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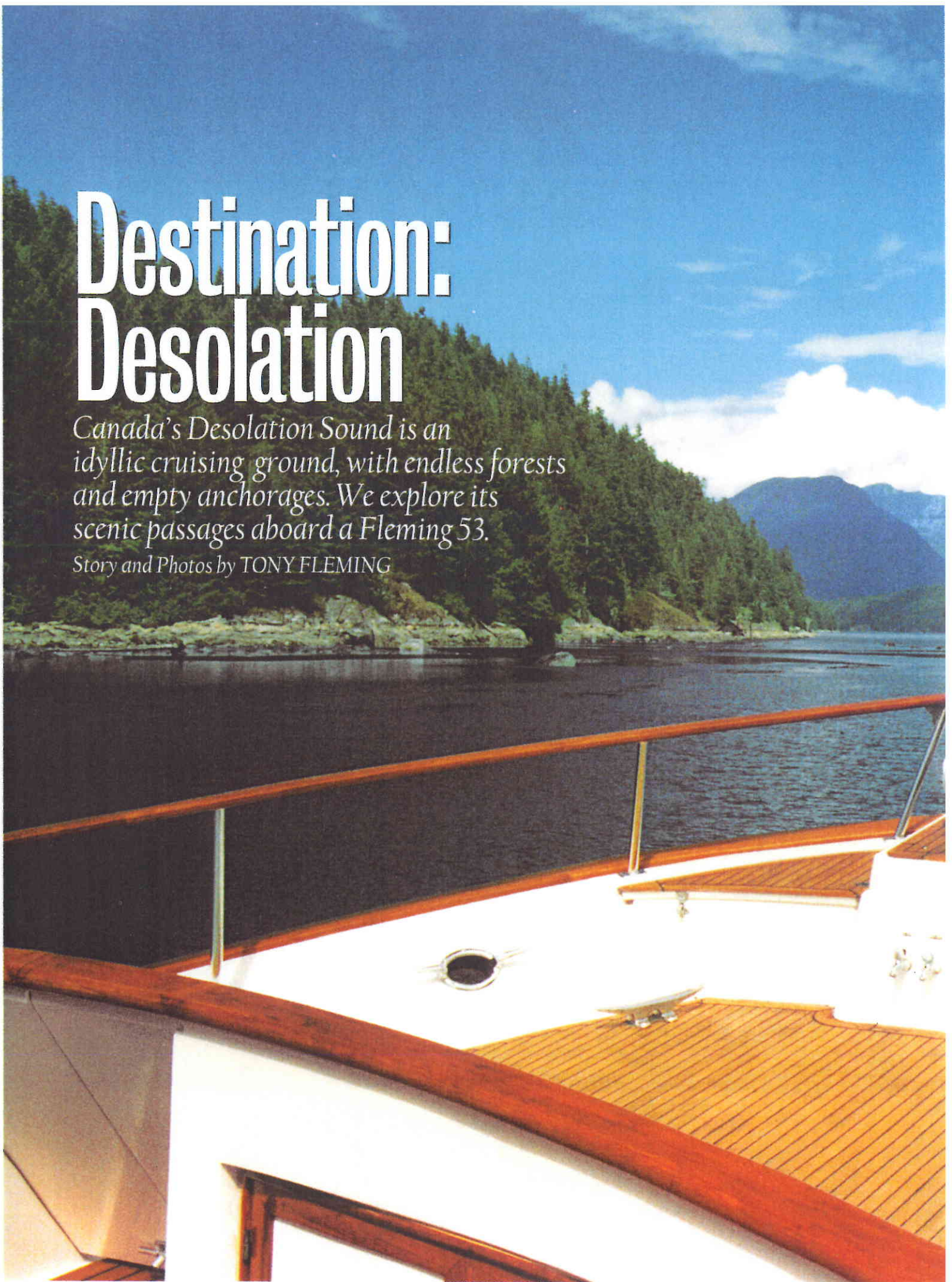
FLEMING YACHTS, INC.

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# Destination: Desolation

*Canada's Desolation Sound is an idyllic cruising ground, with endless forests and empty anchorages. We explore its scenic passages aboard a Fleming 53.*

*Story and Photos by TONY FLEMING*







**VIRGIN SHORELINE:** Forests surrounded the Fleming throughout its entire cruise along the secluded passages of Desolation Sound.





**GORGEOUS DESOLATION:** The Fleming 53 in Whiterock Passage (opening spread) and anchored in Handfield Bay (above and below).

