

Saving Hindu

A nearly 100-year-old schooner with a rich history undergoes a rebuild to get her ready for a second century

Hindu still has some of her original 1925 timbers, which will eventually be replaced.

Left: Designed by William Hand, *Hindu* was launched in 1925. Right: Bill Rowan purchased the schooner in 2011; his son Josh is in charge of her.



FREAS PHOTOGRAPHY (LEFT); NICK DOLL PHOTOGRAPHY (RIGHT)



On her way to being saved, *Hindu* was almost lost.

On July 10, 2020, the 95-year-old William Hand-designed schooner was transiting from her charter home in Key West, Florida, to her summer home in Provincetown, Massachusetts. It was 3 a.m. *Hindu*'s captain, Josh Rowan, was just off watch and sleeping on deck while his fiancée, Erin Desmond, was at the helm. "It was dark and a little foggy," Erin remembers. With two friends along as crew, they'd been sailing almost nonstop to stay ahead of Tropical Storm Fay.

They motorsailed through Long Island Sound as they followed another boat's track at 7 to 8 knots when midway between Connecticut and Long Island, just north of Port Jefferson, New York, the boat came to a complete stop. "Suddenly it felt like we were aground," Erin recalls. "We're stopped, but we're in 150 feet of water."

"It felt like we'd struck a rock," Josh says. In the dark, they saw something sliding down the side of the boat. "It was bobbing up and down like an iceberg," Erin recalls. That's when they realized it was the bow of a submerged boat.

Hindu was taking on water. "It was horrifying," Erin says. "I was in shock. It didn't occur to me that we could go down." The collision had caused the plank-on-frame hull to spring a leak. They called the Coast Guard, but after assessing the situation Josh felt the bilge pumps could handle it until they got to Cape Cod.

After getting hauled out in Provincetown they could see the collision had knocked the stem 3 inches out of line, popped a lot of the hood ends away, and cracked the forefoot. She would need major repairs. Unable to run the summer charters that were supposed to help pay for a long-planned winter refit,



they loaded more pumps and headed for Maine to start the rebuild five months early. Josh already knew who would be doing the work. Shipwrights Simon Larsen and Mike Rogers had rebuilt other William Hand schooners, including the 83-foot *Ladona*. “They had done such a beautiful job with the rebuild of *Ladona* that I wanted them on the *Hindu* team,” Josh says.

Once in Maine, Josh and Erin heard from the Coast Guard. Someone had drilled holes in the submerged vessel in an apparent attempt to sink the 30-foot pocket cruiser during the tropical storm to collect the insurance money. The boat’s fuel and water tanks had kept her near the surface. “It was like a needle in the haystack to find that vessel in the middle of Long Island Sound,” Erin says. “Why on earth would you do that? We were very, very, very, very lucky.”

“One foot to either side, and we’d be on the bottom,” says Josh, who grew up on a boat. Before Josh was born, his father, Bill Rowan, started working on a 50-foot sailboat so he could sail off to distant shores with his wife and kids. The fact that they lived in Oregon’s Cascade mountains, 250 miles from the ocean, did not deter him. Bill bought a Fatty Knees dinghy so Josh and his siblings could learn to sail in their grandmother’s swimming pool. “We would tack up to the diving board, go downwind to the shallow end of the pool, pull the dagger board up, and go back,” Josh recalls.

Twelve years after he started building his sailboat, Bill launched the 50-foot, Tripp-designed *Edward D. Rowan*. Josh was five years old when they set off for Central and South America. “My parents were kind of hippies,” he says. “We were known as the Row-ins because we never had an outboard.”

His mother liked to spend time ashore in little Mexican fishing villages and enrolled her children in the local schools. They spent so many years in Spanish-speaking countries that Josh dreamed in Spanish. “I was known as the ‘dirty Mexican,’” Josh says, chuckling at his old nickname, which he admits was apt.

Six years later, the family came ashore in Key West. Josh was 11. “It was whacked,” he says. “I thought everybody [went sailing]. I learned that you had to know who Michael Jackson was.” Bill hung out his architecture shingle, the *Edward D. Rowan* was put on a mooring and Josh went off to a junior boarding school in Lake Placid, New York.

When he returned to Florida for high school, he convinced his parents to let him fix up the mothballed family boat and start a business. His mom wrote the Coast Guard for an age exemption—he wasn’t old enough to be a licensed captain—and at 16, he was running his own charter company.

Left: Shipwright Mike Rogers checks beneath the deck before making a chain-saw cut. *Top:* Tools of the trade



He first laid eyes on *Hindu* in the late 1990s when the schooner pulled into Key West en route to Jamaica. “I just saw this beautiful, perfectly proportioned schooner,” Josh says. “You couldn’t help but notice her.”

Hindu had started life as *Princess Pat* in 1925. During the depression, she frequently changed names and owners. She quickly became *Anna Lee Ames*, then raced as *Saispas* in the 1930 Newport-Bermuda race, and in the late 1930s became *Hindu* when she served a short stint in the spice trade between Boston and India.

During World War II, *Hindu* joined the Corsair Fleet. Also known as the Hooligan Navy, the fleet was made up of privately owned vessels manned with volunteer crews. *Hindu* was converted into a U-boat hunter with a deck mounted .50-caliber machine gun, sonar equipment and depth charges and encountered a couple of enemy subs.

After the war, Capt. Al Avellar of Provincetown used *Hindu* for day-sails, fished for tuna, and when the weather was right, took people whale-watching at Stellwagen Bank in Massachusetts Bay. *Hindu* is credited with starting the whale-watching industry on the eastern seaboard and stayed with Avellar for more than three decades.

