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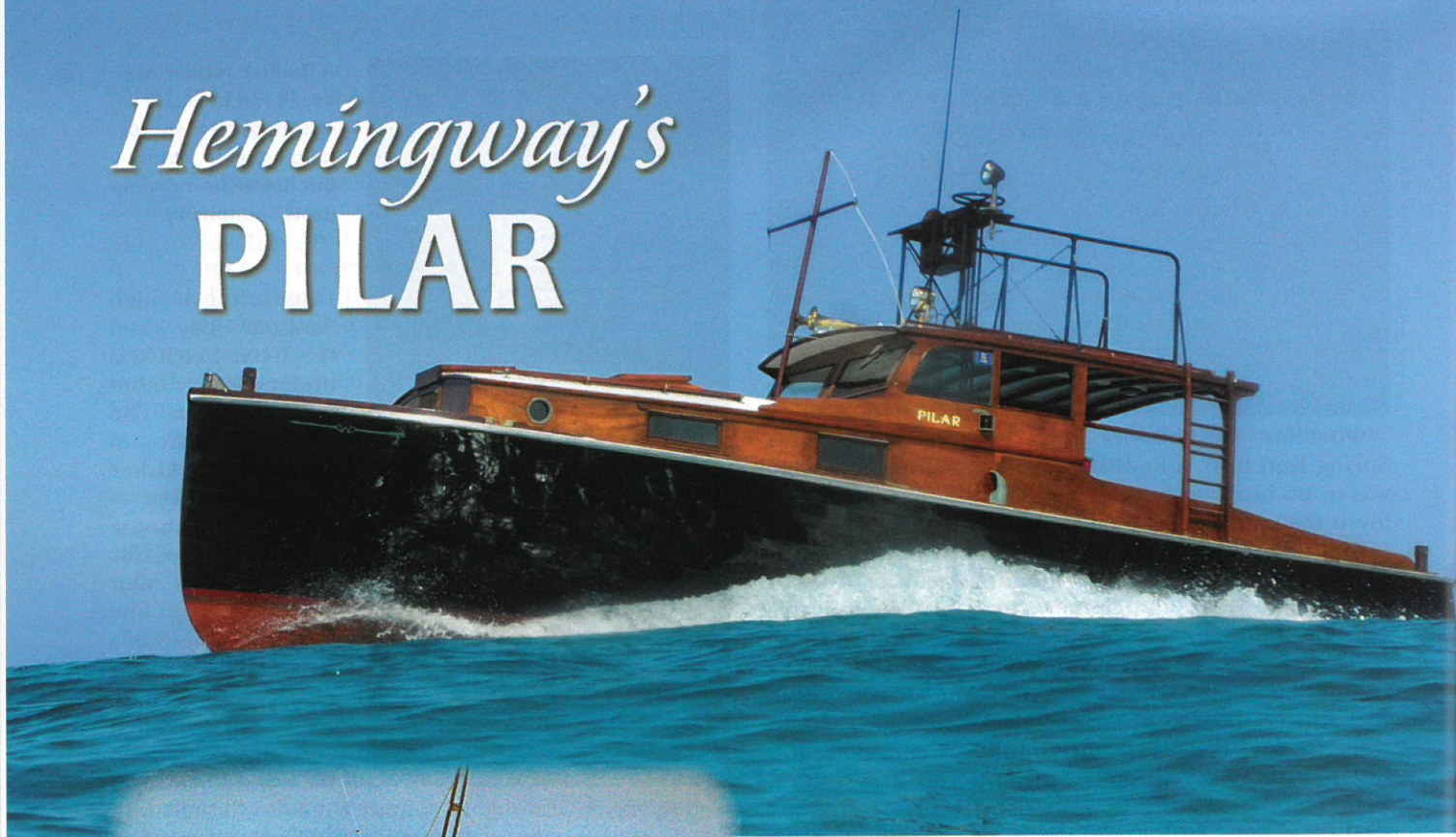


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Hemingway's PILAR



TONYARRUZA



LEICESTER HEMINGWAY COLLECTION / MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE

For a film-double, details help to “get it right”

by Hilary Hemingway

This is the story of two boats named PILAR: novelist Ernest Hemingway's original 38' Wheeler Playmate of 1934, and a 34' Playmate of 1933 that will serve as a credible film-double. Researching the original boat, and keeping in mind a Hemingway note about *The Old Man and the Sea*—“It's a great story if I can get it right”—linked the two boats together in such a way that the story of one cannot be told without the other.

