

ASIA-PACIFIC BOATING

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2005



REGATTA PLANNER
Asia's Racing Circuit

RIISING FORTUNE
Lurssen's Phoenix

RACINGFOCUS

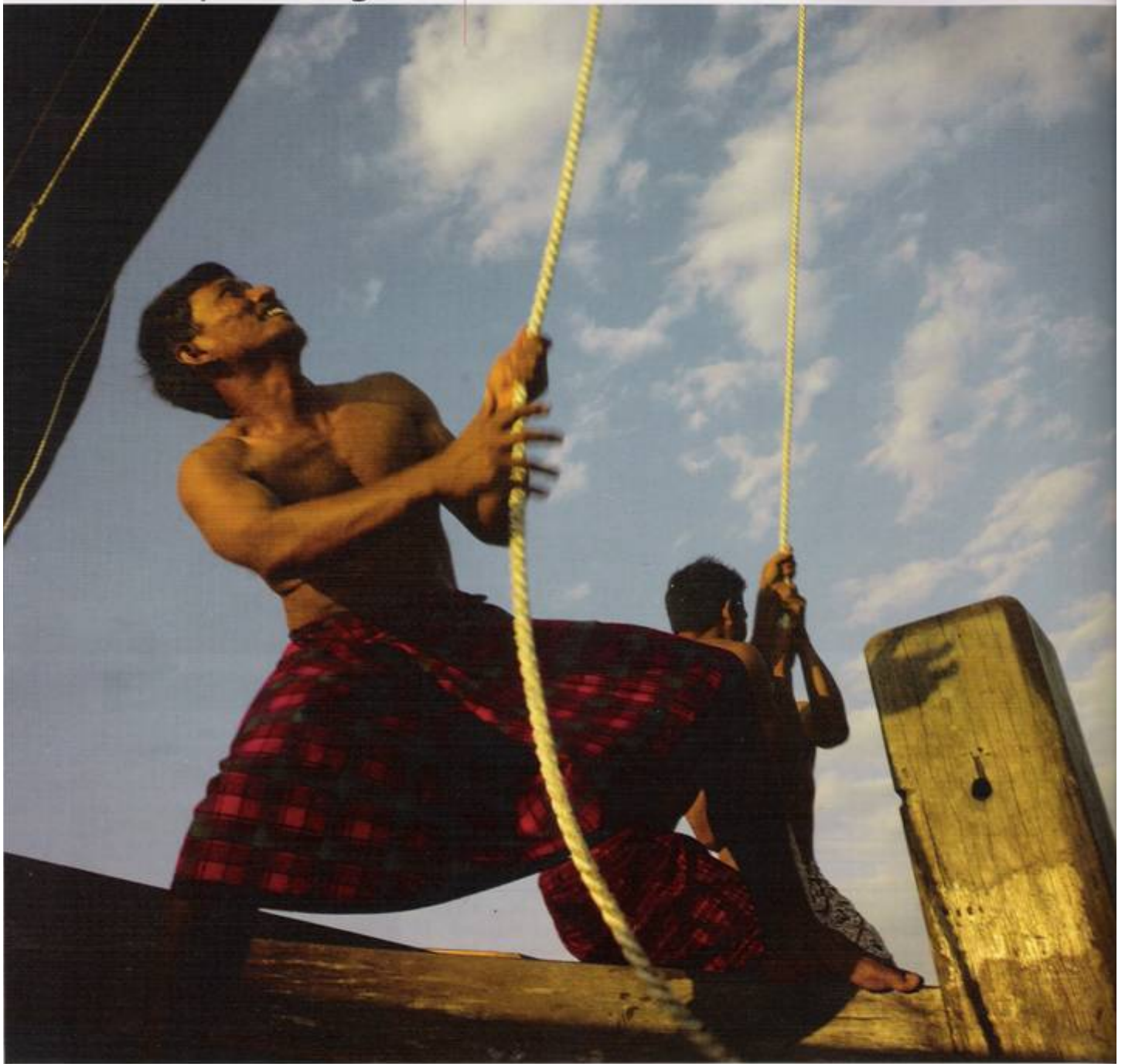


Hong Kong
Singapore
Malaysia
Thailand
China
Philippines

HK\$55
S\$8 (inc GST)
M\$15
฿200
RMB60
P220

Indonesia
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₩6,200
NT\$200
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In Bugis folklore, Silolona was the name of the ship that saved the world. Today, its modern incarnation, a 50m Phinisi schooner built in Borneo using traditional techniques, offers a journey through old-world luxury and style.

