

# New-Age Noah of Obstruction Pass

RUMORS ABOUND THAT 85-YEAR-OLD APP Applegate is building his 80-foot cold-molded-wood brigantine, *Aproximada*, on an Orcas Island, Washington, mountain because he's waiting for the second Great Flood. Such scuttlebutt suggests a desperate man on the fringes of lucidity—which, after a few minutes of conversation with him, is clearly not the case. Applegate engages you, his eyes are full of life, and he has an infectious thirst for adventure and one last cruise.

To get to Applegate's construction site, you must first ascend muddy, pothole-ridden Pickett's Lane, which switches up the side of Mount Constitution. Near the lane's end, at an elevation of 400 feet, is the land that belongs to App Applegate.

The day of my visit, the sun is shining, and Applegate is stripped to the waist. He has a full white beard and clear, blue eyes. He's making iron mast bands, bending the metal strapping and welding the ends together. Seeing me approach, he stands up, a welding visor flipped up over his brow, and offers a welcoming smile. The "vessel," as Applegate calls it, is surrounded by large trees. Its fir-needle-strewn deck is 15 to 20 feet above the forest floor. Block-and-tackles hang from limbs, and rusty steel cables run down to the boat's hull. Welding machinery is sheltered with blue tarps, plastic sheets, and plywood.

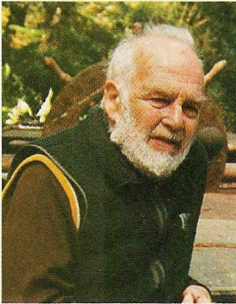
The overhanging transom is finished bright; across its breadth is stenciled *Aproximada* and, for a home port, Obstruction Pass, the name of a cut between Orcas and Obstruction islands, just off Rosario Strait.

*Aproximada*, which Applegate designed and has been 12 years building, isn't his first experience with a voyaging boat and

the sea. He began sailing when he was 37, and soon he became captain of *California*, a 65-foot schooner out of Honolulu. In 1970, he designed and built a 90-foot steel barkentine, *W.J. Eckert*, which he cruised along the Eastern Seaboard of North America. He has his commercial license—300 tons, all oceans.

Applegate's lifestyle is a study in simplicity. On a south-facing slope, he lives with his partner, Rivkah Sweedler, in an amalgamation of tarps, plywood, and blankets built 23 years ago for \$400. Inside, two chairs face a small pot-bellied stove nestled between steel tanks. Applegate, who

**Eighty-five-year-old App Applegate says his 50-ton brigantine *Aproximada* will be ready for a spring 2004 launch.**



has a master's degree in physics, explains that the tanks are filled with water to retain the heat of the stove. Electricity for a reading light and radio comes from a hydro-generator in a nearby stream and solar panels on the roof.

Life is good, and Applegate seems to be on target for a launch next spring. Still, there's the matter of getting the 50-ton vessel down to sea level. He tried, unsuccessfully, to hire a military cargo helicopter to lift *Aproximada* from her site. The current plan is to skid her down the mountain on a seven-ton steel plate with a D-8 Caterpillar tractor pulling and a D-6 chained to the stern as a break.

This will require a swath cut to the ocean and the permission of his neighbors. When asked if he foresees problems, Applegate breaks into a wide grin and quips, "I've got someone working on it."

**Bruce Halabisky**