PILAR is the crown jewel among artifacts preserved at the Finca Vigia Hemingway Museum on a hillside in Cuba. When he lived there, Hemingway used its four-story tower to check Gulf Stream conditions; if no whitecaps showed, he and his captain, Gregorio Fuentes, would head out for an afternoon of fishing. Today, PILAR rests under a canopy in a concrete cradle on a former tennis court, where she is viewed by thousands

of Hemingway aficionados and sportfishing enthusiasts every year.

The film-double for PILAR was also built by the Wheeler Yacht Company of Brooklyn, New York (see sidebar, page 56. Launched as ELHANOR, she spent most of her life at Sodus Point, New York. After an 11-month, \$250,000 makeover at Moores Marine in Beaufort, North Carolina, it's doubtful that Norman Vanderbilt, who owned her for 50 years, would recognize her. Transformed in November 2012, ELHANOR, now PILAR, will be used this summer during the filming of *Hemingway & Fuentes* in the Dominican Republic.

“PILAR is iconic,” said Andy Garcia, the film's director. “She is the most recognized sportfishing boat in the world. So we went into this knowing her film double had to be highly detailed and authentic. The camera

Above—For an upcoming film about Ernest Hemingway's sportfishing days in Cuba, ELHANOR, a Wheeler Playmate of nearly the same vintage as the writer's PILAR of 1934 (inset), was reconfigured in exacting detail to capture the spirit of the famous boat. One detail that could not be changed in the 4' shorter hull was the break in the sheer aft, which Hemingway had specified for PILAR.

Russell and Saunders first took Papa to Cuba for marlin fishing in 1932. With their Cuban mate, Carlos Gutierrez, they boated 50 marlin in five weeks. Russell was no stranger to Cuban waters, having made hundreds of nighttime crossings in his 34' ANITA for

Stuppy Joe's Bar. and Josie Russell, a Key West rumrunner and owner of son, owner of a hardware store and a turtle cannery; Saunders, a transplanted Bahamian; Charles Thompson from men who knew the Gulf Stream. Capt. Bra moving to Key West in 1928 he learned saltwater fishing. He was an avid freshwater angler, and after Illinois. He grew up 2,000 miles from the ocean in Oak Park, a good student, and an even better teacher." Hemingway Ernest not as a bronzed giant fighting huge fish and My father, Les Hemingway, remembered his brother som.

My father, Les Hemingway, remembered his brother som. Ernest not as a bronzed giant fighting huge fish and telling tales in the roughest bars. "Papa was never like that," he recalled. "He learned by doing. He was both a good student, and an even better teacher." Hemingway moved to Key West in 1928 he learned saltwater fishing from men who knew the Gulf Stream. Capt. Bra Saunders, a transplanted Bahamian; Charles Thompson, owner of a hardware store and a turtle cannery; son, owner of a hardware store and a turtle cannery; and Josie Russell, a Key West rumrunner and owner of Stuppy Joe's Bar.

Hemingway named PILAR after three strong women: The Spanish saint Our Lady of the Pilar in Zaragoza, Spain; the wife of Pablo in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*; and as a tribute to his second wife, Pauline, whom he had nicknamed Pilar. The boat stayed with Hemingway longer than Pauline—or any of his wives, for that matter. PILAR's fame began with Papa's magazine articles

"I think Hemingway knew a lot about boats by the time he ordered his Wheeler," said Jim Moores, proprietor of Moores Marine (see WB No. 207). "His choice of a Wheeler shows it. Hemingway knew he needed a boat that could handle severe weather, which comes up fast in the Caribbean. I've been in the wooden boat restoration business for 35 years, and I've seen all kinds of yachts of that period, but when I look over at our Wheeler PILAR, what I admire most is her simplicity and elegance. It's pure genius."

