



Friends united: tea break for the extra hands making light work of *Elixir's* restoration



Matt Mario Photography

ELIXIR OF YOUTH

MAX CAMPBELL DREAMS OF A WORLD CIRCUMNAVIGATION WITH FRIENDS, BUT FIRST THEY MUST RESTORE A 50-YEAR-OLD SWAN...

We set out to cross Biscay in January. I had a stinking cold, and my crew, Harry and Chloë, were new to bluewater sailing.

Over the past year we'd worked harder than ever to prepare *Elixir* for this journey. Our departure was two months late, but we were doing it. On board there was an air of excitement, mixed with nervousness and fear. I felt alive again.

My own introduction to bluewater sailing consisted of 10,000 miles, single-handed in a 22ft sloop. I return home at 23, after two Atlantic crossings and 14 months without standing headroom or a toilet. Arriving back in my home town of Falmouth is anticlimactic. The first days are emotional. Yet, I find that my life in Falmouth doesn't bring the same excitement as I'd found aboard *Flying Cloud*.

I return to work and become swept up in the humdrum of employment. It takes months for me >

‘Progress is fast thanks to all the extra hands that come to help’

to find my feet in society again. As routine starts to take over my life, I begin to dream up plans for another adventure.

That single-handed experience has changed my life in such a positive way. It's enlightening to spend weeks in your own company. Taking a step back from society and surrounding myself in nature altered my outlook on life. I want to do it again, but this time, to share it.

A NEW BOAT

I don't have to look far for the right boat. Left in my stepdad's (Dave Cockwell's) boatyard, is a 37ft S&S Swan. Sadly, her owner passed away and over a period of five years she's been gathering moss and leaves. Dave gives me a half share – he'll provide materials, knowledge and mentorship. My friends and I will do the labour. Once finished, we can sail her wherever we wish.

My crew consists of Harry Scott, 25, and Chloë Peglau, 26. Harry is my best friend and sailed with me to Portugal on *Flying Cloud*. We spent three months sharing her tiny cabin as we cruised south through Europe. Chloë and I have been close for years. She's a novice to sailing, but she's positive, hilarious and has a craving for knowledge. When we're together, the three of us share a lively, ambitious, and wide-eyed energy. In my naivety, I proclaim that we'll have *Elixir* floating by the end of summer.

Together, we stand under *Elixir's* bow. Her topsides are green and lichen grows from her toerails. Fifty years of sunshine has left deep cracks in her gelcoat. The cabin is a mess of rotten mattresses, and a thick, brown filth has collected in the bilge. She's perfect!

We begin to build a shed, which is more a flimsy timber frame that cocoons *Elixir* under a cover of polythene. It's basic, but it keeps us dry, and we start on the tedious first step: to remove the deck fittings.

Elixir was built in 1970. Swans built in that era have fastenings encapsulated in glassfibre. Exposing each nut requires both careful guesswork and a hole-saw. Each genoa track has 28 bolts, requiring awkward vertical drilling and a mess inside the cabin.

We spend weeks sanding – so long that it becomes comical. I've buried myself in the pursuit of that elusive feeling I had found when sailing *Flying Cloud*. It's worlds away, from the shaky tent at the back of the boatyard.

My desire to find it again is what motivates me, through 14-hour days and endless physical effort.

Dave Gunn, a grizzly yacht painter with a flair on the spray gun, applies the final topcoats. We build some staging for him and then leave him alone to work his magic. We can't believe the transformation when we return a few days later. *Elixir's* deck and topsides shine with a fresh coat of gloss.

Progress is fast thanks to all the extra hands that come to help. At times I find myself managing a group of up to ten people. Close friendships emerge from the big, dusty tent. People come to look, and then return many times,



Not a pretty sight. At the start of the project

drawn by the excitement of a collective passion project.

One by one, we Sikaflex on stanchion bases, deck cleats and genoa tracks. It's satisfying to see the polished stainless fittings populate the clean white deck.

Out of the original 14 winches fitted on *Elixir*, three are salvageable. The big stainless steel Andersens, used as primaries, spun from the start. The rest are chrome plated Barlows, which crumble as we struggle to remove them. Our budget is tight, and sourcing winches becomes a concern.

A WELCOME DONATION

Elixir isn't the only S&S Swan at Mylor Creek Boatyard. Laid up inside the workshop is her younger (but bigger) sister, *Pactem*, a Swan 41. Her owner really adores her and has made the decision to renew his winches. I catch wind of this decision, and nervously call him with a proposition. After a few days of contemplation he kindly donates the old ones to *Elixir*. I can barely contain my excitement.

In August, we decide to leave our jobs and invest one final push to get *Elixir* afloat. We pencil in a launch date, during a spring tide, and work all hours to see her afloat. I'm grateful to my friends, Lily, Dom and George, for sacrificing their free time in the weeks running up to the launch.

