

FROM TREE TO SEA

The second life of one of Sweden's oldest fishing boats begins here – and she looks good for another 100 years

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PHOTOS **C/O RAVANIS FAMILY AND LARS JANSSON**

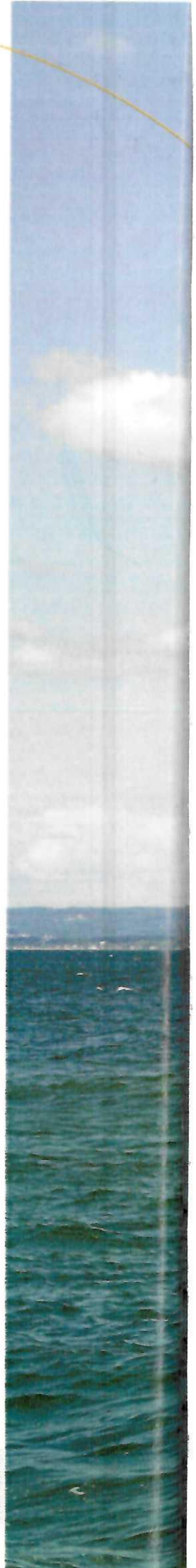
After an entire year and 1,859 hours of work, *Bessie's* second life can now begin. The 108-year-old fishing boat from Limhamn, Sweden, is ready to embark upon another century at sea.

“For us, it is still the same boat,” said Mathias Ravanis who, together with his brother Martin, runs the Nyhamns Såg & Båtbyggeri, the Saw & Boatbuilder's Yard in Bräcke, in northwestern Skåne, that restored her.

Bessie was built in 1909 just outside Malmö for a herring fisherman, Anders Matsson, with the registration code MÖ 347 (today it is HG 52). Her restoration is the largest project to date from the Ravanis' yard and the finished boat has been turning heads wherever she sails.

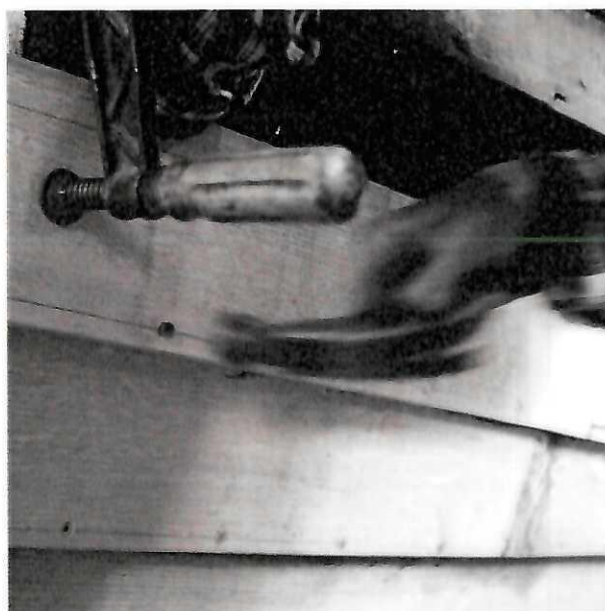
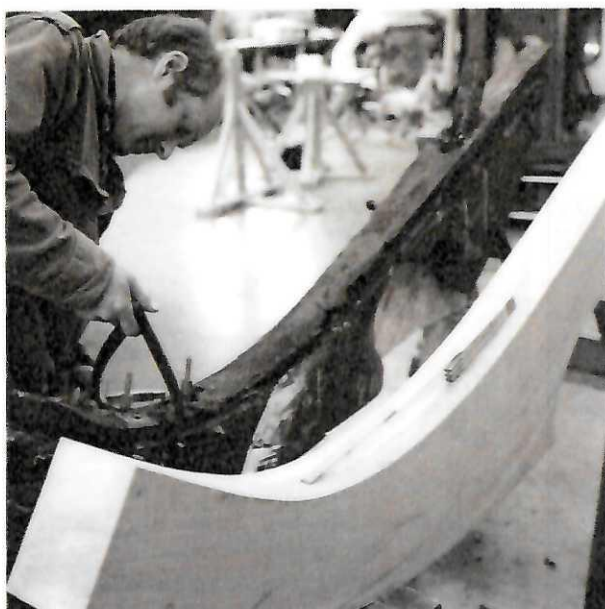
“If you remain faithful to the original lines and construction, show respect for the skilled workers who built her and use timber of the same high quality as was used then, then it is very much the same boat,” said Martin.