One of the first sailors to visit the waters east of Vancouver Island was not impressed by what he saw. "Our residence here is truly forlorn," he wrote. "An awful silence pervades the gloomy forests whilst animated nature seems to have deserted the neighboring country." The writer, none other than Captain Vancouver himself, called the place "Desolation Sound."

A few hundred years later, I was privileged to visit this area and discovered that its name is stunningly inapt. My guide was Dick Clayton, who has cruised these waters for many years, and who thinks nothing of heading out by himself in search of salmon in his Fleming 53 *Divona Sea*.

Vancouver Island is separated from mainland Canada by the Strait of Georgia, the northern end of which loses it-

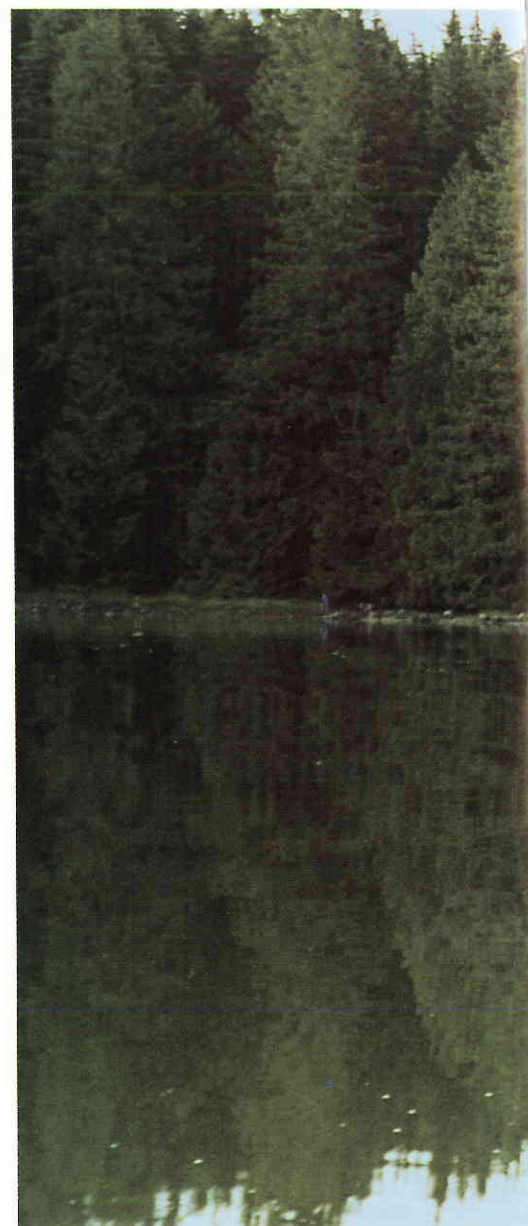
self in the maze of channels and passages of Desolation Sound. Here, among the Discovery Islands, are some of the world's most idyllic cruising grounds. And they are within easy cruising distance from cities like Vancouver or Victoria. In fact, within a few hours of leaving bustling city streets, you can find yourself in an empty cove, surrounded by rugged scenery, and breathing air fragrant with the tang of the fir, cedar and hemlock forests that clothe the surrounding mountains.

Although little remains of the original forest, there are trees everywhere—marching in green battalions across the landscape, sprouting from crags and teetering so close to the shore they can be used to secure your stern lines. But high on the steep slopes, bald scars in the evergreen mantle mark the sites of recent clearcuts. The resulting

booty is formed into rafts as large as football fields which dwarf the tiny tugs that wrestle them across the water. We caught the aromatic whiff of resin each time we crossed their swirling wakes.

Renegade logs, floating just below the surface, demand a sharp lookout. "Watch out when you see seagulls standing on the water," Dick cautioned, pointing to a trio of seemingly unsupported gulls bobbing up and down on stiff,

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**PILOTHOUSE PROTECTION:** The Fleming 53, with its enclosed pilothouse, is the perfect Northwest cruiser.

pink legs. And not far from the gulls, a pair of acrobatic seals, their sleek bodies curved like seasoned circus performers, rode an almost invisible dead-head.

We spent our first night in Melanie Cove—an offshoot of Prideaux Haven which, at 18.4 feet, has the highest tidal range on the coast. Dick made sure the anchor chain had ample scope with room to swing and that we had enough water under the keel so that low tide or a change of wind would not leave us high and dry on the beach.

The following morning, clouds hung low across the water, hiding from view the surrounding 7,000-foot peaks. Occasional shafts of weak sunlight pierced the gloom and reflected off the surface, turning it to silver. The chart showed depths of 2,400 feet beneath our keel. We got under way in good time so as to reach the Yuculta Rapids at slack water.

