



Looking down on the sun deck, can you spot the two places where the masts used to be? (Turn the page to see "before" photos.)

COURTESY
THE YPI GROUP

Megayacht Makeover

BY KIM KAVIN

The owner of the 192-foot *Islander* used charter downtime during the recession to fulfill his dream of transforming a motorsailer into a motoryacht.



In 1991

a father and son set out to build the yacht of their dreams. Each had a specific vision for her, and predictably — as things so often go when one person tries to meld his imaginings with another's — the creative art of compromise dominated the design process. What might have been a sailing yacht or a motoryacht instead became a motorsailer. The father got his vision of wind-filled sails, the son got his motoryacht profile, and the charter industry got the 192-foot *Islander*, which remained in high demand for almost 20 years.

Then came the end of 2008, when the Great Recession sapped the charter business along with the rest of the global economy. The father had passed on, and the son still loved *Islander*, but he could not relinquish his original dream of a true motoryacht. The yacht's crew had time on their hands, and it seemed like the perfect chance to make the dream a reality.

"I'd seen the boss, for years, drawing on the backs of napkins and thinking about it becoming a motoryacht," says Capt. Duncan Stephenson, who has been with the yacht for nearly a decade. "He had it in his mind to change her, and with the economic slowdown we decided that, if we were ever going to do it, this was the time."

So in early 2009 *Islander* pulled into northern Florida's Green Cove Springs to begin her transformation. The work would eventually be finished along the St. John's River in Palatka, Florida, a full year and a half later. Her owner paid for the spaces and hired independent contractors in both locations, to keep costs down as well as to retain complete control of the project. Stephenson put *Islander's* crew to work as shift bosses, giving them oversight responsibilities for various contractors each day. The crew then reported back to Stephenson, who kept the big picture on schedule while making some on-the-fly decisions as needed.

"We did a lot of planning, but in hindsight, you always wish you'd done more," he says. "When you open something up on a boat, you think, 'Oh, right, and that, and that too.' We'd have one thing going on and realize that we could do another. Like when the interior headliner was down to remove cabling that used to control the winches on deck, we realized we could install new routers for upgraded Wi-Fi."

Stephenson kept a list of all the work that was completed during the 18-month project. The first line reads, "Remove rigging. Two masts, boom, 21 chain plates." It's stated matter-of-factly, in a single line of type, but the reality included the drama of a barge, with a massive crane, floating alongside the yacht. The line "14 captive winches removed" doesn't nearly do justice to the fact that each one weighed several hundred pounds and had to be moved by crew and contractors with block-and-tackle so the crane could reach the winches. "Replaced and reorganized engine-room tool boxes" was a three-week ordeal to sort years and years of accumulated, well, *stuff*.

Those three examples are among dozens upon dozens that fill Stephenson's single-space list, which goes on for 12 full pages. The rudders had to be welded into center position. Then all of the hydraulic motors, pumps, piping and rams that controlled them had to be removed. Later, an ABS stability test had to be done to ensure that the rudders, now dead appendages,

