

Genesis interior, 2005

Getting to Alexis Andrew's hideaway overlooking placid Indian Creek takes some doing; and even though I've been there once before, I'm once again lost. The lengthy drive, the climbing, rocky path makes it one of those out of the way places, literally, as we say in Antigua, "behind God back." My mood though is dramatically improved after a couple of hours in the photographer's company – getting a preview of his books 'Vanishing Ways' and 'Genesis' – and its not just because he is pleasant company and pleasantly passionate about his art.

It occurs to me as I drive back, hardly feeling the jostling, pausing at the highest point to take in the breathtaking green valley skirting the creek below, that there's a parallel between this journey and the subject explored



Brother Pete, Grenadine Bank, 1999

in both books – boating; something about the outcome being that much more beautiful for the effort involved.

Before I left, Alexis showed me the money side of his photography, the sleek mega-yachts acquired as investments; beautiful shots. Still the images of Carriacou fishermen leaning into a sloop built with their own hands as they push her out to sea for the first time, of those men riding the waves in this wooden single-mast craft, of them dancing around her – to ward off evil spirits – hold greater beauty to me.

"I enjoy bringing people back to basics and you cannot get more basic than building something out of wood to take you across the sea," Alexis said.

It wasn't a wooden sloop that brought him to Antigua when he docked in coastal

English Harbour back in the early 1980s. Starting in Greece, where he was born, his camera and his spirit of adventure had seen him set foot on basically every continent on the globe; though it was the sea that called,



Father & Son, Windward, Carriacou 2003

still calls, to him. Still, he dropped anchor here and made a life, which now includes wife Jackie and their young children.

'Images Antigua Barbuda', the first of three books on his Indian Creek imprint, was awash with the colour and diversity of island living albeit that the photographer brought a fresh eye to even the familiar. Pulling up on Barbuda's Frigate Bird colony, for instance, instead of the red chest of the preening male Frigate set against the black white and green of feathers and foliage, we get a sepia-toned, eerily quiet view; the approach, the boat-driver's hand raised, signaling silence, as they enter the birds' domain. From Eric Clapton playing pool in a local rum shop to a costumed reveler letting off at Carnival to a Horse Spider captured in startling detail, 'Images' is a pepper pot of themes compared to 'Vanishing Ways' and 'Genesis'. These are very tightly focused on boating and boat building. Still, reading some of the text and previewing the images, it's an easy bet that anyone who loves a good story will be drawn in.

So, here's the story. Alexis' first boat, Summer Wind, was a veritable wreck when he bought her; one of those traditional wooden Caribbean boats that had long gone out of style. "I recognized something attractive in it," Alexis said.

Once upon a time, primarily in the period between the first and second World Wars, boats like Summer Wind filled the water ways – ferrying cargo, people, fish. They were built, by hand, in places like Carriacou in the Grenadine Islands where the process was a community affair; everyone playing a part from the felling of the Cedars to the embroidering of the flag by the wife of the boat's owner/builder. Folklore surrounding the process included even the phases of the moon.

Of course, Alexis didn't know all this when he acquired Summer Wind; and when he got her fixed up and entered her in her first deep sea fishing tournament, it wasn't without ridicule from the power boaters.



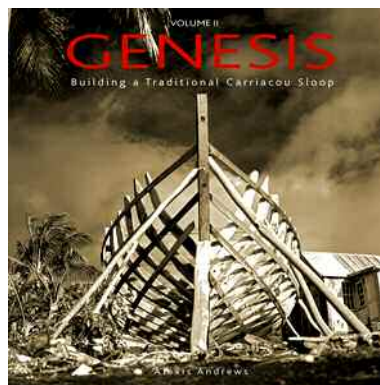
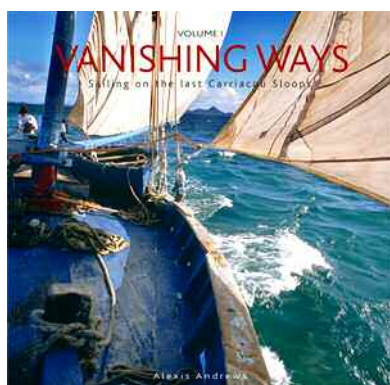
Butterfish

"Everybody has been spoiled by speed and change, Internet, cell phones, instant gratification," Alexis said of the attitudes that likely assisted with the decline of this once thriving indigenous sloop-and-schooner-building industry.

In time, Summer Wind lived up to her name, becoming damned near unbeatable. As Alexis said, "one of the reasons these craft were so good was because they were fast." In fact, now that he has Genesis, Summer Wind has been swept up by a resident of the upscale Mill Reef resort community. Not before she'd ferried Alexis and a character referred to in his book as 'The Cuban' on many a "crazy" adventure; not before he'd stumbled upon the Carriacou community which became the subject of 'Vanishing Ways'.

Though set in this same community, 'Genesis' is a much more personal tale. It's the tale of Alexis' boat, built from scratch by shipwright Alwyn Enoe and his boys, with Alexis traveling to Carriacou every month or so to pitch in and record the progress. In fact, he said, everybody in the community got involved in the one and a half year long project. The success of Genesis in regattas since and the interest she's sparked opens a potential new market for this waning industry; with these two new books, set to debut at Antigua's Classic Yacht Regatta (April 2008), potentially causing that ripple of interest to swell.

Either way, the images are sure to enthrall. They're as beautiful as I've come to expect of Alexis' work; his sustained contact with the Carriacou boat builders providing, as well, an intimate and poetic perspective. Alexis remarked how much he liked being a part of that culture; and the images certainly capture that.



CARRIACOOU SLOOPS Vol I & II Limited Edition Box Set 10" X 10" 130 pages each, colour + black & white images with accompanying stories. Available from IndianCreekBooks.com