

# THE WANDERERS

With tens of thousands of nautical miles in their wake, this adventurous couple inspires others to head for new horizons

By Pim Van Hemmen



*True East* in Lake Superior at  
Michigan's Pictured Rocks  
National Lakeshore Park

*True East* navigates through glacial ice in Alaska.



Marcia Hayes and Dan Prigmore with a guest and a postcard view.



When Dan Prigmore and Marcia Hayes of Coconut Grove, Florida, ordered their Sabre 48 in 2011, they figured they'd take it to Maine, where they'd been cruising for years aboard their Legacy 32.

The couple loved traveling with their dog, Lola, but they also liked to bring friends and family along, which is why they wanted a larger boat.

"We thought we'd run the Sabre like the Legacy," Dan says. "Doing anything else never occurred to us. But then people said, 'You know where you really ought to go...'"

*True East* has since become the best-traveled Sabre motoryacht on the planet. During the past seven years, Dan and Marcia have run their boat in the Great Lakes, the Canadian Maritimes, the Pacific Northwest, Alaska, the Bahamas,

the Mediterranean Sea and the canals and rivers of Western Europe. Along the way, they've gathered loads of experience, formed opinions about how and where to cruise, and inspired other boat owners to head for new destinations.

Dan is no stranger to boats. He started with an 8-foot pram as a child, spent the 1960s and '70s chartering sailboats in the Caribbean, and commuted from Hull, Massachusetts, to his office in Boston on a 30-foot, twin-engine Hacker-Craft. In 2000, he found *Canim*, a 1930 Ted Geary-designed, 96-foot fantail motoryacht. He had her restored, put 30,000 miles under her keel and sold her in 2007.

"I had great captains who taught me a lot about cruising and boat handling," Dan says, "but I'd never seen America. I only knew America from 30,000 feet."

He bought a GMC MotorHome, named it *True West* and toured the national

The Sabre cruises the Seine River in Paris, France.



Dan and Lola tow a friend in British Columbia; dining aboard in Ghent, Belgium

parks. He also purchased the Legacy, which he named *True South*, and used it for summer cruising.

Not long after, Dan met Marcia and her Chihuahua-Terrier rescue dog, Lola. When Dan asked her if she liked boating, she told him, "I like to be in the water, on the water or under the water."

For the next couple of years, they used the motorhome to see America's interior and the Legacy to explore Maine, the Bahamas and the southern rivers of the United States. They moved up to the Sabre 48 because of its two equal-sized state-rooms, ease of use and performance. They don't run at night, so the Sabre's 30-knot cruising speed was key for open-water runs in daylight.

"Generally, I don't like to go more than 50 miles offshore," Dan says. "We chose an express cruiser over a trawler for its run-and-hide capability. In a three-hour weather window, you can be pretty certain about what's going to happen. In six



hours, you should be okay. After that, you have no idea."

In 2012, the couple took delivery of their Sabre 48 in Fair Haven, Massachusetts, and steered *True East* toward New York City. They then headed up the Hudson River and used the Erie Canal to get into the Great Lakes, where they spent the summer. They loved the North Channel in Lake Huron. "Georgian Bay is lovely," Dan says. "And Lake Superior is surprising. It's crystal clear."

They met up with local boaters and changed course if someone recommended an interesting detour. While navigating the Trent-Severn Waterway between Lake Huron and Lake Ontario, a boater encouraged them to do the Rideau Canal. "It turned out to be one of our favorite places," Marcia says.

They spent a week on the canal and found Ottawa, Canada, to be one of the most beautiful cities in North America. "We adore the Canadians," Marcia says.

"They're the nicest, most decent people in the world."

From the start, the two operated the boat together, but outfitting the Sabre is Dan's avocation. To prepare for the Canadian Maritimes, he added a 12-volt watermaker, a life raft, jack lines and Type I life jackets, but they found the cruising there easy.

"You go out the St. Lawrence, you work your way down the Maritimes, there's nothing scary," Dan says.

To get to fresh cruising grounds, *True East* sometimes travels by land.

In 2014, Dan put the Sabre onto a flatbed truck for the 2,800-mile road trip to Pasco, Washington, and had a crane drop her into the Columbia River. The couple then spent the season cruising the Pacific Northwest.

Going down the Columbia near Hood River, Oregon, in 40-knot winds and with a 6-knot current, they buried the boat—an experience that led them to customize their vessel.

"We took a couple of feet of water over the bow," Dan recalls. "I asked Marcia to check the tender. She said the tender is fine, but the cushions are floating in the cockpit."

For his own peace of mind, Dan subsequently had 6 inches taken off the bottom of the swim platform door to create a larger scupper. It's just one of a number of modifications they've made over seven seasons. To get ready for Alaska, they added an 18-foot antenna to improve the VHF radio's range, 400 feet of chain for the anchor, an aft windlass for stern-tie capability, and an improved heating system. To carry more provisions, they added a second fridge and freezer to what Marcia calls the Sabre's "basement," near the washer/dryer, food pantry, kayak, bicycles and 10 cases of wine.

Overall, they've invested \$200,000 in upgrades, from dual water pumps and dual macerators to a built-in coffee maker and a total galley redo. Items on the bridge have moved around too. After years of using ActiveCaptain to plan trips, Dan now runs Garmin's BlueCharts on an iPad.

Before each cruising season, Dan outlines a rough course on Google Maps. He then lays out a detailed route on BlueCharts and picks his ports. The itinerary is then shared with friends and family who can pick a date or port to join the couple for a leg of the cruise.

