

Tiana II— Scripting a life

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There are five Swan 76s sailing the seas of the world. Two of the ketches are British owned, one is West German, one is Greek, and one is *Tiana II*, owned by an American screen-writer named Stirling Silliphant. Traditionally, Swans that come out of the Nautor shops at Pietasaari, Finland, are white. *Tiana II*, which bears her name and her symbol—a red Vietnamese flower—on her transom, is black. Her cove stripe is gold. So much for orthodoxy.

At 0830 on a day in early summer, the black Swan is a study in contrasts. She is drawn up with her stern to an outer dock of a small marina in Viareggio, Italy, a town noted for two enterprises: producing the world's largest private yachts and catering to summer vacationers. Typically, there is no wind in this corner of the Mediterranean. The morning is warm and made hazy by industrial pollution.

A loud driving disco beat indicates that the occupants of the elegant yacht at the dock are very much awake, as are the crews of several lesser yachts that flank her. Their interest is drawn to the foredeck of the Swan where eight adults are grouped in various nonyachty costumes. They seem, albeit painfully, to be making movements linked to the music. Leading the group is a slim young woman with delicate oriental features. She is wearing bright yellow dancer's warm-up leggings, black arm warm-ups, and a brief red costume over black leotards.



"Bend," she says. "One, two, three, four. Stretch. Five, six, seven, eight."

This is the woman for whom the boat is named, Tiana Alexandra, a Vietnamese actress and dancer and martial arts expert. And around her is the cast with whom I am making this voyage. There's the owner, Stirling Silliphant, in his sixties, husky of physique, and despite the thick gray

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hair, unaccountably younger looking, as if he'd caught that California secret of eternal agelessness. Despite his intensity, he can twinkle when he wants to, and this morning he is in good humor as he goes along with his wife's exhortations. Also straining are the captain, Don Kuhn, a former Caribbean charterboat owner and skipper and retired Air Force B-52

navigator; two young American crewmen, mate Tom Laney and deckhand Philippe Danielski; the British cook, Cecily Waring; and the Swedish stewardess, Anne Marie Rogbrant.

Tiana, tiny and enthusiastic, isn't even breathing hard as she points one bare foot over her head. "On your toes, Stirling. One, two, three, four, higher Marty, five, six, seven, eight." Not participating are the children, Stirling, Jr., age six, and Melissa, thirteen, who are below.

So the day begins on *Tiana II*, a day like any

other when you are gunkholing a 76-foot ketch around that part of Mediterranean littoral known as the Ligurian Sea. Except that Silliphant wants more than harbor-hopping; he has made the boat something special—the vehicle for a way of life that some would call fantasy. Only a writer with the resolution and where-withal of someone like Silliphant could script it for himself.

Even in this entertainment-crazed age of cinema and video, Stirling Silliphant's name is not on the tongue of every American householder, but in the film and television community, Silliphant has a reputation as a man with a smoking typewriter, perhaps the fastest in the West. He is the writer-creator, and sometimes producer, of such TV series of blessed memory as "Route 66," "Naked City," and "Longstreet," and more than 200 hours of original TV drama. In some twenty-five years in Hollywood he has written twenty-six pictures, including *In the Heat of the Night* (for

In his "office" aboard *Tiana II*
Silliphant chats with son Stirling Jr.



Martin Luray

Tiana Alexandra leads aerobics as crew Phillipe Danielski (left) and Tom Laney follow. Right, underway under drifter

for cruising. Flush decks are okay for the guys who race. They don't have to live aboard for any length of time."

S&S came up with a deckhouse version, so *Tiana II* became one of two Swan 76s with that feature. The deckhouse is the center of the boat's activities, with a dining table, liquor cabinet (soon to be faced with stained glass), and stowage cabinets. There is a large nav station with full-size chart table and some of the \$100,000 worth of electronics on board—satnav, weatherfax, and a loran-C. The biggest surprise of all is the seating. Four high-backed screening room chairs face each other across the table.

The interior of the boat is surprisingly compact for such a large vessel. One stateroom with double berths amidships houses the Silliphant children, another the cook and stewardess. The owner's cabin aft has a dressing table and plenty of stowage and a private bath and work space for Tiana.

There is a separate full galley forward of the deckhouse with refrigerator, freezer, microwave oven, and gas stove, and forward of that are crew quarters with two small crew cabins plus the sail bins (*Tiana II* carries thirteen sails). A freshwater maker turns out 500 liters of sweet water a day. A 16-kilowatt generator turns out ac power for the machines that need it.

