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THE BOATING ISSUE

THE HUNT FOR WHITEWATER

NAVIGATING CASCO BAY'S ROCKY
CLIFFS AND COVES IN SEA KAYAKS

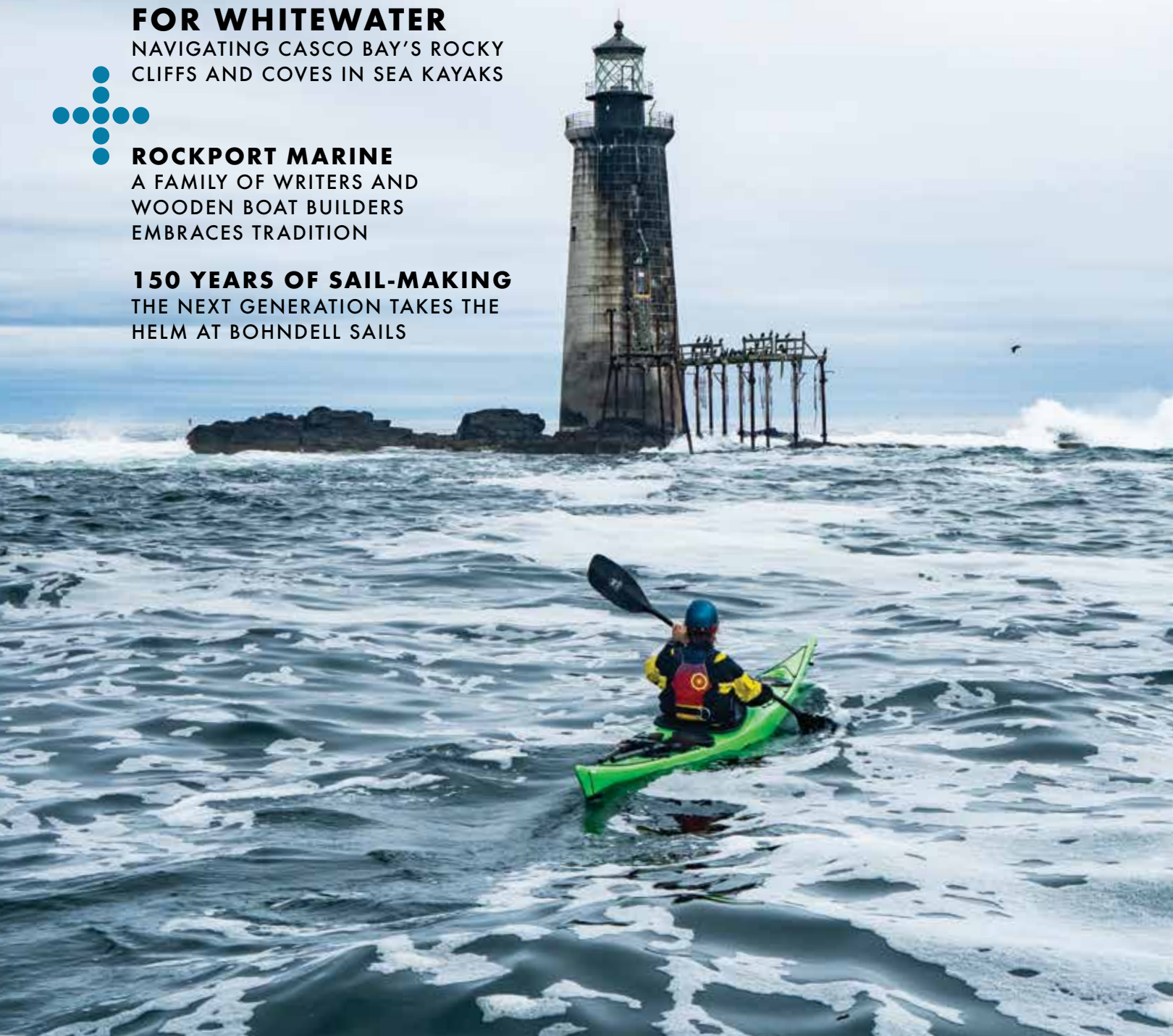


ROCKPORT MARINE

A FAMILY OF WRITERS AND
WOODEN BOAT BUILDERS
EMBRACES TRADITION

150 YEARS OF SAIL-MAKING

THE NEXT GENERATION TAKES THE
HELM AT BOHNDELL SAILS



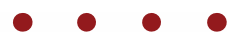
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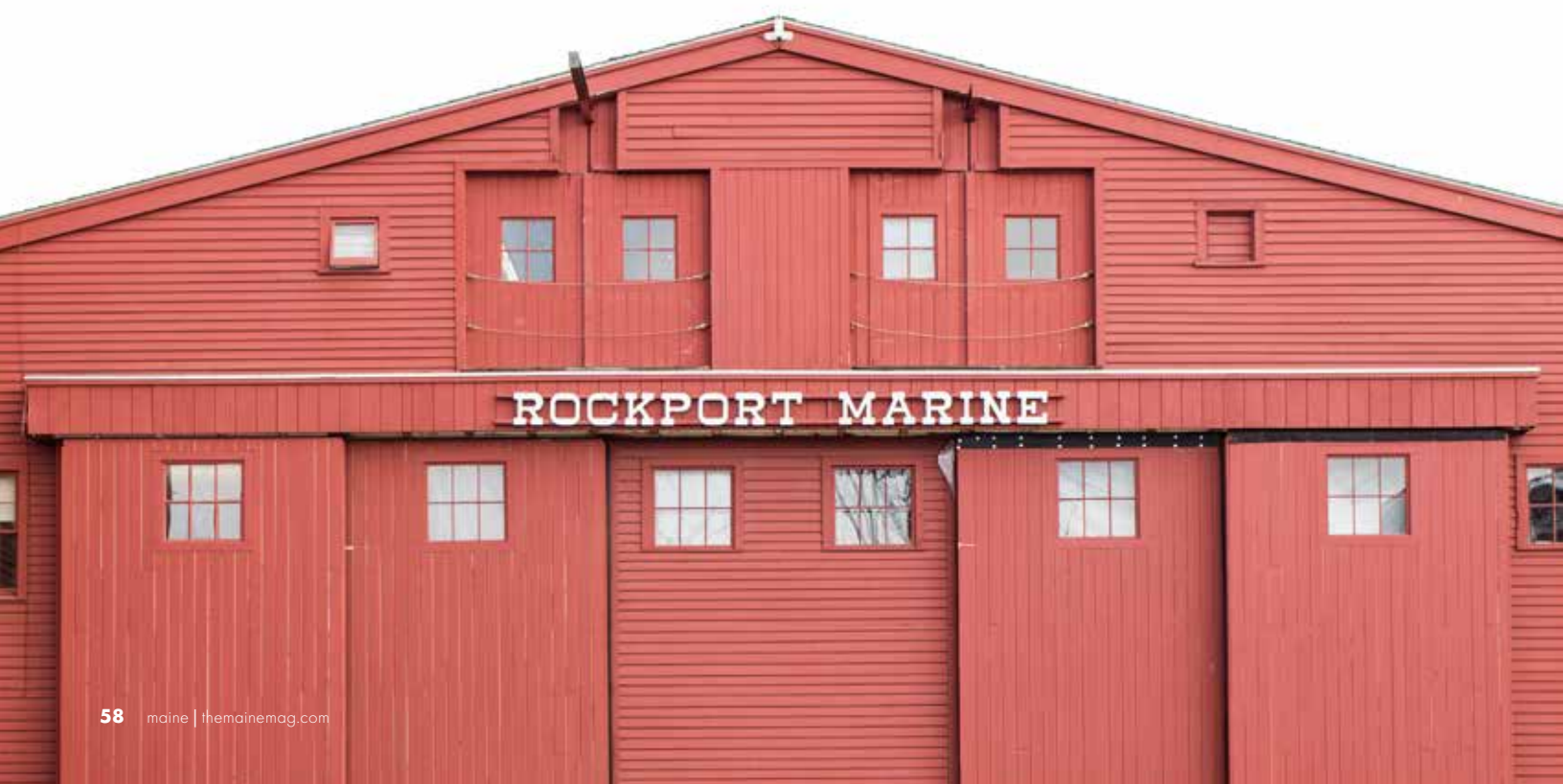
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INHERITING THE CRAFT

From E.B. White to Joel White to Sam Temple, this family of boat builders and writers has created a long-lasting legacy on the coast of Maine



by Anna Fiorentino // Photography by Heidi Kirn



Opposite: Rockport Marine specializes in traditional wooden boat building and restoration. **This page:** Sam Temple took over Rockport Marine four years ago, at age 34.



