

MULTIHULLS

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Cat Man Do

Landlocked in Austria, in the very heart of cosmopolitan Vienna, Gregor Tarjan grew up as a savvy city kid with an appreciation for art galleries, like the one his father owned.

Today, from his New York base on Long Island's north shore, his focus is catamarans: designing them, writing books about them, sailing them, selling them. When it comes to cats, the man's all-encompassing credo could be: "Can do."

"I have a passion for catamarans," Tarjan told me during a recent visit to his waterfront home and adjacent office near Port Jefferson. "You could call it an obsession."

This month, in an issue in which we celebrate and profile some of the prominent members of the domestic multihull scene (see "The Cats Come Home," page 38), the tale of Tarjan's unlikely journey — from central Europe to the high seas — fits right in.

Like many youngsters, Tarjan devoured the books and stories of the early navigators and explorers who set sail for the New World. At 16 he began sailing himself, aboard rented prams on the Danube River. Thanks to his mother's Manhattan roots, he matriculated at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, where he joined the sailing team. After college he attended the Landing School, earning a degree in yacht design,

Shortly after purchasing his own cruising catamaran, Gregor Tarjan came to the realization that his admitted obsession with long-range cats could also become his full-time profession.

which he parlayed into a job at Derecktor Shipyards in Mamaroneck, where he was part of the group that built the 1987 America's Cup-winning 12-Meter, *Stars & Stripes*.

Then, interestingly, he did something completely different, embarking on an endeavor perhaps better suited to the son of a Viennese gallerist: launching a business manufacturing handmade carpets and textiles in Nepal and India. During this period, at a fine-arts fair, he met his Dutch wife, Flo, and before long the couple had two sons.

But he never stopped thinking about yachts, and his commercial success gave him the means to purchase the full-size cruising cat — a "man's boat," he says, laughing — that he always dreamed of: a French-built Outremer 43 that he named, wisely, after his bride.

In numerous ways, *Flo* proved to be a life-altering purchase. First, it gave him the vehicle to begin voyaging in earnest, and to learn firsthand about the offshore quirks, characteristics and capabilities of cats. Later, when he helped an inquisitive neighbor purchase his own Outremer, he was struck by a curious thought: Maybe he could switch careers and help others chase their own twin-hulled dreams. Perhaps his passion was also an opportunity.

Tarjan sold his old business and launched a new one, called Aeroyacht, a one-man, multifaceted multihull dealership and boutique. Soon he was representing a diverse collection of brands: Outremer, Fountaine-Pajot and Sunreef cats, as well as Dragonfly and Neel trimarans, among others. He authored several books on cats, which bolstered his credentials and broadened his education. His research took him around the world to countless boat shows and races, and opened the door to an incredible array of long-range deliveries and intriguing sailing opportunities. Next came project management, working with well-heeled clients and top shipyards on custom, one-off "super cats" over 100 feet. Finally, in a way returning to his own roots, he designed a cruising cat, the Alpha 42, which boatbuilder Marc Anassis currently has in production in his boatyard on Long Island's south shore.

"That seems to be a sweet spot in the marketplace," he says of the 42-footer. "It's got the room for a family of four to sail around the world, but is still large enough for people who want to scale back and step down from a 60- or 70-foot yacht."

In what spare time he has, Tarjan also enjoys racing vintage automobiles ("Cats, cars and art, that's it," he says. "I'm very vertical in my interests!"), but the sea and his profession remain his top priority. Looking forward, on one hand he's dismayed by some of the trends in newer cats, specifically the aesthetics. "The Achilles' heel, to me, is the sheer size and bulkiness," he said. "Because we have so much volume, we try and fill it. There's the danger of turning off people with an artistic mind."

On the other hand, not surprisingly, he reckons cats are the future of cruising. "I see catamarans becoming the cruiser's liveboard platform, maybe not for everybody, but for the majority. Especially young guys, like my sons. The cat is here to stay. It's just going to continue evolving."

Herb McCormick is CW's executive editor.