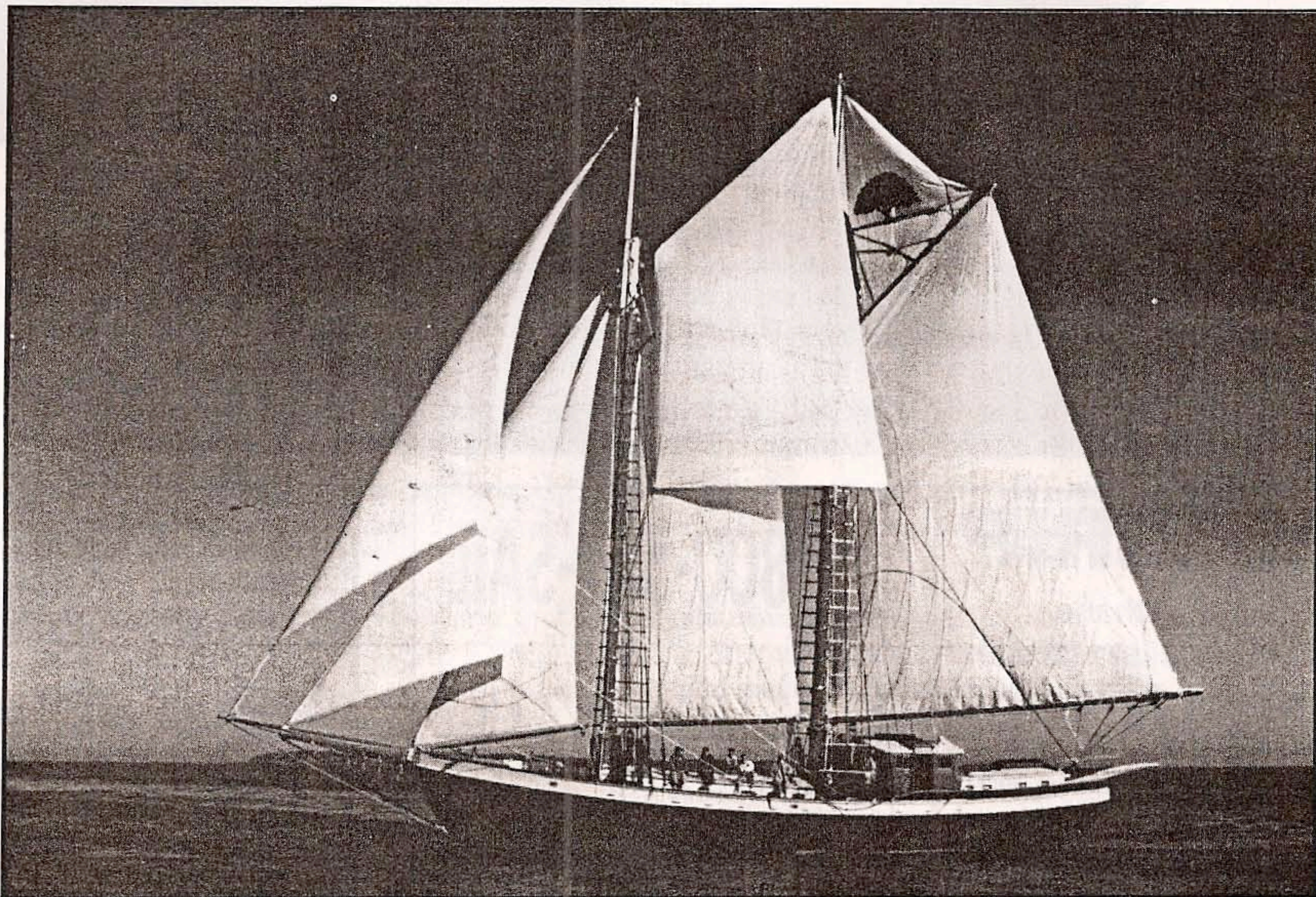


COVEY ISLAND

Wooden Boats For The Ages



Ted Brewer designed, 93' Gaff-Schooner, "Tree of Life", built by Covey Island Boatworks (1991)

By Charles W. Moore

In this fibreglass age, popular conventional wisdom has it that wooden boats have seen their day, and that wooden boat construction will therefore be relegated to museum demonstrations and restoration work.

