

passione est 1960

Words: Gillian Montgomery Photography: Maurizio Raffaele

There are some self evident truths when it comes to style icons. The E-Type Jaguar, the Rolex Daytona, the Chanel 2.55 and the Riva Aquarama. Each sets the standard in its respective field and can confidently hold court with some of the worlds most celebrated designs.



The image of cruising across the Italian lakes in a Riva, the sound of that engine in the background, the bright sunshine reflecting off the high gloss varnished woodwork. But if you want to be a part of that ideal, you'll need to move quickly and with some deft. The world of classic sailing vessels is getting smaller and with market forces increasing demand, you'll need a broker and a restorer. The ability to restore mahogany Rivas is a skill only held by a few worldwide. Bellini Nautica are one of the few, who can also rebuild a boats entire electrical system from scratch.

Established in 1960, Bellini Nautica is one of only three companies on Lake Iseo that charters classic Rivas. Known as “the Ferrari of the Seas”, we sense this is more a case of using a sprat to catch a mackerel. Chances are once you've experienced its gleaming mahogany hull and period details, you'll be setting your purchase affairs in order.

Passed down through the family for generations, we sat down with Battista Bellini, the grandson of the workshop's founder, to learn a little more about what goes into the restoration process.

When did you know you were taking the reins?

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I would say the day I was born, although I only really began to work in the company five years ago. I have a passion for wooden boats, but also a passion for humanity – and meeting people. I just love to meet people to share my passion with them. My grandfather started about 50 years ago, building Bellini wooden boats. Wooden boats were fashionable at the time: everyone wanted to look like Brigitte Bardot in her own Riva in St Tropez. It was a golden era. The boats were handcrafted and therefore expensive, so were only for wealthy customers. But as the years went by, plastic and resin boats became more prevalent and wooden boats became just old boats. My grandfather died when my father was 17, but before he

died, he told him: “Don't build boats, it's too difficult to survive doing that now.” And so my father decided to focus on the servicing, storage, buying, selling and restoration of these old wooden boats.

Can you tell us about the companies private collection?

Yes, we have 17 Rivas in our collection. We have almost every model and every evolution of each model. We feel it's important to preserve the history of this legendary brand and have some of the rarest models that even Riva doesn't have in its own collection. In addition, we have boats such as the Sebino, the second built of a series

of 13 boats, and the Lancetta, one of the very first models built by Riva and the only example remaining in the world. For sure, there are some boats missing from our collection, such as the Scoiattolo (Italian for squirrel) from the very early years. There are only two or three remaining in the world.

Are these purely show pieces then, do they ever touch water?

Certainly, as much as we can! For example, at the Concorso d'Eleganza Villa d'Este, some of the Rivas used as shuttles for the VIPs are from our collection. That's another way to share our passion.