LARS JANSSON









Above, clockwise from top left: high quality grown timber crook in the new renovation matches the original laid beside it; replanking from the bottom up; working timbers in the 'Saw & Boatbuilder's Yard' in Bräcke; riveting the new planking. Facing page: the Ravanis brothers, Mathias and Martin

All that is left of the original *Bessie* is nine planks and two small frames in the bow. Everything else is new, including the fittings, which Martin forged himself outside the workshop.

All the planking consists of quarter-sawn oak, the frames are of curved oak that was seasoned for two-and-a-half years in their own timber yard, and the deck is made of quarter-sawn pine heartwood from Värmland in northern Sweden.

"Lots of people think that it's Oregon pine, but it's Swedish pine. And entirely without sapwood," explained Mathias.

When *Bessie* was built in 1909, shipbuilders were not overly concerned about the quality of the deck – then, it was seen mostly as a kind of splashguard. Today, however, brothers Erik, Svante and Petter Wallin, who have inherited the boat from their father Sven Wallin,

want to be able to sleep in the boat. A deck that doesn't leak is of some importance.

In all other areas, however, Per Persson – the boatbuilder in Limhamn who built *Bessie* – paid just as much care to the quality of the timber as Martin and Mathias have done.

"She was particularly well built," said Martin. "There was curved timber throughout and quarter-sawn planking. The boatbuilders in Limhamn were extremely clever and they built boats that were perfectly adapted for fishing in the strong currents of Öresund."

In 1914, Limhamn was Sweden's second largest fishing village, after Råå outside Helsingborg. Just 30 years later, there were more than 170 active fishermen in Limhamn and this was the golden age for traditional wooden boat builders. The small fishing village had three boatyards and the brothers agree that

Per Persson's was the finest: "He was an enormously skilful boat builder."

The Öresund boats are clinker-built and were always built without construction drawings. Instead builders would make a half model from a piece of wood and cut out a hull form that they liked. The model was then cut into cross sections, from which templates were made in the classic style, enabling them to see the internal form. Working

without drawings, it is by means of the planking that the desired lines are developed. The boat is then built from the keel upwards, with each plank slightly overlapping the previous one.

"The beautiful and harmonious lines are a major part of the appearance of a clinker-built boat," said Martin.

"On *Bessie*, some of the planks had been replaced before, while others were in such poor condition that it was difficult to see exactly how the planking had originally been done."

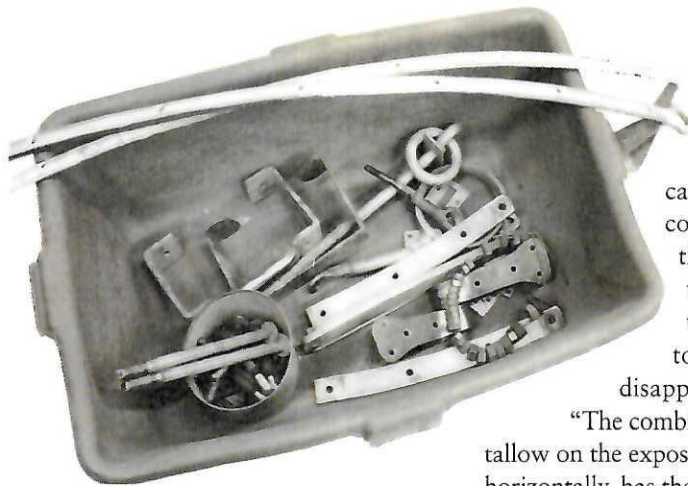
Work began to align and secure the boat and then a few days later the stem had been eased away and a mould made. "At first, we thought that we had something in our stores that we'd be able to use. But the stem is very unusual – almost 90 degrees between the top and the root, and 3.5m long," recalled Martin.

