

# Inside...

*The* debate on God, faith, religion is a hardy perennial. Our main story this month is about God. Does he exist or not? Did the resurrection of Jesus really happen? Are we either going to heaven or hell? Has purgatory been abolished? If there is life in the hereafter will it be a reflection of this one? Is there spiritual recompense after death? Or is our end to quote Omar Khayyam "Dust into Dust, and under Dust to lie/Sans Wine, sans Song, sans Singer and – sans End!" Does life have a meaning without a God?

The most agitated manifestations of religious belief are directly connected to dissatisfaction with our human experience in so far as there is a demand for fairness, for a balancing out, for a justification of unhappiness which seems as if it can only be satisfied from somewhere beyond the clouds. There seems to be a need for a God who will correct our own inadequacy, a power that will put things rights.

But the need for God does not prove the existence of God. A man in a desert may need a flask of water which is not there.

Do we need religion to give us a strong moral sense? There is no doubt that a strong moral sense can provide an effective defence against evil and destructive motives, and religion has a large part to play in promoting, directing and undergirding it. But there are many who do not have a religion yet abide by strong moral values.

There are others who are popping in and out of churches and *festas* but scratch the surface and ...

Perhaps we must individually come to terms with ourselves and collectively work for a more desirable world, god or no god.

These articles are being offered to stimulate, provoke and hopefully set you thinking.

If you find them too heavy then go to our section on Seduction.

marie b.



**MARIE BENOÎT**  
Executive Editor



ON THE FRONT COVER:  
**Morgan**

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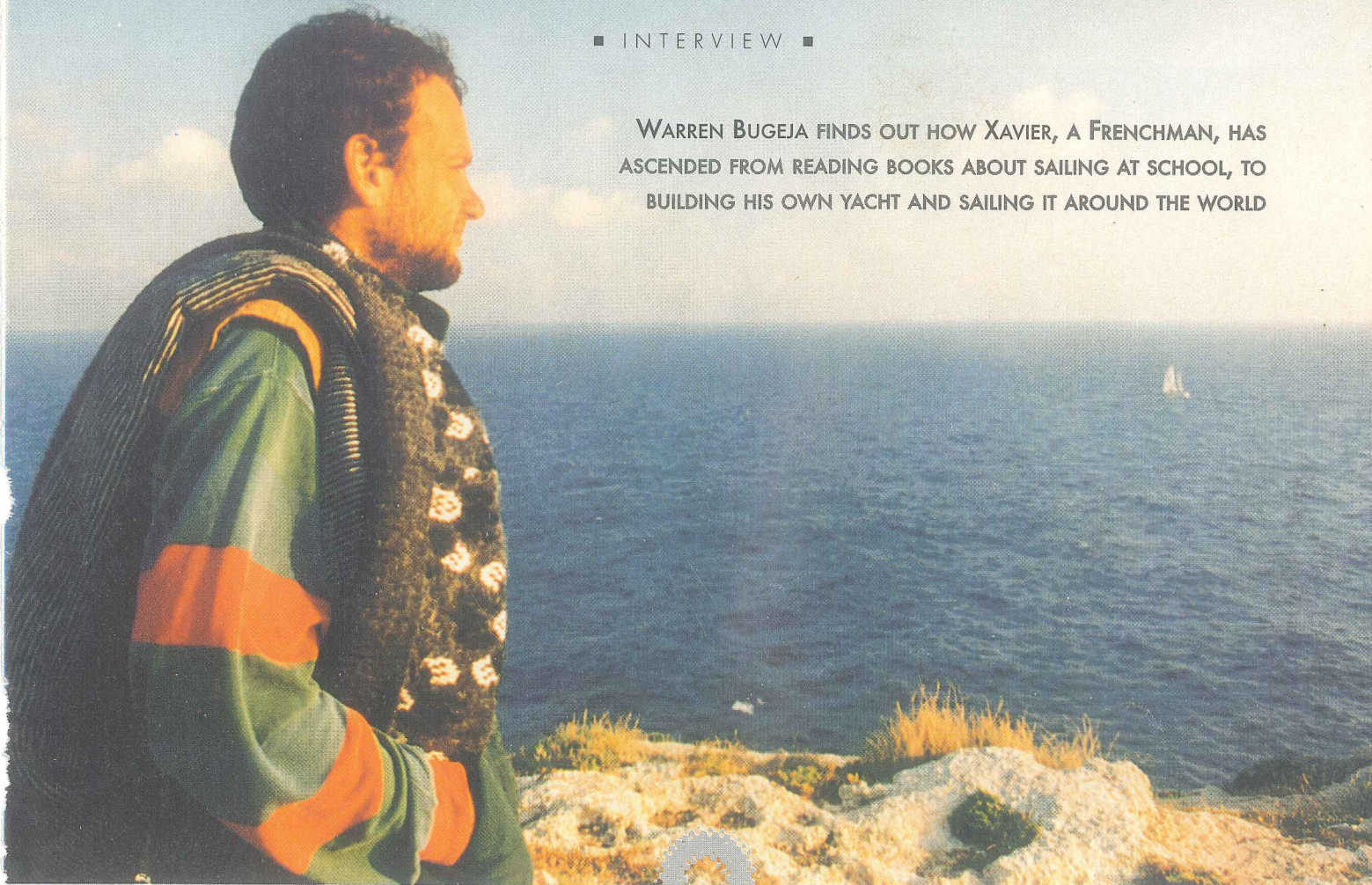
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WARREN BUGEJA FINDS OUT HOW XAVIER, A FRENCHMAN, HAS ASCENDED FROM READING BOOKS ABOUT SAILING AT SCHOOL, TO BUILDING HIS OWN YACHT AND SAILING IT AROUND THE WORLD