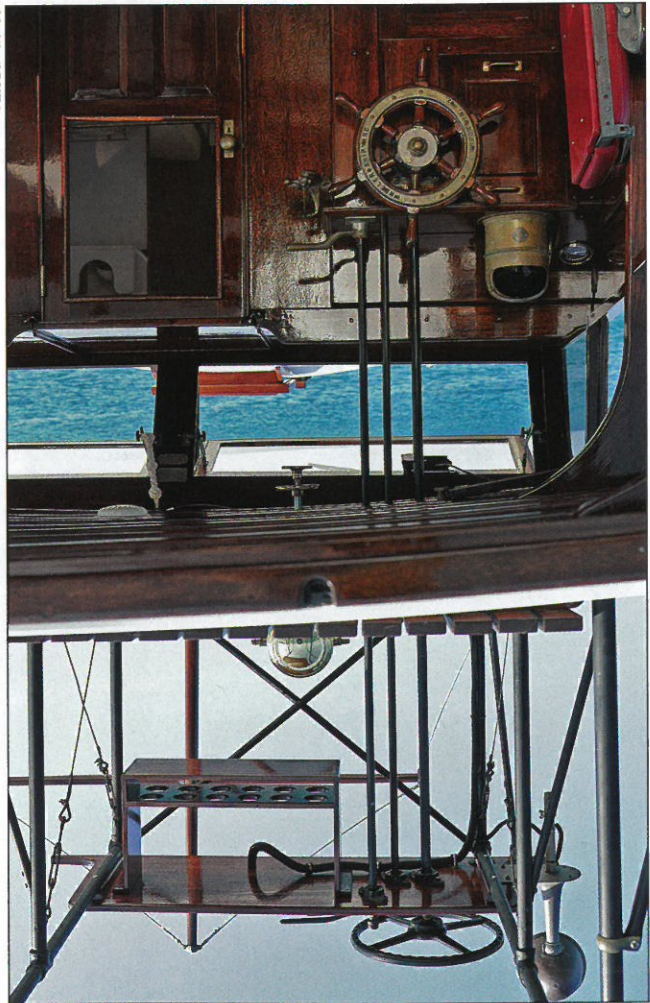
the open-air cockpit berths. accommodations for guests, though he himself preferred because he wanted a large cockpit for fishing as well as April 1934 for \$7,455. He ordered a twin-cabin model "Papa," as his friends knew him, bought PILAR in Bening his fourth wife, Mary Welsh.

has to see her as PILAR, from the details in her close-ups to her silhouette in a wide shot." Garcia stars as Fuent. Anthony Hopkins plays Hemingway and Annette Bening his fourth wife, Mary Welsh.

Above—Hemingway, whose passion for big-game sportfishing played a leading role in advancing the sport in the early 1930s, became an early advocate of the flying bridge. He had one added to PILAR, complete with a Model T Ford steering wheel. Right—The film version of PILAR recreates the appearance of the original steering and engine control linkages, along with details such as a powerful spotlight (visible in the middle of the photograph) operated from below.



LEICESTER HEMINGWAY COLLECTION, MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE



TONY ARRUIZA



The Wheeler Yacht Company, which was founded in 1910 and continued in business until 1965, specialized in finely crafted motoryachts. Known for relatively deep-V hulls and high freeboard that made them seaworthy and safe at sea, the Wheeler Playmates sold by the hundreds during the 1930s.

TONY ARRUIZA

outfitted with four 75-gallon gasoline tanks feeding the centerline 75-hp Chrysler Crown main engine plus an offset 40-hp Lycoming used for trolling. Despite their different fuel capacities, the film version and the original PILAR have roughly the same range: 500 miles at 8 knots. "I ran her off Key Biscayne at Christmas," Garcia said of the new boat. "We had a decent chop but still made 16 knots easy. Her sweet spot I felt was at 12 to 14 knots cruising." Wheeler reported that in sea trials she reached 19 knots. "As I understand it, Ernest preferred to run PILAR at 8 to 10 knots. With displacement hulls,

once you go over the design speed you drag your wake with you, and it makes for a wet boat."

Aboard the new PILAR, what catches the eye—and the camera lens—is her woodwork. From bow to stern, she was sanded, stained, and varnished. Her brightwork gleams. She's been fitted with new canvas matching the original colors. Her black topsides shine. The one original PILAR color that was rejected was her green deck paint, which simply didn't test well on film.

