



# ADAPTING A YACHT FOR ACCESSIBILITY AND LONG-DISTANCE CRUISING

By | Marianne Scott

**A**fter arriving at Sidney's Cedar Grove Marina, I asked a boater if he could point me to the yacht *Wolastoq*, which seemed hidden in a sea of boats. "Sure," he pointed, "she's over there, the nicest boat in the marina." Indeed, *Wolastoq* is a well-proportioned, roomy, goodlooking yacht. I was welcomed aboard by owners Scott and Jane Young, who'd just returned from a five-month journey exploring BC's coastline. They'd hoped to travel to Alaska's Glacier Bay National Park, but Covid restrictions kept them south of the U.S. border.

The Youngs had taken possession of their North Pacific 44 wide-body, trawler-type sedan in the spring of 2021 after it was delivered to Vancouver. "After flying to BC, we took a month to commission her while cruising the Gulf Islands and fixing any defects," said Scott.

Their extensive coastal voyage had been a longish shake-down cruise. The couple, who live in Fredericton, New

Brunswick, had searched for a new yacht that could take them on coastal and river voyages for years to come, and could also meet specific requirements—the yacht had to be accessible for Jane, who has multiple sclerosis. This neurological disease has many guises but usually impairs mobility and stability. Jane has lost some control of her legs and feet.

The pair has long experience cruising and were determined to find a boat that would allow them to extend their boating life to the maximum. To meet the goal of taking longer voyages, Jane retired from her position as executive director of the New Brunswick Automobile Dealers Association last February. Scott, whose little finger wears the "iron ring" bestowed on Canadian engineers when graduating from university, is a stakeholder in a company that designs and builds industrial wastewater facilities, such as food and paper processors. He works part-time from the yacht and from home.

"We spent time seeking out the right boat builder," said Scott. "They had to construct a quality yacht, of course, but they also had to be willing to undertake the customization we needed. We chose North Pacific Yachts because of the layout, large windows, fine teak finishing and traditional teak-and-holly soles, but most of all, builder [and co-owner] Trevor Brice appeared to be the most flexible and responsive to requests for modifications."

They chose the 44-footer (45'10" LOA), with its 13'8" beam and 4'6" draft. It was designed by naval architect Andrea Viacava, who draws all of North Pacific's yachts. *Wolastoq* has only one outside covered walkway, on starboard, which results in a wider salon. "Does that mean you always seek out a starboard tie?" I asked. "Yes," said Scott, "but we added a door on port so we can exit the yacht that way too. Still, with our bow and stern thrusters, we can usually tie to starboard."

Scott regretted that Covid restrictions



kept him from visiting the factory in China, where North Pacific builds about eight yachts a year ranging from 44-59 feet. “But,” Scott explained “although I couldn’t travel there, Trevor kept us informed throughout the 18-month build. He’d send multiple designs and photographs of the adaptations. I’d study them and ask questions or make suggestions. The next day, he’d send a new drawing or photo. I felt like I was driving the bus.”

*Wolastoq*, built to ABYC standards, is propelled by a single, Cummins 250hp engine. Its 300-gallon water and 400-gallon diesel tanks allow for long-distance cruising, especially at the sedate pace of 7.5-8.5 knots. A Dickerson diesel space heater takes the chill away on cool BC evenings. Because Jane’s condition leaves her sensitive to temperature changes, the boat is also warmed by hot water heating throughout and is cooled by reverse-cycle air conditioning. The latter will come in handy when the yacht cruises this winter in Caribbean waters.

### INTERIOR ADAPTATIONS

Many of *Wolastoq*’s modifications are eminently sensible and I sometimes



Cockpit and stairs to the flybridge

wonder why boatbuilders don’t include them routinely as they make boats safer for everyone. The yacht has been “handled” throughout. That means extra handles and rails have been positioned outside and inside so that Jane can move from one handle to another, especially during higher waves (“we can handle winds up to

25 knots,” said Scott). Inside the yacht’s salon, extra-deep grab rails are attached to the deckhead. The trim on the built-in furniture is deeper/thicker so that gripping is easier. There’s even a handle above Jane’s side of the bed.

Except for the entry from the cockpit into the salon and the shower stall, no



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thresholds have been installed. (Scott, a fine woodworker, plans to lower the cockpit sill.) The stairs to the two staterooms on the lower level have double banisters, and the head is on the same level as the staircase's base.

Behind the interior bridge and its navigation instruments, two fully adjustable Lleboc captain chairs are foldable for easy access. Jane does a good bit of steering unless the winds become too turbulent for her to handle.

The master stateroom's bed, whose headboard points toward the bow, is accessible from both sides. The second stateroom has twin bunks, and after a hanging locker was removed, a desk with a swing-out seat was created for Scott.

## EXTERIOR ADAPTATIONS

The yacht's exterior has also been modified. For strength and easier clamping, the outside stainless top rails have a 1.5" diameter, while the stanchions and lower rails measure 1.25" instead of the usual 7/8th or 1-inch. A longer, four-step swim ladder allows Jane to exit from the water onto the swim platform, which has twin, two-inch diameter, folding staple rails fastened to the deck.

