



# Clean, Sweet Wind: Sailing with the Last Boatmakers of the Carribean

*Douglas C. Pyle*

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A generation ago, before waves of tourism submerged traditional ways, Douglas Pyle spent half a decade sailing his small sloop from island to island in the eastern Caribbean, seeking out native whalers, fishermen, and traders to learn how they built their boats. *Clean, Sweet Wind*, his story of that time, is as much a portrait of an island people as it is a record of their work upon the sea. In these pages we glimpse a society as vivid as the aquamarine waters of the reefs and the patched sails of graceful boats.

As he explored the family traditions of the Antillean seafarers, Pyle found himself admiring one boatbuilder in particular, Haakon Mitchell of Bequia. Mitchell had been a fisherman until an accident cost him a hand; when Pyle met him, he and his sons were building a vessel for inter-island trade. Starting first as an observer, then as a helper, Pyle finally became one of the family, working on the new sloop each day and taking meals with Mitchell and his sons. Their lifelong friendship is a central theme of *Clean, Sweet Wind*.

But this is more than a lyrical evocation of a place and time. In his years among the islands Pyle collected information on all the different boat types sailing at the time. The second half of the book is a journey from Trinidad to the Virgin Islands, with a look at each type.

*Clean, Sweet Wind* captures Antillean speech, beliefs, and hospitality with as faithful an accuracy as it renders the graceful designs of Caribbean boats. The result is both a detailed study of traditional watercraft and one of the finest regional narratives yet written.

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