

BORN TO EXPLORE

With Silolona, Patti Seery created an Indonesian sailing legend. Now her son, Tresno, and a new boat, Si Datu Bua, have joined the luxury charter family.

PORTRAIT BY SUZY RAYMENT PORTRAIT BY GUY NOWELL



ABOVE:
Patti Seery and her son Tresno with the crew from S/Y Silolona and S/Y Si Datu Bua

RIGHT:
Si Datu Bua under sail at the Asia Superyacht Rendezvous

Patti Seery describes herself as “just a mid-western housewife”, but that is being excessively modest. Patti is an exceptional woman who has almost single-handedly put Indonesia on the cruising map, and turned a traditional Indonesian phinisi into the ‘ne plus ultra’ of the bespoke adventure and cultural charter experience par excellence. Patti’s love affair with Indonesia goes back 20 years when she arrived there with her husband Doug, an engineer in the oil and gas industry, and their two young children. Patti vividly remembers her very first day in Indonesia, when she went exploring through the docklands of Sunda Kelapa in Jakarta, and watched the big Indonesia phinisis unloading teak from Sulawesi. “It was – really was – love at first sight. I was instantly ‘hooked’ by these unique vessels, but I never dreamed that 20 years later I would have built two of these magnificent ships and be running a luxury chartering operation in what has to be one of the most pristine, most

exciting and most culturally diverse parts of the world.”

Patti used her early years in the East to travel all through the immense archipelago that is Indonesia – learning about the myriad island cultures and especially their textiles, and becoming proficient in the local language, Bahasa Indonesia. Never one to do things by halves, Patti took a Master’s degree in textiles from the University of Baroda, India - she was already a graduate in Education and Architecture at Montana State University.

“I was lucky that through Doug’s work we had the opportunity to visit some of the most interesting and out of the way places on the planet. As the children got older I started running cultural tours for people who were looking for a more authentic Indonesian experience, and quickly became totally engrossed with the cultures and art of this impossibly complex nation.”

Patti has worked tirelessly to promote the unique cultures of Indonesia, and as she points out there is ‘no single Indonesian culture’. It is a nation composed of 17,000 islands, many of which take great pride in their own customs and





**ABOVE LEFT
AND RIGHT:**

The Asmat suite on
S/Y Silolona; Patti
Seery and her son
Tresno

art. This champion of Indonesian culture feels particularly connected to the Dani and Asmat peoples of Irian Jaya, where she was adopted as an ‘earth mother’ by some of the tribes.

In the 1990s Patti set up a four-month cultural tour during which she accompanied 40 Asmat artists and eight Dani chiefs on their travels to the USA. The musicians performed at several prestigious museums including the Smithsonian (Washington DC) and the Field Museum (Chicago), and Patti reflects that there were significant cultural interchanges on both sides of the artistic divide.

But she was not content with a simple one-off cultural exchange. There were bigger plans afoot – building her own phinisi so that she could take guests to remote locations where they had a chance to engage in an entirely authentic Indonesian experience. Patti particularly wanted to make a contribution to the local boat building culture, which was beginning to wane as the fishing and cargo-carrying industry switched from traditional wooden craft to modern (and less attractive, but more functional) powered vessels.

“I had no experience in boat building so it was a very big learning curve,” says Patti, “but I knew the Konjo people who were the traditional phinisi builders, so I headed off to Sulawesi”. There Patti found her ‘master boat’ builder, Nasir, who built Silolona – named after the haunting chant that was sung at the boat’s keel laying ceremony. As if building a 160’ traditional boat was not sufficient challenge, Patti was determined to build it to Lloyd’s Registry specifications, conforming to the very highest standards required for charter operations. In short, what was achieved was a traditional phinisi that breathes rustic charm while delivering luxury accommodation and top safety standards. With the help of her Indonesian crew, Patti has made Silolona the gold standard of chartering in Asia, since then ‘often copied, but never equalled’. Without a doubt Silolona is the benchmark by which all others are measured.

After seven years in charter, Silolona’s success has led to a new addition to the Seery household. “I learned so much from the building of Silolona, that another boat was always on the agenda. A chance to improve on all the mistakes that we made the first time round.” - although Yachtstyle believes that it

really would be very hard to find any real ‘mistakes’ on board Silolona – certainly from a charter guest’s point of view.

“When my son, Tresno, completed his degree in Naval Architecture it seemed the perfect time to utilise our joint skills, and apply some modern sailing techniques and modifications to the traditional phinisi design, and create a new chapter in luxury chartering in Asia.”

The result is Si Datu Bua, and her ‘coming out’ sailing performance’ was at the Asia Superyacht Rendezvous, in Phuket in December 2012. “Although she will never be a fast sailing yacht”, says Tresno, “we can take more advantage of the available breeze. With a more efficient rig she can sail higher and faster. She will be that much less reliant on the engine, and as a charter yacht we can be more environmentally attuned as we cruise the Indonesian archipelago. Speed isn’t everything,” he notes with a smile.

With aluminium masts and booms, and decked out with modern sails, Si Datu Bua still creates an historic image that would not be out of place in old Batavia (Jakarta) or trading teak and spices back and forth across the Java Sea. The interiors of this superyacht also reflect that era when spice traders were bringing their precious cargoes of cloves and nutmeg from the Spice Islands back to Europe. In a recent BBC series ‘The Spice Trail’, hosted by Kate Humble, Patti was an advisor for the Indonesian segments in the programmes, and Silolona featured strongly, creating some dramatic and historic imagery.

With the whole of maritime Asia to explore, what keeps Patti firmly tied to Indonesia? “I am fascinated by this period of history – the spice trading years – when Occidental and Oriental cultures met and clashed, when mercantilism and near-primitive tribalism bashed their heads together, and changed both parties. And of course there is the unimaginable natural beauty of the Indonesian islands. It would take more than a lifetime to properly explore this region, and I am really only just beginning.” Patti and Tresno Seery, Silolona and Si Datu Bua – all born to explore the untapped beauty of the Indonesian archipelago, one of the richest expanses of ecological and cultural diversity on the planet. 🌿