# S E A G Y P S Y



**T**HE name of his yacht is *l'Arpiou*, French for naughty boy, a nickname coined by an ex-girlfriend, to describe her sailor companion. Yet the only thing naughty about Xavier are his eyes, two azure expanses of ocean, sparkling mischievously in a sun-tanned rugged frame of tranquillity.

Xavier exudes calmness of being. The wisdom of silence, resulting probably from days and nights spent alone, out at sea.

Asked to appraise his lifestyle in three words, Xavier recedes into inner backwaters, a haze of misty blue and a few minutes later, dreamily replies: "freedom, movement... and... peace".

It might have escaped the rest of the population, save for one or two

sailing enthusiasts. But, for some time now, *l'Arpiou* distinguished from the rest of the bobbing boats by an aquamarine border striped around her aluminium hull, has been amiss from her usual berthing alongside the quay at Spinola bay. Whilst nobody was looking, an adventurer came our way on a journey to circumvate the world.

Xavier's life long affair with the sea, a relationship he describes as "passionate" began in the school library. "I read a lot of books written by young people sailing around the world, going to Antarctica, any story I could get my hands on. We had this old wreck of a boat and together with some friends I would dream of fixing it up and sailing off, like in the books."

Xavier grew up in Paris and then in a ski resort in Val d'Isère, one-

time host to the winter Olympics, where his parents set up a skiing shop. Occasionally, during the low season, Xavier's land locked existence would be relieved by the sound of a flapping tarpaulin, when his parents rented a sailing boat for the holidays. However it was not until his 20th birthday that the sea breeze wafted his way and provided Xavier with the chance to act out his childhood fantasies.

While working as a beach boy in the south of France he was approached by Jim, who had just built a yacht and was looking for crew to help him out on a diving charter he was organising to the Red Sea. "Jim was leaving in September and that is when I would have been out of a job... I intended to stay on Jim's boat for just two months, but I stayed for two years. >p.21

p.26> "I was 20 years old, I had nothing special to keep me in France."

Xavier's first trip took him from Djibouti to the Maldives and then onto Sri Lanka where he took leave of Jim and the sea to trek overland through southern India, up to Rajasthan, New Delhi, Nepal, Burma and then down to Singapore. There he hitch hiked a voyage back to the Maldives where Jim was anchored, ready to start all over again. "I was not paid for my work on the boat but I did not spend any money, Jim fed me. When you share food on a boat it does not cost you very much. Before going to India I bought some cigarettes and whiskey, sold them and lived off the money for about a month, I would only spend about one dollar a day just for food and travelling..."

