

Bay City or Bust: The renovation of the International Eagle

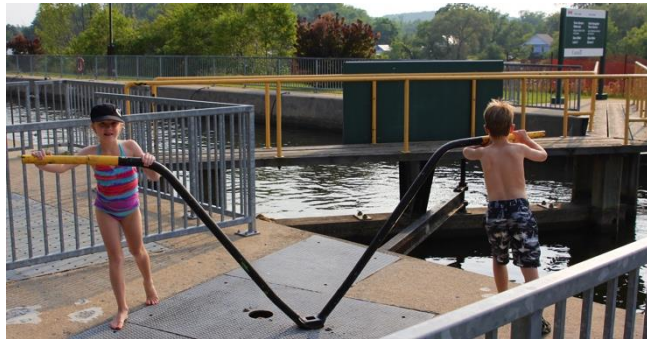
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How It All Started

Our family's boating story began one day in July of 2011 while enjoying dinner with my in-laws and discussing boating as a potential family activity. My in-laws recounted their family boat trips on the Trent-Severn Waterway and among the Thousand Islands as some of their fondest family memories. After reading some of the trip logs penned by Laura (my wife) as a child, we were convinced that boating should be in our future.

The plan was to review our options over the next few months and make a purchase to be ready for the start of the 2012 season. Not having owned a boat before, our list of requirements was fairly short - we were looking for twin engines so we could always get back to port and comfortable sleeping arrangements for two adults and our two children, aged 4 and 6 at the time. We started looking at 27' boats and quickly decided that jumping to 29' offered more comfortable accommodations. After looking at a couple of 29's, we got two foot-itis (is that a thing if you don't own a boat yet?) and just thirty days after first deciding to research boat options, we purchased a local 1999 Four Winns 328 Vista, which was 35' overall!

We thoroughly enjoyed our first boat for five seasons. She was docked in Western Lake Ontario, just 10 minutes from our home. We spent most weekends and many weeknights on board our 'lake front addition' to our home. Over the years we ventured further and further from our home dock, crossing Lake Ontario many times, completing the 44 locks of the Trent Severn Waterway and spending two summer vacations on Georgian Bay.



The Search

As a family we were really enjoying boating. It offered an opportunity to spend time together, visit new places, and provided a venue to entertain our friends and family. So much so, that near the end of the 2016 boating season we started looking for a larger boat. Our search first took us to Chicago to inspect a fully renovated 1969 Commander 47 - it looked more like a modern condo than a 47-year old boat. It had been featured in a magazine in 2012 when the renovation took place and while it had been heavily used since then, it was still holding up cosmetically. The owners took our family out for a lovely four-hour cruise and we decided to make an offer.

Unfortunately, after flying a surveyor to Chicago, we discovered that the boat had a good hull and looked great, but was not mechanically sound. While the trips to Chicago proved an expensive adventure, we discovered that a Commander 47 was a

great platform and we narrowed our search. My son and I looked at one other Commander near Midland, Ontario, but it was pretty clear this boat had not left the dock very often and would need a full mechanical and cosmetic restoration.

Daily web searches for the perfect boat continued until a few weeks later we came across a 1969 Commander 47 that had not yet made it onto Yacht World. It was located in Bay City, Michigan, which was only a four-hour drive from our home. The next weekend we took a road trip to have a look, and liked what we saw.

This Commander had a full flybridge, 10-year old Imron paint, and 8v53n Detroit Diesels that had been rebuilt just 7 years prior. Every lubricated part had been replaced in both engines, except for the crankshafts. The owner of the boat, who purchased the boat around the year 2000, had clearly spent a great deal of money keeping this boat in great condition. It certainly didn't hurt that the boat had spent the past 16 winters out of the sun inside a heated building.



If there was a downside, it was the dated floral interior that had been remodeled in the mid 1990's, but that was just cosmetic.

Unfortunately, it was October and the boat was already laid up for the winter. We made the somewhat crazy decision to buy it on good faith of healthy engines, not wanting to wait for the summer and potentially lose out on a great boat. Near the end of October 2016, the next chapter in our families boating life began and International Eagle became ours!

Renovation

Not being the type to exercise moderation, and wanting to take advantage of the indoor heated storage that was included in the purchase, we decided to completely renovate the interior of our new boat over the winter. That meant a round trip of 8

hours every weekend to Bay City, Michigan. That winter I made the drive almost every weekend, and we made the best of it by having friends and family come occasionally to help out. We brought the kids along on a few weekends to make it a truly family project. You'd be amazed at how talented my kids are at removing wallpaper!



We started by taking all soft goods out – with the 22” wide door that meant cutting up the refrigerator, chair and couch to get them out. We then stripped all of the wallpaper and padded vinyl that covered the walls. (Laura would like to make note of the thousands of staples she removed by hand.) The kitchen was cut out, the dinette and it's raised platform removed. The dark green, 2” shag carpet had to go and the hardwood in the kitchen was ripped up as it was starting to swell. The custom made window surrounds were removed to open

up the space and let more light into the cabin.