But don't tell that to **John Steele** and the other folks at Covey Island Boatworks. In their yard at Petite Riviere, N.S., on a stretch of Nova Scotia's coastline saturated in wooden boatbuilding tradition, the Covey Island team believes it has

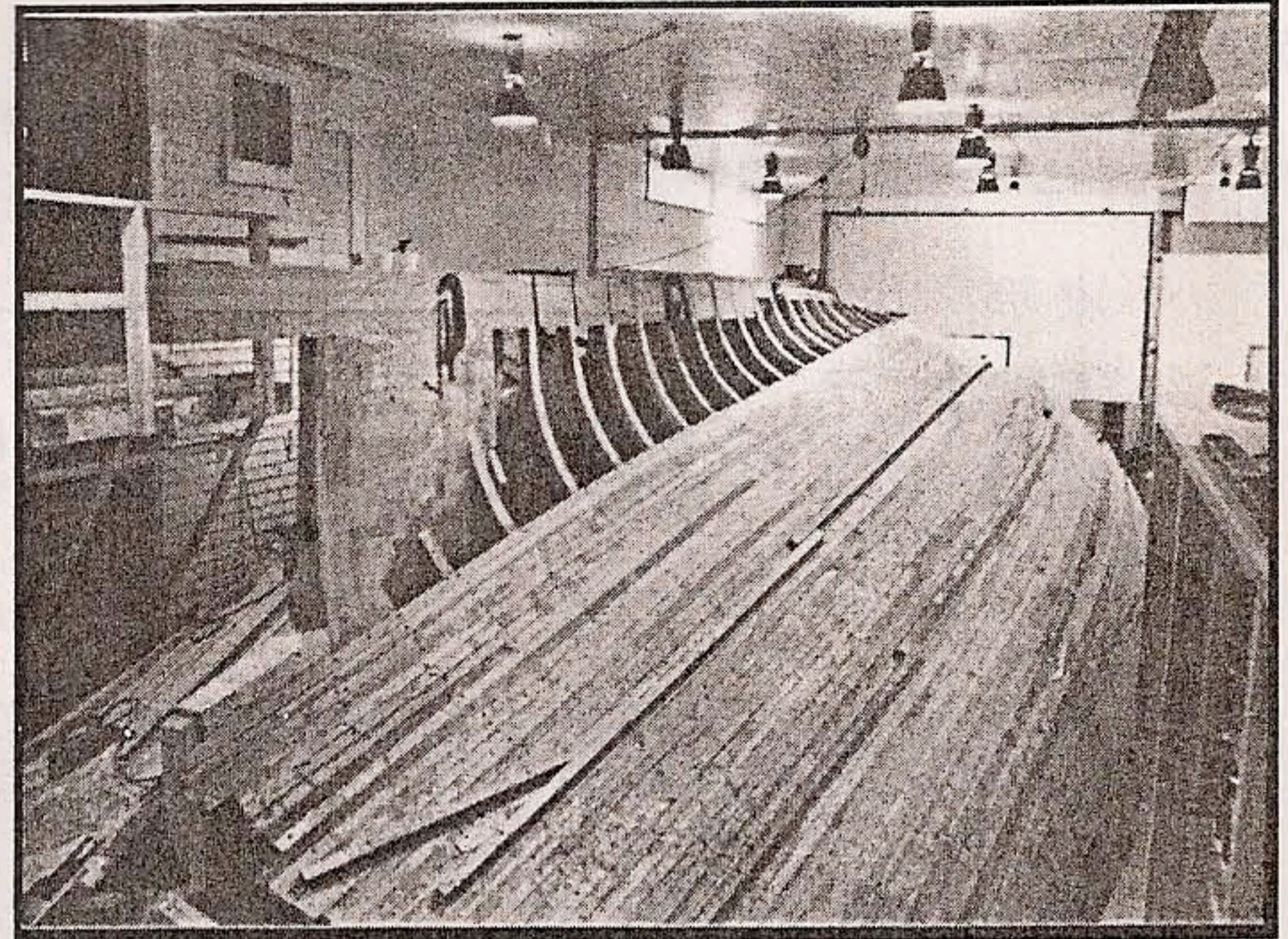
taken the best aspects of time-honoured boatcraft and leap-frogged over fibreglass technology into the 21st century.

The Covey Island yard was established in 1979 by Mr. Steele, and December 1992 saw its 66th boat under construction - a 25 foot cruiser which was displayed at the Halifax Boat Show this past February. Anything but a "niche" constructor, the yard has built an eclectic collection of types and designs - both power and sail - ranging from 25 foot

fishing boats, through high-tech racing multihulls, to what is perhaps Covey Island's piece-de-resistance to date, the magnificent 93 foot (70' on deck) **Ted Brewer** designed, gaff-rigged, schooner *Tree Of Life*, owned by **Kelly Kellogg**. *Tree* was recently named one of North America's 100 best yachts by *Sail* magazine.