What set the original PILAR apart from any other Wheeler Playmate was her primitive flying bridge. The

A Long History—and a New Wheeler

by Wes Wheeler

My great-grandfather, Howard E. Wheeler, founded a small boat-repair company in Brooklyn, New York, in 1910. But the Wheeler Yacht Company grew quickly, and soon turned to yacht construction. Only six years after its founding, as the United States joined the Allies during World War I, the yard secured an order to produce 110' submarine chasers for the U.S. Navy. Pleasure boats, however, remained the core of the business, and with the Armistice the company returned to building yachts, with a specialty in powerboats.

The company established a reputation for building custom motoryachts of the very highest quality, using only the finest materials of the day: oak, teak, mahogany, cedar, bronze, and brass. Among these yachts was the Wheeler Playmate line, which my grandfather, Wesley L. Wheeler, designed. He gave the Playmate, like many of his hulls, a "semi-V" bottom to provide a clean entry with minimal roll, coupled with ample freeboard for safety in the open sea. Hundreds of boats like these were built in the 1930s for a discriminating clientele

that demanded the finest money could buy. It was Wheeler's reputation for quality and seaworthiness that led Ernest Hemingway to the company. During his 1933 safari to Africa, he took with him a 1933–34 Wheeler catalog, from which he placed his order for his Wheeler 38' Playmate, built as hull No. 576 and named PILAR.

All five of Howard Wheeler's sons—including my grandfather—worked for the company. My grandfather was a graduate of the Pratt Institute's naval architecture program and became the lead designer for the company. My dad, Wesley D. Wheeler, grew up in this environment, worked in the yard, and became a naval architect himself.

When the Second World War came, the company returned to war production on a massive scale, building 230 vessels, including 83' cutters for the U.S. Coast Guard and 165' rescue tugs and 136' YMS minesweepers for the U.S. Army. The cutters became famous as the so-called "matchbox fleet," which secured its place in history by rescuing hundreds of soldiers during the Normandy invasion. By the end of the war, Wheeler

Wes Wheeler is the great-grandson of Howard E. Wheeler, founder of Wheeler Yacht Company. He is an operations executive, currently CEO of Marken LLP, a global logistics company serving the pharmaceutical industry. He holds a BS in mechanical engineering and an MBA. He lives in North Carolina with his wife, Marianne. Inquiries about the Wheeler PILAR model should be directed to him at 1020 Pinehurst Dr., Chapel Hill, NC 27517, 919-606-5575; wes@wphwheeler.com.

to my grandfather and all who love legacies. it was good enough for Papa. This new boat is a tribute much else. My grandfather had it right 80 years ago, and modern equipment. But there is no need to change by 250-hp Yanmar engines. And, of course, she'll have

COURTESY OF WES WHEELER

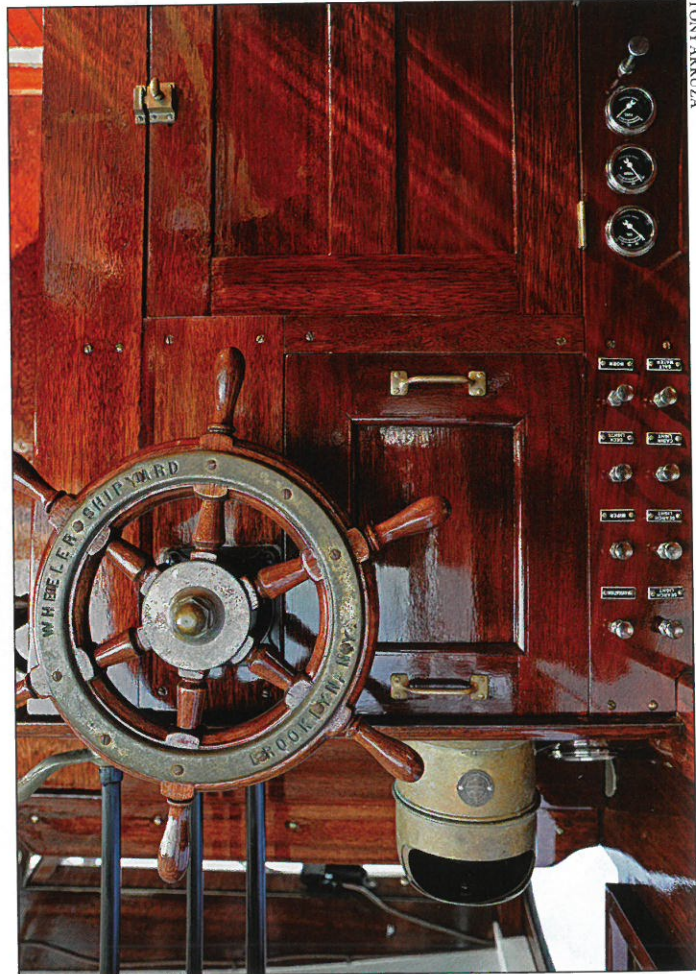
Inspired by replicating PILAR for film, the Wheeler Yacht Company founder's great-grandson intends to initiate a new Wheeler PILAR model for production.