A 50-ton 1941 sardine carrier that once shipped herring to Jonesport's William Underwood canning factory occupies the back quarter of the workshop at Rockport Marine. What arrived as a bare wooden hull with dried-out planks will relaunch this summer under a new guise, one nifty enough to attract visitors, including Underwood's descendants and the fishermen who once took the boat down the Canadian Maritimes. "Somebody began a rebuild and sort of lost steam and she sat derelict for a while," says Sam Temple, co-owner of Rockport Marine. Ten years ago his stepdad and business partner, Taylor Allen, mounted it on a hydraulic trailer, floated it on a barge across Penobscot Bay, and rolled it through the sliding doors of the old red barn. "Taylor works on it six or seven days a week, 9 to 12 hours a day," says Temple. He has time for it now. Temple took over most responsibilities for running the boatyard four years ago, at the age of 34.

Some of the world's best in wooden boat building and restoration can be found in Maine. Brooklin Boatyard, which now specializes in sophisticated carbon fiber and, like Rockport Marine, cold-molded construction, was founded by Temple's late grandfather Joel White, an MIT-trained U.S. naval architect known for his classic wooden boat designs. Allen's parents, Norma and Luke, founded Rockport Marine in 1962, as Maine's waterfront industry shifted from fish processing back toward wooden boat building. Allen spent a year in the 1980s working for White because his father was taking on mostly mechanical work. "My grandfather appreciated the way that Taylor was," says Temple. The two lived together at one point, and Allen later married White's daughter, Martha, who is Temple's mother. "There's still a lot of sharing between the boatyards," says Temple, whose uncle Steve White now owns Brooklin Boatyard.

Today, Rockport Marine has the attention of the world as one of the best in traditional wooden boat building

and restoration. In this small, specialized industry, Rockport Marine is one of the few still restoring and repairing with plank-on-frame construction, a long-lasting, time-honored method in which a single layer of planking is caulked longitudinally with cotton to form the hull.

Between scraps and sawdust and barrels full of spliced wire sits one of only 103 Concordia yawls, built by the Abeking and Rasmussen shipyard in Lemwerder, Germany, ten years after the yard was demolished in World War II. There's also a sloop by legendary Danish designer Aage Nielsen, who left exclusive building rights to Rockport Marine, along with a yard in Denmark, when he passed away in 1984.

Among these elite vessels is the sardine carrier, its finishes high on paint and low on varnish, with simple

joinery connecting its timbers. This is a pleasure boat, not high-end enough to classify as a yacht. It's comfortable, approachable, low-speed, and deeply ingrained in tradition and history—in line with the sailing vessels that are the primary focus of Rockport Marine. The cabin sleeps six, with a queen-sized bed under a skylight on the deck, made of traditionally caulked pine instead of costly teak. When it's complete, Allen and his wife, Martha, are considering sailing to Newfoundland, at a top speed of 10 knots, or 11 miles per hour. "These sardine carriers are the only power boats that have sort of done it aesthetically for Taylor. They're wonderful-looking boats in the water," says Temple. He points out a built-in in the salon: a writer's desk Allen built for Martha, a noted journalist.

Writing, like wooden boat building, runs deep in Temple's blood.



Opposite: Rockport Marine is one of the few still using plank-on-frame construction for its vessels. **This page:** Rockport Marine co-owner Taylor Allen's 1941 50-ton sardine carrier will relaunch this summer.



“The most important tool when you’re building boats is your eye. The same goes for writing,” says Temple, who earned an English degree from Bates College in 2002. “In both cases you can really tell whether it feels right.”

Why Temple chose the boat building side of the family business is written on a plank nailed onto the barn: “If a man must be obsessed by something, I supposed a boat is as good as anything, perhaps a bit better than most. A small sailing craft is not only beautiful, it is seductive and full of strange promise and the hint of trouble.” The words are borrowed from “The Sea and the Wind That Blows,” an essay by Temple’s great-grandfather and longtime Mainer, the late, great writer E.B. White. Joel White is E.B White’s son, and Martha White is his granddaughter.

Temple’s memories of his great-grandfather are of the North Brooklin farm—its iconic rope swing and the animals that made it into *Charlotte’s Web*. *Fern*, an 18-foot Aage Nielsen day sailor commissioned by E.B. White in the 1950s, was named after the little girl in the story. “I remember his face,” recalls Temple, who was five years old when his great-grandfather died. “E.B. was interested, thoughtful, and introverted with a good sense of humor.”

Shortly after *The New Yorker’s* launch in 1925, E.B. White came on as one of the first staff writers under literary editor Katharine Sergeant Angell. The two were married four years later, and had Joel, who was seven when they moved to Brooklin, Maine. While E.B. was busy writing essays and children’s books—and the classic writing guide *The Elements of Style*—his son was developing his own ideas about what he wanted his passion to be. “Joel was one of those kids who was always fascinated by boats in a natural way,” says Temple. He’d gone lobstering once with a neighbor, built a few skiffs with E.B., and made up his mind.