By eliminating the outside port walkway, the cockpit is better suited to outside meals, but most important, enough space was created to position a curving stairway up to the flybridge; it substitutes for the standard stainless-tube ladder. The staircase features double banisters and steps finished with the same non-slip Flexiteek as the rest of the exterior deck. The top of the staircase is surrounded by handholds of various heights, while a series of stainless, 2-inch diameter safety grab bars lead through the centre of the deck toward the steering console.

The Youngs are very pleased with the yacht and its performance. "We spent almost five months aboard and the creature comforts are great," said Scott. "We even have a lift TV hiding behind the settee."

"And I'm happy with the fridge space and that we have a washer/dryer aboard," added Jane. "We have lots of storage space too, even behind the salon cushions, so we can provision for three-to-four weeks."

## EXPLORING BC'S COAST

"We were never in a hurry during the



Jane and Scott Young in their leather easy chairs Photo Marianne Scott

trip," Jane continued. "And although we were disappointed not to have seen the Alaskan glaciers, we had the time to explore endless bays and fjords. This trip made us bi-coastal."

"We covered about 3,000 nautical miles," added Scott. "Put 500 hours on the engine."

They spent time exploring the beauties and restfulness of the Broughton archipelago, visited Bute and Toba Inlets and Tribune Channel. After a stop in Port Hardy, they ventured north past Cape Caution to Fury Cove with its wide, white beaches. They visited Ocean Falls, once a company-owned logging town, where a good part of its former buildings are being reconquered by the rainforest. They provisioned and dined at the Shearwater Resort and Marina near Bella Bella.

They did more than just travel up the Inside Passage, entering inlets and their side channels often skipped when cruisers aim for Alaska, while also exploring the perimeters of small islands. Douglas Channel's 50nm leading to Kitimat was part of the trek, as well as the Gardner Canal, a side fjord, itself stretching inland another 50nm. They transited Grenville Channel between Pitt Island and BC's mainland, popularly known as "the ditch" for its narrow length and frequent winds-on-the-nose.

"I was excited by our first 100-foot high waterfall," said Jane. "Then I saw ever bigger ones, maybe even 1,000 feet.

Kynoch Inlet's waterfall was spectacular."

Jane can paddle around in an inflatable kayak and see things up close in little coves and creeks. To get seated in the kayak, she dons a full-body glove with a loop. "Scott is strong enough to lift me in and out of the kayak," she said. "It gives me the freedom to explore."

In Prince Rupert, they found that the pandemic had closed both the splendid Northern Museum of BC, with its Indigenous art and historical artifacts, as well as the North Pacific Cannery National Historic Site in nearby Port Edward. But they were able to get around town using Jane's "travel buggy," an all-terrain electric wheelchair, which is stored in *Wolastoq's* cockpit.

## THE WILDLIFE

North of Prince Rupert, Scott and Jane visited the Khutzeymateen Provincial Park, the first grizzly bear sanctuary in Canada. Named for a Tsimshian term that translates as "a sheltered place of fish and bears," this Park is home to about 50 grizzlies, the largest concentration anywhere in North America.

It's far from the only wildlife the couple saw. As the border with the U.S. was still closed to pleasure craft, marine traffic was light and it seemed that wildlife was out in full force.

"It was incredible," said Jane. "We saw wolves, black bears and grizzlies,



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*Bow seating area*

schools of salmon gathering to spawn. Humpbacks were everywhere, orcas too and pods of dolphins doing their dance.”

One of their most memorable sightings was a group of humpbacks cooperating in a bubble-net hunt. “After the rounding up of fish, we saw 12 tails going down in about 30 seconds,” said Scott enthusiastically. “Seals were always around. Sea lions lounged on the rocks. Also, sea otters floating on their backs. Kingfishers dove for fish and oyster catchers lined the shores. When we turned south again on the outside of Banks Island, it was full of blowing humpbacks.”

Despite the recent die-off of starfish, Scott said it was common to pull them up attached to the anchor chain in all their colourful attire. “We’d have to undo their arms stuck through the chain.”

### PLANS FOR FURTHER CRUISING

The Youngs had planned to ship Wolastoq to Florida by ship in late 2021, hoping to explore several Caribbean islands during the 2021-22 winter. Covid and an absence of available freighters obstructed that plan. So they left Wolastoq in BC and may cruise its coasts again. For the longer term, they’ll again try to ship Wolastoq to the Caribbean, and eventually travel to New Brunswick via the Intercoastal Waterway and coast-hop the Atlantic seaboard afterwards. Ultimately, they hope to cruise the New Brunswick rivers and explore Newfoundland, and St. Pierre and Miquelon.

Jane finds that cruising on a yacht has many advantages over other modes of travel. “When I’m aboard,” she said, “I get to see so many things without having to climb into cars or planes. No unpacking. I have more patience when I’m aboard. We’ll have to continue to adapt and figure out how to do things as they get more difficult. But we plan to carry on.”

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