



Legendary Boatbuilder

The Lindwall Legacy

Santa Barbara shipwright Paul “Sugar” Lindwall was a master craftsman whose wooden fishing boats and yachts are still treasured by discerning mariners.

By Mark Lewis • Art by Mike Rider

The Santa Barbara Maritime Museum proudly displays a 23-foot modern reconstruction of a tomol, the sewn-plank seagoing canoe that once carried intrepid Chumash mariners between the mainland and the Channel Islands. But there is a lesser-known coda to the story, because the art of wooden boatbuilding flourished once again in Santa Barbara from the 1940s through the 1960s.

This wooden-boat renaissance was mostly a one-man affair, and his name was Sugar Lindwall.



Above – The Santa Barbara Maritime Museum honored Paul “Sugar” Lindwall and his family’s business, Lindwall Boat Works, with a floating exhibit in the harbor on June 28, 2003.

Lindwall boats dockside from left to right: *Lucy L*, *Marda*, *Angelina*, *Galatea*, *Tonina*, *Cecelia*.

Right – Paul “Sugar” Lindwall, a familiar and revered figure along the Santa Barbara waterfront, observes the launch of one of his boats, circa 1960.





"Sugar was the last of the great wooden boatbuilders," says Marla Daily of the Santa Cruz Island Foundation.

The museum's *California's Maritime Ranches* exhibit includes the ship's log of the *Vaquero II*, the one-of-a-kind cattle boat that shuttled between Port Hueneme, Santa Barbara Harbor and the Vail & Vickers ranch on Santa Rosa Island for more than 40 years. Nearby, the *Commercial Fishing* exhibit includes a wooden ship's wheel "hand made by Paul 'Sugar' Lindwall in 1951," which "belonged to the fishing vessel *Cecelia*, one of the first fishing boats owned by the Castagnola family." The display case also includes a photograph, apparently taken in the '70s, which shows Laurence Jackson Castagnola with his young nephew Morgan aboard the *Cecelia*, which, like its steering wheel, was built by Sugar Lindwall.

Lindwall died in 2011, but his legend lives on in the harbor, both inside the museum and outside in the marina, where commercial fishermen and serious yachtsmen still trade stories about this master craftsman of the waterfront.

Despite its long maritime history, Santa Barbara did not have a true harbor until the breakwater was built in the late 1920s, using rocks quarried on Santa Cruz Island and barged across the chan-

nel. The new marina led to the rapid growth of the commercial fishing industry, which spelled opportunity for a Finnish immigrant named Charles Lindwall.

Charlie and his wife, Angelina, had six children. The youngest was Paul, born on August 18, 1923, in a house Charlie built on a small island in the Columbia River near Astoria, Oregon. (The house is still there. When a Lindwall builds something, it stays built.) Paul suffered from asthma, so when he was about 5, the Lindwalls moved to the



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drier climate of Southern California. Charlie and his older sons set up shop as boatbuilders on Stearns Wharf. Paul was still in school, but he spent many hours in the boatyard learning the trade. He also acquired the nickname Sugar, and it stuck.

After graduating from Santa Barbara High School in 1941, Sugar joined the family business. He and his brothers Vic and Lloyd helped Charlie build the 45-foot long-range tuna boat *Linda*, which Lloyd took to sea to fish albacore. The family's next project, the 50-foot *Angelina*, was supposed to be Sugar's boat. But the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor forced a change of plans.

With the nation now at war, Sugar and his high-school sweetheart, Lucy Smith, decided not to wait to get married.

"We knew he'd have to go eventually, so in 1942 we eloped to Las Vegas," Lucy said in a Maritime Museum video interview.

In 1943, Sugar shipped out to the Pacific Theater with the Navy, which assigned him to repair landing craft. Meanwhile, his father and brothers finished *Angelina*—but not, as it turned out, for Sugar. When he came home from the war in 1945, Lucy put her foot down. She wanted him at home with her, not off at sea chasing tuna for weeks at a time.

"He'd been gone so long that I just couldn't handle it," she said on the video.



Above – Sweethearts since high school, Sugar and Lucy Lindwall celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in 1992.

Left, above – Sugar Lindwall and his father, Charlie, completed the 65-foot *Vaquero II* (nicknamed *Noah's Ark II*) in 1959, said to be the largest wooden boat ever built in Santa Barbara.