On deck, Silliphant's desire for some simplicity shows in the lack of furling gear; all sails are on hanks. The only concessions to muscle-saving are the power-driven sheet winches, the hydraulic backstays, and the pair of powered windlasses. His desire to keep the weight centered and the bow light led to an arrangement of grooved Teflon tracks leading from the bow anchor fittings to chain lockers about two-thirds of the way aft to the mast. The system, designed by Rod Stephens ("my guru," Silliphant says) keeps the anchor chain off the deck and led correctly as the anchor is being raised ("I'm an anchor fanatic," Silliphant says). All halyard winches are on the masts rather than on deck ("much easier on the back; we're not racing").

Where other writers would opt for a cabin in the Maine woods over a \$1.5

which he won an Academy Award), and *The Poseidon Adventure* and *The Towering Inferno* (for which he didn't).

The previous day, we anchored off Porto Venere, a town nestled in the seacoast mountains. We are talking in his "office" belowdecks. It is his private place, a stateroom that contains a small couch, desk with IBM Selectric II, a rather complete marine and medical library, files of marine reference material, and full communications equipment (SSB, ham radio, Morse decoder). Hanging over his desk are a pair of rather remarkable heavy bronzed surgical lamps that he found in Hollywood.

"The whole concept of this boat is to blend my cruising life with my working life," he says. "I have a seven-year plan to slowly circumnavigate the world and write at least twelve books [the first has been sold to Ballantine] based on a person named John Solo, a sailor who operates in the China 'lake'—the whole area of Borneo and Sumatra and Indonesia and Indochina and the South China Sea. For great personal reasons, while sailing, he takes 'cases' of a paramilitary nature, so he can use his experience as a guerrilla fighter." Silliphant plans to spend a lot of time in those same waters.

Like Silliphant himself, his character is in love with his boat. And how she handles. And the sea. His dream of circumnavigation is no different from that of others with the

globe-girdling itch. But Silliphant describes himself as a "predator" when it comes to devouring information that reappears in his writing. *Tiana II* "moves me around and helps me open up to the world. At the same time I'm able to sit down and work every day at the typewriter. That is the boat's function and purpose. As we go along I do two things. I input myself, and I try to educate my children about the countries we touch."

Some hours later as we motorsail along the coast to Viareggio, with Kuhn at the helm, a tour of the vessel makes it clear that Silliphant has

"Tiana II moves me around and helps me open to the world." Silliphant is a "predator" in devouring information

what he wanted, a "stock" Swan 76 customized to his needs and taste, but not, apparently, without a great deal of travail. *Tiana II*, hull #3 of the five built, has a deckhouse, which is not what Nautor had in mind when it solicited the first three buyers (of which Silliphant was one) to get the line started. Nautor favors flush decks for its Swans, as first designed by Sparkman & Stephens, but Silliphant would have no part of it.

"I insisted on a low deckhouse because I felt it would be comfortable





The Silliphants entertain critic Rex Reed, right, off Cannes. Gathering the drifter, left, Captain Kuhn works the foredeck

million ocean-going office, Silliphant opted for close combat with the builder in order to get what he wanted. He enlisted Rod Stephens's considerable design help and influence.

While the boat was in the finishing stages Stephens wrote to Silliphant frequently, with that tremendous precision born of experience, "To stiffen the mizzen and minimize the vibration, I suggest you install a single 26-inch strut at the point of attachment of the forward leading middle shroud originating at the fore side of the mast about 13 inches below the band."

When Tiana was ready for commissioning, Stephens traveled to Pietarsaari and went over her as if he were a human scanning machine. Nothing escaped his attention: "The mizzen sheet outer boom blocks should be a fiddle block on a transverse bail."

One of Silliphant's insistences was a \$3,000 option, a bullet-proof cock-

pit coaming fabricated by using Lexan inside the coaming mold. "If we are under fire, we hope we will be able to survive by getting down below coaming level." Neither Silliphant or Kuhn, who have been there, have any illusions about lawlessness in Southeast Asian waters. "I don't want to be somebody's victim, or somebody's meal," Silliphant says. (His fictional character, John Solo, feels the same. Anyone trying to attack within 300 yards is a dead man.)

Sitting in the cockpit, his life-jacketed son by his side, Silliphant muses, "God knows she's a great sea boat. She doesn't pound. She's taken everything we've put her through."

The Med at the moment couldn't be more unlike the North Sea the previous October when he and Don Kuhn and a Brazilian mate moved the boat from Finland to the south of France. "Our best day it was blowing Force 6. It was always on the nose with that horrible North Sea chop. One day, with the wind finally coming around to the beam we surfed at 14½ knots."