So the hunt began for exactly the right piece of curved oak – a search that would take two months. The brothers looked in boatyards and sawmills in Denmark, and took their mould to various stately homes and estates around Skåne, trying to find a tree that was suitable. In the middle of April, Martin happened to be passing through the village of Stubbarp, just a couple of kilometres from their own boatyard. Suddenly he saw an oak tree that seemed to have just the right curve to the tree base. "We went there with the mould and it looked just right," said Martin.

They were able to buy the tree, but it took a great deal of digging for them to be able to fell the tree sufficiently far down to salvage the piece of timber for the stem. Once they'd begun to saw the oak using their horizontal frame saw, it became evident that it contained a certain amount of rot.

"But the tree base itself was completely healthy, the curve was perfect, there were vertical growth rings everywhere and the piece we wanted proved to be better than we'd ever dared dream."

One week later, the new stem was in place, the keel had been replaced and the stern post had been eased away. Both the grown oak for the frames and the oak timber for the keel came from their own stores.



Ordinarily, a piece of oak – such as that used in the stem – must be dried for five years before it can be used. But by using tallow to coat the ends of the wood and both the inside and outside of the stem wood, where the streaks run at a tangent to the surface, it is possible to prevent too much moisture

disappearing from the wood too quickly.

"The combination of the quarter-sawing and the tallow on the exposed areas where the streaks do not run horizontally, has the effect that the moisture leaves the whole piece of wood at the same, slow rate. This means that the wood doesn't crack, as it might otherwise do," explained Mathias.

When the planking was loosened, the frames almost fell apart as they were in such poor condition. The nails had completely rusted. For this reason, during the renovation work, they used only copper rivets and rustproof screws – no galvanised nails at all.

"Oak and iron form a really devastating combination," said Martin.

The floor timbers had previously been fixed to the keel with galvanised ship nails, which proved to have burst both the floor timbers and the keel. Martin and Mathias came to the decision that acidproof, rustproof, French screws were a better alternative. The bolts are extra-long but do not go all the way through the wood, and they can be screwed tight with great strength.

"This provides the boat with an immensely strong spine, while, at the same time, the screws can be removed if we need to change one of the floor timbers."

This notwithstanding, the brothers have remained faithful to the boat's original design – they have even planed the deck beams in the same way as Per Persson did in 1909.