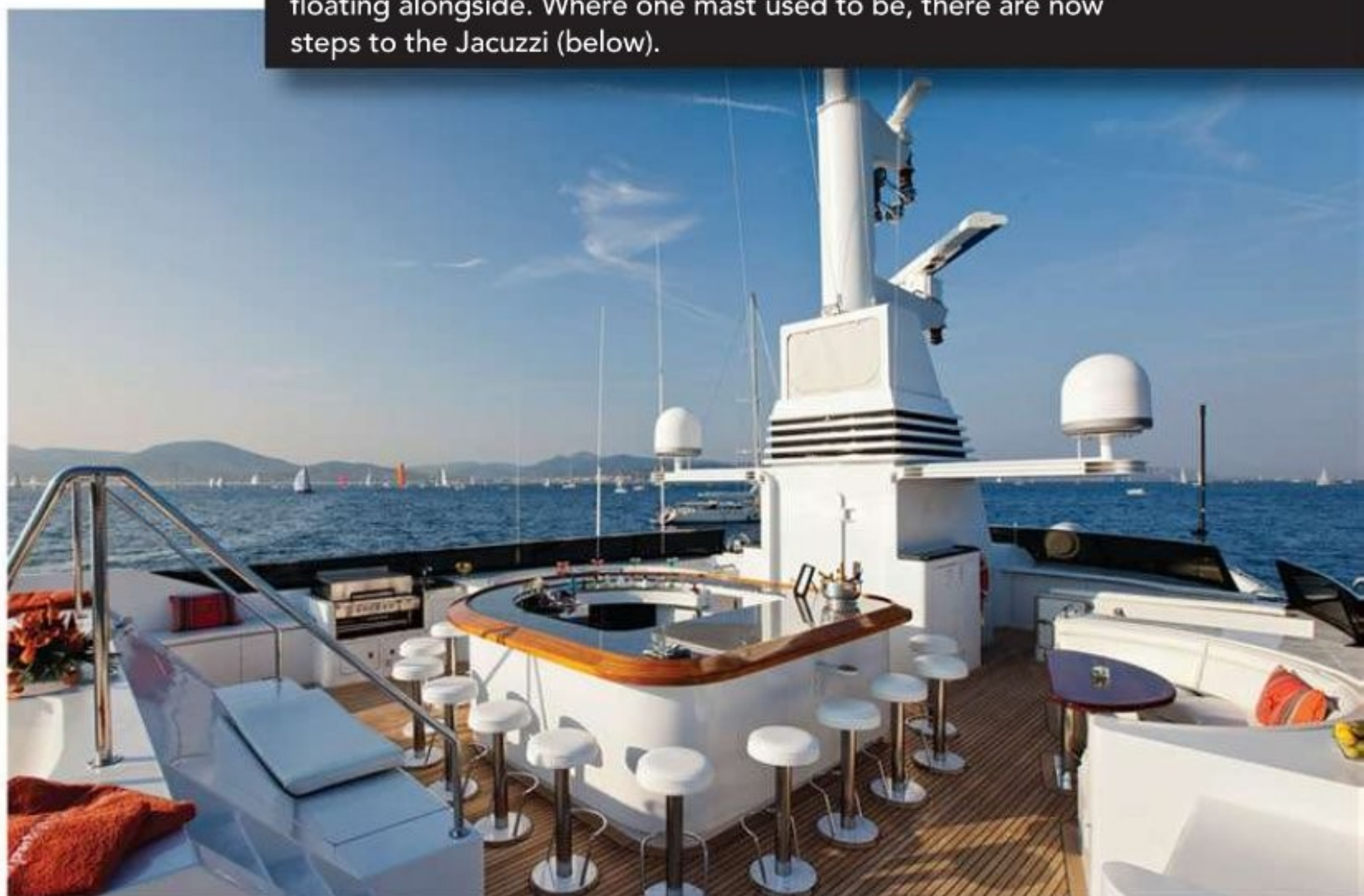
ISLANDER'S CONVERSION

BY THE NUMBERS

- Number of keels removed: **2**
- Number of masts removed: **2**
- Number of spreader lights removed: **24**
- Number of satellite domes removed: **2**
- Number of chainplates removed: **21**
- Number of captive winches removed: **14** (each weighing several hundred pounds)
- Feet of cable removed: About **33,000**
- Feet of Ronstan track removed from hull sides: **300**
- Number of gray- and black-water tanks stripped to bare aluminum: **4**
- Feet of water pipes replaced in fresh-, gray- and black-water systems: **300**
- Reissued tonnage certificate: **499**
- Duration of work: **18** months
- Amount spent: More than **\$2** million



Removing *Islander's* mast (above) required a crane and barge floating alongside. Where one mast used to be, there are now steps to the Jacuzzi (below).



would not hinder the yacht's handling or equilibrium.