Hard sailing is what Silliphant likes. "There's some kind of wonderful when you're up there and taking whatever comes." He is not, therefore, turned on by our progress toward Viareggio. The boat is isolated, dream-like in the haze, moving along on autopilot. "It's like a desert down there," he says indicating the water. Clearly he is thinking about the Caribbean and about the sea off California's Point Loma where he grew up, mostly in the surf. The aft lazaret holds a compressor and four scuba tanks, but they have not yet been used.

Silliphant has been around water and sailing all of his life, first as a young man growing up in San Diego and then after returning to Los Angeles from New York where he had worked as a PR man for Twentieth-Century Fox. There have been a series of boats: two Hobies, a Ranger One-Ton, which he raced informally, and an Islander 36, which he single-handed. The Islander and the Silliphants moved from L.A. to San Francisco, where after sailing the deep water and consistent winds of the Channel Islands, he found himself going aground constantly. ("It got to be that if I didn't go aground I was bored.")

In 1979, Silliphant began thinking

about changing his lifestyle, and the search began for the perfect boat to effect that new commitment. He took his family to the Caribbean to cruise aboard Don Kuhn's 93-foot auxiliary ketch, *Harbinger*, and discovered that togetherness at sea was what they all wanted ("couldn't get Stir-Stir off the boat"), and the search eventually ended in Pietasaari with Kuhn hired as captain.

As it turns out, lifestyle aboard *Tiana II* is neither plain nor sybaritic, despite the boat's evident luxury. Silliphant's work is never far from his mind; he closes himself in his office when he needs to. *Tiana* and Cecily plan the menus. They shop at every port so there are always fresh vegetables and local sausage and fish on the table. *Tiana* is not inconspicuous on shore. At Porto Venere she wears sunglasses made of white shutterlike strips. The housewives watch quietly

When the black Swan heads out of the harbor, the mystery of her destination is known only to those on board

as she picks vegetables. Cheerfully she greets them in Italian, and gravely they respond. The shopkeepers are unfailingly polite. But heads turn as we walk through the narrow hilly streets of the town.

On board at Viareggio, *Tiana* confers with Anne Marie about the care of the children and the motortrip they will make tomorrow to Florence and Siena. Stirling confers with Kuhn about itinerary and boat problems and the care and feeding of crew. It is all done rather informally and quietly.

On the following day, the crew and I take *Tiana* south to Livorno (Leghorn) where the Silliphants are to rejoin the boat in the evening. There isn't enough wind to blow out a candle, and the smog and the haze make the shoreline a few miles away indistinct. The closer we approach the big seaport, the more freighters and tankers we find anchored off the coast. That night, the Silliphants safely on board, we pick our way through them with the use of radar, enroute to Elba, forty-five miles due south. The main is set, but the wind is still a dying

zephyr out of the east, so the diesel is again called upon. Silliphant, who had been expecting a fine breeze for sailing, settles down with some disappointment in a sleeping bag on a cockpit seat.

Elba is mainly known to Americans as the island where Napoleon briefly exiled himself in 1815 and, having nothing else to do is said to have invented the palindrome: "Able was I ere I saw Elba." To the Italians, Elba is to Tuscany what to Americans Martha's Vineyard is to Cape Cod: floods of vacationers offload the ferries and invade the place. We are anchored off the main channel in the U-shaped harbor of Portoferraio, and one trip in the inflatable to town is enough. We sit on board under an awning and talk and wait for enough breeze to come up to demonstrate the boat's sailing qualities. There is only a brief squall and shower followed by more light winds and a spectacular sunset that tints the castle where Napoleon lived.

In the morning, my last on board, I wake at 0630 to hear the unmistakable sounds of rising wind: the tugs at the anchor, the shriek of the shrouds, and the pounding of halyards against the masts. The leading edge of a front out of the southwest is spilling rain and wind gusts up to 25 knots, and Silliphant decides, after breakfast, that it is a fine time to go sailing. Under staysail, #3 jib, full main, and double-reefed mizzen, we head out of the harbor at about 9 knots, *Tiana II* needing just a little balancing and a little touch of the helm to respond. A quarter turn of weather helm is eased by letting out the traveler, and it's like eating salted peanuts, the sailing is so good we all crave more. But I have to leave after lunch, so we return to the anchorage.

Cecily prepares a buffet in my honor—small pizzas, fresh-baked local bread, ham, cheese, a kind of egg roll filled with raisins. We have been a family for five days, living comfortably with each other. Saying goodbye is not easy.

Later in the afternoon while waiting for the ferry, I see *Tiana II* heading out of the harbor under main, unmistakable with her black hull and low white deckhouse and long, sweeping sheer. The mystery of her heading is known only to those on board.