Left, below – The custom-built, exquisitely detailed *Vaquero II* shuttled cattle between Port Hueneme, Santa Barbara Harbor and the Vail & Vickers ranch on Santa Rosa Island for more than 40 years. The west coast's only cattle ferry had sufficient deck space to hold enough cattle to fill two railroad cars.



Laurence Jackson Castagnola

Laurence with nephew, Morgan Castagnola, on stern of Castagnola family boat, *Cecelia*, built in 1949 by Lindwall Boat Works in Santa Barbara. Morgan is a fourth generation Castagnola.

Above – The *Commercial Fishing* exhibit at the Santa Barbara Maritime Museum includes this wooden ship's wheel, which Sugar Lindwall built for the *Cecelia*, and a photo of Laurence Jackson Castagnola and his nephew, Morgan (current owner of *Cecelia*).

Bottom – The 48-foot *Cecelia*, one of the first boats constructed by Lindwall Boat Works, was launched from Santa Barbara's West Beach in 1951. The vessel joined the Castagnola Brothers fishing fleet.

"That's right, she cut my water off," Sugar put in. So *Angelina* went to Vic, who used her to fish albacore out of Morro Bay. Sugar rejoined his father at the Lindwall Boat Works on the wharf, and he built a house in the Samarkand neighborhood for Lucy and their two young daughters—Carol, aka Punky, and Diane, aka Diney. The house was as carefully crafted as a Lindwall boat, and he and Lucy shared it for 65 years.

Sugar's tenure on the wharf, however, turned out to be more short-lived. He and his father soon moved the Lindwall Boat Works to a 1.5-acre lot at Micheltorena Street and Highway 101 (in those days not yet a freeway) and began turning out wooden boats for local fishermen. One of the first was *Cecelia* for the Castagnolas.

Sugar soon inherited his father's role as the yard's presiding boatbuilding genius. Like Charlie (who died in 1959), Sugar insisted on using only high-quality wood and expensive Monel fasteners, made from a nickel alloy that does not corrode.

"He'd hand-pick-out every piece of wood that was in every one of his boats," daughter Carol Bowie says. "The boats are still in wonderful shape."

In 1959, Lindwall took a break from fishing boats to design and build the 65-foot cattle boat *Vaquero II*, said to be the biggest wooden vessel ever built in Santa Barbara. Its launching that year



was a memorable event in town as the enormous boat slowly was trundled from the yard to the shore. As always, the two Lindwall daughters were on hand to witness it.

