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## Nobody is perfect but this guy comes close

Posted on 27 November 2014 *Written by Dieter Loibner*



The yawl Artemis cuts a fine figure in the Danish islands during her first season after a long restoration.

If saving and restoring old boats were like football, Joachim Kaiser would be the second coming of Vince Lombardi. Like the legendary NFL coach, Kaiser has won many battles, often snatching victory from the jaws of defeat, drawing on his knowledge of the game and an ability to adjust as necessary. He knows the tricks, and he knows the blunders, many from firsthand experience. Paraphrasing Lombardi: To achieve success, there is a price to pay. Kaiser paid his dues in the restoration business, which requires research, intuition and the ability to shake the money tree.

Normally, Kaiser is on the prowl for historically relevant vessels, scouring quiet backwaters in northern Europe where wrecks are rusting and rotting into oblivion. His track record earned him the nickname “truffle pig.” But these days he isn’t looking to find a boat — he’s trying to get rid of one: Artemis, a vintage 1900 yawl with a sparred length of 118 feet that was worth millions only a few years ago. In fact, he’s giving her away.

## A dogged pursuit of history

About Kaiser: With a past as a sailor, seaman and magazine editor, he is blessed — perhaps cursed — with a near-irrational interest in historic vessels and a talent for digging up old records that borders on obsession. Looking at world events, the restoration of old boats might seem like a frivolous problem, but for people such as Kaiser, preserving maritime heritage is like analyzing ancient DNA. After all, how do you know where you're going if you don't know where you came from?

There is a method to this madness, and it starts with answering some questions: Is the vessel historically important? Does it have ties to the region? Is it really what everyone thinks it is? Can it be restored, and at what cost? If it pencils out (even barely), Kaiser has to find ways to sell the project to people who subscribe to his vision and will help him tap resources for manpower, supplies and cash.

Another piece of this puzzle, at least in Hamburg, is leveraging restoration projects as job-training programs in cooperation with the city's unemployment agency. Under the tutelage of skilled professionals, at-risk youth and unemployed older workers acquire skills that prepare them for a career change or entering the workplace. Success breeds respect, and Kaiser's track record over the past four decades earned him the reputation of a wizard who can beat long odds and see things through.

Recently he was awarded a medal of honor by the city, which has seen its ranks of historic ships swell over the past several decades. In search of them, Kaiser roamed far and wide. During a sailing trip in Denmark in the 1970s, he found Rigmor, an ancient revenue cutter built in Glückstadt on the Elbe River in 1853. In 1990 he located the steamer Schaarhörn in Scotland, a ship that was built in 1908 in Hamburg to cart Emperor Wilhelm II around. In 2002 he ventured to Seattle to rescue the 1882 pilot schooner No. 5 Elbe from near certain demise. That boat had become famous as Warwick Tompkins' cruising yacht Wanderbird, which sailed from Gloucester, Massachusetts, around Cape Horn to San Francisco in 1937.

All of these vessels were repatriated, restored and relaunched, and now are part of the Maritime Foundation Hamburg's fleet, taking paying customers on cruises or charters and generating revenue that helps cover maintenance and operating costs. Typically they are run by their own non-profits made up of volunteers who donate time and/or money, crew aboard them or help with upkeep.

## Fishing in the muck

Today, Kaiser remains involved in managing the foundation, which is a little bit Mystic Seaport and a little bit International Yacht Restoration School rolled into one, but also distinctly different because it restores historic buildings, too, and answers to the city of Hamburg. Its headquarters are near the customs facilities in the commercial port, and from his office Kaiser has a dead-on view of the Elbe Philharmonic Hall, which is destined to become one of the world's most advanced concert halls but right now is a bottomless money pit. A symbol of sorts? "No," says Kaiser, "once it's done, it will be great for Hamburg."

Kaiser's walls are lined with shelves filled with ring binders that are neatly labeled with the names of the vessels he has saved, with one glaring exception: Artemis. The gaff-rigged yawl, named after the Greek goddess for hunting, wilderness, childbirth and virginity, had become the proverbial albatross around his neck. "In 1994 we dug

her out of a mud berth on the Blackwater River east of London, where she had spent several decades as a houseboat," he recalls.