Despite the impressive tidal range, currents in the channels rarely exceed 2 knots, but they sweep through the passes in powerful torrents. Dick explained that the tidal surge from the southern end of Vancouver Island takes about two hours longer to reach the passes than that from the north and so, by the time the tide from the south has peaked, the flow from the north has already reversed its direction. At places only a mile or two apart, sea levels can differ by as much as three feet and the battle to equalize gives birth to a maelstrom of rips, eddies and whirlpools.

### Nervous as a prima donna

We arrived exactly on time and, in company with a small fleet of other boats, left the aptly named Calm Channel and headed for the more turbulent Cordero Channel. Even at slack, the water seemed as nervous and unpredictable as a prima donna on opening night. Miniature whirlpools tugged at our hull and roiling upwellings belched from the surface. The whisked-up water danced with the jerky movements of a crowd of strobe-lit disco dancers.

Dick took the Fleming through the

rapids at a sedate pace, keeping a watchful eye on our wake. Too often, powerboats blast through the passes at high speeds, seemingly unaware that their wakes can combine with the fast-moving water to produce waves that hit the shore with an enormous destructive force.

But the passes act as filters, separating boaters who have neither the time nor the confidence to navigate them from those who want to see what lies ahead. The anchorages south of these choke points tend to be more crowded, with water that's 20 to 30 degrees warmer. But the passes don't pose any threat to a well-built boat—provided that they are navigated at slack. There is a catch, however: The interval of calm is often only a matter of minutes and it is essential to consult the tide tables and make sure your watch is accurate. If you time it wrong, you could be facing a tidal stream of 9 knots in Yuculta or an even more ferocious 16 knots at the infamous Seymour Narrows.

We continued up Cordero Channel and, after a brief excursion through Greene Point Rapids, turned into Mayne Passage past the small community of Blind Channel.

Leaving East Thurlow Island to port, we entered Johnstone Strait, which is the main route to Alaska used by cruise ships and commercial traffic. Along the way we kept a sharp lookout for floats marking lines of shrimp traps and gill-nets. If you cut them loose you could be legally liable not only to replace what you've damaged but also to compensate the owner for what income he considers as lost.

It's a tough job, shrimping in these waters. You have to be highly motivated to set pots in water as deep as 300 feet. Besides it being a long way to pull up a line of traps, if you leave them down too long—as Dick did on one occasion—your haul might be a trap bursting with crabs surrounded by piles of empty shrimp cases.

Squadrons of float planes use the channels as flyways, bringing fishermen to and from the lodges where they fish for coho and steelhead. Wild fish were in short supply this season but cultivated stock were doing well. During the late afternoon, we passed a

salmon farm and were invited to stop and take a look. The floating pens were alive with silvery fish destined to migrate no farther than a diner's plate.

That evening we enjoyed our own barbecued salmon steaks, accompanied by a bottle of chilled Chardonnay. It was a picture-perfect setting. Overhead, scarlet ribbons of cloud radiated above the trees and reflected in the looking-glass surface of the anchorage.

### Panorama of peaks

The following day, Dick threaded *Divona Sea* through the winding channels of the rocky, tree-clad Octopus Islands. We launched the dinghy and I went ashore to comb the beach, and then climb among the pines and brambles, photographing the Fleming in what most certainly looked like her natural habitat. The gray mists of the day before had given way to brilliant blue skies piled high with great pillows of clouds. For the first time we were able to enjoy the panorama of snow-capped peaks from the grandstand of the flying bridge.

In Okisollo Channel the tide was in full spate. We bypassed the turbulent entrance to Hole-in-the-Wall and, allowing the 8-knot stream to seize our hull, swept through Surge Narrows in a grand glissade. Once free of the current, Dick turned *Divona Sea* into the crooked arm of Whiterock Passage. He took care to line up the range markers to the dogleg at its center and then, by looking aft, followed the reverse ranges out of the narrow channel toward the Rendezvous Islands.

Captain Vancouver spent more than three weeks exploring these waters. And despite the name he gave it, Desolation Sound is the gateway to an almost limitless choice of gorgeous cruising grounds and delightful destinations. Most can only be reached from the water—which is surely one of the best reasons to visit them. Perhaps it's time to change the name to Destination Sound.

For more information about the Fleming line, contact Fleming Yachts Inc., Dept. MB&S, 510 31st St., Suite H, Newport Beach, CA 92663. (714) 723-4225.