



Left: Jackie Kennedy was a guest aboard Northwind (seen in background) during a Greek holiday in 1961. Below: Northwind had a supporting role in the Netflix series Griselda, about Colombian cartel leader Griselda Blanco

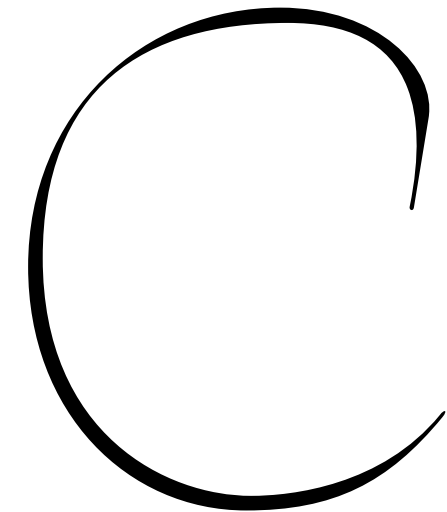
# WHERE THE WIND BLOWS

*How did a classic 1930 yacht from Wisconsin become a spy ship for the UK, and later a movie star? Cecile Gauert visits Marina del Rey, California, to find out*

PHOTOGRAPHY: JAMES BURKE / THE LIFE PICTURE COLLECTION / SHUTTERSTOCK; COURTESY OF OWNER







Cinematographer and entrepreneur Tom Jones (and until recently, the owner of *Northwind*) used to have a sailing yacht he kept in Southern California. He enjoyed sailing there, even in winter, if he could, but it was only on occasion. Then one day he came across a listing for a 1930 yacht that immediately caught his eye. “I love history,” he says. “Everything about my life at that point seemed to be about 1930.”

The boat listing gave him an idea. Why not take it to his favourite yacht club in Marina del Rey and turn it into an office? “I would be on there every day.” And he would take it slowly to restore the boat to its original glory. “I wanted it exactly as it was originally, only better.” The storyline proved a bit more complex than he envisioned (more on this later).

Why *Northwind* captured Jones’ imagination is understandable when you delve into its past. So many stories could not fail to seduce a storyteller, starting with the man who inspired it.

The first owner of the magnificent *Northwind* (also *North Wind*) was born in 1873. A *Mayflower* descendant, Charles Martin Clark was an engineering graduate from Columbia University who became a director of the Bradstreet Company. He lived in Manhattan at 713 Park Avenue, a five-storey limestone-faced home with a neo-French classic design that he rebuilt in 1916 with his wife, Boston-born Bessie, an active socialite. He was also an avid yachtsman.

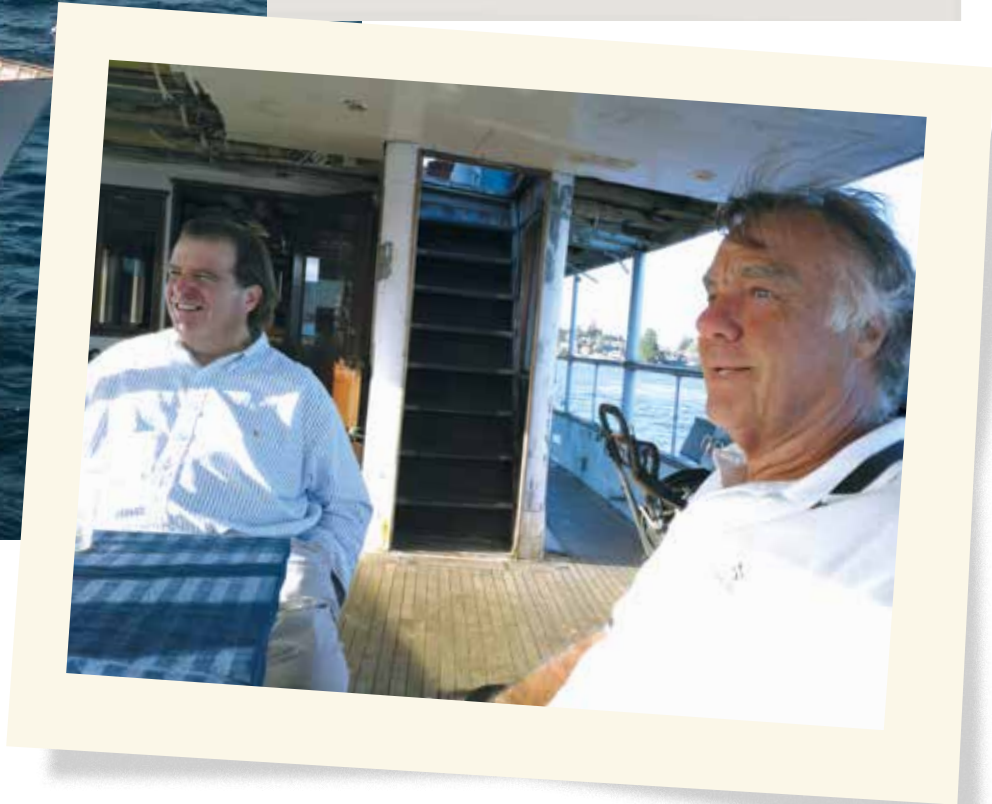
The now defunct *New York Herald* links Clark to a steam yacht named *Alfreda*, which visited Newport, Rhode Island, in 1922, and the *Miami Herald* recorded Clark’s visit to Miami on another yacht, named *North Star*. By the late 1920s, he was apparently ready to move up, and