As we progressed, we discovered many hidden surprises, including a broken floor support and areas of mold under the wallpaper. Taking everything apart allowed us to find and repair these issues. It was nice to wash all the walls, coat them with mold resistant primer and get a fresh start.



Making It Ours

Our intended use of the International Eagle is what spearheaded many of the changes and equipment outfitting. Since I do a lot of the work myself, it's still a work in progress and you'll see that in the images. While we were in Bay City, we had Pleasure Craft Outfitters working with us to complete the custom stainless work, carpeting, canvas cleaning and repairs, wallpaper, the custom couch and a lot more. We can't recommend them enough. The owner Randy has a wealth of experience and acted as a true partner on the project.

Our plan was to keep the boat in southern Georgian Bay, the home of 30,000 islands with many secluded bays to anchor in. The marina we chose is a two-hour drive from our home, which means the boat is used like cottage. Most weekends we have family and friends aboard and spend a couple of nights on anchor in a bay.



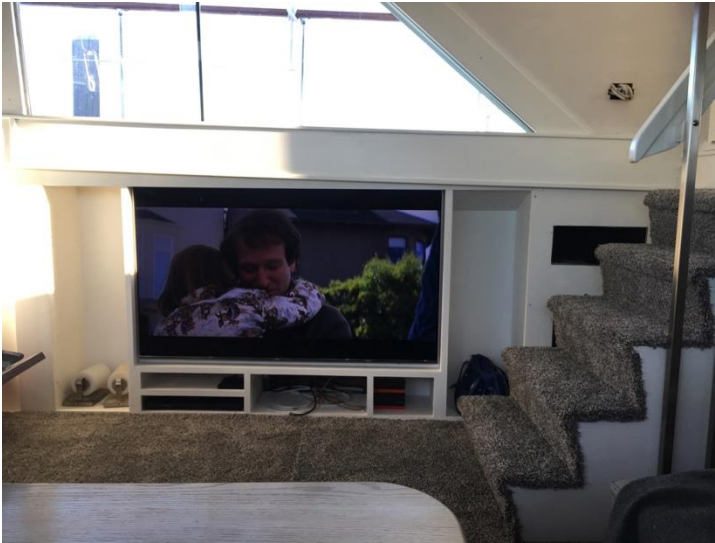
Our goal was to create accommodations that would allow us to have another family up for a weekend, sleeping at least four adults and four children. I always find a double bed too small for two adults, so I wanted our adult guests to have a queen bed. Since they would be sleeping in the salon, the couch needed to transform into a comfortable queen bed, a bit of a trick when the headboard wall is the exact width of a queen bed and the door is only 22" wide. No store bought sleeper sofa was going to work for that.

The solution was to have a custom couch built that turns into a queen size platform, onto which we place a high quality inflatable mattress. The result has been happy guests!

Since we enjoy eating outside on the main deck, we chose to remove the dinette to create a full beam galley! With the original layout, the chef would be cut off from the rest of the passengers by high walls. We instead wanted an open concept space with a bar top so guests could sit and chat with those at work in the galley. I built new kitchen cabinets using marine grade mahogany plywood and solid mahogany trim, painted them white and topped them off with Corian countertops.



The port side of the galley is where all the interaction happens, so that's where the bar is. The starboard side holds the refrigerator and pantry, so building a higher wall on that side doesn't block the conversation.



Our family doesn't spend a lot of time watching television on the boat, but sometimes it's a very helpful option to keep the kids happy while the adults are eating dinner. This past Thanksgiving, we had 9 children down below watching a movie at one time while we hosted 8 adults for dinner on the main deck.

Design Inspiration

While I was busy tearing things apart, Laura was busy picking decor! The striped fabric that we choose to recover the front bench in became the inspiration for the colour scheme used throughout the boat.

Rather than trying to restore the boat to its original décor, we decided to choose interior finishes that would feel reminiscent of being in a beach house with lots of white, soft tones of green and grey, and some fun pops of colour. The end result is a one of a kind interior that makes you feel instantly relaxed when you step down below.

All of the cabins and heads received new wall coverings, flooring and soft goods. A large benefit of the 'save nothing' approach is that everything is fresh and any musty smells completely disappear.

Here is an example of the before and after of the forward cabin and head.



Electrical

Spending every weekend on anchor is a great experience, but only if your boat's electrical system is designed for it. International Eagle does have a 10kW generator onboard that is used sparingly when needed for the stove, a hot shower or when the batteries have been depleted. We prefer a quiet anchorage, and constantly running generators are not quiet!

When we purchased the boat, every light was 120VAC, except for one hall light and the engine room, which were 32VDC. The only 12VDC available was a 32V to 12V, 40A convertor. If we didn't make some changes, we'd have no lights while away from the dock unless the generator was running. During the renovation, every light was replaced with a 12V LED so we could power the lights from batteries and to reduce the overall load.