“I know his parents weren’t thrilled about his career choice,” says Temple. “They would have preferred to see him in a more urban area with a more academic career.” But White stuck firmly to his path. After a few years at Brooklin Boatyard it became apparent that White was a success; he later gained recognition for his W-Class designs. He built E.B.—a sailor, though a nervous one—two boats, the most enduring named *Martha* after his daughter and E.B.’s granddaughter.

“If you do a Google search for E.B. White, the word that comes up most is beloved—beloved writer of children’s books. I really think it’s the same for his son in boating,” says Temple. Temple is really no different. He recalls reading *Stuart Little*, his favorite of his great-grandfather’s books. “Like most kids, I think I liked small things coupled with big adventure.”

By age 10, Temple was shoveling sawdust and keeping pigeons off the boats with a BB gun—any excuse to stay longer at his grandfather’s boatyard. Allen was the chairman of the Camden Rockport school board, and helped Temple establish an independent study on the build process. Temple spent a summer in college lofting, or drafting, a square topsail schooner, and promptly returned to boatbuilding after graduation. Then, in his mid-20s, he left to become a caretaker on a gentlewoman’s sheep farm in Blue Hill, keeping the fields clear for retired cattle next to a vacant barn. In that barn Temple designed his first wooden boat. “It was ideal, in terms of my lifestyle and getting ahead, having to figure everything out on my own,” he says.

Temple returned to Brooklin Boatyard long enough to help build a 74-foot commuter yacht, and in 2008 he followed Allen 21 miles south as the crow flies to Rockport Marine, and the kind of plank-on-frame boat building and restoration White had passed down to both of them.

Today at Rockport Marine, Temple produces one-off designs and restores neglected vessels for passionate aficionados—one customer owns a coffee shop in Nicaragua, another mass produces cardboard boxes. About a quarter of the work is for customers overseas. Each leaves with a classic, one-of-a-kind wooden boat, which may require more maintenance than a fiberglass hull, but without the expense of its custom mold. “My grandfather had a saying, that better-looking boats last longer because people take care of them,” says Temple. “Wooden boats tend to be nice looking, tend to inspire loyalty among their owners, and tend to get maintained.”

Electricians, machinists, fabricators, designers, painters, mechanics, riggers, and carpenters—many long-time employees—work on about three large wooden boats, and another half-dozen smaller boats each year. “I just hired a



Opposite, clockwise from top left: The *Maine Idea*, a 50-foot trawler designed by Joel White. A life ring hangs on the side of the rigging shack. A block and tackle to hoist one of the wooden masts stored in the spare loft. Matt Macone planes exterior trim.



ROCKPORT MARINE



guy who was a year behind me in high school who worked on a dairy farm in Union seven days a week for the last 17 years,” says Temple, who also recruits from the yachting industry and programs such as the Carpenter’s Boat Shop in Pemaquid, the Apprenticeship in Rockland, and the Wooden Boat School in Brooklin. “Farms turn out to be a good place to get workers because they do a little bit of everything and are typically good problem solvers.”

In wooden boat building, which is lower-paying but more challenging than house carpentry, success isn’t measured in income. “It’s something you do out of a passion for an old boat you love or a desire to be part of the creation of a new boat,” says Temple, who lives and breathes his job. Temple lives with his wife, Meggan, and their four-year-old daughter, Maite, in an apartment attached to the barn that was once a sail loft—the same apartment Allen grew up in. He escapes down a long dirt driveway in Brooklin on 26 acres with blueberry fields where he built a second home a decade ago.

Temple, who also blacksmiths and shoots a recurve bow and arrow, owns nine boats, most under 20 feet, including a skin-on-frame canoe he built for his daughter, who named it *Sail Away Unicorn*. For his birthday, his wife throws an annual regatta for boats under 14 feet, celebrating the love for small boats he inherited from his great-grandfather and his grandfather.

“I’m not into long-distance offshore stuff,” he says. “I don’t need pressure or a challenge in that aspect of my life. The boating I do should be easy.”

Temple picks up a framed black-and-white photo of Joel White sitting on his desk. E.B. has written on the photo: “Builder, wondering what’s about to go wrong.”

“It’s a very accurate description of how I spend my days,” he admits. “We’re really good at it, but there’s always stuff you don’t know.” To Temple, there’s no better voyage. +



Opposite: Temple at the stern of the *William Underwood*, a former sardine carrier. **This page:** Bill Brengle, who has worked at Rockport Marine for 36 years, puts another coat of varnish on the new main mast of a Concordia yawl.