



Sailing Saga South

ORIGINAL DUTCH TEXT BY MAYA TOEBAT
EDITED BY IZZY WEDDERBURN, FEATURING VINCENT LEROI
PHOTOGRAPHS BY ZEGER DOX

OPENING LOG: WORDS BY ZEGER DOX

ZEGER JOINED VINCENT FOR THE VOYAGE
FROM PORTUGAL TO MOROCCO IN LATE 2024.

January 1st, 2025 – Sunrise

The sun shyly peeks over the horizon as I roll out of my bunk and poke my head through the hatch to check on Saga. Captain Vince is already at the helm, eyes barely open, grinning from ear to ear.

“High on caffeine and high on life, amigo. Bienvenue au Maroc!” he shouts.

Light spills across the water as the Moroccan coast comes into view. After a long night of lightning and rain, the promise of safe land feels surreal. The swell has calmed, the wind has softened. We’ve made it.

The dream of sailing south on this little boat – his boat – is unfolding, quietly, completely.

It all started a few years earlier in Amsterdam, where Vince was working odd jobs to save money for a journey he could barely imagine but couldn’t stop chasing.



Original Dutch text by Maya Toebat. Edited and translated for New Mountain Magazine Issue 2.

Somewhere, deep down, Vincent Leroi had always dreamed of a life at sea. He just had to find the courage to chase it – and a boat to carry him there. In the end, it was an encounter with a stranger on a rainy day that nudged him towards the horizon.

What followed was a slow, chaotic, and sometimes overwhelming journey – one that took him from the forests of Belgium to the waters of Cornwall, Portugal and Morocco, and back again.

Vincent didn't grow up in a sailing family. He had no formal training, no inherited knowledge. "But the pull was always there," he says. "From the beach, I used to watch ships disappear into the horizon. It was the unknown that drew me in."

While studying photography in Ghent, Belgium, he bought a little boat – a way to escape the city with friends and float out to quiet cow pastures. But the real shift came when he met Rik, an old sailor. "You know what you need?" Rik told him. "A ship with sails."

The words hit hard. "He didn't try to convince me," Vincent remembers. "He just saw something in me – something I hadn't yet dared to act on. I laughed, I cried. But I knew then: I was ready to leave."

His parents had been paying for his student flat, so he pitched an idea: what if they fronted a year's worth of rent in one go? With that, he could buy a boat and live aboard. The plan worked. He found a small vessel in the Netherlands – *Lady of the Sunshine* – and sailed it back to Ghent via the Westerschelde. Neither he nor his friend had any experience. "It was chaos. Strong currents, massive cargo ships... total panic. I wouldn't recommend it to anyone."

But he stuck with it. For over two years, Vincent lived aboard Lady, sailing Dutch waters until the boat eventually gave out. "Selling her broke my heart," he says. "Boat life had become part of my identity. Especially when you sail solo – you become one with your boat, like a snail with its shell."

He found his next boat in Denmark: Saga, a Scandinavian design inspired by Viking ships. "It was love at first sight," he grins. "Butterflies in my stomach. She's got this pointed stern, a beautiful curve – a proper little pirate ship."

The previous owner, a Danish captain, had Parkinson's and could no longer sail. Vincent and his partner, musician *Camille Camille*, joined him for a final voyage.

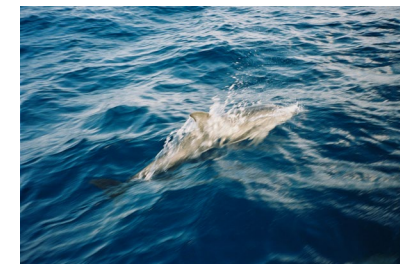


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"He didn't just want to pass on the boat – he wanted to pass on his love and passion of the sea. It was emotional."

Saga was seaworthy but not liveable. Vincent moored her in Amsterdam and spent the next two years rebuilding: epoxy, electrics, solar, plumbing. All done on a shoestring, in freezing winters, while giving canal tours to fund the work. "This was the hardest thing I've ever done. You have to really want it. It takes everything."

"Sometimes I wonder why I do this. I'm not a 'merman'. Water and wind overwhelm me. But maybe that's why I keep doing it – to learn how to stay calm in the storm."