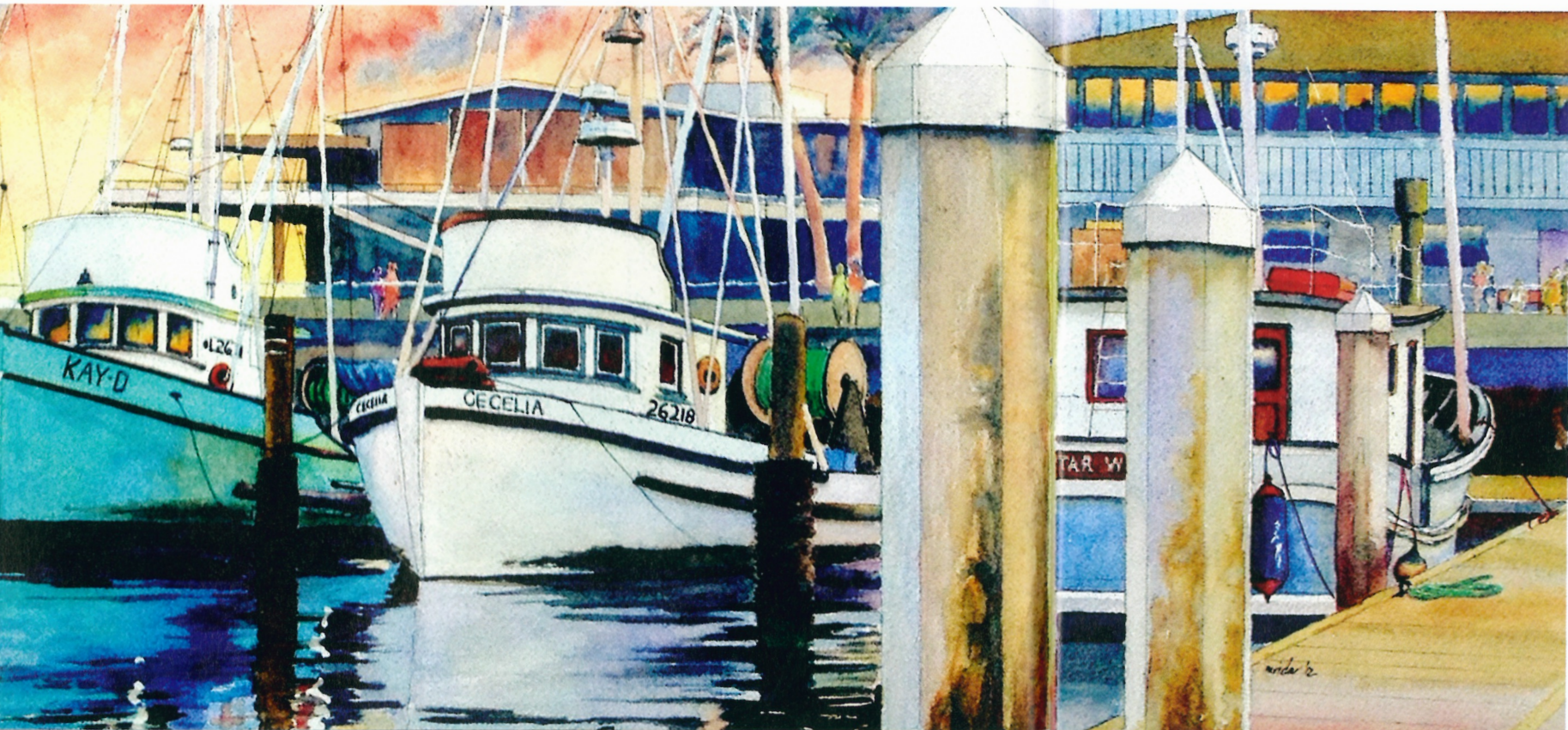
"Usually Mom and Dad would take us out of school so we could see the launches," Diane Powell says.

Vaquero II later would be featured on two episodes of Huell Howser's PBS TV show *California's Gold*, which showed Vail & Vickers cowboys on horseback driving cattle aboard the boat for transport from Santa Rosa to the mainland.

Vaquero II was a one-off—the only cattle boat on Lindwall's resume. But after launching her, he did not go back to building commercial fishing boats. A new career phase beckoned, thanks to an innovative yachtsman named Willard "Bill" Shepherd.

In those days, most cruising yachts were sailboats. Shepherd and his friends wanted long-range diesel-powered yachts that looked and operated like work boats but were built for comfort. In 1957, Shepherd bought the commercial fishing boat *Angelina* from the Lindwall family and started converting her into this new kind of yacht, called an offshore cruiser.

At the same time, Shepherd and others were urging the noted naval architect Art DeFever to design an offshore cruiser from scratch. DeFever took up the challenge, and presumably it was not



a coincidence that he turned to Sugar Lindwall to convert his blueprints into reality. Together, DeFever and Lindwall created six classic wooden cruisers from 1959 through 1967, all built at the Lindwall Boat Works on Micheltorena Street. The biggest was the 60-foot *Tonina*, built in 1964 for Frank Collbohm, the founder of the RAND Corp., the pioneering think tank in Santa Monica. *Tonina* now belongs to Rick Fricke of Arcadia, who first noticed her in a Wilmington marina when he was a kid. Years later, she became available, and he snapped her up.

"I've had the boat 30 years in April," he says. "*Tonina* has been to Hawaii and Tahiti."

More often, Fricke sails her to White's Landing at Catalina, where she sometimes ties up near the Lindwall-built cruisers *Marda* and *Galatea*.

"We get all the Lindwall boats together," Fricke says. "We all know each other."

Galatea now belongs to Brad Avery of Newport Beach, who sits on the Santa Cruz Island Foundation board. Lindwall originally made this boat in 1967 for William Hanna, of the TV animation studio Hanna-Barbera, creators of *The Flintstones*, *The Jetsons*, Yogi Bear, *Scooby-Doo* and other cartoon favorites. Hanna was a hands-on client who visited the boatyard frequently during the construction process.

"Bill Hanna and his brother would come up every weekend and 'help,' quote-unquote," Powell recalls with a smile. Hanna reportedly later said that watching the boat take shape in Lindwall's yard was like watching an orchid come into bloom.