Plying the seas for 95 years, *Northwind* has had a plethora of owners, from a financier to a spy (allegedly). Her last caretaker was Tom Jones (below, on left, with the yacht’s long-time captain, Christian Lint)



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## DESPITE THE DEPRESSION, NO EXPENSE WAS SPARED AND *NORTHWIND* SLID INTO THE WATER AT 10AM ON 10 MAY 1930

it hosted top performers of the Bradstreet Company as a reward.

Unfortunately, Clark’s enjoyment of *Northwind* was short-lived. In 1935, he invited his nephew aboard and it was the latter who found him dead, of a pulmonary embolism (according to one newspaper), in his owner’s suite at the age of 61.

There follows a big gap in the history of *Northwind* but somehow she turned up in England and in the hands of the British government. The US government auctioned several boats requisitioned for the war effort to the British Navy, says historian and maritime lawyer John Leonida. According to an entry on the Classic Yacht Register, *Northwind* was struck from the US

Registry as early as 1936 (and was reinstated by an Act of Congress on 16 October 1988).

Some stories place *Northwind* among the fleet of private boats that supported the British government’s efforts to evacuate soldiers from the beaches of Dunkirk in 1940, although no official records exist of a ship named *Northwind* (or *North Wind*) as one of the so-called Dunkirk Little Ships. It could, of course, have been renamed or operated under a code name.

Jones, who bought her in 2016 when she was teetering on the verge of being scrapped, says he was unable to find official documents about this widely shared story.

Still, she distinguished herself as a good member of His Majesty’s service. It was the

in 1930, he took delivery of *Northwind* from Manitowoc Shipbuilding Company.

The yard, based in Wisconsin in the town where Henry Burger established the Burger Boat Company, built mostly commercial vessels (tugs, ferries, scows, barges and, eventually, when the Second World War came around, submarines) but it made two yachts.

What attracted Clark to this company is sadly lost to time, but a knowledgeable yachtsman would have appreciated that they built solid, seaworthy and reliable steel hulls and would have known about the local craftsmanship, which was stable and excellent from wood to metal. While others may have built their yachts in Germany and the UK, a *Mayflower* descendant surely would have preferred building in the US.

The yacht that came out of Manitowoc that year was a spectacular example of the work of leading New York-based design firm Cox & Stevens (its Design 155 measured 37.6 metres). In the company’s archives, credit for *Northwind*’s design also goes to Frederick W Capon (who later contributed to the design of the never-built mile-long Liberty Landing, imagined in 1935).

Despite the Depression, no expense was spared and *Northwind* slid into the water at 10am on 10 May 1930. There was some rush to get her ready to cruise, and within a couple of months she was delivered with a six-metre launch and a

6.7-metre sailing boat that could be lifted on deck. *Northwind* had a 6.7-metre beam and a 3.3-metre draught. Her original (American-made) 300-horsepower diesel Winton engines were reversible and started with compressed air; they gave the yacht a speed of 15 knots, according to an article in the *Sheboygan Press*, which reported on the launch. She had room for eight guests and 12 crew, the paper noted.

A book about Manitowoc shipbuilding, *Maritime Manitowoc 1847-1947*, provides somewhat different information but adds it had a stove for heat and windows that opened. The dining room, complete with built-in cupboards, was located on the forward end of the main deck as was the custom in those days.