This project would have been impossible without all their help and enthusiasm. Sharing the milestones brought me much more joy, than if I'd been alone. Yet, each exciting high is balanced with moments of stress and despair.

Throughout the project we face setbacks. While fitting a toerail, a loud, splintering crack brings a feeling of anguish. I watch the precious teak fracture in front of me as we attempt to bend it into place along the bulging gunwales. The timber has split along a scarf – not a big fix, but it still sets us back a day.

Standing beneath *Elixir's* reverse counter, I notice a chip in her paintwork. For a moment I gaze at it, >

Clare Jarne Photography



Above and far right: sanding and more sanding, to prepare for a professional paint job and teak replacement. Right: Chloë plugs the screw holes on the new handrails



Chloë and Lily glass in a new base for the forward hatch, which had previously leaked. A new hatch is then fitted

'She floats without any leaks... but the engine doesn't start'



Above: Chloë and Bethany Allen line up the rudder stock



Above: Max and Chloë re-stitch sails in Newlyn's Solo Sails loft, while Vanessa Mancini helps with the varnishing work (right)

Above: George Maisey fits the new foredeck cleats after the paint job. Left: Harry installs new cabin windows. The old Perspex windows were replaced with polycarbonate



wondering how a ding could be so small, yet so deep. And then I spot a similar mark, and another, and another. I show them to Chloë, and for a moment we puzzle together, before it dawns on us what's happened.

While hanging the teak battening in her cabin, Chloë had drilled four new pilot holes where the original brass screws had sheared. The battening screws into encapsulated wooden frames, glassed into the hull. The pilot holes had passed through the wooden frames, before continuing back out through the side of the hull. Launch day was in several weeks, and the workload already seemed overwhelming. I step outside for a moment, feeling shaky and lightheaded. Stress had risen to an unsurpassed high, I want to put my tools down and walk away. Yet, I'm chained to this project. But after five minutes of deep breathing, I'm back to work.

Unfortunately, these aren't the only holes to open up in the hull in the run-up to launch day. Two of the Blakes seacocks have completely seized. Both times, the inner cone shears as I attempt to free them. They are in small, awkward lockers. To add an extra layer of difficulty, they are both encapsulated in glassfibre.

We also find several holes in the stern tube. This time, crevice corrosion is the culprit. We cut out the rough piece of pipe, leaving another large hole below the waterline.

PREPARING FOR LAUNCH

It's three weeks before our launch date, and *Elixir* still has open holes both above and below the waterline.

We glass in a new stern tube, fit a new shaft seal, and replace the seized Blakes seacocks with ball valves.

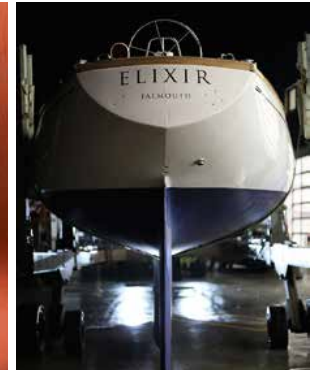
A week later, we apply the deck paint. After masking around the deck fittings, we spray on the non-skid. We add the granules to the paint and spray it at the freshly-keyed deck.

Last come the wooden cleats, handrails and sliding hatch. Dave (Cockwell), a carpenter by trade, leads the joinery. We have access to a CNC machine to shape these, saving us hours of precious time.

At 1700 the engine of the Merlo telehandler roars into life. The front of the shed has been removed, revealing an audience of friends and family, here to watch *Elixir's* resurrection. It's an impressive sight. Bright lights illuminate her rolling tumblehome. Her topsides glow – complimented by a matching dark blue cove line and antifouling.



Max Campbell has 10,000 miles of solo Atlantic sailing under his belt



Ready to splash: the new paint job shows off the Swan 37's classic lines and tumblehome

Several hands still work on the boat, fitting fairleads and greasing nipples. The strops lifting the keel put a stop to our tinkering. We climb off the boat, walk outside of the shed, and our elation peaks. Eleven months of hard, focused labour reveals itself in front of us.

First to come is the fine, piercing bow, enhanced by the fresh teak toerails. Next comes the bulging midsection. The cockpit, with its with shining, fresh winches, follows a slight yet elegant sheer. Finally, it tapers into the sleek, reverse transom. For the first time we stand back and see the result of a hundred jobs, culminating in the start of *Elixir's* new life.

I remember the transient joy I had found at sea, when sailing *Flying Cloud*. Watching *Elixir* embrace the inky creek reminds me of my motivations, and suddenly that vague memory feels much less remote.

She floats without any leaks, but the engine doesn't start. We bleed the system with a cup of diesel and motor down the creek, before the engine cuts out again. We ghost down the empty creek in darkness. Engine-less and mast-less, drifting downwind in a moderate northerly. A workboat from the yard picks us up and tows us to a nearby marina.

