frank Huckins know it. The two men quibbled and haggled until settling on a sale price of \$17,000. Voges took ownership of the boat fully turnkey, down to the china and silverware.

And thus began *Avocette III*'s high life, dotted with moguls and movie stars. Like many men of the same ilk, Voges would often commute aboard his yacht from his Long Island home to the city and have the chef cook him breakfast in the aft galley on the way in. Come five o'clock Voges would reappear, perhaps with a friend, to be served with an ice-cold highball that would be lustily downed in the forward rumble seat on the way back home.

And life was good. But, to paraphrase Nathaniel Hawthorne, fortunes are always rising and falling in America. And in 1944, Voges let *Avocette* go. Though the yacht avoided wartime conscription, she did not fair all that well. "After Fred died, the boat became kind of a wreck," says Cindy Purcell, Frank Huckins' granddaughter and current purveyor of Huckins.

Avocette III would pass three-quarters of a century in various states of repair and disrepair, depending on whose eye she caught. But the poor old girl was in a particularly derelict state when, through a happy chain of events, she came under the aegis of one Bill Morong of Yachting Solutions in Rockport, Maine, in 2012.

"We took her on as a project until we found a benefactor for her," Morong says. "She was a basket case, and also such a complexity. At some point there had been a fire aboard, and she had really just been through it. At Yachting Solutions we build and restore boats. It was a good match for *Avocette* at that time. Because let me tell you, she needed some help. She stayed with us for nearly eight years until we found the right guy to buy her. And man, was he a perfect fit."

The right guy is a new retiree coming out of the finance world, who owned a small Crosby tug that he used to take around his home waters. "Once I saw the boat and had a vision about what it could be, I knew that she would be a wonderful platform for adventure for the next chapter in my life. I also viewed the project

as a bit of an artistic patronage," the owner says. "It's Gatsby-esque, a fantasy boat. Boating was a big deal back then. Motors and airplanes and cars - this was the exciting technology of its era. They were fabulous designs and sadly most of them are gone. But I had to get my wife on board," he continues with a chuckle, "and then we went at it full bore. We spent hours thinking through every detail to make sure it was the stuff of our dreams."

"She really is a piece of floating art," Morong seconds. "[The owner] is a patron of the arts like any other."

Morong put *Avocette* through a "resto-mod" process, a relatively common idea in the automotive world, but a truly original one in the marine industry. The yacht was gutted and effectively rebuilt. Period drawings from Huckins and laser scans of the original structure helped preserve her lines, profile and aesthetics, though her underbelly was updated to account for the new IPS propulsion and cabin headroom.

Commuter-style yachts are notorious for being tippy, due to narrow beams imbued by the commonly accepted naval designs of their day. That's not a problem for *Avocette* though; she now has a Skeankee gyro-stabilizer that will nail her in place, even in sloppy conditions.

Yachting Solutions also added Volvo Penta IPS435 pod drives, which serve multiple purposes. They will be a boon to the new owner, who plans on captaining the boat himself and thus will benefit from the ease of use of the pods. Also, the relatively compact engine system freed up more space on the boat (more on that shortly). And finally, the engines pack some giddy-up, which was important to both the owner and Morong, as it stayed true to *Avocette's* original purpose as a playboy's speedster. On the pins she can hit 31 knots and cruises happily at a brisk 28 knots, which is very close to what she cruised at under her original power.

And she knows it. Scratch above 28 knots and the boat starts to oversteer a bit at the bow. At the wheel it's as if a voice from the past is stage whispering "Hey, knock it off!"



C-zone technology is another sweet touch for the new owner, as he doesn't have to worry much about looking after the yacht's systems.

But an overhaul of *Avocette's* guts is a far cry from all Yachting Solutions put into the build. The new and improved yacht is nothing short of an immaculate art deco beauty on the inside. The geometric details of the style are everywhere. Triple-ridged design, a hallmark of the movement, are visible throughout, with stainless steel detailing ranging from door handles to cabinets to a toaster - that's right, even the boat's toaster is art deco. However, the pièce de résistance is a working, stainless-steel fireplace that the owner himself dug up in a small London shop.

