

Dream Boats

Sleek luxury yachts hold a glossy appeal, but for two sailors, romancing the high seas calls for nothing less than a wooden sailing vessel anchored in lore and tradition **海上传奇**

TEXT LIM FONG WEI/林方伟
PHOTO EL ALEPH & THE VEGA



The El Aleph, a traditional Phinisi boat outfitted as a floating luxury apartment, is a sight to behold.



Unlike the modern sleek boat, El Aleph's ironwood exterior and teak interior instantly harks back to the romance of old-fashioned sailing.

Two ships – one a newly-built Indonesian phinisi that has been outfitted as a luxury yacht, the other an ancient Norwegian vessel reborn as a courier of goodwill – are keeping the romance of old-fashioned sailing alive.

El Aleph One Man's Passion

Buying a boat is easy, but try building one from scratch.

Somewhere in between vacationing on his friends' yachts and trading bonds in Moscow, French financier Eric Kraus got a bee in his bonnet about doing just that – to build a boat to call his own.

He had been spending a lot of downtime in Indonesia and fell in love with the local phinisis that sailed majestically across the ocean. These schooners – boats with at least two masts with a shorter forward mast – are indigenous to the Bugis people and were originally made for cargo.

When Kraus, who is in his 50s, decided he absolutely had to build one for himself, he set about

El Aleph is equipped with a top-of-the-line GPS, while satellite Internet access keeps its crew and passengers connected 24/7 to the world, even when they are out in the middle of nowhere.

engaging the original tribe of Bugis boat-builders to construct the luxury cruiser of his dreams.

The boat, which he has named El Aleph, is a 40m-long superyacht that, with sails at full mast, looks like an ancient vessel that sailed straight out of a Technicolor movie, complete with epic film score of soaring violins and a gamelan orchestra for that Asian touch.

Inside the ship, however, Kraus would not compromise on his taste for five-star comforts and modern technology. The interiors are fully air-conditioned and the sizable 50 sq m master cabin with dressing room and 10 sq m private terrace are designed for privacy.

Conventional modern boats, however luxurious they may be, do not excite Kraus, who had sailed El Aleph into Singapore as part of the recent inaugural Singapore Yacht Show. As he looks out on the fleet of white fiberglass yachts moored nearby at ONE*15 Marina, he proclaims: "They are boring Tupperware. I don't want to be inside a plastic tub."

Kraus admits to being an "incurable romantic". He enjoys books on history (a dog-eared copy of The Fall Of The Roman Empire lies on his bedside) and magical realism. His boat is named after Jorge Luis Borges' story, The Aleph, which describes a point in space of all-encompassing infinity – anyone who gazes into it can see everything in the universe from every angle.

His love for history was transposed into the development of his own historic schooner. What started out innocently enough as sketches on an envelope spiralled into a two-year caper of bringing together old ways and new ideas; local and international craftsmen and technical experts; and fantasy and reality.

Phinisis are traditionally built on the beach. The Konjo boat builders of Tana Beru village south of Sulawesi, Indonesia, were engaged to build El Aleph's structure, which was later shipped to Bali for the local carpenters there to craft the elegant interiors.

The technical requirements proved too intricate for the electricians there, so he had to seek external expertise, before painfully discovering that few foreign engineers had worked on a traditional boat such as his before. Meanwhile, he had to surmount hitch after hitch in dealing with indigenous craftsmen and bureaucrats "who have a different sense of time and organisation", he recounts. "I did sometimes feel like I was lost in a jungle. I am a bond trader. What am I doing here?"

As for the cost of the boat, he says, throwing up his hands: "I budgeted US\$800,000 (S\$990,000) to build the boat; I stopped counting beyond US\$2.5 million."

El Aleph was completed in 2009 and, in hindsight, Kraus is glad he stuck it out. "It is five times the weight of a modern boat, is extremely seaworthy, can hold 100 tons of cargo and is more reinforced than any of these modern boats around." To think that he had rolled up his sleeves and sanded parts of the boat himself, Kraus should be proud of what he had built.

The superyacht is available for charter at US\$60,000 a week, which covers all expenses, meals, crew time and facilities such as watersports and diving equipment. With six cabins, it can take up to 12 guests at a time for extended cruises and up to 100 guests for day cruises. It accepts only eight charters each year – the rest of the time is reserved for the owner's use.

El Aleph has been cruising the seas around Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Myanmar and the Andaman Islands. Kraus is keen to share his latest find – the reefs off Raja Ampat. The avid diver enthuses: "From November to February, Raja Ampat offers the most beautiful and unspoilt cruising and diving I've ever seen." It is accessible only via private boats, which delightfully for Kraus, is his very own El Aleph.

El Aleph may be contacted at www.elalephcruising.com



A modern Renaissance man, Eric Kraus is trading bonds for building luxury Phinisi boat. (Photo: 曾坤顺)

船艇 BOAT.