words Chris White



SPIRIT OF THE AGES



In the last few seconds of sunlight following the racing at last December's Phuket Invitational, some 50 participants had gathered on the ironwood decks of *Silolona*, drinking cocktails and listening to the yacht's crew perform Indonesian music. Owner and musician Ronny Fordatkosu, clad in traditional dress, his long hair tied up in a plume and a great string of white seashells about his neck, climbed upon the wide back of a wooden sofa, opened his body towards the glowing sky, and emptied his lungs, calling: "Silolo-o-o-o-onal!"

As his voice carried longer than echoes,

farther than a sea eagle's daily flights, we all watched frozen in awe, as though time had ceased in the extended note of his cry. You could practically see the sound waves rippling up to the stars. The assembly of disparate sailors came close to reaching a collective moment of spiritual ecstasy.

Silolona, the woman, was the beautiful lost love of the hero Atuf in the world's longest epic, *I La Galigo*. In the time of the ancestors, the sun was too close to the earth, and many, like *Silolona*, died in the prime of their youth. Atuf could not accept this. He vowed to make the world safe for all of its people and built a ship to sail to



the sun.

He named the boat after his beloved and called upon her spirit to accompany him on the journey. Through many hardships, Atuf sailed into the sun until he could go no further in the blistering heat. Again, he called forth Silolona's spirit, which gave him the surge of strength he needed to thrust his magical spear into the sun, shattering its celestial body. The shards of light formed stars and constellations, and the world was safer for all of humankind.

The modern incarnation of the ship that saved the world may not accomplish such

a mighty task as its namesake, but she has already made the world more secure for the Konjo boatbuilders from the village of Ara, in Sulawesi, Indonesia. Silolona may well be the instrument that saves and preserves their traditional way of life.

Co-owner Patti Seery believes only about five people in the world — transsexual priests from Sulawesi — can read the *I La Galigo* in its original language. The epic tells the story of the first seven generations of people from the time of the ancestors; the men who crafted *Silolona* are direct descendants of the first boat builder. According to legend, the original

Space and luxury abound on the foredeck of this 49.8m-long ironwood Phinisi.



The spacious saloon lounge (above and below right) contains the library, bar, dining area and multimedia technology.

ship sank, with its sails washing up on the shores of the Bugis people and its keel in Ara. Henceforth, the Bugis have traditionally been the sailors, while the people of Ara have continued to build the boats.

Testament to tradition

Silolona is a 49.8m-long Phinisi schooner conceived, designed and built along traditional lines, yet fashioned as a luxury passenger vessel boasting five guest staterooms. Seery has been leading high-end tours to remote nooks of Indonesia for

over 20 years, but until *Silolona* was built, she and her guests were at the mercy of whatever craft was currently available.

She watched first hand as the Phinisi sailing vessels began to deteriorate in quality, bending under the demands of the shipping industry until the spars became little more than show pieces to avoid the higher tax bracket imposed upon motor vessels. Many of the boats can't sail at all any more.

Seery's odyssey began on her first morning in Jakarta, over two decades ago. She had

noticed a fish market on a local map, so at 5.00am, she walked down to the docks. She remembers watching the Phinisi flying past under full sail at 8-12 knots and immediately fell in love — hard. She's been 'the boat lady' ever since.

Four years ago, a boat left her in Irian Jaya with 16 paying customers. That was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. "I decided I could do better," she says. "It wasn't a very noble beginning." There was no reason, she felt, why people should not be able to see Indonesia in a "safe, beautiful boat that speaks to the





history of the spice trade”.

