

BLUE CABIN PROJECT

Reactivating Historical Artist's Studio

The **Blue Cabin Project** is an important restoration project currently underway to restore a floating artist residency. The Blue Cabin was the last remaining squatter's cabin on the Burrard Inlet foreshore. It sat in a cove along the western boundary of Cates Park from 1932 until 2015. It is so named because of its dominant blue exterior, a product of its last occupants, Al Neil and Carole Itter, both renowned artists. Al moved to the cabin in 1966, and Carole began her residency there in 1979.

Around that time, Al and Carole painted a blue to green gradient in 22 shades on two sides of the cabin's exterior. One side, impossible to reach with a paintbrush, remained as it had been when it was first decorated in 1927, the year it was constructed in Coal Harbour before being moved to the North Shore in 1932. This side has been preserved.

When development of the adjacent land threatened the existence of the cabin in 2015, several arts organizations raced to save it. Grunt gallery, Other Sites for Artists and C3 Society worked with the developer, Polygon, who generously paid for the cabin's careful removal from the Dollarton site. It was decided that the cabin would become the studio element of an artist's residency that

would float, on a barge, in the waters around Vancouver and North Vancouver. This decision notably ensures the continuance of the intangible heritage of fifty years of continuous use as a studio.

After careful heritage and engineering studies, Sus and Jeremy Borsos began working on the restoration. Every found artifact was photographed by the Borsoses, as was the entire restoration process, which has resulted in a photo archive of some four thousand images.

The Blue Cabin Project brings forward a desire and need for alternate modes of living and working, and expands our understanding of what constitutes public space.

All surfaces were carefully removed and numbered. The unusual northern European framework (it is said to have been built by a Norwegian) was carefully documented in new drawings. While removing the sub-flooring, over three dozen original entertainment posters from 1927 were discovered, detailing all man-

ner of cultural events in Vancouver—a synchronicity that powerfully underlines the cabin's future use.

All exterior siding was removed by cutting the nails from behind the boards, leaving the heads in place. Re-placing them using taper-headed screws presented a structure that appeared to have simply been repainted. Beneath the siding is a plywood rainscreen that allows air to circulate around the siding, making for an extremely secure structure. As well, insulation was introduced using Rockwool batts (invented in 1918), which now makes the interior energy efficient.

The exterior is embellished with seventy arched 'lunettes' on every wall perimeter. Inside, the decorative elements continue, including moulding between each ceiling board. The exterior paint represents possibly the first iteration of heritage restoration applied to a 1970's colour scheme. The Blue Cabin will undoubtedly continue to represent many firsts, for many years to come.



Project Organizers:

Jeremy Borsos lives and works on Mayne Island, British Columbia and in Athens, Greece. Jeremy's multidisciplinary practice includes writing, photography, installation, painting, and video. Together with his wife, Sus, they have developed a meta-historical use of salvaged architecture, constructing multiple dwellings and ancillary structures in both Canada and Europe.

Sus Borsos was born in Denmark and studied statistics and computer sciences at Copenhagen University before managing Scandinavian Stage Design, where she oversaw the creation of stages for major events in Europe in the 1980s and early '90s. Current projects include working with Jeremy on the restoration and repurposing of the Blue Cabin as a studio component of a floating artist's residency, after which she will redesign and rebuild a studio and living space in Athens, Greece.



Above: *The rescued cabin is secured in an interim location, August 2016. Two assemblages made by the artists are wrapped on either side of the entry.*

Photo credit: Marco Simic

Left: *The Blue Cabin arrives from interim storage to the restoration site at Maplewood Farm in North Vancouver, June 2017.*

Photo credit: Jeremy Borsos