helm stations are functional, they work independently. Although the steering system is hydraulic and both ½-mile Kay Bridge spotlight and the Model T wheel," and antique marine supply stores, we found the same said. "And then, after a lot of hunting in salvage yards bridge using 1" inside-diameter galvanized pipe," Smith said. For the film-double boat, "We had to fabricate our drink-holder shelf is within reach of the wheel. The film version stays as close to the original as possible. For the film-double boat, "We had to fabricate our

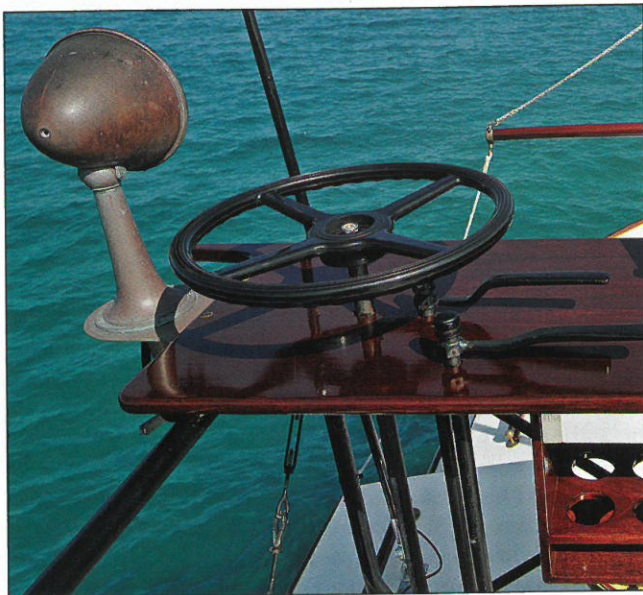
end, a 4'-wide mahogany console is fitted with a steering wheel scavenged from a Ford Model T. The steering mechanism above was mechanically linked to the wheel below. Controls for both engines were led through ½" galvanized pipes from the console down through the cabin roof and connected into the engine controls. A cabin roof and connected into the engine controls. A drink-holder shelf is within reach of the wheel. The film version stays as close to the original as possible. For the film-double boat, "We had to fabricate our

The originality of details in ELHANOR, including her wheel, compass binnacle, switches, and gauges, gave the boat a patina of authenticity that the film producers say they would have found difficult to reproduce in anything but another Playmate of PILAR's vintage.



TONY ARRIZZA

and been awarded eight Navy "E" awards for excellence support of the war effort. At its peak, the shipyard employed more than 6,000 people in the New York area and even had its own band and radio station. Including military and civilian craft, the company built more than 4,000 hulls. With this history in mind, the Wheeler family has decided to make a new entry into custom boatbuilding. I was happy to help Andy Garcia find ELHANOR, which has been transformed to PILAR for his film. I enjoyed following the progress by Nate Smith's team at Moores Marine, but when I saw her in the water, beautifully restored and steaming gracefully through the chop t 19 knots during sea trials, it was breathtaking. I was overcome with a sense of family pride. That day, I asked my father to help design a "new" 38' Wheeler. We will all this the "Wheeler PILAR Model," because it uses my grandfather's original Wheeler Playmate lines and incorporates the exact dimensions and modifications of the original PILAR, which Hilary Hemingway and I were able to confirm by direct observation in Cuba. This new boat will be built of wood, perhaps at Moores Marine, and subsequent boats built to the design may be either old-molded wood or fiberglass. My boat will have more power than the original PILAR, with twin screws driven