She’s hoping to create a market for these boats other than traditional cargo, stressing that today’s economics make it very difficult for the wooden boat industry to compete unless new uses emerge. “I want our boat to be financially successful so other people will copy it.”

Team building

In the early planning stages, Seery went through a number of architects until she found Michael Kasten, an American who

truly “understood and respected what I was looking for”. However, it was her research in the Dutch archives and old photos in Jakarta’s National Museum that led her to Ara.

Among the Konjo people there, she found Nasir, who has built more than 20 Phinisis and comes from a long line of builders. His father, who had built the first boat to sail to Vancouver, had given him the family building tool, a small blade fastened to a wooden handle with fishing twine, similar to a hand adze, or a hatchet with its blade turned 90 degrees. Nasir’s grandfather had

used the same blade.

Wood supplies in Sulawesi had been inadequate for the bigger vessels for many years, so the Konjo boatbuilders assembled in a mangrove swamp in Batulicin, on the remote southeastern tip of Borneo. Here, they discovered the long pieces of ironwood required for *Silolona*. “Where else,” Seery asked, “would we have found the perfect keel of 22m long and 50sqcm without a blemish?”

Nine original boatbuilders used one chainsaw — “an old, old chainsaw!” — four





Top: One of five guest rooms, the Asman Suite is situated forward to port. Bottom: The boat operates throughout Asia under different charter options (see following page).

“The concept is that our ‘Silolona’ brand will ensure the integrity and quality of the experience.”

– Patti Seery, co-owner

electric drills and two fist-sized disc sanders in conjunction with their traditional hand tools. They performed even fine woodworking with the chainsaw. In the end, 13 men finished the hull in just under 11 months. Every scantling adhered to German Lloyd’s specifications, the most complete regulations for wooden boats of this size.

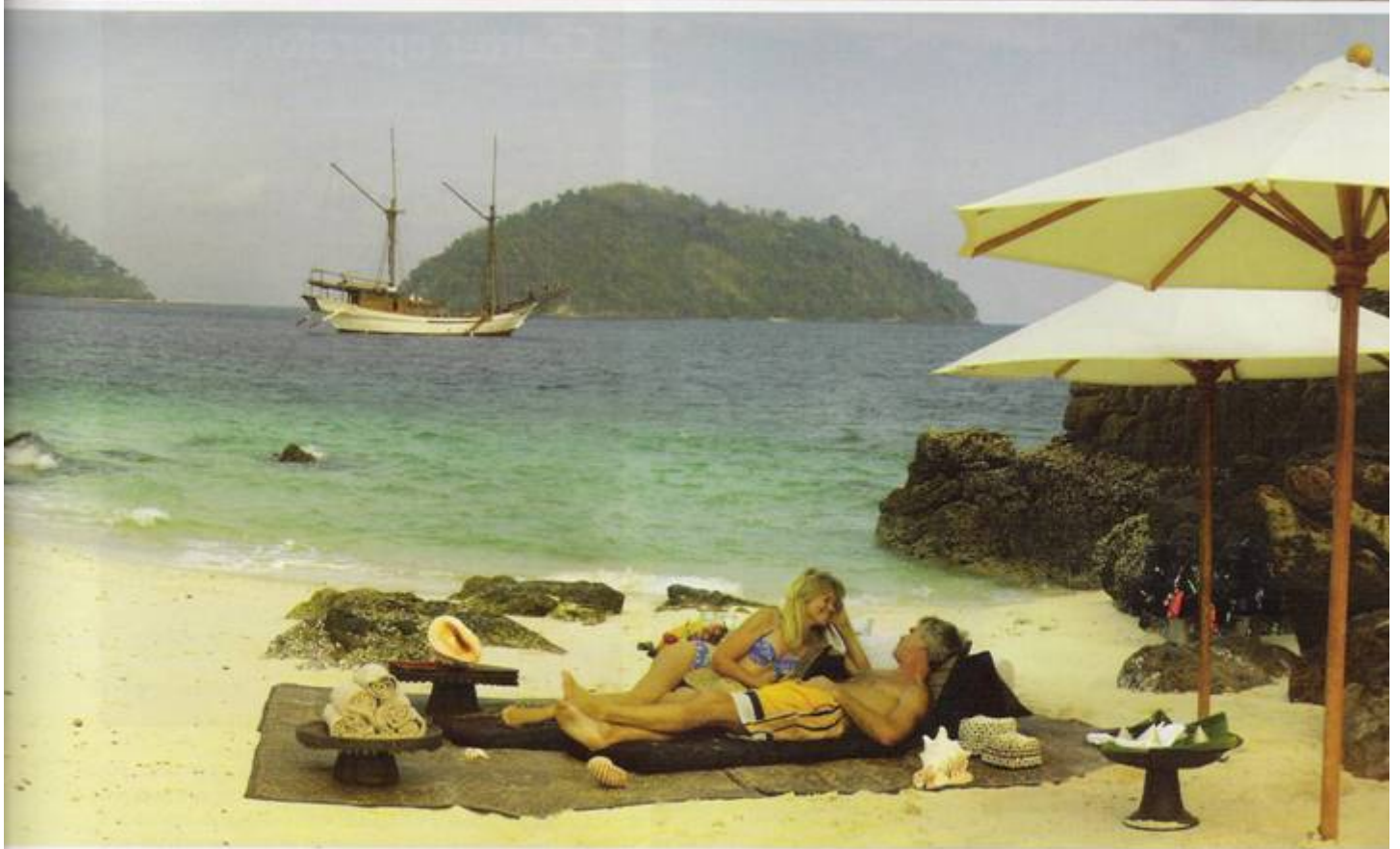
From its conception, *Silolona* meant much more to all involved than just a new, luxurious sailboat. On the day the keel was laid, Fordatkosu’s chant calling the spirit of his ancestors gave the ship her name. The builders then wrote NGOA on the emerging

