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From Fishboats to Yachts: Sugar Lindwall and His Enduring Creations

Look at this," says Rick Fricke, owner and skipper of the 58' long-range trawler-yacht TONINA, when asked why her builder, Paul Robert "Sugar" Lindwall (1923–2011), has been so revered even though the man built fewer than 15 boats.

Fricke opens a gear locker deep inside TONINA. The fit and finish of both trim and structure are as neat and tight as high-quality, handmade furniture.

"With Sugar's boats, this is what you got when the boat was brand-new, and this is what you get in the boat after more than 50 years," Fricke says. For 30 years, he has owned TONINA (built in 1964), the largest trawler-yacht to emerge from a legendary partnership between the San Diego naval architect Art DeFever and Lindwall's Santa Barbara boatyard.

"In all that time, I've barely had to do anything to the hull and deck except paint," he says. "That's how much time and care Sugar put into building this boat. That's how tough she is." He goes on to add that TONINA is no harbor queen. She has voyaged as far afield as Tahiti, Alaska, and the Sea of Cortez.

TONINA was Lindwall's largest yacht, and her diverse surviving sisters also are cherished by their owners and celebrated by aficionados of Santa Barbara's harbor and maritime history. They include yachts such as GALATEA,



TONINA on launch day, 1964. Frank Collbohm, the original owner, is on her bow. Inset—Sugar Lindwall poses in front of TONINA's propeller with Collbohm and his daughter.

COURTESY OF RICK FRICKE (BOTH)

trawler-to-yacht conversions such as ANGELINA, fishing boats such as LUCY L, and the Channel Islands cattle boat VAQUERO II.

Lindwall began building boats with his father, Charlie Lindwall. Charlie left his home in Finland in 1894 at the age of 14. He and his wife, Angelina, moved to the Columbia River in Oregon, where a neighbor gave little Paul that nickname, "Sugar," because he was such a sweet kid. In 1929, the family moved to Santa Barbara to find a better climate for six-year-old Sugar's asthma. Charlie established Lindwall Boatworks at the end of Stearn's Wharf. In 1943, he built his first boat, LINDA, an albacore trawler, with his three sons, Sugar, Lloyd, and Vic.

After working on LINDA, Sugar Lindwall attended the U.S. Navy boatbuilding school in San Diego,

earning marks just two points below the highest marks ever given by instructors at the school. Then he married his high school sweetheart, Lucy, and shipped out to the Philippines to repair landing craft until the end of World War II. While he was in the Navy, his father and brothers launched the 48' fishing trawler ANGELINA.

He returned in 1945, and the Lindwalls had a baby girl. He wanted to go offshore fishing in ANGELINA, but Lucy told him "no way." She wasn't letting her husband leave home again. So while his brothers headed to Oregon to fish in ANGELINA and LINDA, Lindwall took over his father's boatshop and built the trawler REMORA (now named LUCY L for Lindwall's wife) in 1948. Then, in 1951, he launched the 50' trawler CECILIA for the prominent Castagnola fishing family of Santa Barbara.

Over the next decade, word spread about the toughness, fit, and finish of Lindwall's workboats, which were all built of white oak frames and Douglas-fir planking fastened with Monel. When a Los Angeles-area heavy-equipment dealer named Bill Shepherd started the Offshore Cruising Society to promote world cruising in stout motor-yachts (and to sell Caterpillar diesels), buyers immediately turned to DeFever's "go-anywhere" fishing trawler designs with Lindwall's quality construction.

What followed from the DeFever-Lindwall partnership was a string of eight offshore cruisers for celebrity owners such as Frank Collbohm who founded the Rand Corporation and Bill Hanna of Hanna-Barbera Productions. The boats set aesthetic standards for offshore cruising yachts for decades to follow. These were boats that took a lot of time and care to build. Not only were they big, but they were rich with luxuries: wet bars, soapstone fireplaces, raised paneling, and king-sized beds in the staterooms.

And while DeFever often gets all the credit for

the look of these trawlers, owners such as Fricke will tell you that Lindwall added his own interpretations.

"The look and proportions of the pilothouse windows, the additional and iconic side gussets [supporting the upper deck] are pure Sugar," Fricke says. "The man was an artist... and a hell of a nice guy."

When he died in 2011 his obituary read, in part: "Building and repairing wooden boats was his life's work, but when approached by friends, he also built wooden furniture for local restaurants, boats, and homes. He was a very generous man, and when asked by a local plastic surgeon to craft fiberglass casts for child burn victims, he donated his time making these casts and fitting them to the patients. This skill then led to the making of casts for injured horses as well."

—RP

Boats by Sugar Lindwall

- 1943** LINDA—45' fishing boat used by Lloyd Lindwall to fish albacore, lost on the Columbia River Bar, Oregon
- 1944** ANGELINA—50' trawler used by Vic Lindwall to fish albacore. He sold the boat to Bill Shepherd, Caterpillar engine dealer, who added a helicopter deck
- 1948** LUCY L (ex-REMORA)—35.8' commercial fishing vessel
- 1951** CECILIA—50' commercial fishing vessel named for mama Cecilia Castagnola
- 1954** 32' power sport fisherman
- 1958** VAQUERO II—65' cattle boat built for Vail & Vickers
- 1959** RAPPAREE—47' offshore trawler-yacht
- 1959** PAU HANA—47' offshore trawler-yacht
- 1961** MARDIA—50' offshore trawler-yacht
- 1962** CHICKADEE—52' offshore trawler-yacht
- 1964** TONINA—58' offshore trawler-yacht
- 1965** EL VENCIDO—50' offshore trawler-yacht
- 1965** BLUE PETER—50' offshore trawler-yacht
- 1967** GALATEA—52' offshore trawler-yacht
- 1974** CORAL SEA—steel offshore trawler-yacht