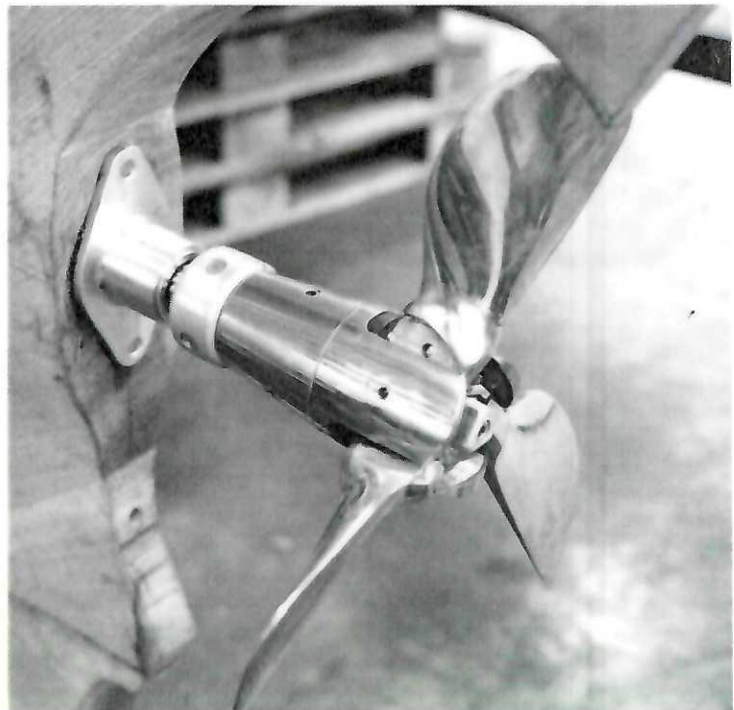
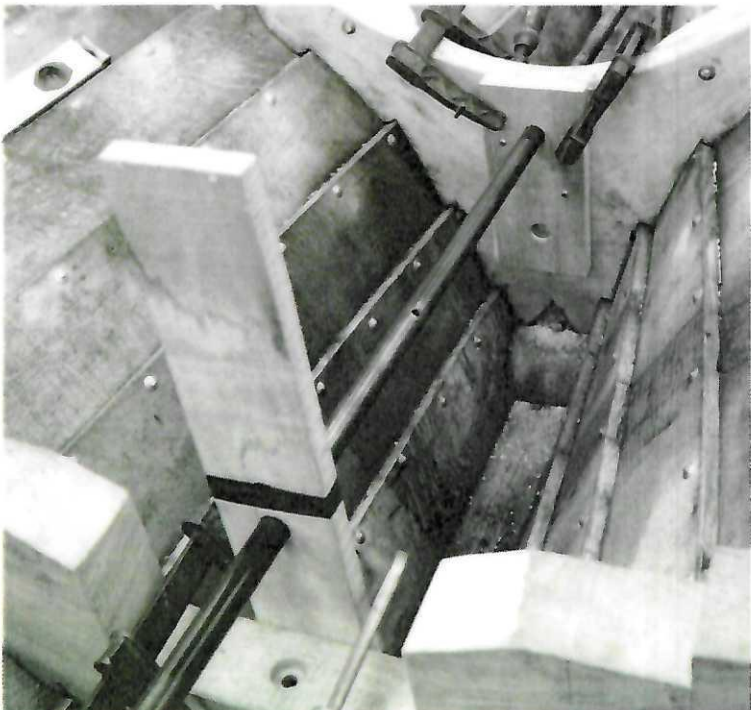
"For us, it goes without saying that we shall do things in the same way as when the boat was built 100 years ago," said Martin.

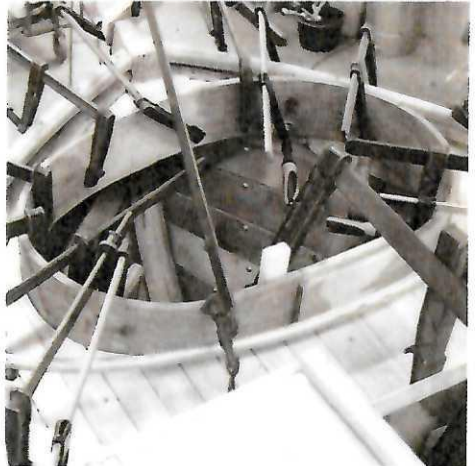
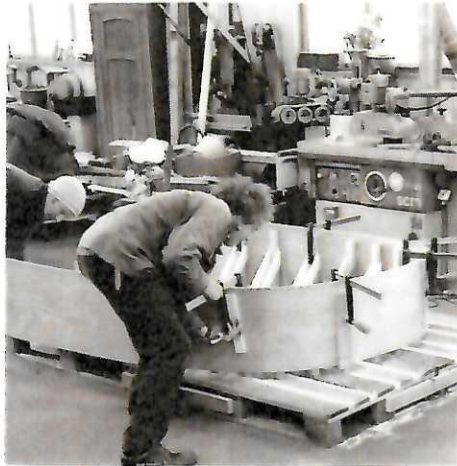
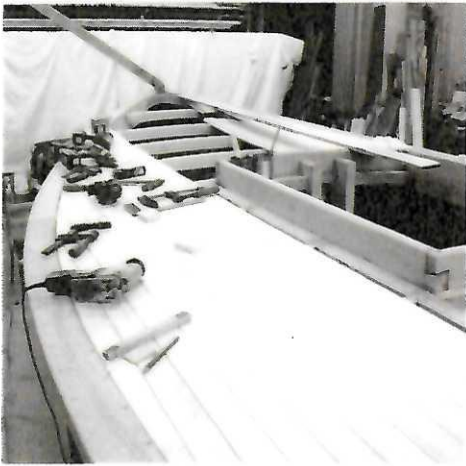
The 13in high coachroof coaming is made of a one-inch-thick piece of oak, which was steamed into its oval shape. The brothers built a template of the opening, around which they then bent the 3.5m long hot plank. The board was left to cool for a few hours before it was removed and mounted on the boat.