Silolona was first available for charter last July and enjoyed a very successful season doing Komodo Expeditions for Amanresorts, with whom they’ll be working again this year (see Charter Operators box). Last December, she sailed up to Thailand, where she was the queen of the King’s Cup Regatta and the belle of the ball at the Phuket Invitational superyacht rendezvous.

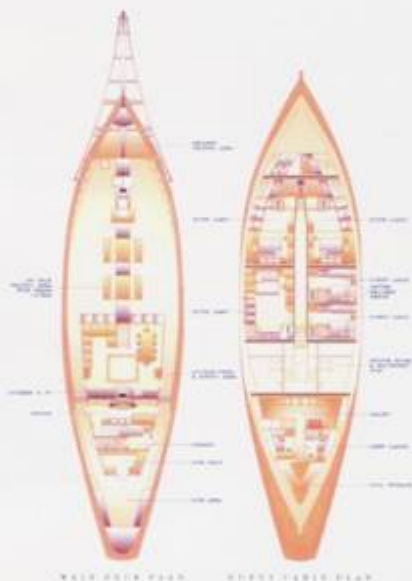
Following the tsunami, *Silolona* has been helping to restore Sumatra and working to help build boats for the people of Aceh (see following article). After appearing in Singapore for the Boat Asia show, she began doing Komodo Expeditions for four

months from early June, then running cultural programmes in Papua Barat (formerly Irian Jaya). This December, she’ll offer charters throughout Myanmar’s Mergui Archipelago with SEAL Superyachts.

Silolona’s success has created a strong enthusiasm for building more luxury sailing Phinisis, and Seery is currently in serious discussions with interested parties. “The concept is that our ‘Silolona’ brand will ensure the integrity and quality of the experience,” she says. “We eventually hope to have a fleet linking the spice route.” All the while, making this world a safer place for the builders of these majestic sailing vessels. **APB**



