

August 26, 2010

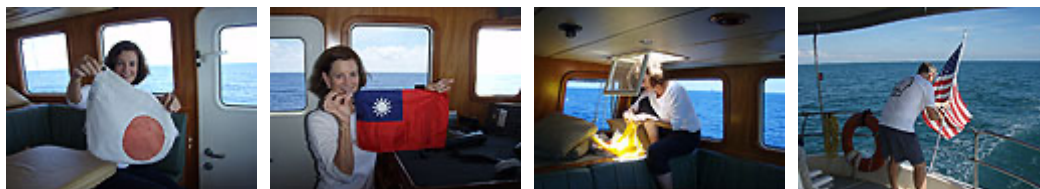
Ta Shing Greets Homecoming Boats with Gala Celebration

Fete heightened by historical significance and appreciation on both sides

By Jeff Merrill

(Ed. note – this is the fourth and final installment of a multi-part series on the very first Nordhavns ever to return to the factory where they were constructed. California-based Nordhavn sales representative Jeff Merrill, traveling aboard one of the boats, Nordhavn 62 Seabird, had the privilege of participating in the historical event which took place July 3, 2010, and documented the days preceding, during and following the occasion. Click to read [Part One](#), [Part Two](#) and [Part Three](#).)

The quickened pace of my beating heart and the exciting chatter on board were the physiological responses to our proximity to Ta Shing...now it was time to get physically ready for our arrival.



At 1pm Carol got busy with flags by taking down our Japanese courtesy flag and then hoisted our yellow Q flag (quarantine). When you arrive in a new country you fly the Q until you have been cleared in and then you hoist the host country flag. Because Taiwan is not a popular travel destination for cruisers it was a bit of a challenge for the GSSR fleet to find flags, but Ken found some Taiwan flags with wooden dowels in a party store a few months back, gave one to each boat and Carol soon busied herself sewing on attachment points to the flag. Seabird has her courtesy flag halyard accessible from the watch berth through an overhead hatch in the pilothouse roof so you can change flags easily from inside the boat. Steven also put out Old Glory so we would be properly flagged as we arrived. I looked at the instruments and noticed that the water temperature was 88.5 degrees 5 miles offshore. Jonn took the helm and rapped on the VHF with the other GSSR boats before everyone's focus switched to entering the harbor.

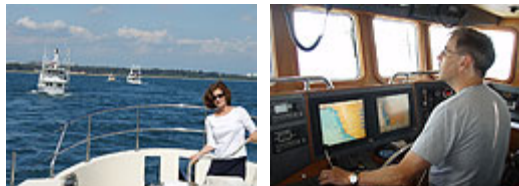


Our plan with Ta Shing was to give them a couple of hours notice before we would arrive so that they could be ready to receive us. Rachel had asked me to call by cell phone, but as I mentioned earlier, our SPOT devices allowed the Ta Shing gang to track our progress live on the internet. As we got about two miles out we were approached by a Taiwanese Coast Guard boat. We did not communicate with them over the radio. They just showed up and started with the lead boat, Sans Souci, by pulling around to their transom, then went to Grey Pearl to repeat this and finally

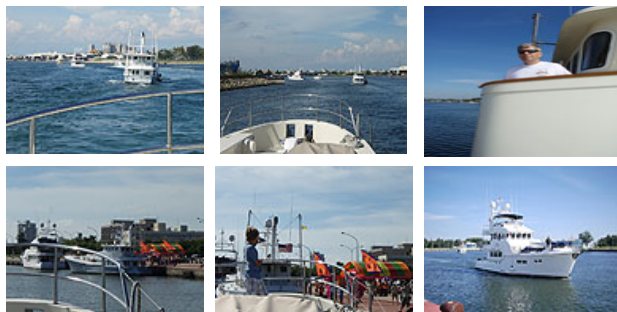
to us - it was obvious they were confirming our hull names to verify that we were, in fact, the three Nordhavns arriving to An Ping. We waved to the authorities who waved back and soon a larger Taiwanese Coast Guard boat came on the scene. As we followed our guide boat (sporting a US ensign) operated by the fishing boat captain Mr. Chen who was hired as our escort, we got into a single file line and began the entrance to An Ping harbor which is not well charted. (It was very nice to play follow the leader arriving into a strange new port.)



Passing through the harbor entrance we found ourselves bordered by floating fishing pens on each side. I had been a bit worried about the purity of the water in An Ping, I've been there several times before and it is a dirty, industrial port. What I didn't realize is that there are two An Ping harbors – the commercial one where I've launched and sea trialed new Nordhavns before – and the fishing harbor, a very pleasing sight to the GSSR making their Taiwan land fall. It's not a long entrance and as we were following Sans Souci and Grey Pearl we could hear drums. Loud drums, pounding a wonderful almost tribal rhythm. Carol was busy getting our dock lines ready while Jonn and I went outside to soak this all in. We saw our cohorts make the turn to port and as we came around the bend I was floored by the grand welcome that Ta Shing had planned. Here it was a Saturday afternoon and there must have been nearly 100 employees and family waving from the sea wall to greet us.



Ta Shing had organized a beautiful seawall for us to tie up to and a colorful curved tent centered a most festive greeting. We saw large flags fluttering in the breeze – both US and Taiwan and three large red dancing lions were undulating to the beat of the drums.