Eventually Xavier returned to France to fulfil a long-term project, that of building his own boat. A task that took three years to complete and cost 3000 francs (approximately Lm200). Most of the craftsmanship on the inside of the yacht was undertaken by Xavier, an uphill struggle for someone not used to working with his hands and with no technical background. "I had to start from scratch, but I kept going because I knew what I wanted. It was not a dream, I had already lived that life for one or two years before and I knew I liked it."

A few lessons in manual dexterity later and *l'Arpiou* was launched on her maiden voyage; a solo crossing of the Atlantic. "It is very easy to cross the Atlantic, much easier than to sail around Malta for four days. The most dangerous activity is pissing overboard. That is why I leave a rope trailing behind the boat in case I fall off! With the Atlantic, you put everything on one side and you end up on the other side because the current and the wind pushes you there. In the Mediterranean the weather changes all the time. A storm can arise in no time at all and the wind is constantly changing direction. When the sea gets rough the waves become more difficult to navigate. They rise in sharp and stiff peaks instead of rolling like in the Atlantic."

The trip which took 30 days "the longest stretch I have ever done without seeing land", proved to be a "spiritual" experience for Xavier. "You get through some very high and sometimes very low moments. You find yourself such a nothing on the ocean and at the same time so

part of the ocean. It is so big and there is you on your little sailing boat."

This feeling of being out there in the big wide blue is compounded because "you only ever know where you are at the end of the day". That is, if like Xavier you opt to eschew the satellite in favour of a good old fashioned sexton. The procedure involves taking three readings at different times of the day, each "reading" constituting a "line" forming a triangle which gives a rough idea of your position within that triangle give or take five miles here and there!



For Xavier, loneliness is not a problem: "It feels good."

Although *l'Arpiou* is adequately outfitted with the basics; a GPS, a depth sounder and a VHF radio ("Roger over and out" for the rest of us), that is as far as it goes. Xavier is reluctant to invest in anything more sophisticated. "I do not even have a fridge, I prefer to save my money for travelling rather than putting it in the boat. Three times, I was given a fridge and each time I gave it away. I do not need much, the more you have, the more you have to fix or depend upon."

But who needs fridges when you have a gas cooker? "I bake my own bread, baked bread tastes wonderful when you have been out a long time at sea." So do vegetables it seems. "Cabbages, potatoes, onions, garlic and carrots keep for a long time if you buy them fresh from the market. What is very good is pumpkin. It keeps for three to six months. I

remember once we were in the south of the Indian Ocean. We had been crossing for a very long time. One day we opened this pumpkin and it ran with water. The smell was fresh and sweet and the seeds were still moist as with morning dew, it reminded us of land." Xavier's culinary skills read like a shipwreck survival course. Self-sufficiency is the key word. "I can make yoghurt and I grow sprouts from mung beans which are a source of nutrients on long journeys. If I catch fish, I cut the fillet into little squares and put salt on them for one night. Then the next day I take out the salt and I let the pieces dry in the sun. At night I will take the pieces down inside so they do not get spoiled by the humidity and the next day I will put them back out in the sun." The process is repeated for six days and "at the end you have very good fish"! Before embarking on a long voyage, Xavier always makes sure he is well-stocked in case of any emergency. "I can eat for six months with all the rice, the flour, the pasta.... I always keep a good reserve and I normally shop for my reserve where the food is cheap. I did not shop for my reserve in Malta," he winks.

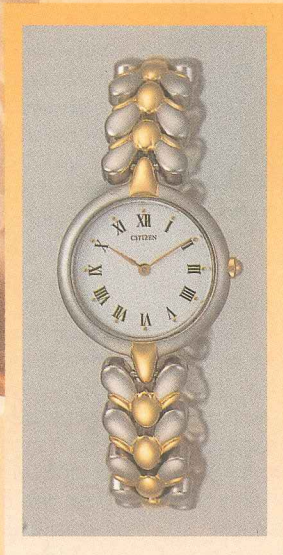
When he is not drying fish or eating, Xavier wiles the day away on automatic pilot, reading, sleeping, reflecting, writing in his diary and occasionally playing the flute. There is always something to repair or to be mended. Does he ever get lonely at sea? "No, I do not suffer at sea but when I am on the shore," is his unusual reply. "There is something natural about being on your own out there, sailing. Loneliness is not a problem. It feels good. But when you come to a place you are on your own because you do not especially know anyone. There is life and people all around and you can feel much more lonely than in the middle of the sea, when for days and days you do not see much except the occasional sea bird".

