

Perfect Balance



Sailing and Pittwater are hand and glove for Clareville couple Iain and Alex Murray and their daughters Eliza, Lucy and Imogen.

Story by Rosamund Burton

It's two weeks before Christmas, and Iain Murray is preparing for the Sydney to Hobart Race on Wild Oats XI, the race record holder and eight-time line honours winner. He has been part of the Wild Oats sailing program since 2001, and built the boat which won the Admiral's Cup in 2003.

In addition, the Big Fella, as he's known, is also gearing up for the Australian Etchells Class Championship being run by the Royal Prince Alfred Yacht Club off Pittwater in January, before heading to the world championship in San Francisco this September, with fellow crew Richie Allanson from Avalon, and Euan McNicol, his Star coach for the 2008 Olympics. Iain won the Etchells World Championship in 1984, and 33 years later aged 58 his passion for sailing hasn't diminished.

On the slipway below the Murrays' house on the waterfront at Clareville is a dilapidated motor boat which Iain's father bought in 1965.

"Every Sunday it was in the car down to Akuna Bay, and off for an adventure in that boat," Iain reminisces. "We did that for many years, going to the Basin, up the Hawkesbury, over to Gosford."

Now 93, Iain's father's love of Pittwater

burns strongly. He is still living in the same weatherboard house in Seaforth where Iain grew up, and every Sunday he puts his kayak into the water at Bayview, and paddles up to Clareville to visit the family.

It was in 1987 after returning from the America's Cup in Fremantle that Iain and wife Alex moved into a friend's boatshed at Clareville.

"We fell in love with Pittwater, so we bought a block of land on the waterfront, and spent three years building a house," Alex explains. They had only lived in it for six months when they had the opportunity to buy their current double-frontage property with its pontoon.

"We tarted it up in about six weeks, and were always going to knock it down," Alex explains. But despite Iain's redesign plans over the past 22 years, the original house still stands, and with the bikes leaning against the wall at the back, and dog Tilly wandering in and out, it's very much a lived-in family home. Eliza, their eldest daughter, is now working in London as a fashion editor, but Lucy, who is at UTS and Imogen, who is at AFTRS, both still live at home.

The Murrays have cherished every moment of their lives at Pittwater. Eliza,

Lucy and Imogen, all got their speedboat licences when they were 12 years old, and used to visit their friends by boat, and after school motored over to Mackerel Beach for a swim. When they were waitressing at The Boathouse at Palm Beach they often went to work by boat rather than car.

Iain is the patron of the Avalon Sailing Club, where their three daughters sailed when they were young, and Alex taught the local kids on the Murray design Nip-pas.

"Sailing skills give you an understanding and respect for the wind and the power of the sea," says Iain. "I learnt the hard way in 1977 when I did my first Sydney to Hobart race and thought I was invincible." Iain was at the helm when the boat rolled and he fell overboard, not wearing a lifejacket. "I was lucky to survive that, and came home with my tail between my legs."

Alex grew up in Longueville and started sailing, aged eight, in a Sabot. When only 16 and still at school she met Iain at a dinner at the Lane Cove Sailing Club.

"He was 19, but he had a business and was buying land and building properties in Sydney's West. He was pretty dynamic, and I didn't really have much say," she

says with a smile.

From 1977 to 1982 Iain won six consecutive World 18-foot skiff championships. He sailed on Syd Fischer's 12 Metre Yacht, Advance, in the 1983 America's Cup. Then in 1987, defended the prized America's Cup sailing on his and John Swarbricks designed Kookaburra III.

Iain's accomplishments are phenomenal in sailing, and also boat design manufacturing and marine infrastructure. He also has been involved in property development.

"I'm now back to working in the Cup," he says, explaining that in his role as the America's Cup Regatta Director, which he also held 2013, he is responsible for the competition side of the event. In the past 15 months, his team has run nine events around the world, and he'll spend five months of this year in Bermuda.

With her husband as her yardstick Alex is extremely modest about her

sailing achievements, despite having days earlier returned from the Melges 24 World Championship in Miami. Aged 20, she was Sydney's first female skiff sailor. Also, she competed on the international match racing circuit with American-born Sue Waters, who lives in Bayview, the Pittwater born-and-bred Kerrie Shimeld, and her old friend from Lane Cove, three times Olympian Karyn Gojnich.

They competed in the International's Women's Keelboat Challenge at Newport Rhode Island.

"The others all left their babies behind, or had husbands, but because Iain was in Lake Garda testing boats for the next Olympics, I took Eliza, and got a sitter there. When the boat got in I'd run up the dock and breastfeed."

Alex, Sue Waters and Kerrie Shimeld were instrumental in the start in 1995 of the RPYC Women's Twilight Series, which over the past 21 years has truly

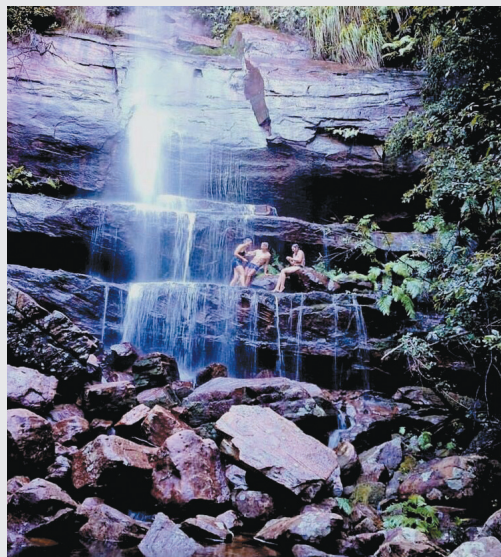
empowered women in the sailing community.

On a swing mooring just beyond their pontoon is a slick, red-hulled yacht.

"It was purpose-built as a present for Alex, for enduring a long term of marriage," Iain says. It's called Belicymo: 'Beautiful', 'Eliza', 'Lucy' and 'Imogen' married into one word, which explains the weird spelling of it.'

"It was our 20th wedding anniversary," Alex recounts, "and I was annoyed that Iain wouldn't commit to going to lunch with me. He rang up, and said, 'Have you looked out the window?' There it was, with a big bow on it. It was so romantic, it was ridiculous. We spent the day sailing it with all his mates who brought it up from Nowra.

"It has brought me so much joy," says Alex, gazing out at the yacht and Pittwater beyond. "Just to be out there is a treat for me."



CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE: Iain and Alex racing on Belicymo; a montage of the family's good times sailing on Pittwater; Lucy having afternoon fun on a Laser; the family enjoying a cruise on a Halvorsen up the Hawkesbury (1998); Alex and Iain in their Pittwater 'backyard', with Alex's second love Belicymo in the background; the Murray kids relaxing at favourite spot Lovett Bay waterfall.