Many of the new lights are normal household fixtures fitted with 12V dimmable LED bulbs, driven by Anigmo dimmers and operated by Vimar Elkon switching. I include the details here because determining what actually works together well is harder than you might think.

I installed a 690Ah 12V battery bank (6x 6V GC2 batteries) and wired them up with 4/0 gauge custom cables to a Magnum 2000W inverter/ 100A charger. The inverter enables us to run the coffee maker and television from the batteries. The 12V bank also supplies power to a new 12V distribution panel and windlass. 300A fuses protect against overcurrent or short circuit conditions.

A Magnum remote panel is used to configure and control the inverter and can also display the battery bank current state of charge. The panel will display real time current draw and voltage, but most importantly the amp-hours (Ah) that have been drained or added. These details allow us to know exactly when we need to recharge the batteries. Without this information, boaters often recharge before it's really required or drain the batteries below 50%.

Making coffee, watching television and using all of the 12V and 32V equipment, we can easily make it through the weekend without needing starting the generator. We tend to use the BBQ for cooking dinner instead of the stove, so the generator is rarely called into action.



Ground Tackle

Knowing your boat is secure at anchor is important when you fall asleep or head out for a day of adventure on the dinghy. The Danforth anchor that came with the boat was not a good match for the rock covered, weedy and muddy bottom we encounter on Georgian Bay and the rope rode didn't encourage a sound sleep. Given we would spend every weekend on anchor, some serious changes were in order.

I decided on a 33kg Rocna anchor mated to 200' of 3/8" G4 chain. This is long enough for our typical 15-20' deep anchorages, utilizing a Mantus bridle between the chain and forward cleats. In case we need more, there is 150' of 5/8" rope spliced to the end of the chain.

A Maxwell HRC10-10 windlass performs the duty of deploying and retrieving the anchor via a handheld remote or a switch at the helm. Unfortunately this

combination required us to remove the original samson post, so the open chocks were replaced by 10" cleats.

Safety

We added custom stainless handrails in a few places to enhance safety. The most notable was on the transom where stainless grab handles that run nearly the full beam are inset into the blue recess. The result is a place to hold on when docking the boat. The handles don't stick out and look factory.

We also added a grab rail on the starboard side of the ladder, which provides a secure place to hold while you are on your way up or down.



We rebuilt the transom boarding ladder treads and had a custom four-step swim ladder fabricated. The previous swim ladder was only two steps and when raised, didn't line up with the boarding ladder steps. This created a dangerous situation that could cause people to lose their footing on the unevenly spaced rungs. The new swim ladder perfectly lines up with the boarding ladder and essentially makes each step twice as deep when raised.

The last place we added a measure of safety was around the top of the flybridge ladder. Here we placed a stainless railing on three sides to help avoid accidentally stepping into the opening and provide a handhold while at the top of the ladder.



Main Deck

The main deck is easily the place we spend most of our time. It's our primary helm, a place to hang out and where we eat. We really haven't changed anything on this level yet, except to clean the carpet and add a table. We have plans for the future, but to maintain sanity we're going to fully finish the renovations inside before starting outside.



The previous owner had a beautiful wrap around bench installed, with a removable seat where the boarding ladder is. All that was required was a table, and as luck would have it Laura found the perfect table on Kijiji, a 1960's era teak dining table that was recently refinished. While it can extend to seat 10 people, with the leaf out there is room to move around more easily and access the boarding ladder. I don't think a more perfect table could have been created.

The Flybridge

To match the wrap around bench on the main deck there is a full wrap around bench on the flybridge.



The flybridge is the coffee room, evening cocktail room and the best view in the house. To think when we were looking for this boat, we thought we didn't want a flybridge. Now it's now one of our favourite spaces on the International Eagle.

Bringing Her Home

In the beginning of June 2017, after a winter of hard work it was finally time to launch and start the 450-mile trip home. We made one last drive to Bay City, MI as a family and boarded International Eagle for the eight-day trip home. We travelled north on the west shore of Lake Huron and crossed into Canada at Gore Bay on Manitoulin Island where the International Eagle officially became a Canadian vessel. Waiting out a day of intense fog, we continued through the beautiful North Channel stopping at Killarney and Britt. We then continued south, following the small craft route on eastern of Georgian Bay until we reached South Bay in Honey Harbour.

It was an epic trip with many stories of it's own and quite an intense way to get used to a operating a new boat that was so much different that our previous boat. But when you cruise six to eight hours per day at 8 knots, you have a lot of time to figure out the details!

Our First Season

Every weekend last summer we welcomed new guests on board and explored the waters of Southern Georgian Bay. We also met new friends and fell in love with the Georgian Bay boating experience.

When we took on this project, some people thought we were crazy. And there were more then a few occasions where we thought they might be right! But no matter

what challenge we were facing, we just kept focusing on our end goal: to create a space to make memories with our family and friends for many years to come.

With one season under our belts, we feel like we've achieved our goal. The first summer with our Chris Craft Commander was our best boating season yet and we can't wait to get back on the water!