Scant information documents the kind of trips *Northwind* took but articles in newspapers of the time noted that it had been designed to cruise along the Eastern seaboard. The *Miami Herald* noted the arrival of 123-foot (37.5-metre) *Northwind* in Biscayne Bay for a Thanksgiving celebration. Cornelius Vanderbilt Jr’s acerbic pen in the *Miami News* places it in Palm Beach in February 1931, along with a who’s-who of the yachting set of the time: Harold Vanderbilt’s *Vara*, Vincent Astor’s *Noma* and William Mellon’s *Vagabondia*, among 100 yachts “worth conservatively half a billion dollars” gathered there that year. And at least on one occasion,

PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY OF OWNER; COURTESY OF CVA YACHT REGISTER; SEAN MCCARTHY & TREVOR HANSON-VOSS ON BEHALF OF CATALINA CREW



Camille Peteros. They purchased her in 1982 and took her back to North America from Antibes.

“Their four-month voyage provided a fount of anecdotes and stories for the years to come,” the obituary written for Harold’s passing in 2007 states. Once back home in Seattle, the obituary continues, they spent a year fixing her up and then “lived their dream” for the next 12 years travelling along the US and Canadian West Coast, including a trip to Kodiak Island via Alaska’s Inside Passage.

She changed hands, likely a few more times but remained in the Pacific Northwest for most of the ensuing years.

Christian Lint, a capable Pacific Northwest captain who took classics under his wing that some may have considered relics, found *Northwind* in the Gulf of Alaska where he was working on the *Exxon Valdez* clean-up. (Following the oil tanker’s wreck in 1989, more than 1,000 private boats were sent up to aid in removing spilled oil.) He had much experience with such boats, having looked after *El Primero*, an 1893 power yacht that he got out of dry dock, and the 1924 wooden-hull ferry *Kirkland*, aka *Tourist No 2*, which eventually sank.

A former chef on board *Northwind*, John Coulson, told the *Peninsula Daily News* in 2013 that the University of Alaska had chartered the yacht in April 1990 for five months to research the effects of the oil spill on the waters around Kodiak Island and Katmai National Park. It was rough sailing, the chef reported, and he feared the yacht would come apart. Because it was riveted steel, the captain told him there was enough flex to prevent that from happening. Was the captain Lint? The story doesn’t say, but it must have been. Lint was a part of the boat’s history for the better part of 30 years, taking over from a previous captain mid-voyage in 1989 when the boat got hampered, according to another story.

“There was nothing he could not do on the water. He was a wonderful guy. He was nuts kind of, but a good kind of nuts,” Jones says of Lint, whom he employed as captain for a while.

Jones was looking to sell *Northwind*, to find an emotionally vested custodian to succeed him, when Alastair Callender of Moravia Yachting connected us a few months ago.

That was not his plan when he fell in love with the yacht a few years back. A documentarian who directed the fascinating 2019 movie featuring Bruce Springsteen and members of the E Street Band among others, *Asbury Park: Riot, Redemption, Rock ‘N Roll*, Jones has a talent for



## STORIES PLACE A YOUNG PRINCESS ELIZABETH DINING ABOARD IN MALTA IN THE EARLY 1950S

storytelling and an interest in a range of topics.

When we met at the California Yacht Club in Marina del Rey last August, the conversation ranged from e-commerce (he has co-founded a start-up, seeking to reinvent the business model based on fair share), to how Dr Francis Collins, who mapped the human genome, went from atheist to believer, a story he would like to tell in a documentary.

When he discovered *Northwind* he was steeped in 1930; it was the year his mother was born and the year his Malibu house was built for the three-time Academy Award-nominated cinematographer Arthur Edson (of *Maltese Falcon* and *Casablanca*). The yacht then was under Captain Lint’s care and was part of the estate of a Florida woman. It had been listed for sale and was languishing in a marina in Bremerton, Washington.

“I went to see it there,” says Jones, who fell under her spell right away. “She is this beautiful fantail, steel yacht with all this history.” He asked around about the cost of fixing her and devised a plan to turn the boat into his office. He wanted to move her to the California Yacht

Club where he had been a member for years.

“The plan was I was going to buy it, bring it here (to Marina del Rey), be on there for 10 years, get qualified, understand it, get it all fixed up and eventually take it all around the world,” he says. Someday, he thought, he’d pass it on to his son. “It was a great plan.”

Jones decided to go ahead with the purchase but had to postpone the closing for a couple of weeks.

Although he says you won’t find him golf club in hand when he retires, his film company, Halo Group, did work for CBS on the Masters Tournament (“The best stewards of a brand I have ever met,” he says). Waiting to close the deal, he was on location in Augusta, Georgia, when the news reached him that *Northwind* was in a bit of trouble.

