



Protected by its blue bag, Eagle's boarding ladder deploys from between the trampolines on the foredeck, allowing passengers easy access when the cat is nudged onto a beach.

Brookes nodded in the direction of a high-sided cat in the Basseterre fleet. "She's not one of my children," he said.

Beyond their role as specialized working sail in a contemporary world, Brookes's cats contain lessons about

the potential resilience and longevity of wood/epoxy composite construction. I've heard plenty of wooden-boat purists predict the doom of any vessel built of plywood covered in glass. In fairness to such criticism, numerous wood/epoxy boats do in

fact suffer from water intrusion and extensive rot. But Brookes's cats serve as a rebuttal to those voices: his big cats demonstrate that if well built and maintained, wood/epoxy boats can last, and last.

Brooke's boats have not been babied, or kept in mild environments. Baked in the Caribbean sun, bashed upwind in steep seas, and occasionally tossed ashore or strained through the pilings of a pier by hurricanes, most of Brookes's cats have sailed for upward of 25 years without hogging, rotting, or falling to bits.

And they're still making enough money to generate demand for him to build more.

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