

feature

Restoration

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY
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Restoring a Dame



After nearly 90 years of service – and quite a bit of neglect – the 9m *Eileen Patricia* was in a sorry state. But a meticulous, three-year restoration has revived the grand old dame's grace and elegance.

B

uilt in 1933, the restored little launch is impressive in many ways – the craftsmanship, the authenticity of her fittings, the attention to detail. But the most intriguing part of her story is her new interior – it's based almost entirely on informed guesswork.

She belongs to Aucklanders Peter Mence – a passionate classic boat enthusiast and no stranger to long, detailed restoration projects. He has previously owned classic boats and is currently funding the restoration of the iconic Logan yacht, *Victory*. For him, the *Eileen Patricia* project was about preserving an important part of New Zealand's maritime heritage.

"We're not a hundred percent certain, but we're reasonably confident that – apart from a few dinghies and skiffs – she is the first launch designed and built by Bill Couldrey after he'd completed his apprenticeship with Arch Logan. The only existing record of her life is an old black and white photo – taken just before she was launched – in the backyard of Couldrey's Northcote home.

Couldrey, he points out, was an important figure in the evolution of the New Zealand's boatbuilding industry between the wars.

"It seems she had a fairly varied life – when I bought her she was tied to a pile mooring in Westhaven and had been used as

a fishing boat for eight or nine years, with her interior stripped out. That made the restoration of the interior particularly tricky – the old photo was no help at all and, as is quite typical for that period, there were no plans.

"So we defaulted to what we imagined were the influences that shaped Couldrey's thinking at the time. Logically, having just completed the Logan apprenticeship, he would have been guided by Logan designs, so we based the interior on other Logan boats of the period."

As is so often the case in restoration projects, Mence thought *Eileen Patricia's* revival would involve a few basic repairs and a lick of paint. He delivered her into the hands of Helensville craftsman Marco Scuderi – who quickly informed him that the old lady required quite a bit more than superficial rouge and lipstick.

"She's a carvel build," says Scuderi, "kauri planks over kauri ribs. No real rot to speak of, but I had to eradicate quite a bit of worm. The sheer planks on both sides were cracked – injuries probably sustained during her life as a fishing boat – so I replaced those. And there were plenty of old penetrations in the hull I had to patch.

"But the greatest challenge was rebuilding the interior. Sourcing kauri, of course, was difficult. But Trade Me came to the rescue with a large slab of the timber that had been used as a bar top. It was perfect for reconstructing the coamings and



Much of the vessel's rekindled charm lies in her period fittings.

the aft structure. And I was able to rebuild the superstructure based on the old photo."

Much of the vessel's rekindled charm lies in her period fittings. The steering system, for example, is the original one fitted by Couldrey. It comes from a tram and comprises beveled gears linked to the rudder quadrant by a long, bronze shaft. The old steel plate rudder wasn't particularly effective, and a new profiled rudder (cast in bronze) has been fitted.

Mence says the launch was originally fitted with a petrol engine, but when he acquired her she was equipped with a 55hp Fordson diesel.

"It was big, dirty and smelly and we elected to replace it with a 55hp Yanmar. The Fordson engine/transmission weighed 740kg – the Yanmar replacement weighs 220kg. That gave us more than half a tonne to play with in terms of weight redistribution when creating the new interior."

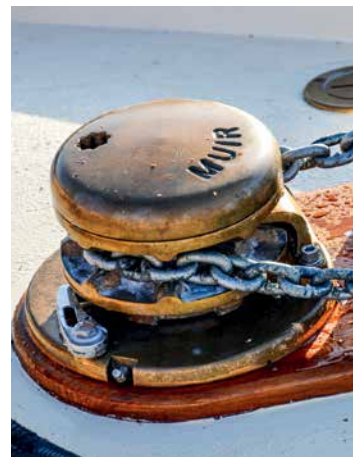
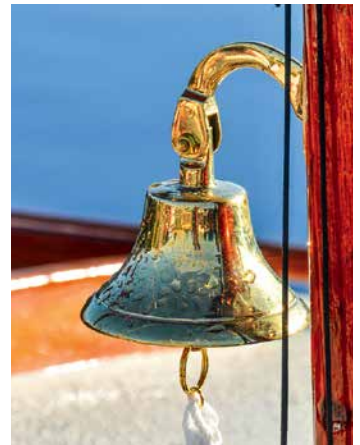
A new four-bladed prop completes the drive-train and matching it to the hull and engine/transmission equation was tackled by Power Equipment's Murray Deeble. Mence's initial sea trials confirmed the boat is quite a bit faster (with lower revs) and a lot quieter.

Particularly impressive is the care Scuderi and Mence have

ABOVE *Eileen Patricia* halfway through her restoration at Marco Scuderi's boatyard.

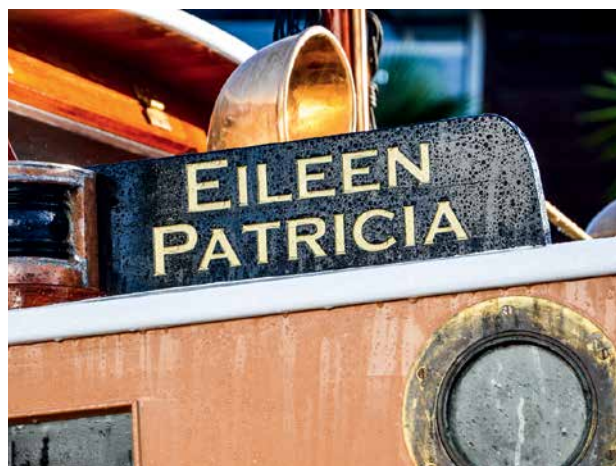
RIGHT After three years of TLC, she's poised to slip back into her natural environment.





ABOVE The little launch's restoration carries impeccable detail and great authenticity. Many of her fittings were crafted in the old style.

BELOW Owner Peter Mence (at the bow) thought the restoration would be a relatively quick fix. It took three years, but the result is a treasure.



taken to preserve the character of the old launch, especially considering the Simrad navigation equipment that's been installed. This has all been hidden under a saloon locker with a folding cover. Until it's folded open, you'd never know that the equipment was on board.

The nav lights and steaming light are original – but the bronze Muir windlass was a custom order, and the copper dorade scoops were manufactured locally. The brass ship's bell – engraved – is new. Overall, the sense of authenticity is flawless.

Resplendent in her new livery, the newly-restored *Eileen Patricia* is a gorgeous addition to country's fleet of classic launches, another example of painstaking craftsmanship that's such a feature of Scuderi's restorative magic. **BNZ**