She was built in 1900 at Summers & Payne in Southampton for Frank Loughborough Pearson, a noted architect of cathedrals. Nice, but what's the connection to Hamburg? "Artemis sailed in the Kiel Week in 1900 against the yacht of Emperor Wilhelm II and finished third," Kaiser says. "Since we already restored the steamer that was built for Emperor Wilhelm's use, Artemis was considered a good fit."

Although that's quite a stretch, to say the least, the foundation bought her through a straw man from the widow of her last owner, William Bentley, who owned a popular seafood restaurant in London. She was carted back to Hamburg on a yacht transport ship.

### Jobs for a platoon of people

The restoration was a gargantuan undertaking, a rebuild in many aspects, and a protracted affair that lasted until 2007 and cost a bundle. One published guess put the amount at 6 million euros. Of the hull structure, only the teak stringers were left. Keel, stem and deadwood were fashioned from oak, and a smaller portion of the frames in the aft section were laminated from Iroko. The deck is Oregon pine, and the original skylights, hatches and doghouse were reinstalled. They used kaya for the planks and spruce for the spars, both by the truckload, as well as nearly five miles of wire, more than 700 feet of pipe and a mountain of stainless steel for hardware and tanks.

The 110-ton boat also was fitted with an engine for day trips and charter cruises. It was a big job and a tough sell because Artemis has no roots in Hamburg, a city that treasures the workboats that helped build its wealth in the maritime trade. As a consequence, money often was tight, so work stopped and the boat sat idle. But Kaiser and several others never gave up, and in the spring of 2008, a dozen years after the restoration commenced, Artemis finally was launched to great fanfare.

The boat also provided work for 173 trainees. Everybody had reason to smile. Sponsors signed up. The city was proud. Artemis was another gem in the crown. "Over the years, the former wreck turned into a marvelous nautiquity," one reviewer gushed. "Convincing down to the details, and impressive beyond measure when her 35 meters are plowing through the water in all their power and splendor." With a vessel that large and complex, what could possibly go wrong?



New oak frames were installed after the removal of Artemis' infected planking.

## A formidable mess

She was paraded around the Baltic and was the undisputed belle of the ball at the classic boat festivals. The Rita Hayworth of yawls. But clandestinely she made water, and more than just a trickle. An open seam? A warped plank? Just a teething problem, right? Suspicions that something more serious was happening arose on her trip back to Hamburg at the end of the season. An inspection of the stern by dinghy revealed several soft spots. The boat had to be hauled. The day she came out is a day Kaiser won't forget. "The phone rang," he says, "and one of the boys said, 'Can you come? It ain't pretty.'" It was worse.

"I could reach right through the soft wood and pull out bits of the laminated frames around the rudder post," Kaiser says, his mouth a rictus of pain. The diagnosis was devastating: a severe infestation of *schizophora paradoxa* fungus. It had affected the planks below the waterline, which had to be removed. Some of the laminated frames had to go, as well. The keel, stem, deadwood, stringers, deck and interior were spared. Still, Kaiser and the foundation had a formidable mess on their hands. "Of course, fingers were being pointed, but we couldn't pin the blame on one single factor," Kaiser says.

Sponsors started to grumble and eventually jumped ship, forcing the foundation to pull the plug. Critics suggest they bit off more than they could chew, even though they deserve recognition for finishing what was started in 1994. It's just that the challenges, the funding problems, the delays and a portion of plain bad luck eventually caught up. So Artemis went back to square one: a hulk — a pretty one, though — sitting in a cradle on a pier. But "her substance is good," Kaiser says.

The boat might be a freebie, but her gear and equipment are for sale at a fraction of the original cost. Will it be enough to entice someone, anyone? There were nibbles but no bites. It will take someone with considerable skill, vision and wherewithal to get this straightened out, but in this business the word "impossible" does not exist. For Kaiser and those who've worked on Artemis, it would be a relief to see her go to a good home. "Nobody here could bear watching her being broken up," he says. "Or maybe there's a Plan B, rebuilding the hull and using what's in good condition."

Painful as this experience was, it didn't dampen his enthusiasm for the restoration game. Or, as Coach Lombardi said: "It's not whether you get knocked down, it's whether you get up."

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