The yacht also had to have its tonnage certificate reissued, and the owner wanted that number no higher than 499 to eliminate the additional requirements that yachts of more than 500 gross tons must meet. Even with so many items being removed, *Islander* came in right at 499 on the button. As Stephenson explains it, weight was reduced, but the spaces still needed to be enclosed where that weight was once carried. Tonnage is as much about volume as it is about weight, and the yacht's volume didn't change very much.

One of the heaviest items removed was the after keel. "Remove aft keel," actually, takes up just three lines on Stephenson's list, but when he talks about that particular job, he refers to it as if he is recounting a legend or a fable. He shakes his head and exhales before describing the three-day process, which he calls his "Two Nights of Restlessness."

Removal of the after keel began with *Islander's* formal dining room being carefully stripped of its table and sole, all of which would later be put back into place. A cofferdam was built and

temporarily installed one deck below, in the guest accommodation passage, to allow removal of the pin on which the keel pivoted. Chain blocks and beams were installed in the dining room overhead. The chains were then lowered through a hole in the sole, down through the cofferdam, and, finally, attached to the keel. They would help to maintain *Islander's* structural integrity as the keel, now attached to the chains, was freed from the yacht and lowered onto the riverbed.

"The idea was that the keel would be lowered down, we'd send a diver down to release it from the chains, and then we'd sail off so that a barge and crane could come behind us and pick it up," Stephenson says. "We hoped it would be lying in five to six feet of silt in the river, but it turned out to be more like 15 to 20 feet of silt, so the keel just kept going. It kept disappearing. We're talking about a 20-ton keel. That's a serious load. The chain blocks were creaking and creaking. At one stage, I actually started to wonder if the river was bottomless."

Removal of the forward keel was easier, he says, because variables like silt depth became known quantities — and because the second

After *Islander's* masts were removed and her rudders were welded into center position, a new stability test had to be done to ensure safe motion under way.



THE MAKING OF A YACHT

TO SEE PHOTOS OF ISLANDER'S MASSIVE REFIT, DROP IN AND STAY A WHILE AT YACHTINGMAGAZINE.COM.

time you do anything, even if it's removing a megayacht's keel, the job just somehow gets easier. In fact, the ordeal with the aft keel made other tasks seem almost easy. The bridge overhaul, for instance, included removing and upgrading everything except the yacht's engine controls and autopilot. Most people would consider that job mammoth, but it was quite straightforward considering what *Islander's* team had already endured.

In the end, Stephenson says, he was thrilled about the project because it let him upgrade things properly, in a way that most other captains never get a chance to experience.

"Usually, a new regulation comes every day, and we do things little by little," he says. "With these 18 months, we could look at systems in their entirety. *Islander* is now an extremely solid platform in terms of reliability and ease of operation."

He has noticed a slight increase in speed too, giving the yacht a new top end of 18 knots, but the real difference to him is in the efficiency of all the new systems. *Islander* has been, in a word, simplified, which is really saying something about a 20-year-old boat of any size. All of the time that Stephenson and his crew used to spend working with and around older systems is now time that can be dedicated to improving service for charter clients during summers in the Mediterranean and winters in the Caribbean.

"And we're talking about what we can do even further to improve," he says. "Most of the crew were here throughout the refit, so we all know the boat from the inside out, and of course we all now have our own wish lists."

The 18 months and more than \$2 million spent were an outstanding investment. "By managing the project ourselves and taking our time, we were able to get really good value for our money," Stephenson says. "And there is definitely a new pride of ownership in the boss's eyes. It will be exciting to find out whatever we'll be doing next." □

Islander is part of the charter fleet at YPI Group. She takes 12 guests at a lowest weekly base rate of \$195,000. Contact 001-33-493-340-100, charter@ypigroup.com; ypigroup.com.



Islander's new profile (below) is the vision that her owner has had in mind ever since she was built as a motorsailer, to accommodate his father's dream of sailing.



PHOTOS COURTESY THE YPI GROUP