A life time at sea often living in cramped quarters can make for a tempestuous swell in the relationships department. "After a few days at sea there are no self-defence mechanisms, you cannot protect yourself. In order for a relationship to survive you need to be completely open, within a certain boundary of self-respect." Privacy is established by "not talking a lot at sea", and parameters of sanity maintained during the night watch shift "when you are completely alone for four hours". >p.22



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*When on steady ground, Xavier loves walking and meeting new people and places*

p.21> Following his transatlantic escapade Xavier teamed up with his then girlfriend of four years who had shared his dream of building a boat and entertained romantic visions of sunsets at the helm of *l'Arpiou*, on a leisurely cruise of the western coast of Africa. From the south of France they travelled to Spain then Morocco, (where they lost their pet cat overboard) *Capo Verde*, and down to Senegal. Rather than take the established route, crossing over to the Canary islands, drifting onwards to Antigua in the Caribbean, they decided to explore the estuaries and rivers off the beaten flow, downtown Africa. Xavier's girlfriend embarked on the adventure not because the sea was in her blood – a necessary prerequisite – “She sailed because she loved me. She is from the ground” Xavier explains, excusing her for not having survived the rigours imposed by his chosen lifestyle. “Not a lot of women like sailing, it is a hard life physically. Like when you open the tap to wash up, and no water comes out, so you have to haul all these gerricans about a mile and fill the tanks up. And then after all that, there is no warm water for hot showers, it is not a very comfortable life.”

To rub a little sexist salt into unwashed limbs, women may also feel excluded by the male bonding going on down at the local pontoon. “When you meet other boats all the men become friends very quickly. The women take more time to build up a relationship, and then it is time to move on. It is not enough to like sailing; you must be committed to travelling as a way of life. I carry my home with me, I never feel homesick, why should I? When I switch on TV after some time at sea it seems as though nothing has changed within the four year interval, just another war, an earthquake, a strike.”



When he is on steady ground once again, Xavier, who loves walking and meeting new people and places, immediately heads towards the nearest bar "to have a cold beer", a treat he relishes in the absence of a refrigerator on his yacht. His Maltese port of call being Muddy Waters in St Julian's where the sound of the blues carried him forth. Originally Xavier intended to stop over in Malta for just two days but he stayed for two months. The ostensible reason behind his extended local sojourn being an angry *grigalata*. Yet the sailor who "does not have a girl in every port" fell in love while searching for crew to sail with him to Crete and then onto Australia. However the season changed and the Red Sea is waiting...

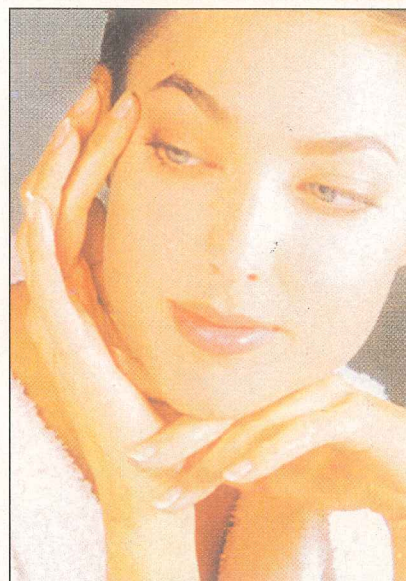
Any advice for would be seafarers? Xavier is quick and earnest in his reply, "To be patient, to just go out there and do it... try! Everybody has to try".

### Did you know?

#### Sea superstitions

- Never leave on a Friday, it is bad luck
- Never say the word "rabbit". If you must refer to the dreaded name, you should allude to "the animal with the big ears who is the cousin of the hare". Apparently in the days when boats were made out of wood, rabbits were kept on board for food on long voyages. However, they would often escape and gnaw at the ropes anchoring the vessel ensuing havoc in their wake.
- Always place a coin or some money under a mast on a yacht. This brings good luck and is reputed to prevent the mast from falling in a storm.

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