

# A MIGHTY ENDEAVOUR

THE TRADITION LIVES ON

BY SUSAN ZALUSKI

*Endeavour II* currently under construction behind Foxy's Bar and Restaurant

PHOTO: SUSAN ZALUSKI



Although many British Virgin Islanders today prefer sleek, racy motorboats, just over a half-century ago, small, locally-constructed sailboats dominated these waters. Visiting yachtsman painted colorful descriptions: boats overloaded with cargo that could include paying passengers, 'ground provisions' (starchy root vegetables like cassava, yam and potato), charcoal, straps of fish and even livestock. Following Emancipation, newly freed slaves were forced to meet their needs for sustenance, survival and shelter, and naturally



PHOTO: SUSAN ZALUSKI

turned to available resources ashore and in the surrounding sea. With a population and resources spread across some 50 small islands and cays, sailing and small boats played a major role in social and economic development.

Several years ago, the Jost Van Dykes Preservation Society (JVDPS) embarked on the mighty task of building an updated version of a 'Tortola boat', as those distinctive looking sailing sloops came to be known. Although Jost Van Dyke itself was not a major boat-building center, the residents have been celebrated as the best seamen and fishermen in the BVI. Sailing, fishing and the repair of the Tortola boats was a mainstay of life on Jost Van Dyke until the mid 1960s, when sailing vessels were inevitably replaced by motorized craft. While traditions change with modernization, a maritime legacy endures on Jost Van Dyke and the islanders have a great affinity with the sea. While all four of the other main inhabited islands of the BVI have air service, little JVD (3.5 square miles) is entirely dependent upon travel by boat for anything—and everything.

*Endeavour II* was designed by a volunteer Canadian naval architect, who based her lines on those of the original vessels, with input from a group of Jost Van Dyke elders who grew up sailing original sloops. In the 1940s, one visitor recalled these unique vessels as 'odd-looking, beamy little craft, with a great deal of freeboard forward and practically none aft' (\*see note), which is an accurate description of *Endeavour II*'s design. Tortola boats were also recognizable by their 'long booms [that extended far beyond the boat's transom and] dipped frequently in the water as they rolled along'. *Endeavour II* carries this same unique 'leg of mutton' sail plan.

The original Tortola boats, usually planked of native woods (White Cedar), were 18-20ft long and had movable rock ballast.

They might be painted with steely-grey U.S. naval paint – when available – or house paint, if that was the only option. In contrast, *Endeavour II* is 32ft in length and boasts a 6,000lb lead ballast keel (poured on site and created from recycled or salvaged scrap), and is planked with South American Silverballi. The planking is saturated with epoxy resin covered with two layers of fiberglass and marine coatings donated by Interlux. She's also equipped with a 55hp

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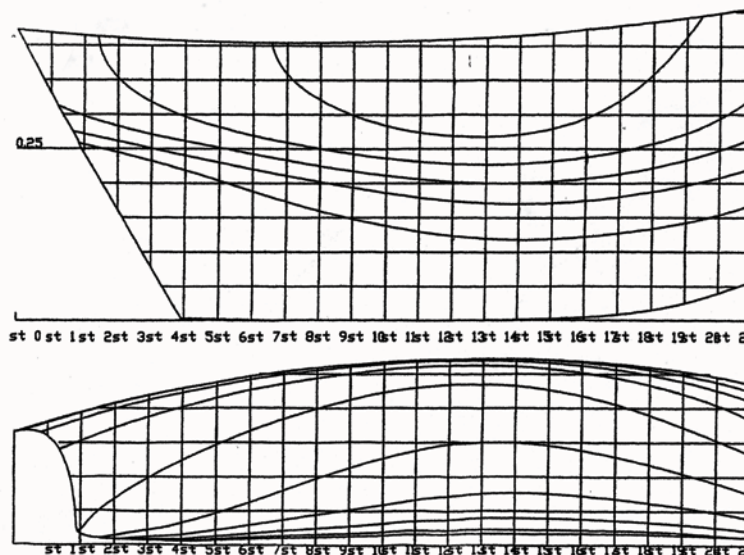