But one might safely say that all of Covey Island's boats are "gold platers." Each vessel is hand-crafted by a team of 12 to 18 artisans who know their methods and materials well, take pride and pleasure in their work, and approach each project "as if we were building the boat for ourselves." Covey Island also takes a more-than-proprietary interest in its products after they're handed off to owners, and this almost familial bond appears to be reciprocated. The firm proudly claims to be "in close contact with virtually all our boats", which now sail every ocean of the world.

Covey Island builds boats in wood/epoxy composite construction. Just as fibreglass techniques take two basic materials - brittle polyester resin and limp glass fabric - and transform them into something considerably greater than the sum of their parts, so wood/epoxy transcends the qualities of its fundamental components. However, unlike fibreglass, the wood and analog combination is light, strong, and pliant,



The 93' schooner "Tree of Life" under construction, showing strip planking detail

yet remarkably stiff. Wood has twice the strength-to-weight ratio of solid fibreglass, is warm, quiet, and doesn't sweat. As John Steele puts it: "composite wood/epoxy offers advantages no other material can come close to. It has tremendous strength, durability, and insulation values and it requires

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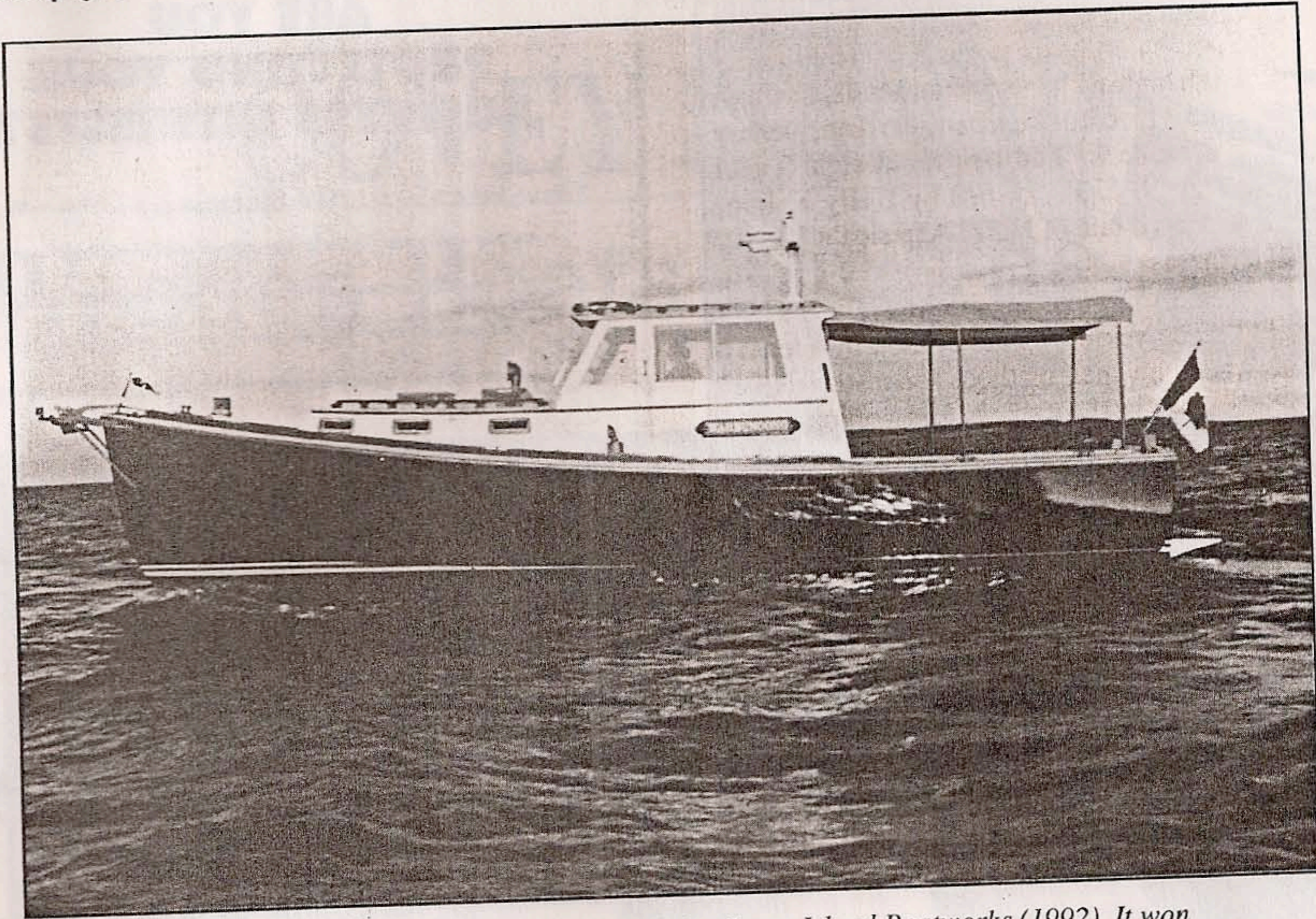
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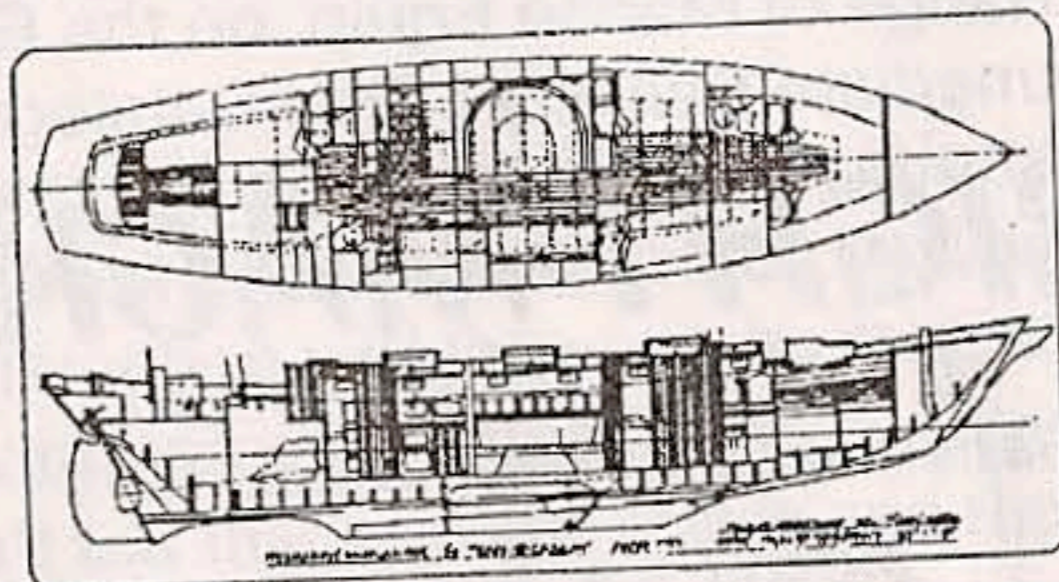
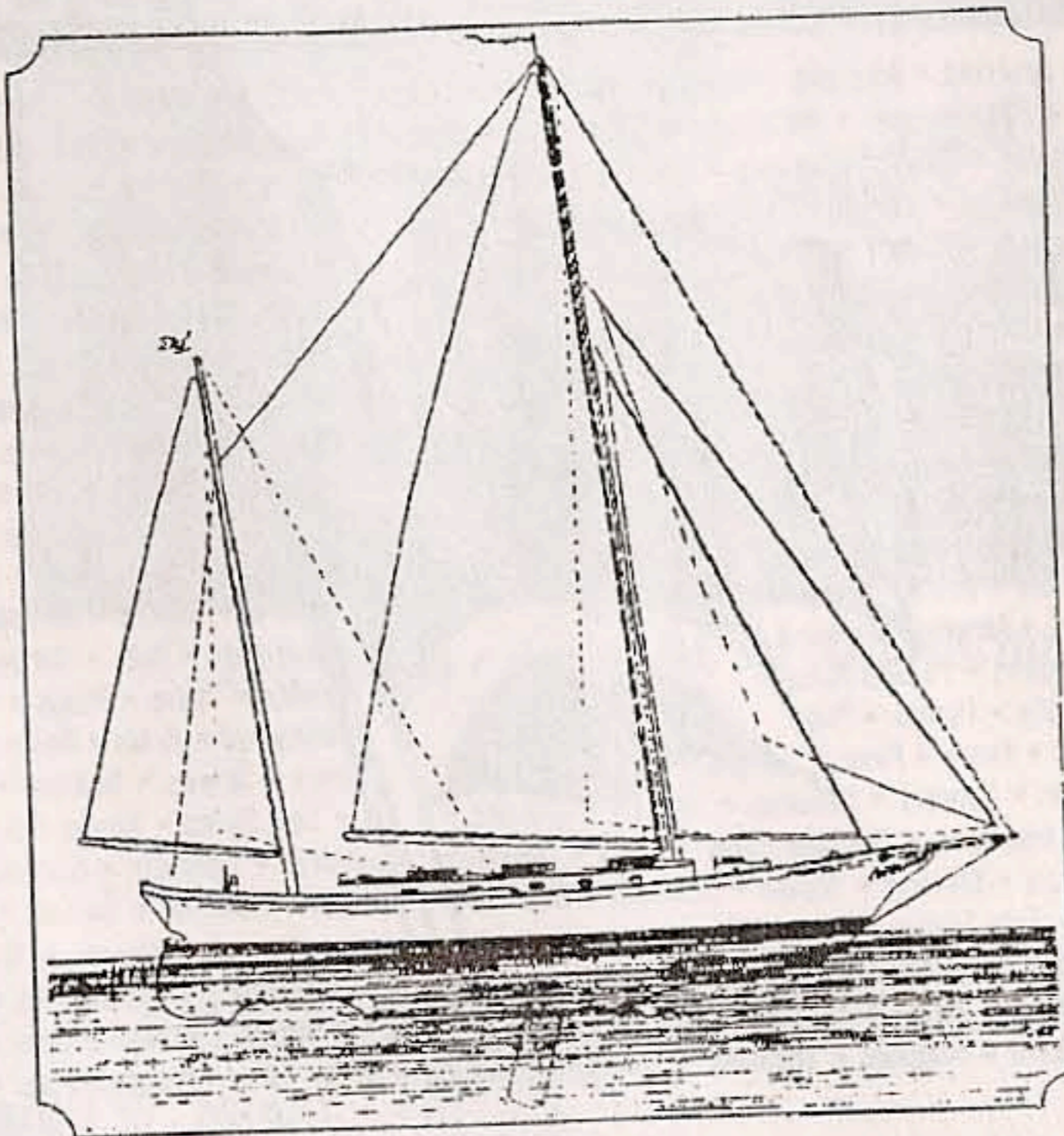
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The 35' Lobsteryacht "Wahbuhnoog", built by Covey Island Boatworks (1992). It won "Best Powerboat in Show", and "Best Overall Aesthetics", at the '92 Mahone Bay Wooden Boat Festival