Interestingly, Lindwall never made a boat for himself, or for his family. He was a shipwright, but not a sailor.

"Daddy never wanted to deal with boats on the weekend," Bowie says. "That was not entertainment for him."

Galatea was the last boat to emerge from the Lindwall yard on Micheltorena Street. Route 101 was being expanded from a highway to a full-fledged freeway, and around 1970 a new overpass obliterated the birthplace of the classic Lindwall boats. Sugar moved his business to other locations, but soon gave up running his own yard and instead set up shop in Rod White's boat yard in the harbor, where he worked until he retired in 1999.

"He taught me a lot about wooden boats," says shipwright Chris Mohs, who still works there several afternoons a week. (The yard now is called Harbor Marineworks.)

"His boats were classic wooden boats," Mohs says. "They were things of beauty, with a function."

Lindwall continued to repair boats, but his days of building them from the keel up were over.

It was getting harder to find high-quality wood at reasonable prices. Fiberglass was becoming the material of choice, and Lindwall did not like working with fiberglass.

"Daddy called fiberglass boats 'Tupperware boats,'" Bowie says.

Lindwall's last hurrah as a boatbuilder was not a diesel cruiser but a sailing ship, the *Widgeon*, a 54-foot sloop he finished for G. Norman Bacon of Santa Barbara, using a preexisting wooden hull. Bacon skippered *Widgeon* to victory in the Transpacific Yacht Club's Los Angeles-to-Tahiti race of 1970. When Bacon and crew made their triumphant arrival at Papeete, "Mom and Dad were there waiting for them," Powell says.

The very first Lindwall boat, *Linda*, was lost long ago on the sandbar at the mouth of the Columbia River. The remaining 15 are all still around and still afloat. Eight of them crowded into Santa Barbara Harbor on June 28, 2003, for the Maritime Museum's "floating exhibit" tribute to their builder. Three had been built as fishing boats (*Angelina*, *Cecelia*, *Lucy L*); four were offshore cruisers (*Chickadee*, *Galatea*, *Marda*, *Tonina*); and then there was the inimitable *Vaquero II*, recently retired from her cattle-boat duties for Vail & Vickers. Contemplating this impressive flotilla representing his life's work, Sugar Lindwall did not have a lot to say.

"He was not a big talker," Bowie says.

"He enjoyed people, but he didn't like to be the center of attention," Powell adds.

In retirement, Sugar and Lucy were regulars at the waterfront, walking hand in hand along the breakwater.

"They were there almost every day," Bowie says. "That was their social life."

Sugar died in 2011, at 87. Lucy died in 2017, at 93. The boats live on. *Vaquero II* currently is languishing at her mooring in the Sacramento River Delta, after a brief second career as a party boat in Puerto Vallarta. The others are still in active service. At least one, *Cecelia*, still operates out of Santa Barbara Harbor, skippered by Morgan Castagnola, the youth in that old *Cecelia* photo on display in the Maritime Museum. And *Angelina* is once again a Lindwall family boat, having been reacquired by Sugar's nephew Chuck. (Its current home port is Mystic, Connecticut.)

"They're coveted boats," Rick Fricke says. "You'd have to get in line to buy one."

That is especially true of the offshore cruisers. After *Galatea*, Art DeFever started doing business with big yards in Mexico, Japan and Taiwan that mass-produced his designs in steel or fiberglass.



There are thousands of DeFever-designed cruisers in the world today, but only six that were hand-crafted from wood by Sugar Lindwall.

"These are pre-production DeFever's," Fricke says. "They're all one-off and custom. There will be no more than that."

In fact, barring another unforeseen renaissance, there will be no more seagoing wooden boats of any kind made in Santa Barbara. It's the end of a tradition that goes back a thousand years or more. This region is famous among anthropologists for the Chumash and their tomols, the most advanced sewn-plank canoes made in the entire Western Hemisphere until the Mission Era put an end to their boatbuilding. Sugar Lindwall was just one man, but in his own way, he kept the wooden-boat tradition going in Santa Barbara for several decades, while creating a lasting legacy. Then he died, and there is no one to take his place.

"It was the end of an era," Chris Mohs says. "He was the last of a kind." ♦

Below and right – Noted naval architect Art DeFever designed the 58-foot *Tonina*—the largest offshore cruiser built by Sugar Lindwall.



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