"It is not all that easy to warp such a broad plank, which also has to be done with millimetre-accuracy so that it will fit when put into place. After being heated for one hour with steam and high pressure, we had only three or four minutes to bend and fix it into place around the template", said Mathias.

Bessie is the oldest remaining fishing boat from Limhamn that was built for sailing, even if she did have a Svedala motor installed. The very first motor for boats

Facing page, clockwise from top left: oak timber is marked for what Mathias Ravanis says is "the same boat"; machining a style line; fitting a new-sawn and jogged frame into place; Bessie has a new three-bladed folding propeller; aligning the new prop shaft, through the aftermost floor; frame sawing





Clockwise from top left: laying the new Swedish pine deck; forming the new coachroof coaming; fitting the coaming for the helm cockpit; "...the beautiful and harmonious lines are a major part of the appearance of a clinker-built boat"; working at the anvil; caulking the deck seam adjacent to the coachroof coaming

reached this small fishing village in 1904, but it wasn't until 10 or 15 years later that boats really began to be adapted for these heavy motors.

Anders Matsson, who first ordered *Bessie* from Per Persson's boatyard, was not one for motors; they made such a terrible noise, was his firm opinion. Anders continued to fish with *Bessie* until he was in his 80s, although his grandchildren had to act as his eyes as his own sight had deteriorated so much.

"My grandfather could sail so that no water ever came over the boat – he rode every wave and had even been out in storms in *Bessie*," recalled Anders' grandson Harry Matsson in 1979, when talking to Per Lindskog, one of Sweden's experts on traditional wooden boats.

The Limhamn boats were built for Öresund's prevailing conditions – strong currents and choppy waters – as well as to carry their heavy loads of freshly caught herring.

"A carvel-built boat from Bohuslän on the west coast, would just tread water in the sound, while the Limhamn boats cut right through the waves," said Martin.

In the early 1900s, Limhamn and its three boatyards were built upon the herring business. During the First World War, the herring suddenly increased in number in Öresund and because the war prevented any large-scale

fishing in the North Sea, this led to a golden age for both fishermen and boatbuilders along Skåne's western coast.

"They used the traditional method of driftnet fishing. The boats went out in the evening, set the floating nets in the twilight and lowered their masts so that they would not pitch as much. They'd have two paraffin lamps – one on the net's buoy and the other on the boat."

The boats would be out like this for several hours. The three men on board would drink coffee and have something to eat, and at 11 or half-past they would haul in the heavy nets and sail home – hopefully with the boat full of herring. *Bessie* remained in Limhamn until 1963 when Sven Wallin, a sea captain from Svanshall on Skåne's Kullen peninsula, found her on land and decided that this was the fishing boat that he wanted.

In her new life, *Bessie* will remain in Svanshall and be used for fishing by the Wallin brothers: Erik, Svante and Petter.

"For us it has been a very special and educational experience to have been able to renovate the oldest preserved herring boat from Limhamn," said Mathias.

"*Bessie* can now be used for fishing for at least another 100 years, and it is unique that the Wallin brothers – who first learned to fish with *Bessie* – can now continue to fish with the same boat." ●