As the last boat to arrive, we had a wonderful view of the proceedings. Many eager Ta Shing hands were there to grab our mooring lines and there were lots of camera snapping and high

fives. As we tidied up and began to shut down I went to the pilothouse to check our numbers – we had just travelled 339 miles and landed at 15:43 making it a 46 hour trip. On the seawall were several very long red carpets that extended from each boat to the tent – what a reception! We stayed put while the Taiwanese Customs crew came aboard to take our passports and have us sign arrival papers. All of the formalities for clearing in had been carefully organized by Ta Shing so the process was seamless and took hardly any time at all. Looking out the window of the saloon I could see Lillian Huang, Rachel Tan and Cooli Lee waiting while our teammates departed their Nordhavns and walked the red carpet to the welcoming tent.



The exhilaration and thrill of being part of such an extraordinary display of welcome was a bit overwhelming, but underscored the appreciation and thoughtfulness of the Ta Shing staff. They have always been helpful and accommodating every time I have ever visited, but that has always been by plane, train and taxi, never by boat.

With our paperwork stamped and approved we walked out into the heat and disembarked from Seabird and stepped into the world of what celebrities must feel like. We were quickly adorned with bright leis and escorted along the red carpet to join our fellow sailors under the colorful tent that was plastered with a great big banner which said, “WELCOME HOME! SANS SOUCI, SEABIRD, GREY PEARL”



On hand to greet us was none other than Ta Shing president Tim Juan who shook hands and made us all feel like visiting heads of state. Nice cold Taiwanese beer and waters were passed around and we all reveled in the amazing display of friendship and honor that was bestowed upon us. As we said our hellos and had introductions Tim found bottles of champagne to present to each captain while each of the ladies of the GSSR were provided with a beautiful bouquet of flowers. What an absolute blast to be a part of this celebration. Before too long we gathered for photos and then each of the captains popped the cork and champagne was poured in glasses for a toast to our successful passage and festive arrival to Taiwan. We all basked in the glow of what a big deal this was for everyone involved, this monumental moment in time started to sink in as we all realized the significance of being the first Ta Shing build Nordhavns to ever return back to the nest – the fanfare and personal interest by every employee made this an unforgettable homecoming.



As glorious as the welcome celebration was, it was the other

details Ta Shing thought of that really showed how much they anticipated our needs – including a huge 130 kW generator to provide shore power to each boat and night watchmen to stand guard and prevent curious Taiwanese onlookers from just hopping aboard (which actually happened to Seabird) since after all we were parked on a public wharf.

The Ta Shing working crew was eager to get started on the projects that had been arranged and they immediately got on board and started looking at the work to be done, chatting and pointing and taking notes. Most employees have never seen anything other than a brand new Nordhavn, and since they always wrap them up with protective cardboard the workers rarely get to see a truly commissioned and completed boat. I'm sure they were thrilled to see how well their craftsmanship holds up to the rigors of time and ravaging of the sea – all three of these Nordhavns have been meticulously maintained and this seamanship is probably the best tribute the owners could provide to the appreciative workers.



We watched the dancing lions put on a very cool show that lasted nearly ten minutes. It occurred to me that this was more than just a traditional performance, it was a sort of spiritual link – three lions, three boats. Then it struck me: the routine was a re-enactment of the years each of the boats have spent “dancing” at sea, of all that had transpired since departing from the factory, and of their return to the place of their birth all these years later – happy, safe and in one piece.

I called Dan Streech, president of PAE, to let him know what an amazing scene was taking place and I could hear the pride in his voice that everything had come together so smoothly. It really was very moving and something that I wish everyone from Nordhavn could share in as there are so many people responsible for making this all happen.



The joy of seeing old friends and the shared enthusiasm of the assembled crowd was infectious as we all mingled around the dock and took photos. Even for the three crews who have partnered in dozens of arrivals it was something more than special. And for the employees of Ta Shing it was a homecoming that they had never expected to witness. It was a few very special hours in the lives of all in attendance that will provide unforgettable warm memories to be savored.

As the celebration begun to wrap up around 5pm Tim Juan invited all of the crew out for a grand welcome dinner so we went back aboard our boats to clean up. We were picked up in minivans and whisked out to town for a wonderful meal. It was a relief to be at the dock, tied up safely and finished with the underway part of our trip, but this relief, as much as it swells a sense of accomplishment, also triggers a sadness of being done.

We went to the Corner Steak House (sounds out of place, tastes great) and sat together as a large group at one table where we dined, toasted and reveled in the joy of all being together. For dessert a birthday cake came out and the assembled diners all sang Happy Birthday to me (my second birthday in Taiwan in the last three years – the Ta Shing folks really know how to make you feel welcome when you flip the calendar on their turf).

Back at the boats we were still keyed up, but retired to our rooms to the sounds of fireworks popping outside. A wonderful way to end our arrival day in Taiwan and we all quickly turned out the lights to catch some sleep.



Plans were made for the coming days to do some sightseeing and begin the repair projects that will be reported in the next installment of this journal, but before I close this entry I would like to once again offer a huge THANK YOU to everyone involved for making this wonderful adventure come true, especially our most gracious hosts, the entire crew of Ta Shing!



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