Meggi Macouq and Capt. Shane Granger, traded their high profile advertising jobs to start their "mom-and-pop charity" onboard the historic Vega. (Photo: 广启聪)

The Vega Heritage Alive

In her heyday some 120 years ago, she was one tough Viking cookie, a blend of warship and workhorse. Today, the Vega sails the Southeast Asian seas with a softer image, serving rural communities as a supplies ship.

The 60-foot sail-powered beauty from Norway has great bones – it has an all- oak keel and frame – and is exceedingly rugged. Built by Norwegian ship builder Ola H. Nerhus to be a deep-sea carrier for the North Sea and certified for Arctic trade, Vega was celebrated for her strength and ability to carry massive loads that other boats her size could not.

Designated a "Historic Vessel", the golden girl is still seaworthy and definitely not ready to retire to some maritime museum. But in the 1990s, that looked to be its fate when the financial downturn hit – until one Shane Granger came along and took it off the hands of its beleaguered owner.

The 62-year-old Ireland-born former advertising photographer, who has extensive experience in skippering and restoring old ships, saw Vega's potential and has been overseeing the ongoing restoration of the ketch (a ship with two masts, the forward mast being taller) since 2003. Captain Granger and his wife Meggi Macoun have been using Vega for their charity drives, making trips between Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand to collect medical supplies, educational tools and farming supplies from donors for distribution to the poor living in isolated islands around East Timor and parts of Indonesia.

In fact, Vega had carried 25 tons of food and medical supplies to disaster zones after the 2004 tsunami. "We did get knocked around quite a bit," says Granger, recalling the aftermath of the tsunami, "but she can easily navigate through rough seas that had already severely damaged the rudders of newer, much larger boats."

The old-world charms of this grand dame endears herself to the people she helps. "She does not intimidate the island communities like some modern floating palace. Being a traditional ship helps people to relate to her," says Granger.

The response from Singapore has been heartening, he notes. On its recent trip, a clinic donated vaccines and autoclaves used for sterilising, the French School of Singapore gave 14 boxes of school supplies and an agricultural company donated two tons of vegetables.

They believe in charity through action, says Granger, who calls his cause a "mom-and-pop" outfit: The crew consists of just him, Meggi and whoever volunteers to join them on some legs of the journey, such as Singaporean designer Joanne Har.

While out at sea, Meggi, 45, who is a Prague-born graphic designer, takes on design and advertising projects to raise funds, 97 per cent of which is pumped back into the ship's maintenance, fuel and their meals.

Meanwhile, Vega is not showing signs of slowing down. Granger says: "Our real challenge is to help ensure that 100 years from now, Vega is still alive and sailing, perhaps even under the Norwegian flag again. She is going to be doing good for many generations to come."

Vega may be contacted at www.sailvega.com



Vega brings educational and medical supplies to these children living in Indonesia's remote islands.

海上传奇

一艘是外在复古，内在摩登，完全根据印度尼西亚传统双桅木帆船“皮尼西”的样式而建造的游艇；一艘是有百多年历史的挪威名舰，经修复后被赋予新的使命。在新与旧、过去与现在之间，它们继续在海上乘风破浪，完成它未完的传奇。

阿莱夫号：复古的狂想

你会爱船爱到从零建起一艘来吗？

生于法国，常驻莫斯科，经常周游列国以至无所谓国籍身份的证卷交易员克劳斯（Eric Kraus）就是这么一个“船痴”，但他并非找船厂代劳打造现代摩登游艇，而是造出一艘外观完全依照印尼传统双桅木帆船“皮尼西”（Phinisi）设计，内在却跟五星级酒店一样舒适奢华的游艇“阿莱夫”（El Aleph）。

“阿莱夫”第一眼就让人进入时光隧道。这艘用温暖、坚韧的铁木和柚木打造的船艇弥漫着异



“阿莱夫”耗资逾250万美元建造。(Photo: 曾坤顺)

国情调，但又沾染些许“危险年代”的气息。印尼布吉士（Bugis）人是海事种族，他们驰骋东南亚海域，有的是令人闻之丧胆的海盗，有的是把香料木材等运往五湖四海的海盗者，所乘的船就是这款不惧风浪的“皮尼西”。

克劳斯所造的现代版“皮尼西”，外观和功能与当年的有过之而无不及，不同的是，它是让现代富豪享乐的游艇，内有6间备有浴间的冷气卧室，50平方米的主卧室面积比当下的“米老鼠公寓”还要宽敞，还有更衣室和10平方米大的私人阳台。

船上能住12人，出海的话一次能容纳100人。船上安装卫星宽频互联网，即使在呼天天不应的大海中央，船客仍能和世界连系。这艘船使用最高规格的GPS全球卫星导航系统，并采用特别的逆变器控制电流，以确保船在行驶时保持安静。

在ONE° 15游艇俱乐部，停泊在“阿莱夫”旁的摩登游艇丝毫引不起克劳斯的兴趣。他直言：“我觉得它们跟保鲜盒一样，很枯燥无趣。我对住进塑料盒没兴趣。我还是最爱实木打造的船。”