Above—True to the spirit of the original PILAR, the flying bridge has a steering wheel recycled from a Ford Model T. **Right**—A fighting chair dating from before World War II and found in an antique store closely matched the one Hemingway had installed on PILAR in the early years after the war.



of one another. “We wanted this boat not just to look like but perform like PILAR,” Garcia said.

Most sportfishermen today are equipped with fishfinders, but to be faithful to the original the new PILAR will not have one. “We will find our fish the old-fashioned way, just like Papa,” Garcia laughed. “I think the hardest part of this whole film will be finding the fish,” Walson said. Papa faced the same dilemma during filming of *The Old Man and The Sea*: When the production company was unable to catch a 1,000-lb marlin off Cuba, Hemingway had them fish off Peru, where landing a 1,200-lb fish provided dramatic footage—though most of it was out of focus due to heavy seas.

To land a big fish, the new PILAR has the perfect fighting chair, just as Hemingway’s boat did. He modified the cockpit after World War II, following Cuban sportfisherman and civil engineer Julio Sanchez’s innovation of an amidships swivel-mounted chair, based on a barber’s chair. An adjustable footrest and an angled back allowed the fisherman to pump the rod effectively when reeling in. Hemingway liked everything about it, but had a problem: PILAR had a 2,500-lb capacity icebox built into the cockpit amidships, with seats to port and starboard. He modified one of the existing seats, with a foot brace devised by Fuentes, mounted it on a taller pedestal amidships, and installed a separate icebox farther forward, to starboard, to replace the abandoned one.

For the film, finding the right fighting chair was a concern. “We looked at all the historical photos of PILAR’s fighting chair, and decided we would probably end up custom-building it,” Garcia said. But the Moores crew found a pre-WWII fighting chair nearly identical

to PILAR’s at a New England marine antique store.

Hemingway also added 15’ bamboo outriggers to PILAR, with their heels lashed near the foot of the mast. Later, he replaced them with box-frame telescoping outriggers, believed to be an early design by Tommy Giffords, mounted on the side decks on each side of the wheelhouse. The later outriggers were close to 25’ long, with a center pole that extended to 45’. Hemingway rigged them to be raised and lowered from the flying bridge. The film PILAR will match the later outriggers in design but will be made of bamboo.

“This boat is more than just a working prop,” Walson said. “When you step on board, even if you are not an actor, you feel transported back in time. In films, some actors need to put on a costume to get into character, but when you step aboard PILAR, it really feels like you’re in a different time and place. It’s as if you’ve just stepped into a Hemingway novel. You could be a risk-taking, Tommie-gun-toting U-boat hunter, or a barrel-chested fisherman hooked up to the world’s biggest marlin. It’s a tangible magic aboard. It’s where adventure happens.”

Hilary Hemingway, Ernest Hemingway’s niece, has worked as a writer of books, documentaries, television news, and feature film since 1984. Her background for this article comes from her love of boating, her book Hemingway in Cuba, her PBS documentary Literary Explorer: Hemingway’s Cuba, and her latest screenplay Hemingway & Fuentes, co-written with Andy Garcia.

Wes Wheeler, author of the sidebar on the Wheeler Yacht Company also contributed to this article.

PILAR'S Life at the Finca

"Remember to get the weather in your damn book—weather is very important." —Ernest Hemingway



HILARY HEMINGWAY

PILAR today rests under cover and well supported in a former tennis court at the Finca Vigia, which is the name Hemingway gave his home in Cuba. The house and grounds are now a museum devoted to the writer's life in that country, where he was much admired.

Whether continues to be important in PILAR's life at Finca Vigia. A month after Hemingway's death in 1961, his wife, Mary, returned to Cuba to read through Papa's will. Following his wishes, she formally handed over the Finca "for the welfare of the Cuban People." The home would become a museum. Another provision dealt with PILAR's future: "I have given to Gregorio Fuentes, of Pasuela Street 209, Cojimar, Ernest's yacht, PILAR, making known to Gregorio that he is free to dispose of the yacht as he sees fit," Mary reported.