In the 1980s, she changed hands a few times until attorney John Bennett bought her. Josh says Bennett was *Hindu*’s most interesting owner. During a trip to Jamaica, Bennett may have brought back something other than Indian spices. When he died unexpectedly, *Hindu* spent a few years on the hard and developed a hog. She was so derelict that *Wooden Boat* magazine featured her in its “Save a Classic” feature. Capt. Kevin “Foggy” Foley, who had sailed aboard *Hindu* when he was 12, saved the schooner from the dumpster when he and some partners bought her in 2004. He patched her up and brought her down to Key West for chartering.

Josh had captained the *Edward D. Rowan* for nine years, and in 2007 Foley hired him to be *Hindu*’s captain. Soon after, Foley lost the boat in an ownership dispute. A bank took possession; *Hindu* was stored on shore and again was nearly scrapped.

Still smitten with the boat, Josh and his father looked at her in 2011. “It broke our hearts when we found her,” Josh says. She needed a ton of work, but Bill had sailed aboard *Hindu* and always loved schooners, so he dipped into his retirement savings and bought her.

Over 18 months in Key West, they repaired the hull, replaced the keel bolts and the engine, and gave her new spars and rigging. They were aware the 1925 backbone needed to be replaced, but they gave themselves 10 years to earn enough money for a major rebuild.

They relaunched her in 2013 and brought her back to Provincetown, where the boat reconnected with an eager clientele that had known her for more than 60 years. “We think she’s taken in the neighborhood of 2 million people sailing,” Josh says. “And those people and their descendants come sailing every single summer in Provincetown.”

In 2015, knowing *Hindu* would be unable to earn income during a rebuild, Josh purchased a replica of an 1880s-era Fife cutter named *Bloodhound*. With a massive boom and a huge retractable bowsprit, the 70-footer struck Josh as the perfect boat to keep *Hindu*’s loyal fans in the fold. He also partnered with two friends to purchase a luxury catamaran to run 10-day trips to Cuba, a venture that took a hit when the Trump administration closed that country to American tourists.

Hindu currently sits in Thomaston, Maine, where Josh purchased the former site of the Maine State Prison probationary office, specifically for the rebuild project. Knowing that wooden boat repairs can take much longer than planned, and subsequently put a financial squeeze on boat owners when yard fees pile up, he felt owning the land for the boat restoration was a safer bet. “*Hindu* is in her probationary period,” Josh jokes about the unusual location off Maine’s historic Route 1.

After they removed *Hindu*’s keel, cabin house, engine, cockpit, interior and lower planks, a Hemlock timber frame barn structure was raised around the schooner and wrapped in plastic to protect her from the elements. Once *Hindu* is back in the water, Josh plans to pour a concrete foundation for the timber frame structure, flood the lot in winter and slide the hemlock barn across the ice onto its new foundation.

Although many of William Hand’s drawings were destroyed in a fire, *Hindu* is now being restored close to her original lines. To fix the hogging, Simon and Mike had to jack her ends up, but because the boat’s planking was holding the hog in place, they had to resort to the chainsaw. Josh laughed when asked about the many cuts that run deep down *Hindu*’s sides. “Mike told me, ‘you may not want to be here when we do that.’”

While correcting the hog, they also fixed the asymmetry. *Hindu* was lean on one side and bulging on the other. They turned a huge purpleheart timber from Guyana into a new backbone and started replacing frames. New Douglas fir planking will come from Oregon, where Josh’s father still owns 500 acres of land.

A previous restoration used frames and deck beams that were an inch smaller than the originals. The deck flexed and all the undersized timbers needed to be replaced. On the deck, Mike used a chainsaw to cut through the rail caps to expose the tops of the old frames. Some pieces let go willingly; others took some convincing with a crowbar.

As Mike disassembled the sheer planking at the bow, and Simon replaced the frames. Originally, the plan was to only replace the top four feet of the frames, but the floor timbers had never been replaced and the overlaps between futtocks were insufficient, so the frames are being replaced from the deck to the keel.

Using a template, Simon marked up a thick hunk of live oak, shaped it on a giant bandsaw, ran it through a planer and cut it to size with a circular saw. He placed the new futtock inside the hull, gave it a few whacks with a sledgehammer and clamped it in place. Simon grew up in Denmark where he attended boatbuilding schools and worked at boatyards. Easygoing and soft-spoken, he made the tricky work look like child’s play. When he swiftly transformed a piece of black locust into a perfectly fitted futtock, he modestly deflected praise and gave the credit to a template he had lying around.

“I call them my termites,” Josh says about the two shipwrights. “They go through wood like crazy. Without Simon and Mike this would be impossible.”

Some of Hindu’s original, heavily checked timbers also need to be replaced, but Josh and Erin are still raising money to finish the job. The loss of charter income put a dent in their rebuild funds and it will be at least another year before they can relaunch *Hindu*.

“Nothing’s cheap on a boat like this,” Josh says. He holds up one of the \$20 bronze bolts that will replace the old iron fastenings. “There are 900 of those bolts in the boat,” he says. “I’m going to have to sell my kidneys to pay for this,” he adds with a laugh.

They have enough money to get the project rolling, but not enough to finish it, so they’ve started a GoFundMe page to help cover some of the costs. “I will never make up for the cost of this project,” Josh says. “I’m doing it because I think the boat deserves a second chance at life. Our plan is when she turns 100, she’ll be better than when she was built.”

Left: Inside the timber frame shed, shipwright Simon Larsen uses the planer to bring a futtock down to size.