“It had sprung a tiny hole in one of the shafts,” Jones says, and there was fear of fuel leakage. The US Coast Guard intervened, drained fuel from the yacht and the captain was asked to find another home.

“Irony rules the world,” says Jones, who decided to go ahead with the acquisition anyway, undertaking emergency repairs and ultimately having the hull coated inside and out with Blue Seal, a product invented by the US Navy. “It will be good for a very long time,” he says. Captain Lint oversaw a bulk of the work in Port Townsend, Washington, working on the corrosion and ripping carpets to reveal the yacht’s original wood planks.

After Lint’s tragic death from an accident, Jones hired a captain from San Diego, and so they decided to take the boat there. They



Far left: *Northwind* could often be found moored outside the Houses of Parliament during WWII. Left: Winston Churchill is said to have indulged his hobby of painting on her aft deck. Below: she was refurbished under recent owner Tom Jones



PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY OF MORAVIA YACHTING AND NORTROP & JOHNSON; BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES

undertook more repairs and then brought the yacht to Los Angeles where it attracted the eye of a film crew from Netflix looking for locations to film the critically acclaimed series *Griselda*, about the notorious Colombian cartel leader Griselda Blanco.

Jones liked the idea of *Northwind* featuring in the series and spent more money to pretty her up for the role. She appears briefly, all decked out with strings of lights, in one of the episodes.

By then Jones’ plans for the yacht had changed. During the active 2019 fire season, his family house was one of 3,000 homes to burn to the ground in Malibu. On the road at the time, he saw it happen on television. “I was in the United Club lounge watching my house burn live on Fox,” he says. After the fire died, there was hardly anything left of the house (not even melted metal), except for a chimney, the mission bell and a falconry mews several feet away. The family decided to move east to New Jersey, where Jones grew up. His son took quickly to

the new life in Princeton, settled in a new school and so life resumed, thousands of kilometres away from *Northwind*.

Thinking like a film-maker, Jones had many interesting ideas on how to help with the refurbishing of *Northwind*, including hiring youth and adults at risk to teach them maritime skills. “The maritime industry needs people,” he says. The idea for the project was essentially, “Can they fix the boat? Can the boat fix them?” He even created a trailer for the movie *Raise the Northwind* he was planning on making.

But now, on the other side of the country and with a new startup to get up and running, he needed a way to pass the boat on. He’d put roughly \$3 million (£2.3m) into the yacht, and it appraised very well.

Another idea began to germinate. Discussing his member’s dues with the new management of the California Yacht Club, he revealed the existence of *Northwind* and they discussed moving it there, which he had wanted to do all

along, had it not been for all the unforeseen obstacles in his plan.

That’s where I planned to see *Northwind*. When I arrived in Marina del Rey in August, I was disappointed that the yacht wasn’t there, but it was a perfectly fine California summer’s day, breezy and sunny. Jones invited me to breakfast at the Ritz-Carlton fronting the marina and began to tell me his stories. A pattern quickly emerged: nothing is easy when it comes to old boats but they are worth the effort.

*Northwind* had to be towed. The tow line broke in transit and the tow boat had no spare, so the crew used one of the yacht’s dock lines and resumed the journey, with Jones checking the progress on his phone. The mishap meant I had the chance to see her arrive and take her position at the dock, which was a slow but memorable experience. She towered over the boats around and the people on the dock.

As news of the arrival spread, several club members and marina staff appeared to assess the new resident. They toured the boat, which is very much as she was decades ago when she was built, including original flooring now revealed, fireplace, riveted steel bulkheads and opening portholes, and marvelled at the possibilities – mostly. She did need work – her staff for one was broken and hanging the American flag on it would have to wait – but there was much to work with.

I toured her on my own, finding clues as to her history via photographs, renderings and books Jones collected and kept on board. I walked her cambered decks and put my hands on the steel bulkheads and the wooden wheel. A strange emotion overcame me; it was as if I had lived this history though it wasn’t mine. I finally settled in the lounge, sitting in a wing chair and leafing through history books. I did not want to leave but of course I did, eventually.

The last time I caught up with Jones, he said: “The boat is happily ensconced at the California Yacht Club. It has been spruced up since you saw it and is looking very fit.” So much so that after several months of being on the market with Moravia, she found a new buyer.

The 95-year-old grand dame from Wisconsin, the pride and joy of a New York financier, who served the British government, hosted Jackie Kennedy and a merry band of other public figures, served as a platform for adventures to a Seattle family, did research in Alaska and became, for a time, the joy and burden of a romantic film-maker, now has a new caretaker and a hopeful future. ■