克劳斯床上放着看到一半的《罗马帝国之灭亡》，主卧书架也都是文学巨著。他显然不是个满脑子钱的生意佬，正因对历史和艺术的热爱，促成他对古老的印尼海船情有独钟。他甚至以阿根廷文学大师博尔赫斯（Jorge Luis Borges）的短篇小说《阿莱夫》为船艇命名。

原本只是他在信封上涂鸦的设计草图，这纸上的造船狂想后来竟一点点在现实里成型。梦想一发不可收拾，但上了“贼船”回不了头，一晃就是两年。回想当年勇，他心有余悸地说：“造船过程很困难，早知如此，我当初才不敢贸然行事。”

“皮尼西”是在海滩上建造的，所用的铁木来自加里曼丹和苏拉维西岛。为完全遵照建造传统，克劳斯特地从南苏拉维西的塔纳毕鲁村找来世代以造船为业的Konjo族。单是船楼和船身的构造就耗上14个月，途中出现的种种难题，克劳斯都靠自己找答案。好比船上的木板、甲板等接合需要动用峇厘岛的木匠操刀，才能做得完美。他也找来一群曾在雅加达造船的电工包办电路安装工程，但很快的，他们的能力又到瓶颈，于是他得从新西兰请来工程师才成功装上逆变器电流系统。他坦承：“这段时间我一度觉得很彷徨，曾自问，我好好的一个证卷交易员到底来这里干什么？”

疯狂的两年后，“阿莱夫”在2009年终于建成，耗资250万至300万美元。他说：“我原来只打算投入80万，冲破250万那一刻我简直不敢去算。”但一切都是值得的。他自豪地看着自己的心血结晶说：“它比现代游艇重5倍，远比它们坚固，能承载100吨的重量，非常适合航行。”

“阿莱夫”每年供人租借8次，每星期要价6万美元（含燃油和食物），其性能最适于在印尼、马来西亚、泰国、缅甸和安达曼群岛海域出航。说到出海，对印尼海域了如指掌的克劳斯津津乐道：“6月，龙目岛科莫国家公园四



“阿莱夫”内在跟五星级酒店无异。

周水源清澈。12月，四王岛（Raja Ampat）风光明媚。”

威嘉号：历史的使命

当年，它是挪威和瑞典海域上的铁娘子。60英尺长，由橡木造成的重型木船“威嘉”号（Vega）专门运载上吨的建材如生铁、砖块、石头，即使历经惊险的北极圈，也能轻松胜任。

118年后，被冠以世上少数仅存的“历史船”，已是阿婆级的它在海事博物馆享福了吧？但它退而不休，10年前开始随爱尔兰航海慈善家格连哲（Shane Granger）和妻子美琪（Meggi Macoun）在东南亚到处行善，负责从新马泰印四地运送医疗用品、书本文具和农物肥料等，救济东帝汶和印尼偏远群岛上的居民。

这艘船在2003年曾因缺乏维修而差点“走入历史”，幸得格连哲将它买下。62岁的格连哲是广告摄影师出身，却当过历史船艇的船长，对修复老船有丰富经验。然而修复“嘉威”绝非易事，格连哲说：“我们用了8年，一板一钉把它修好。直到去年，我们才对它的状况稍感满意。”

修复后，“威嘉”赶上了时代：船顶装上太阳能板（由新加坡一家专为船艇制造太阳能装置的公司慷慨捐献），船身也比跟它体积相同的现代船更坚固。印尼受海啸袭击后，它立刻投入救灾，载送25吨的医药品到苏门答腊。格连哲说：“当时海上风浪很大，比它更新、更大的船的舵都被摧毁了，但它却

安然无恙地抵达目的地。有验船师告诉我，它是他这50年来看过的最坚固的木船。”

作为格连哲慈善事业的亲善大使，这个时候的“威嘉”应该在前往东帝汶、班达群岛等地的海上，除派送救济品，还向当地居民收集他们下次所需的用品清单。今年10月至明年3月，“威嘉”会带着这长长的清单，到新加坡、马来西亚、泰国和印尼的各大船展上募捐。

格连哲说，他来过新加坡几趟，都获得很好反应，有诊所捐出疫苗和高压消毒器；新加坡法国学校捐出14箱教学用品；一家农料公司捐出两吨的蔬菜肥料，并传授宝贵的耕作知识，此外也有自愿者挺身而出上船帮忙。

助人为乐，但却不是简单的事。格连哲和任平面设计师的妻子都得工作，并把97%的收入投入进船艇的燃油、维修费和船上的膳食。格连哲说，他们夫妻俩将与“威嘉”共进退。“我们的最大挑战是确保它在100年后还能继续航行天下，若有一天能回返挪威，升着挪威国旗出海那就最好不过。”

“威嘉号”退而不休，10年前开始随爱尔兰航海慈善家格连哲到处行善，负责从新马泰印四地运送医疗用品、书本文具和农物肥料等，救济东帝汶和印尼偏远群岛上的居民。



“威嘉号”负起把医药品、教科书等运送给东帝汶和印尼偏远群岛的使命。