Covey Islands' latest project, a 57' Herreshoff designed ketch

minimum maintenance."

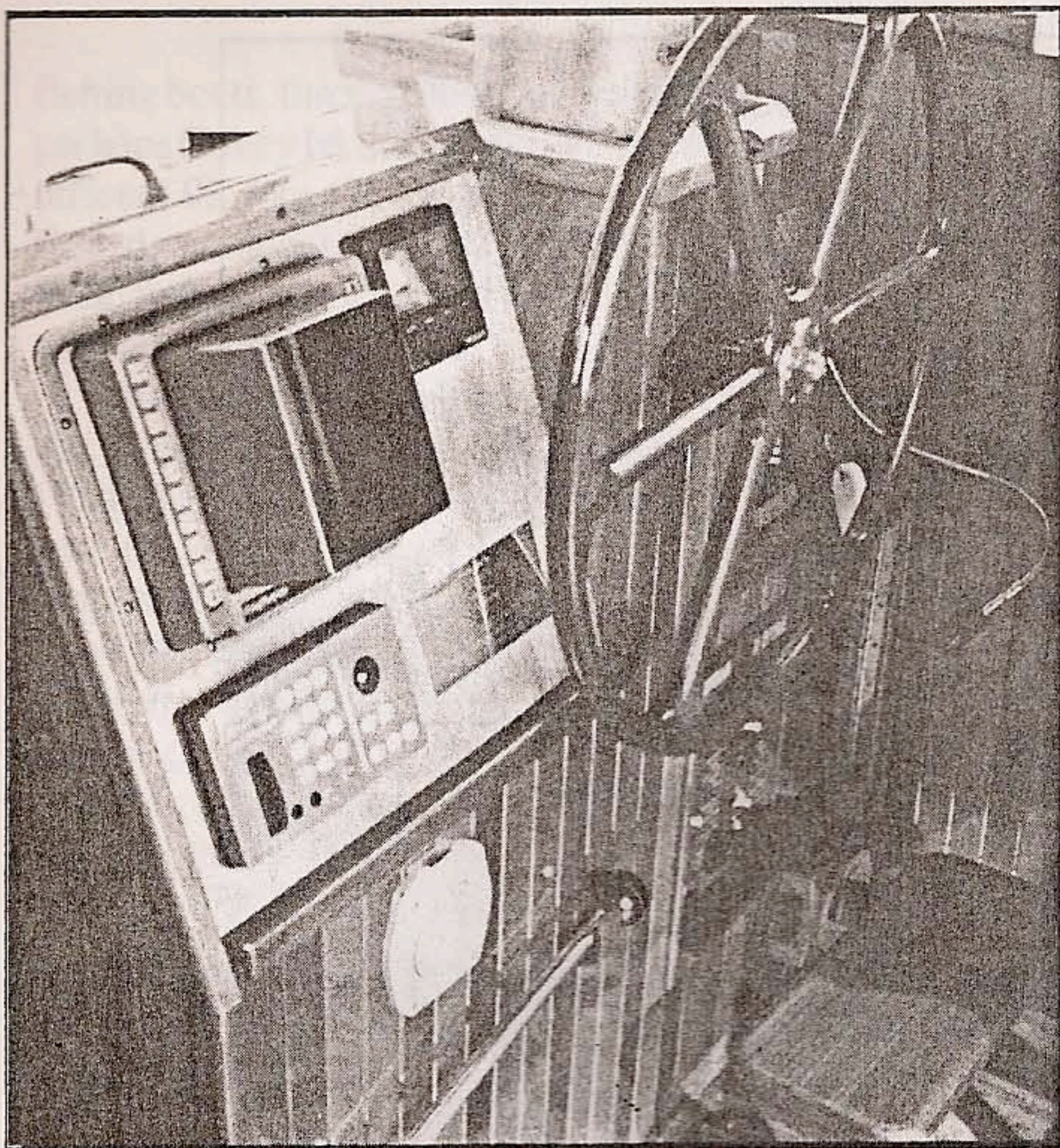
Because of epoxy's superior bonding qualities, structural members can be laminated, eliminating the need for large, clear, baulks of timber. Strip planked hulls likewise permit use of small-dimensioned wood which is cheaper and easier to obtain than traditional boat-lumber.

Readers should not infer that Covey Island Boatworks is only interested in the bespoke yacht trade. The yard's first project in 1979 was the 38' *Night Lark*, which after 10 years of rigorous, year-round commercial service was rated "A-1" in two separate surveys and was sold for more than her original cost. The fall of 1992 saw completion of a 35 foot lobster boat for **Andrew Bushen** of Petite Riviere, and a 25 foot vee-bottom inshore fishing boat will be built in early 1993 for **Rex Spindler** of Lunenburg County.

Another specialty of Covey Island Boatworks is the lobster yacht - a derivative of the traditional Cape Island/Jonesport fishing boat hulls, built and equipped to the highest standards of yacht finish. In July 1992, the recently completed Spencer Lincoln 35' design "*Wahbuhnoog*" (Ojibway for "*Wind From The East*") was judged "Best Powerboat in Show" and "Best Overall Aesthetics in Show" at the Mahone Bay Wooden Boat Festival.

As 1992 drew to a close, Covey Island Boatworks underwent a major restructuring in which two new companies: East System Supply Ltd., and Lunenburg County Ship-

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Wheelhouse detail: Lobsteryacht "Wahbuhnoog"

wrights Inc., were created (the yard's trademark will continue to be Covey Island Boatworks). John Steele relinquished his sole ownership so that employees will now own the company.

The move is intended to improve and re-align workload allocation, and to allow Mr. Steele to concentrate more on marketing. "Employee ownership seems to make the most sense and be the most beneficial", says Steele, who hopes to take a sailing-sabbatical four years or so down the road.

But the yard's guiding philosophy will not change. "The boats we build are for people who know what they want and care about how it is done", says John Steele, "but most importantly, we offer a product of exceptional quality and value, one that combines the best materials and craftsmanship with state-of-the-art techniques."

Boats for the ages, indeed.

Amongst Covey Islands' most recent contracts is the construction of a 57' ketch to the L. Francis Herreshoff *Tioga* design. The design is a smaller version of the famous *Ticonderoga*, better known to race fans as *Big Ti*. The project began in Trois Riviere as a traditional wooden hull, but the owner ran short on funds. The present owner had been interested in such a design, with some modifications, and had the partially completed boat shipped to Covey Island. The hull will be treated with their epoxy system and finished to yacht standards. Launch is expected for May, 1994.

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