

Force Four: Preserving a Family Legacy Through Craftsmanship and Care

EAST RIVER SHIPYARD



Introduction: The Force Four Story

Force Four is more than a sailboat — it is a family legacy built on decades of shared time on the water. Purchased in 1979 by three brothers and their father, Force Four was intended as a true family boat. At 30 feet, it was considered a sizable sailboat for the era, giving their father a comfortable and enjoyable retirement pastime.

When one brother later moved away, David and Keith assumed ownership and made the deliberate decision to keep Force Four. While they occasionally considered upgrading, the boat continued to prove itself as the right size — large enough to comfortably host friends and family, yet small enough to be handled solo.

Over the years, Force Four was used primarily for coastal cruising and family sailing, with very little racing. Today, it serves as a day-sailing boat, valued not by how often it is used, but by the freedom it provides. As David explains, having the boat available — ready to take family and friends out on the water — is what matters most.

Why Refit Instead of New?

Choosing to refit Force Four instead of replacing her was a decision grounded in practicality, craftsmanship, and sentiment.

From a technical standpoint, Jamie Amirault explains that Force Four was an ideal candidate for refit. Most C&C 30s currently on the market would require a similar level of work to reach the same standard. Replacing Force Four with a comparable vessel would likely involve costs two to three times higher than the full refit, without delivering the same build quality, known history, or connection to the boat. New sailboats in this size range come at a significantly higher price point, often with construction methods that lack durability.



Force Four prior to refit with her deck hardware stripped

Structurally, the boat was sound when it arrived at East River Shipyard. There were no major structural failures, and the hull itself remained strong — a testament to the quality of Canadian-built C&C construction. C&C Yachts earned a reputation for producing well-balanced, performance-oriented cruising / racing boats with clean lines and solid engineering. These boats were designed specifically for northern waters, with construction methods and hull forms well suited to the demanding conditions of the North Atlantic. Decades later, C&C yachts remain highly regarded for their durability, sailing characteristics, and timeless design — qualities clearly evident in Force Four.

For David and Keith, long-term ownership and consistent maintenance meant the boat never reached a state of neglect. Joint ownership also helped spread costs over time, allowing upgrades and refits to be handled incrementally rather than as a single overwhelming expense.

The decision to refit was ultimately triggered by the need to repaint the hull — a task typically done every 15 years. This time, with encouragement from Mike Wilson and Brad Boutilier, the scope expanded to include the decks, cockpit, and related systems. With “good bones” and decades of family history, refitting Force Four was the clear choice.

Initial Assessment

When Force Four arrived at East River Shipyard, the most visible issues were cosmetic, common for a boat of her age. Surface cracking, aging paint, and worn finishes were noticeable as the East River team began their assessment.

As the refit progressed and layers were stripped back, the condition beneath reflected a boat that had been well used and well loved. Years of exposure to Atlantic weather, salt air, tough winters, and long sailing seasons had taken their toll in predictable ways. These findings weren’t signs of neglect, but rather the natural result of decades spent sailing in harsh marine environments.

Addressing the age and environment-related wear points during a full refit ensured the boat could be properly sealed, protected, and finished — setting the foundation for a refit that would last for many years to come.

Key areas identified included:

- Hull paint degradation
- Worn and ineffective deck non-skid
- Aged teak needing refinishing
- Steering gear corrosion discovered during removal
- Replacement of fittings that no longer matched the scope of the project

What began as a cosmetic refit naturally expanded into a more comprehensive restoration to ensure the finished product would last.

The Refit Process

The refit was approached as a coordinated, multi-trade effort designed to maximize quality and longevity.

Work Sequencing & Coordination

The process began with full disassembly. All hardware, fittings, and components were removed so the team could address “dirty work” first — grinding, stripping, and uncovering any hidden issues. This ensured all necessary repairs were identified before refinishing began.

Once structural and repair work was complete, the shop was fully cleaned, the boat washed, and the environment prepared for finishing work. Throughout the project, trades worked in close coordination, ensuring each phase supported the next.

Owners were kept informed with photo updates showing progress from teardown through sanding, priming, and final paint.

Structural and Core Repairs

During stripping, several localized core repairs were identified. These areas involved the balsa core sandwiched between fiberglass skins — a common construction method for boats of this era.

