



The naval architect's design drawings for the restoration of *La Spina*.

The rebirth of a classic racing yacht in Italy

By Christina Pirovolaki

HIDDEN away in a warehouse within the compound of a military facility near Naples lies a floating masterpiece which dozens of craftsmen and carpenters are painstakingly trying to restore.

For the past two years, Italian shipowner Federico Ciomo has been following the slow but steady resurrection of *La Spina*, a classic racing yacht from the 1920s which he acquired in a deteriorated state from a shipyard in Spain.

Having owned and restored other boats in the past, the 22m Bermudian schooner with a mizzenmast has been the most challenging project to date.

"Unlike a piece of furniture, a painting or a sculpture, a period vessel cannot be restored in order for it to become a piece for a museum – it must come back to life to plough through the waves again," he says.

"It is something which takes years and millions of euros to accomplish because restoring things is more difficult than rebuilding them."

The story of *La Spina*'s rebirth one that involves the craftsmanship and expertise of naval architects, engineers, surveyors, riggers and sail-makers, illustrates what is perhaps the most expensive and time-consuming hobby in the world – classic yacht restoration.

La Spina's lineage can be traced back to the Baglietto Shipyard in Varese whose first owner, the Genoese marquis Franco –



The yacht *La Spina*, without mast, undergoing restoration near Naples.

surnamed Franchino Spinola – commissioned a high-speed and elegant vessel to be constructed in 1920.

Over the following years, *La Spina* changed owners a number of times and was transformed from a 12m sloop to a 22m ketch, complete with a central mast and smaller stern.

Later, in the 1950s, the vessel sat abandoned and heavily eroded in a shipyard in Vilanova, along the Catalan coast of Spain.

It was during this period that Federico decided to purchase the boat from the heirs of the last owner and to bring it back to Italy to begin its restoration.

When it came to restoration, much thought was given to the right route to take. One option, which has been followed with many of the 'vintage' boats around today, is to adopt a rebuild strategy: taking *La Spina*'s shell as a starting point and then redesigning the boat by adding new materials and equipment.

Since this option did not appeal to the owner, he sought the most difficult route – using traditional methods and preserving as much of the original boat as possible.

With the help of architect Stefano Faggioni, who is known for his work on other classical yachts such as *Lalworth*, *Miguel XII* and *Eliza* since 1999, the ambitious project began.

"A lot of restoration these days are not true restorations because they tend to strip the boat and start from scratch – in this case we tried to keep the spirit of the boat alive," says Faggioni.

Nearly 85% of the yacht's interior is original, including much of the mahogany and maple panelling, furniture, bookshelves, wardrobe and drawer handles.

The folding porcelain and wood wash basins and writing table, usually designed for the marquis are original too, as are the antique cookers in the galley.

The crew's sleeping quarters were kept according to the original design of the vessel, with sleeping compartments hidden underneath the bow of the boat while in the stow, the architect plans to use luxurious tapestry to refit the extensive sofa.

As the ship's architect, Faggioni spent countless hours hunkering down wall layouts in nautical shops and designed ceiling lamps reminiscent of the 1920s.

When pieces were missing such as parts of the panelling we made new ones that resembled them. You cannot sell the difference between the new and the old," he says.

While a considerable amount of the boat's original interior materials had survived, an extensive part of the boat's exterior has suffered irreparable damage after years of too much sun, rain and salt.

The decades that *La Spina* spent beached underneath the wing rays of the Mediterranean sun had decayed and dried out much of the structural skeleton, deck and planking beyond repair.

At the shipyard, 15 men, including yard owner Dino Giovanni and *La Spina*'s future captain Giovanni Mareca have spent countless hours reconstructing the oak hull as well as the stern which was filled with dozens of fast-tied holes.

"Before you start a massive project like reconstructing a boat you never know how much it will end up costing because as soon as you dismantle the vessel and remove the planking you will come across all sorts of surprises," says Giovanni.

Using *Khoya Aowuz* mahogany for the planking, it took two teams of men working round the clock more than five months to place them aboard in the traditional manner. In the end, more than 15,000 specially designed copper nails were drilled, all by hand, into the frame to bolt the planks on.

Even after so much time and effort, the work on *La Spina* continues.

The owner hopes for a technical launch shortly in the new year and the crew, led by Captain Mareca, hope to finally have her ready to take part in the Princes classic yacht circuit and 12m races by the summer this year.

Asked whether he will be a part of this crew, Federico says he "would see him for the world." – DPA