Silolona



Length overall	49.8m (163ft)
Length deck	38.1m (125ft)
Length waterline	28.8m (95ft)
Beam	10.0m (33ft)
Draught	3.1m (10ft)
Displacement	450 gross tonnes
Engines	1 x Yanmar Turbo 680hp
Cruising speed	10-12 knots
Range	2,700nm
Fuel capacity	18,700 litres
Water capacity	16,000 litres
Watermaker	12,000 litres/day
Guest berths	10-15 (3 king beds, 2 double beds + five optional singles)
Crew berths	15
Material	Borneo Ironwood (Kayu Ulin)
Classification	German Lloyd's
Designer	Michael Kasten, Kasten Marine, USA
Builder	Konjo Boatbuilders of Ara, Batulicin, Indonesia
Owner	P.T. Phinisi Silolona Explorer



Charter operators

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 Mob: +62 361 744-5370
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 Web: www.indonesianexplorer.com

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 Fax: +62 371 22288
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MISSION TO SUMATRA

words Chris White
photos John Everingham

As if *Silolona's* construction wasn't fascinating enough, the boat was called in to play a heroic role within months of its launch. When the Boxing Day tsunami struck the coastlines of Asia and Africa, *Silolona* was nestled safely in Thailand's Phang Nga Bay. However, she soon headed south to Langkawi, where co-owner Patti Seery met a medical group of international Sikhs who were stranded and desperate to reach the affected areas of Sumatra. Seery and crew teamed up with a group called 'Waves Of Mercy' and sailed forth with another vessel, *Sean Paquito II*.

After checking into the port of Sabang on January 8, they spent three days gathering information in Banda Aceh, trying to discern where they could be of most use — authorities and eye-witnesses pointed to the west coast of Sumatra. Although a number of relief agencies had been trying to bring relief to the area, getting there was next to impossible. Military officers asked if *Silolona* could go to the town of Calang, which had suffered near-complete devastation.

From this information, the crew of *Silolona* realised the sea would become the west coast's primary access. Information about ports, landings and docks became urgent to the success of any relief effort. Somebody needed to survey the coastline and convey the data very clearly to the UN, the Indonesian government and all the relief agencies in the area. With thousands dying, it had to come fast.

Silolona's team first worked locally, urging officials in Sabang to open the port as a centre for sea-based operations, a move that would take pressure off Banda Aceh. They also coordinated with surviving captains of fishing fleets, who agreed to work with relief agencies to transport workers and rescue victims. At first, Seery's petition to use sea transport fell on deaf ears, but she eventually got through, receiving official approval from the military and local officials. *Silolona* set forth for Calang in hopes of placing the Sikh medical team in the area of greatest need.

The sea had other ideas. Rough waters snapped the forward mast, forcing the vessel to turn back to Sabang, where the medical team decided to stay. It was 19 days after the tsunami and *Silolona* was at a crossroads. They had fulfilled their original mission by placing the medical team — now what?

The crew decided to move forward with the west-coast project. Enlisting two local captains, *Silolona* set sail to survey and record the conditions of ports and jetties. They would move up the coast and document possible anchorages and landing sites, and

investigate the original docking facilities. All information would then be recorded on navigational charts. With her forward mast removed, *Silolona* set sail. Using a dinghy, the crew proceeded to chart all possible boat landings on the newly shaped coastline, compiling their findings in a thick document entitled, *Survey of Coastal Ports and Landings — Northwest Coast of Sumatra*. The UN has been among the many to highlight its importance.

Seery and the crew of *Silolona* are currently at work on a project to build new boats for Aceh. Their team took specs and held discussions with surviving local craftsmen, who Seery says, "are few and far between". They've already begun purchasing wood and engines, and are working with more builders in Tanimbar to provide fishing vessels within the coming months.

"We're going to launch a much larger initiative for collecting funds. The important part of our programme is that we're using traditional builders and are building to the specs from Aceh boats. We're also training new Acehenese builders," Seery says.

"The recipients of the boats will initially have to divide the catch with other villagers to provide protein, but as the boats become more successful, 10 per cent of each catch will be set aside for funds to build the next boat for someone else in the community. We're working with the Indo-Pacific Conservation Alliance to receive funds. A small percentage of the cost of each boat will be provided to address conservation issues for sustainable fisheries." It's just the latest chapter in the history of a boat whose own legend is growing fast. **A23**