Fuentes may have already felt a proprietary interest in PILAR, because for the previous 23 years he had worked, fished, cleaned, and cared for the boat as if it were his own. The only change was that now the humble fisherman became financially responsible for PILAR's fuel, maintenance, and repairs.

Strict fuel rationing that had been in place in Cuba since 1960 limited his range. Fuentes by all accounts kept PILAR anchored in Cojimar Bay. Two hurricanes in the 1960s may have damaged the flying bridge and transom; both had been rebuilt before Fuentes donated PILAR to the Finca.

In 1980s interviews, Fuentes described how he rode out hurricanes aboard PILAR at the mouth of the marshy river that feeds into Cojimar Bay. He would set two anchors off the bow, and rig as many heavy lines as possible to port, starboard, and astern, made off to nearby pine trees, pillings, even mangrove roots, until PILAR looked more like a black spider in a web than a boat. At some point, with storm damage beyond his financial ability to repair, Fuentes decided to give PILAR to the Finca. (There are conflicting dates, in 1963 and 1973, for the boat's actual arrival, which may have to

do with the translation of "arrival," and "return.") In return for PILAR, Fuentes was given Mary's 20' skiff, TIN KID, which he renamed GOMEZ.

After PILAR's repairs were completed, she was trucked to the Finca Vigia Museum and placed in a wooden cradle near the front gate, surrounded by mango trees. "PILAR was kept in running condition until 1979," said Ada Rosa Alfonso, the Finca Vigia Museum director. "And at least once [1977], PILAR was taken from the Finca to a shipyard and made ready for sea again." She was to have been used in an MGM film about Hemingway based on Mary's biography, *How It Was*. But after the project stalled, PILAR was returned to her cradle at the Finca.

In 1979, two monster hurricanes, David and Fred-eric, swept western Cuba with rain and high winds. The Finca's lush green trees were stripped bare. Hard immature mangoes turned into a barrage of natural cannon fire. Photos of PILAR after the storms show devastation consistent with high wind and flying debris: A plank peeled back to expose frames and fittings. Fist-sized holes splintered her transom timbers. Her cockpit canvas, once neatly rolled, hangs in shreds, and the proud flying bridge is left in a twisted heap of galvanized pipes on the aft deck. Inside the cabin are puddles of rainwater and clumps of debris.

If she were a yacht in ordinary use, PILAR would have been written off as a total loss. But the Cubans would not allow PILAR such a death; she was quickly taken to Chullima Shipyard for what they now refer to as the 1983 Restoration, which began in 1979. Fernando Blanco was the project manager, with Gregorio Fuentes as an adviser from start to finish. Given PILAR's age and historical value, she was rebuilt for a life on land, which

meant using heavier and stronger woods. The Cuban shipwrights spent five years meticulously rebuilding PILAR, reframing where necessary from the inside in order to preserve her original shape. They worked to preserve as much original material as possible, as is common in classic boat and ship restorations in museums throughout the world.

Wes Wheeler and I had a chance to see PILAR when we traveled to Cuba in March 2012. "I had seen plenty of photographs of PILAR in Cuba," he wrote, "but it was different when I caught a glimpse of her as I walked down the pathway from the house.

"I was overwhelmed with a sense of pride and family history. Then it hit me: Hilary and I were going to board PILAR, an honor few people are afforded, and for two hours we were allowed to look, study, and measure everything to see how years of restorations might have changed PILAR's dimensions compared to my grandfather's original design. But PILAR's measurements match perfectly, with one exception—the cockpit roof was 2" shorter, 73" instead of 75". We would later see that in the 1983 restoration, the Cubans had rebuilt the cockpit roof, which explains this minor discrepancy.