In 2023, he finally set sail. His first crossing took him to Ostend, then across the Channel to Cornwall with Camille and a close friend. There, he found kinship in others living off-grid on boats – not wealthy yacht owners, but dreamers with patched sails and weathered hulls.

Plans changed constantly. "That's just how sailing is – you learn quickly that the sea doesn't care

about your schedule." From Portugal to Morocco, a surprise weather window opened – just enough to reach Essaouira in three nights and four days. Along the way: lightning storms, bioluminescent seas, and a delicate butterfly landing on the helm in open water.

"The last night, the sea was pitch black. The horizon vanished into the stars, and the water lit up with blue algae. It felt like Saga was flying through space."

Life on board was simple, quiet, and intense. Sailing in shifts, cooking with one hand while bracing the boat with the other, anchoring in remote coves with no road in or out.

"You get hungry in a different way. Your body is constantly adjusting. Eating becomes a ritual – the highlight of long, repetitive days."

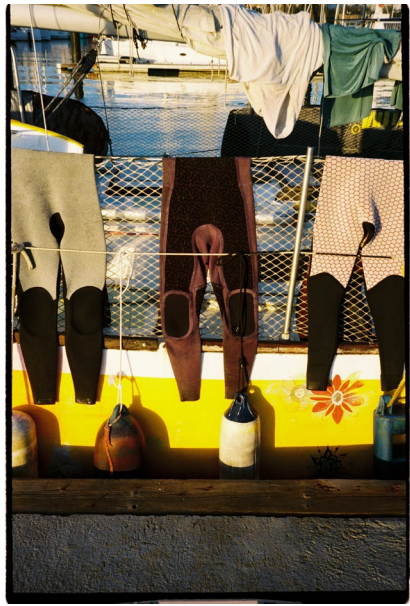
And yet, with the joy came solitude. "I made an open call on Instagram: 'Anyone want to sail this week?' And someone showed up. Around Christmas, my brother and Zeger joined us – we barely knew each other then."



Why do I always run? Looking for the right place to find peace, empty my mind? As if I'm trying to find something. Not knowing what that something is exactly. 'It', the thing I'm always looking for. Feels like some kind of treasure awaiting to be found, awaiting to be discovered. After many attempts to find It, I came home empty handed. But if there is one thing I've learned throughout the years of my search for 'that non-physical something I can't name,' what I've learned is that 'It', is not to be found in one particular place. At least not for me. I have come to the realisation that 'It' is scattered. As if 'It' once landed on this planet like a meteorite, and scattered into a million pieces. All these scattered fragments can be found in all shapes and forms. I did already find some of this scattered-ness. I found it in the sand by the ocean, or in the forest at the foot of a hill. I have seen it in between the feathers of birds, and in the shapes of trees. I found it to be scattered in the hearts of some people I've met, as well as in the eyes of a girl. But it's a very strange and complex thing, this treasure. It acts like a rainbow. Sometimes, you can see It, feel It. At that very moment, It all makes sense and I end up believing I found It. But then, little by little or all of a sudden It disappears again. It fades away, It changes. Then 'It' makes you feel like you've come home empty handed. I made many attempts to photograph It, but a photograph can never evoke the same power as the experience itself. That's the biggest quest for all kinds of artists, I believe. The ability to transform feelings and emotions into matter, sound or movement.

Vincent Leroi





After four years afloat, Vincent is now back in Belgium, living quietly and working on a bio farm.

“Boat life doesn’t always make you happier,” he says. “It made me feel both utterly exhausted and completely rich – and I didn’t have a cent left.”

He left Saga moored on El Hierro, one of the Canary Islands, waiting for the next expedition. “I want to live on land now. To choose when I return to the salt, the wind, the thrill. The next dream is to find a bit of land, build a small farm with Camille and friends. Saga will be for adventures – maybe to Scandinavia, or Senegal.”

“Sailing taught me this: it never goes the way you planned. You have to adapt, let go, move with it. I learned to deal with stress. But most of all, I learned to live in the moment. Not the past, not the future – just this. This is the moment I’m doing it for.”