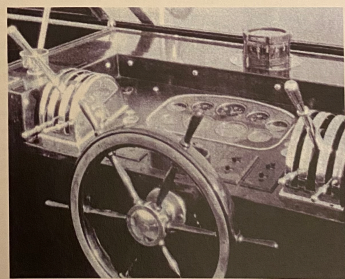
The fireplace is the centerpiece of the yacht's convertible salon/master at amidships, a space that doesn't so much scream elegance as cue it in your ear. Rich sipo is accented with burl mahogany, while two comfortable chairs to starboard complement a convertible settee to port

that morphs into a large enough berth for the owner and his wife. A full head aft (where the galley used to reside) includes a shower that is more than large enough for the owner who stands at nearly six-and-a-half feet tall.

Indeed, the entire interior was re-jigged for the owner's proportions, perhaps most notably in the lower helm/galley forward, where headroom is six-and-a-half feet and electric skylights (an idea as far away as the moon in 1931) create a feeling of even more space.

Forward on the accommodations level, there are twin berths meant for guests, but just as often as not they're used by the owner. A cut-through between the berths leads forward to a hatch that opens up into the forepeak rumble seat; the optimal place to take in that early evening cocktail that Voges and friends so enjoyed.

That is to say, it's the optimal place to be on a summer's day. I was able to sea trial the boat in October in Maine, and while that rumble seat was blissful for a bit, it



Top left: the new Avocette cruises at around 28 knots, the same as she did back in 1931. Above: the original hull was scanned, taken apart and faithfully recreated with cedar and sipo. Unlike the original, the yacht now has an upper and lower helm



The yacht's refurbished interior includes a convertible master/salon (left and right), an art deco fireplace culled from England (right), and fit and finish befitting a superyacht

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sure does get cold quickly up there when the dog days of summer are over.

On test day we encountered the pea soup fog so typical of the New England region out on Penobscot Bay. Unbowed, I took the wheel at the yacht's upper helm, dropped the hammer and watched the speedometer scoot quickly up to 31.6 knots. Easing off a bit, we slowed slightly to the 28-knot cruise speed, where *Avocette* handled with the smooth assurance of a big Cadillac as she slalomed through the myriad lobster pots dotting the gray and flat-calm water. Harbor seals popped up here and there checking out the mahogany wonder, perhaps admiring her just as much as the crew aboard the 241ft *Mogambo*, which was moored just outside the harbor. When a 48-footer is making the crew of a megayacht that size gawk, you know you've got something truly special on your hands.

Toward the end of the sea trial I steered the boat around one last headland, this one dotted with a quaint New England lighthouse standing chaperone over the harbor. The gloom was such that the sky melted into the sea, and for just a fleeting moment, ensconced in that velvety fog, we could have been anywhere in space – or time – as *Avocette* brushed quietly through the current, bearing back ceaselessly into the past.





AVOCETTE

HUCKINS/YACHTING SOLUTIONS

MAIN DECK

LOWER DECK

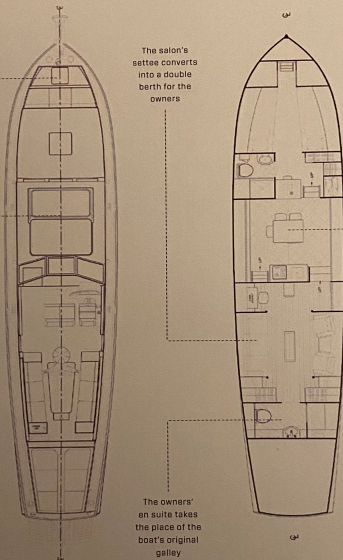
A hatch from the guest cabin opens to the rumble seat

Skylights peek into the galley below and can be opened up

The salon's settee converts into a double berth for the owners

The modern new galley is spacious with 6.5ft headroom

The owners' en suite takes the place of the boat's original galley



12ft
6ft
0ft

LOA 48' 2"
LWL 47' 6"
Beam 11' 1"
Draft 2' 8"
Displacement
27,000lb

Engines
2 x 380hp Volvo-Penta
D6-435 IPS 600
Generator
Kohler 11EKQZD, 11kW
Speed max/cruise
37/27 knots

Fuel capacity
370 gallons
Freshwater capacity
108 gallons
Owners/guests 4
Construction
Cold-molded wood

Naval architecture
original/refit
Huckins/Bill Prince
Yacht Design
Exterior styling
original/refit
Huckins/Bill Prince
Yacht Design

Interior design
original/refit
Huckins/ Bill Prince
Yacht Design; Maloney
Interiors; Newport
Yacht Interiors

Builder/year
Huckins/1931
Refit yard/year
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