"I had read that PILAR was missing her small, square builder's identification plate with No. 576. In the restoration photos, we saw where it had been. It was removed

for safekeeping, just as Moores Marine had done for ELHANOR during her yearlong remodel. The plate may be lost or just misplaced within the Finca. I checked for other signs of Wheeler authenticity by inspecting the windows, doors, galley, and the binnacle's throttle mechanism and steering gear. They all were authentic Wheeler. I put my hands on the wheel and ran my finger over the engraved letters that read Wheeler Shipyard Company. The reality hit: This was the helm Papa himself had wrestled. I then reached down and opened the engine hatch. The museum's curator gave me a shocked look, but I couldn't stop myself. I saw the original Chrysler 75-hp still there, intact. So were the four 75-gallon fuel tanks, the steering gear, and two heavy old batteries. Aft of the Chrysler was a strange wooden box. It was braced with gussets fastened to the frames and stringers, so clearly it held something heavy, but neither Hilary nor I knew what it was. We wouldn't know until we saw photos of the cockpit with the hatch blown off that this was for the famous 2,500-lb icebox Hemingway had originally ordered."

As far as we could see, only one thing was missing from the engineroom: the auxiliary motor. We asked Ada Rosa what had happened to PILAR's second engine. She shook her head and said, "This is how PILAR came to us." Photos taken when PILAR arrived at the museum

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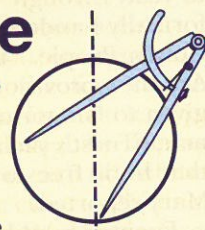
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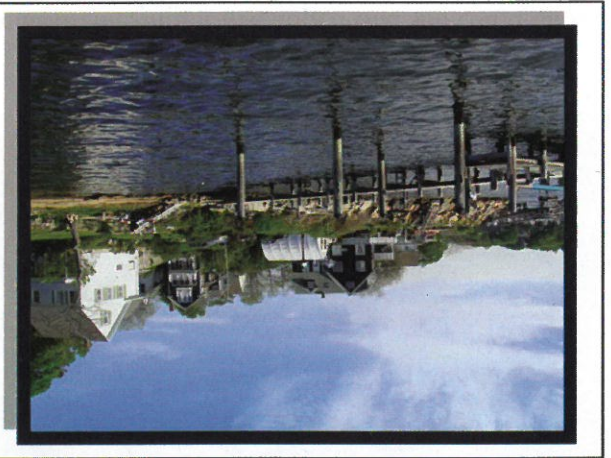
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ever leaving the Finca. A great deal of research and led by marine engineer Rene Guerra with research and recommendations by Dana Hewson of Mystic Seaport. Back in the United States, we compared notes and photos with Andrew Miller and Nate Smith at Moores Marine. They could identify where wood had been replaced, but they could see that the keel and part of the house were original. The frames looked new and spaced farther apart than the originals. The hull planking was new, using Cuban mahogany instead of white cedar. The engine and the interior looked original, along with the transom roller, the wheel, and the binnacle.

In the world of Antique & Classic Boat Society judging, a "preserved boat" is one with at least 60 percent of the original deck and topside planking. PILAR would be judged as a "restored boat"—but she would be in good company, since the USS CONSTITUTION is also considered a "restored boat" and no one considers Old Ironsides a replica.

Wes pushed Nate for a definition. "So technically, she still is PILAR?"

"Yes," he answered. "Her backbone and soul are PILAR."

—HH

show, clear as could be, that at that time she had only one propeller shaft, on the centerline. Perhaps Fuentes used the trolling motor to power his 20' skiff—no one knows for certain. I would find it honorable if he did so, because in that way some small part of PILAR would have continued fishing, and Papa would have wanted that for his Cuban brother.

"Because of the missing motor, people have said we were trying to hide something," Ada Rosa said. "If we were, would I show you these photos? I am doing this because I hope we will work together in the future. The restoration of PILAR must continue, but there are things that cannot be found inside Cuba," and are unavailable as imports because of the longstanding U.S. trade embargo. A 1934 Lycoming 40-hp engine tops a list that also includes a prewar flying-bridge spotlight, two kedge anchors, a three-burner alcohol stove, and blue marble vinyl flooring for the saloon. The Finca museum officials, deeply concerned with authenticity, hope to find replacements sometime in the future, in a post-embargo lifetime.

After the 1983 restoration, PILAR was moved to a new location on Papa's tennis court, where she still resides. A dock was built around her to simulate a marina setting for visitors. Between 2002 and 2006, another round of restoration was completed, this time without PILAR