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Crossing the Threshold with Mir

Ahoy sea-faring friends and colleagues who have joined us since 1997 when Planetary Coral Reef Foundation (PCRF) (a project of the Biosphere Foundation) first began its long term collaboration with Raffles Marina. Since then we have chartered two vessels and are now proud owners of lovely sailing vessel Mir, a 1910 classic Bermuda ketch. This year marks a threshold for us because Mir has been transformed from an old broken ship to a lovely sea-faring vessel.

From October 2011 to April this year, a volunteer team took off the old wooden deck of Mir and replaced it with a steel deck expertly accomplished through the enormous support of ASL Shipyard, Senagali Marine and DEEPBLUE. We are so grateful to all of our many sponsors and dear friends who guided us and helped us through these challenging months as well as to Raffles Marina - the homeport and safe haven for Mir and her crew.

Now, with the decision to base Mir in Asia and through the many hands that worked along her deck at ASL Shipyard, Mir has earned the beauty of her name - a Russian word defining world community and peace. She is a planitary ship constructed over the years as a unique blend of English and western traditions and engaged in work to help steward the well-being of our oceans. Although her homeport is in Asia, she now has the capacity to sail the world's oceans.

In the years ahead, Mir will cycle between its marine conservation projects in NW Bali, the Anambas Islands (South China Sea) and the Indian Ocean Marine Mammal Sanctuary based in Sri Lanka. Raffles Marina is our hub and mission control providing the much needed safe harbour and support of our growing Singapore community.

I have spent my life sailing the world's oceans since first arriving on board a ship in Sambou at the age of 12. For the last 30 years I have been responsible for repairs and maintenance of each ship that Biosphere Foundation chartered. Of all the many dry docks, this one was the most extraordinary. I am humbled by the generosity and goodwill from the 100s of local residents and was engaged in work to help steward the well-being of our biosphere. Although her homeport is in Asia, she now has the capacity to sail the world's oceans.

Thank you for honouring our work and giving us this help to get Mir back to sea to inspire stewardship of our biosphere.

Mark Van Thillo
May 14, 2012

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The Crew of Mir