A JIGSAW PUZZLE

Re-rigging the boat is like some cruel jigsaw puzzle. Different parts of the rig lie scattered around the boatyard. The standing rigging is beyond shot. The running rigging, green and gnarly like jungle vines, leaves green marks on everything it touches.

All the aluminium sheaves have seized. The plastic conduit, used to house wires up to the masthead, has shattered into several pieces.

'Everyone on board is speechless as we motor out of the marina'



Elixir's proud crew Max, Chloë and Harry prepare to leave Falmouth on their maiden voyage

It's December. We work long days in the rain, sometimes into darkness, fiddling around with rivets, conduit and mouse lines. To step the mast, we needed a dry, windless day, yet face two frustrating weeks of gales.

While waiting for a weather window we set our focus on the sails. Most are original 1970s racing sails, a pick and mix assortment of headsails, and two mains. They're in poor condition, but salvageable.

Andrew Wood from Solo Sails in Newlyn lends us his loft and we work together to revive the sails. Over five days we replace leech lines and add patches, headboards and grommets. We take the time to re-stitch any suspect seams. The work is long and repetitive, but we relish the dry loft, with panoramic views over Mount's Bay.

ADMIRING OUR WORK

A dry, windless day, alone in the disarray of Cornish winter, stirs our excitement. We slip the mooring lines in darkness and motor to a nearby quay. The three riggers work the hand-powered crane. Carefully, they lift the 60ft aluminium pole before threading it through the deck into the keel.

They speak a strange language as they work, using words none of us understand. 'Slew it out to starboard' one calls from inside the cabin. 'Pass me up the down f****r,' another shouts from the bosun's chair. But we work well together and by lunchtime, we stand back and take in the sight of *Elixir's* erect mast.

We're so close to sailing now, it's time to add the final details. Keith Buchanan, from Rat Island Sailboat Co. in St Mary's, puts together a sprayhood for us.

The Monitor windvane, strained from tens of thousands of bluewater miles, has fallen to pieces. The load-bearing components need replacing and re-welding: they're simply not strong enough. The first fabricator

told me to bin it – it's corroded and beat beyond repair.

The second person I took it to, Dan Shenton at Metalcraft, was an optimist. He welds some thicker stainless steel plate around the loadbearing areas and returns it to me stronger than when it was first made.

When we found *Elixir*, she had a hydrogenerating device lashed to her pushpit. Will Davidson, an engineer from the boatyard, manages to get it working again. With some clever thinking, he figures it will work best at around 600rpm and he 3D-prints us a selection of propellers, each of varying pitch and diameter.

OUR FIRST SAIL

Everyone on board is speechless as we motor out of the marina. It's glassy inside the harbour, but there's a light breeze inside the Carrick Roads, so we raise the sail and point the boat into the wind. The main flies into the air on our brand-new sheaves. We switch the engine off. As we glide away from Falmouth, we unfurl the massive genoa. A light westerly fills the sails, and we feel *Elixir* yearn for the open ocean.

Now it's mid-December. For the past year, we've been telling everyone that we were leaving mid-October. I constantly face the same question when walking the streets of Falmouth: 'You're still here?'

More hellish gales result in an unexpected Christmas at home. Another succession of lows brings us to mid-January, and we wonder, is it too late to cross Biscay?

We spot a glimmer of hope on the long-range forecast. The Azores high migrates north, presenting a four-day window. This could be it.

It's now the 20th of January. Our friends and family gather to wave us off while we remove the frosted sail cover. We take one last look at Falmouth. The arms of the town bend round the sides of the river, inviting you in with a promise of shelter and security. Turning our backs on home, for the prospect of hardship and the unknown is difficult.

As we pass Pendennis Point, anxiety replaces heartache. A fleeting wave of emotion passes over me. It's that ephemeral feeling that I've been chasing for so long. I feel alive again.

Our goal is straightforward. To sail around the world on *Elixir* and give a new life to this classic Swan that otherwise may have never been saved. We will document the voyage through writing, film and photography. ■

- Max and crew reached the Canary Islands before returning home to isolation to wait out the coronavirus pandemic. Their plans afterwards are to return to *Elixir* and sail across the Atlantic.
- Follow *Elixir's* voyage at www.un-tide.com, on Instagram (@un.tide) and on Facebook (www.facebook.com/untide)



Lily Journeaux



Above: Chloë finding her groove during the first long watches across the Channel. Left: the overlapping genoa is unfurled for the first time as *Elixir* heads out past the St Anthony's Head lighthouse on her first post-restoration sail



Matt Marco Photography



Clockwise from above: all smiles during one of *Elixir's* first sails out of Falmouth; things get more serious crossing Biscay; the finished and provisioned interior with Harry getting used to his new home