About one-third of each season is spent with guests aboard. The rest of the time, Dan, Marcia and Lola have *True East* to themselves. Lola rules the roost. "She kind of owns me," Marcia jokes. The 10-pound dog has her own passport, as well as national and international microchips.

The couple counts Alaska among their favorite cruising grounds. "We love to anchor where there's nothing but a whale and a bear, sharing a glass of wine," Dan says. In particular, they like the triangle between Ketchikan, Juneau and Sitka: "Guaranteed glaciers, whales, bears, beautiful towns, great anchorages," he says.

Every cruise has brought new surprises. While they were on Lake Erie, it blew 70 knots. In the Prince Edward Islands,

with a full hold, the macerator gave out. And between Newfoundland and Cape Breton, a fuel problem forced them to slow down.

"I didn't like that at all," Dan says, "but you deal with the worst-case scenarios."

After cruising for three seasons in the Northwest Dan and Marcia put *True East* aboard a ship to Mallorca, Spain. In Europe, the couple found that their Sabre 48 could have served as a dinghy to the 100- to 500-foot yachts they encountered.

"The marinas in the Mediterranean are huge," Dan says. "And the boats are too."

Boating culture and social interactions were different as well. "In North America, if a boat comes into a dock, there will be another boater to take the lines," Dan says. "In the marinas in Europe, it was the professionals."

After hitting the major Spanish islands, they set off for Sardinia, near Italy's coast. When the weather was bad, they left the boat and took road trips, circumnavigating Sardinia, Corsica and Elba by car. As self-described foodies, they loved the local fare.

"In the Mediterranean, I think I cooked maybe half a dozen times," Marcia says. "We always ate in restaurants because the food was so good."

When they cruised inland, they removed gear from the coach roof to lower *True East's* air draft to get under the bridges. In France, instead of being the small fry among huge yachts, *True East* was almost too big for the shallow, narrow canals.

"We cleared one bridge by an inch," Dan recalls. "And we spent hours with the depth-finder at minus 2 feet."

Last summer, they passed through 346 locks and numerous tunnels. Some tunnels were easy to navigate, but one was poorly lit and so narrow that there was no room for fenders.

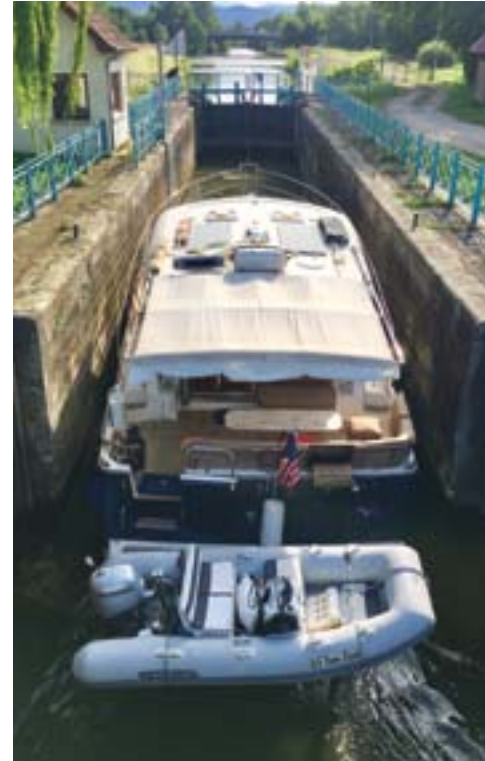
"We did not have the spotlight, which we had to remove from the roof," Dan recalls. "It was an hour and a half of torture."

Although the couple prefers North American cruising, they love what boating in Europe offers.

"There's a marina at the Bastille in Paris with two locks," Dan says. "You go through one lock, and you're two miles from the Eiffel Tower and Notre Dame. You go through the other lock in the other direction, and you're on the Canal Saint-Martin that take you through the tunnels beneath Paris. It's amazing."

Their advice to other boaters is to make sure the captain and mate know how to operate their boat, communicate clearly, and prioritize boat maintenance.

"You have to be a little bit handy," Dan



The couple at Mont-Saint-Michel, France; Dan and Lola off Elba, Italy; on a canal near Strasbourg; locking through Canal du Rhone in France



High and dry in British Columbia (top); the Couture Basin in Bruges, Belgium

says. "A diesel will run with cold water and clean fuel. You need to know those two things. You have to know how to change an impeller and fuel filters. You need to know the basics. And take care of your boat. If you ignore a boat, it's not going to treat you well."

"Dan has a favorite expression: You learn nothing from success," Marcia says. "When we first started out doing locks, we knew nothing about locks. But we weren't afraid. Boating is not that different from going on vacation in a car. Go explore and get out there."

This spring, Dan and Marcia plan to fly with Lola to Antwerp, Belgium, and pick

up *True East* where they left off in 2018. They'll then head through the canals of the Netherlands to Scandinavia and after touring Denmark and Norway, will leave the boat in Stockholm, Sweden.

They have already planned several trips for the future. In 2020, they expect to cruise the Baltic. In 2021, they will take the Danube River down to the Black Sea, and in 2022, they intend to explore Greece and the Adriatic Sea.

And after that? "I'll be pushing 80 at that point," Dan laughs. "But we might be crazy enough to take the boat to Australia. I've already got a quote from Dockwise to ship *True East* over there." ■