WORTHY OF THE SEA
K. Aage Nielsen and 
His Legacy of Yacht Design

Maynard Bray & Tom Jackson

WORTHY OF THE SEA is more than worthy of every sailor’s library, for here is a handsome, rich, and readable study of the extraordinary genius of Aage Nielsen, for too long known only to his clients and those among the cognoscenti who appreciate such genius. Authors Bray and Jackson have crafted an eloquent, well researched, and inspiring tribute to the man who devoted his entire professional life to thinking through and making perfect every single detail of his beautiful, seaworthy, and still-winning yachts. Truly unique among yacht designers, Nielsen’s style and work deserve the most attentive study and appreciation. This book now makes that possible. —Jon Wilson, Editor-in-Chief, WoodenBoat magazine

Knud Aage Nielsen may not be as well known as many of his contemporaries in twentieth-century yacht design—but he should be. He devoted his life to boat design and construction, beginning with his youth in Denmark and continuing first with illustrious design firms and later on his own.

In 1925 Nielsen immigrated to the United States to work with the John G. Alden Company in Boston, Massachusetts. Among the stellar young designers there were Nielsen’s great friends Murray Peterson and Fenwick Williams, with whom he worked during the early 1930s. In 1936 he became the sole designer in the Boston office of Sparkman & Stephens, Inc. He struck out
S&S No. 602
1945
REVONOC, Yawl

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOA</th>
<th>45'4&quot;</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LWL</td>
<td>32'0&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beam</td>
<td>12'1&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draft</td>
<td>4'9&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sail Area</td>
<td>1,014 sq ft</td>
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Built at the Nevins yard, REVONOC was designed in 1945, with Nielsen working with S&S as a freelancer. She was launched in 1946. The owner was Harvey Conover, whose name spelled backward gave the yacht—and one predecessor and one successor—its name.

Conover favored the keel-centerboard combination because he intended to take the yacht on extended cruises in the shoal waters around the islands of the Bahamas and other southern destinations. He used the waterline length of his previous boat, an S&S New York 32 of the same name, as a starting point for expressing his wishes to Nielsen. The result was a yawl that was commodious and well appointed for cruising. But she could also hold her own in races, and the yacht became a touchstone for the newly independent Nielsen as he went on to design a string of keel-centerboarders under his own banner.

Nielsen drew REVONOC’s lines, sail plan, and accommodation plans. She was one of the first of the beamy keel-centerboard type that soon became widely popular under the measurement rule of the Cruising Club of America, of which Conover served as commodore. She was also one of the early yachts to carry a masthead rig.

Rule-bending, however, didn’t drive REVONOC’s design as much as shoal-water cruising ability did. Conover had participated in numerous long-distance ocean races with his first yacht and was a keen competitor, but with the new boat he intended two clear and distinct purposes: he wanted a boat that would provide comfortable cruising accommodations, but he also wanted to remain in the running during the ocean races he greatly enjoyed. His vision closely matched that of many postwar yachtsmen.

REVONOC’s 12' beam allowed the inviting accommodations that ably met Conover’s first demand. She was well appointed below, with an ample galley spanning her width. Her main saloon had both built-in pilot berths outboard and above the pull-out settee berths. Beyond the main saloon she had a port-side head and starboard-side lockers, and forward of these was a large, full-width owner’s stateroom. To meet the second imperative of racing performance, REVONOC’s tall masthead rig carried a sail inventory of main, a range of five jibs, spinnaker, mizzen, and mizzen staysail.

REVONOC opened the way for the full flowering of the Nielsen
With her aft galley using space under the bridge deck to best advantage, a conventional main saloon with pilot berths outboard of the settees, an enclosed head (always on the port side) with lockers opposite, and a forward V-berth stateroom, RE von noc represented what would become a conventional Nielsen cabin layout.

PEM NIELSEN ARCHIVES (N602-N) / BY PERMISSION, SPARKMAN & STEPHENS, INC.
keel-centerboard type. He soon had another success with STORMY PETREL, launched in 1947 at the Simms yard in Dorchester. She was a lovely flush-decked, 51'11" LOA ketch built for Charles A. Harrison of Lockport, New York. She was followed in 1951 by the similar but larger flush-decked keel-centerboarder TEMPTATION, a 56-footer described in Chapter Eight. By the time design No. 266, ALEBET, came out in 1954, the type was really beginning to take off (see Chapter Five), and the 38'7" ALEBET had had a quick succession of sisters.

REVONOC also pointed the way for S&S's development of subsequent keel-centerboarders, including a noteworthy S&S design that followed a decade later—FINISTERRE, launched in 1954. FINISTERRE took first place overall in the Bermuda Race that year and again in 1958 and 1960.

Tragically, Conover, his wife, their twenty-six-year-old son, and a guest perished in 1958 when his third REVONOC was lost after encountering a freak seventy-miles-per-hour gale that struck without warning while they were transiting the Gulf Stream.

The Nielsen-designed REVONOC sails today as PILGRIM under the ownership of David Pugh out of the Watch Hill Yacht Club in Rhode Island.
REVONOC's comparatively broad hull, together with her centerboard, helped compensate for her shoal draft, giving her a decent-sized sail area and a good turn of speed, even in light winds.

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* Worthy of the Sea *