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*Endeavour II* line drawings

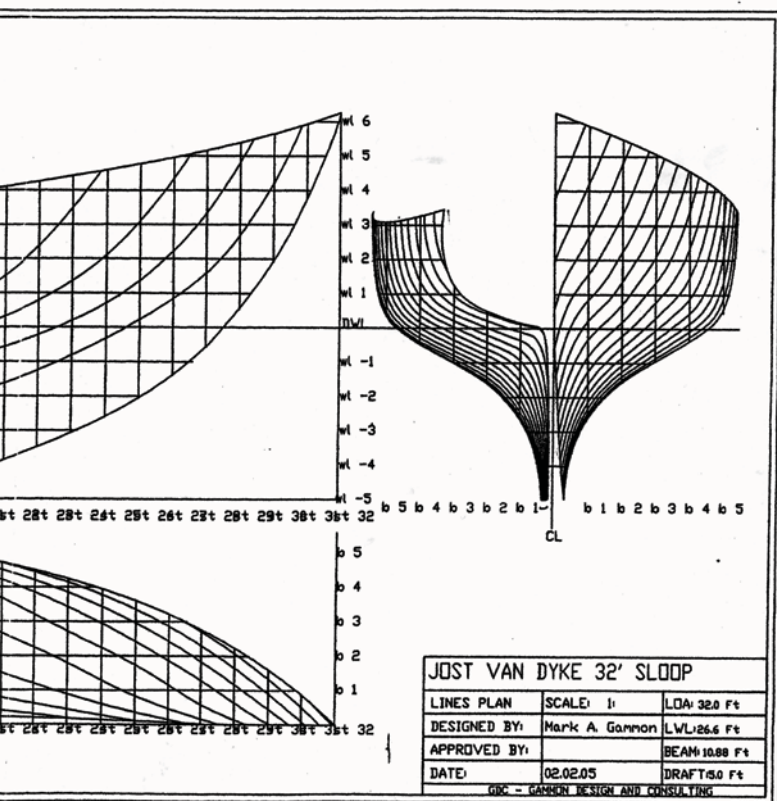


engine donated by Volvo Penta. Most of the original sloops have not survived the intense Caribbean weather conditions. *Endeavour II*, however, is being built for blue-water sailing and long-term durability while, at the same time, retaining the distinctive lines of the Tortola boat.

Construction on *Endeavour II* has been slow and halting over the last several years due to the economic recession (which slowed charitable-giving globally), the growing pains of a young, non-profit organization and the unique complexity of building a modern vessel on a tiny island with no chandlery and few resources. Despite the challenges, JVDPS has continued to advance construction while launching a number of other projects relating to environment and heritage, completing research studies, and working to develop environmental monitoring programs for the island.

Once launched, *Endeavour II* will become the Society's floating classroom – providing a platform for the hands-on marine and coastal ecology activities that the Society has been organizing for local BVI youth over the last three years. Activities include special training opportunities that enable youth to monitor local coral reefs and important marine and coastal habitats.

In the past, Virgin Islanders had an intimate relationship and deep knowledge of their natural environment. Imported goods were expensive and hard to come by and, as a



result, islanders became extremely innovative in their use of natural materials and their ability to constantly recycle scarce goods. For example, fishing equipment, pots and line etc., were built of local vines, plants and other natural materials that would quickly decompose at sea when lost. Today's modern fishing gear – often built of plastic and rugged wire – has a damaging effect on the marine environment when not found. Rapid modernization has brought an influx of new wealth to the Caribbean. With new prosperity came a rise in imported goods with excessive packaging; all have a negative impact on the natural environment. The *Endeavour II* project hopes to advance environmental stewardship among BVI youth, building an appreciation for the natural sciences and key biological communities. More importantly, it is hoped *Endeavour II* will help local youth build an understanding of and appreciation for their grandparents and other generations that came before them.

\*Bertram, Kate (1948) 'West Indies – a Five Year Cruise'. ©

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