

**The Making Of
 “DAVIS ISLAND YACHT CLUB ~ AFTERNOON RENDEZVOUS”
 20” X 36”**

The following series of photographs illustrates the evolution of this painting, and includes an explanation of the composition. Each photo shows the progress up to that date. In the 35 days from block-in to final highlight, I was painting nearly every day, on average 7 hours a day. There were only 4 days that I did not pick up a brush! Though not ideal, I often need to paint from photographs, a very dangerous method because the camera is so inferior to the eye in “seeing” all levels in a scene. With Davis Island a thousand miles from my studio, I had little choice. But years of painting from life have helped me remember what I “should “ be seeing. I hope you enjoy this passage as much as I enjoyed creating this painting.

1. January 4 - this is the end of day #1, the initial blocking-in of sky and water and placement of the trees. Getting past a blank canvas is often the hardest part. The linen had been primed prior to this with gesso and tinted with thinned burnt Sienna. The major lines were sketched in lightly with graphite. I always begin with the surrounding supportive colors in a broad neutral tone and value, here the sky and water. I also paint in “compliments”, my favorite being blue and orange for marine subjects (phthalo blue and burnt Sienna):



2. January 10 - by now the yacht club has been “constructed” but not detailed, and I have laid out the shadow and highlight areas under the trees. Early on I had planned to leave a middle tree out of the composition because it was smack in the center:



3. January 15 - in the previous 5 days I've developed the tree trunks, branches and some early definition of the water. I decided to include the 3rd tree but moved it off center clearing room for the important items on the point like the flag pole and gazebo. Some details have now been added to and around the Yacht Club:



4. January 18 - the addition of foliage to the trees was a welcome change in technique...a loose and suggestive exercise unlike the time consuming rigors of detail required in buildings, boats and figures. Here I've roughly established the location and scale of the couple on the bench and the sailboat entering the harbor:



5. January 31 - Over these 2 weeks I completed or established the tedious details essential to the composition, like the small junior sailing Opti dinghies, the sloop under sail and most details around the club...and my favorite part, the water...



But the composition was still incomplete, lacking a focal point in the foreground that would serve to draw the viewer into and through the painting. The couple sitting on the bench were not yet an interesting draw as they seemed uninvolved and impersonal facing away. Then my wife suggested I add a single classic bicycle leaning against the left tree. Hmmm. I first thought there should be two, but quickly sketched one in to see the effect. A single “girl’s” bike seemed to add mystery to the couple...



6. February 7 - The bicycle did the trick and the composition was now complete!
(more on the bike in the section below titled "THE COMPOSITION")

By the end of the 5th week I had finally added the last highlights and finishing touches, the painting was now complete, signed and the brushes put to rest!



Enjoy the drama, the mystery and the adventure. I certainly did. This project became a more enjoyable experience for me than I had expected, taking on a life of its own as the "story" unfolded before my eyes...one of the many joys in this creative process.

Oh, by the way, beyond that right tree...could that possibly be "Spináche" heading out to join the other boats on the bay?

THE COMPOSITION

I once studied under Dominique Rickard who admired the artist Hongnian Zhang. In his book "The Yin/Yang of Painting" Zhang explains his method of arranging a composition of complex subjects as "finding the dragon". In other words, he uses a serpentine arrangement of the main subjects in a painting to "lead" the viewer's eye through the image. I try to adopt that technique wherever possible. Sometimes a scene already has it, and perhaps that is why it originally appealed to me. In this painting I needed to create it, so I arranged the two small sailboats to lead you to the couple on the bench, then to the big sailboat, which leads you back to the clubhouse. I still had nothing to "grab" the viewer and pull him in. The couple on the bench didn't work because they were impersonally poised and uninteresting other than the girl's hand on her hat suggesting the wind...that is until my wife Amy suggested the bicycle!

The bike turned out to be the master key I needed, a fond and very recognizable symbol of most everyone's earliest memories of independence and exploration. It invites the viewer into the painting, while at the same time adds an unknown romantic mystery to the couple on the bench, thereby making them relevant:

"It must be her bike"

"But where is his?"

"And what exactly are they up to??"

With a few minor brush strokes I created the basket, flowers and wine, giving an air of romance to the mystery pair on the bench! **Viola!**



There is a second drama taking place in this painting, a separate "rendezvous" besides the mystery couple, and it is brewing on the water. The Tartan sloop with its main and genoa full and shapely, holds its course as the skipper prepares to pass by his Yacht Club under sail. Like any sailor who pampers and loves every inch of their beautiful



craft, he is thinking proudly to himself how nice she will look gliding under full sail past the broad windows of the clubhouse. "*Today, WE are the scenery!*" he is thinking. But his daydream is about to fade as the 3 boats rapidly converge. The afternoon wind has suddenly built to well over 18 knots and is pushing his Tartan 3500 directly into the small harbor, dead downwind at near hull speed. Murphy's Law strikes again! Just as the cyclist sitting on the bench feels her sun-hat lifting in the wind and reaches up to keep it from blowing away, the proud skipper suddenly awakens from his daydream realizing his heading will take him directly between the paths of the two sailing school dinghies! Up until now the dinghies have been too busy concentrating on tacking back and forth,

close-hauled, upwind to notice how fast the Tartan is bearing down on them. The young sailor on starboard tack who has “right of way” realizes she can’t challenge the fast moving 35’ sloop yet also knows the sloop’s skipper can’t easily alter his narrow and delicate downwind track. But it quickly becomes apparent the Tartan will likely cross her bow before they meet so she eases sail and steadies her course. The other Opti, who has to give way to the sloop quickly tacks back toward the park. This entire “David and Goliath” encounter surely by now has the attention of every salt-blooded sailor on deck at the yacht club, watching everything unfold with great interest. Unknowingly, in the end, the skipper was correct. His sparkling and swift yacht, along with the close call, has turned every eye on him! All except those of the mystery couple.

For me, besides its use as a compositional tool, the bicycle, holds a personal symbolic connection to this scene. It is a reminder of the very first time I ever considered doing a major oil of the Davis Island Yacht Club. It was back in February 2019 during our first visit to Tampa after our daughter’s move here from New York. From the balcony of her 17th floor apartment on Harbor Island, I kept noticing a bustle of small airplane and sailboat activity along the bay about 2 miles to the south...airplanes and sailboats, two of my life’s many passions. So the next day I peddled my red Mongoose mountain bike



down the east side of Davis Island to the south end where it loops around the runway at Peter O. Knight Airport. There a bike path enters a narrow treelined park which runs north along a retaining wall at the water’s edge, then turns south once again, gently circling a very sweet little harbor filled with moored sailboats. There my bike and I finally reached the end of the road. Before us stood this wonderful yacht club just bursting with activity. The club and its marina, overflowing with every imaginable sailing craft, commands an entire quaint picturesque peninsula that

juts majestically into Tampa Bay. Directly across the harbor from the club, between the landing aircraft and the harbor, was that sweet little waterside park I had just ridden through, dotted with occasional picnic tables and well placed benches along the bike path. Here one can sit beneath the shade of the trees in filtered sunlight for hours with a front row seat to all the yacht club activity and water traffic passing by. With sailboats before me and airplanes behind, I had just discovered my own personal “Nirvana”. One of our favorite routines now is having 3:00 coffee on the very bench in the painting! The numerous seabirds and dolphins that come and go, in concert with the poetic choreography of the many sailboats, make you never want to leave this little piece of Heaven.

- Jim Lawless