Damaged core sections were removed and replaced using like-for-like balsa material, with preventative measures taken to properly seal and protect the new core. These repairs were critical to maintaining the boat’s long-term structural integrity and preventing moisture intrusion after refinishing.

Fiberglass Work

All fiberglass repairs were completed using high-quality vinyl ester resin rather than standard polyester. Vinyl ester provides superior bonding strength and durability, making it the preferred choice for structural and long-term repairs.

This approach ensures repaired areas are as strong — or stronger — than the original structure, rather than opting for faster, less durable fixes.

Carpentry and Rebuilds

Teak work throughout the boat was refinished rather than replaced. While largely cosmetic, maintaining existing teak is increasingly important due to rising costs and limited availability. Preserving original elements allowed the boat to retain its character while restoring functionality and appearance.

Mechanical and Systems Work

While Force Four did not require extensive mechanical upgrades, a significant steering issue was uncovered during disassembly. Corrosion was found in the plates supporting the steering system — a potentially dangerous condition that would likely have gone unnoticed without a full teardown.

The steering system was fully removed, repaired, refinished, and reinstalled, significantly improving safety and reliability.

Paint Preparation and Application



Paint preparation was extensive and meticulous. The entire boat was degreased and washed before sanding to prevent contaminants from being worked into the surface.

All damaged areas were ground out and repaired before priming. A high-build primer was applied and sanded to remove fine imperfections and ensure repairs were

Topsides have been repaired and faired, the first coat of paint is applied to the decks and cockpit

completely invisible. Final primers were carefully sanded, as any flaw at this stage would be magnified by the paint.

Keith and David chose to paint Force Four using the premium AWLCRAFT paint system. Three full coats were applied to achieve depth, durability, and a consistent finish. This system provides a superior finish that can be easily cleaned and buffed. AWLCRAFT is also easy to colour match and blend should the boat require future repairs. These factors all contribute to a long lasting finish.

On paint day, the shop was effectively locked down. Dust control, cleanliness, and environmental conditions were tightly managed, allowing the AWLCRAFT system to be applied under ideal conditions. The result was a light burgundy finish that David describes as “spectacular” and striking on the water.



Premium AWLCRAFT paint application

Final Finishing and Reassembly

Once painting was complete, all refinished and new components were reinstalled. Everything removed during teardown was either refinished or replaced to match the quality of the refit — ensuring no outdated components undermined the finished result.

Materials & Methods

Premium materials were selected throughout the project to ensure durability and ease of long-term maintenance:

- AWLCRAFT paint system for hull, decks, and topsides
- Vinyl ester resin for fiberglass and structural repairs
- Balsa core material, installed with enhanced sealing and moisture protection

On the decks, a three-step non-skid process was used. The deck was first fully painted, followed by spraying a granular non-skid material through a spray gun while the surface was still wet. A final sealing coat of paint was then applied to lock in the texture, creating a uniform, long-lasting non-skid surface. The results on Force Four are both functional and visually striking.

Together, these materials create a system designed to keep moisture out, preserve structural integrity, and extend the life of the boat well beyond the refit.

The Team Behind the Work

Force Four's refit was a collaborative effort, involving:

- **Jamie Amirault** — Project manager & team lead; structural repairs, windows, systems coordination
- **Tony Howlett** — lead painter (who also painted Force Four over 25 years ago)
- **Matt Sawler** — paint preparation and assistance
- **Chris Burton** — woodwork and refinishing

The project highlights East River Shipyard's strength in having skilled trades under one roof, supported by heated indoor storage and dedicated paint and fiberglass facilities — capabilities unmatched by other yards in the region.

The Finished Result

The finished result exceeded expectations. David describes the boat as “spectacular,” with the paintwork standing out both visually and in execution. Insurance appraisers were equally impressed, validating the quality of the work completed.

Clear communication, regular updates, and careful planning made the process smooth and collaborative from start to finish.



Force Four, restored and refit ready for the many seasons ahead

Why This Project Matters

Force Four represents what East River Shipyard does best: preserving well-built vessels through skilled craftsmanship, premium materials, and thoughtful project management.

For owners considering a refit, Force Four demonstrates what is possible when experience, facilities, and attention to detail come together. **This is what we do.**