

# Bart Verschoor – From Sailor to Architect

By Bep van Houdt



**Windsurfing was first part of the Olympic programme in 1984. Four years later Bart Verschoor competed in Division II, a board made by the Austrian firm Lechner.**

Photo: Sjaak van der Linden

Bart Verschoor and I hadn't met since 1988. In the last week of September that year we said goodbye in Pusan, in the south of South Korea. I remember the last interview I had with the Dutch windsurfer. He had just missed winning out on a bronze medal and, now meeting him again in 2016, he was still angry about the American who, in his view, more or less stole the third place from him.

It shows the right spirit in a former sportsman, who has since become an architect and built his own wooden house in the north of Amsterdam, close to the water Y (eye) that divides this charismatic city.

It was pure coincidence I found Bart again, through social media, which flagged up his birthday. I congratulated him and he wrote back, "*Dank je* (Thanks), Bep". I saw he had an atelierstudio. Google, google, google and I found his wooden house via [www.atelierbart.nl](http://www.atelierbart.nl) and we made an appointment for an interview. I took the train to Amsterdam and then the ferry, which reaches the other side of the canal in five minutes. There stood Bart, 29 years older than when we last met, with and now sporting a beard. The sailor with an angel face, was now aged 51 years and looked a bit like a gipsy. But a nice genial gipsy, very socialable and friendly.

An old car brought us quickly to his home. His castle. "With five friends we built this house in three days." Downstairs is his workplace, the first floor is their living quarters and the family sleeps on the top floor. He is home alone; his wife, Annemarie, works in the movie business and the kids are at school. The house is complete, but his ideas are still churning. On the other side of the house he wants to build a guesthouse – Amsterdam is very popular with tourists. It all started when the city council offered inhabitants the chance to buy land. Bart bought and started to build.

Part of the change in direction in his life stems from Pusan. The disappointment of not winning a medal – the man who was 1987 *Rookie of the Year* and won the prestigious Dutch Conny van Rietschoten Trofee (named after the famous sailor) – changed his attitude. As the Dutch say: "Knop om."

So what happened in Pusan? A low low-ranked American by the name of Mike Gebhardt had a bad result in one particular race. Bart: "I think he made tactical errors but he claimed he had problems with his daggerboard." And where the sailors every day by draw got another boat Gebhardt thought he had a reason to complain. So he went to the jury and got an average of the other races he had sailed, that eventually lifted him from a place near the thirties and in the end brought him one point and a third place, just above Bart Verschoor.

Bart was angry: "From the start I had the feeling something was wrong and it took me long time to forget. I had been working so hard for a good result. Because I had to weigh less than 64 kilogrammes, I had eaten only salads – , until I met Dutch sports doctor

Peter Vergouwen. He put me on a high-energy diet. In Pusan I bounced the waves up and down." Until he was surprised by the American: "A long time I had the feeling the result was based on the unfair claiming of a better result for him. It was possibly the American way of fighting. I learned from this case but it didn't make me think like him. Now, after 30 years, I realize unfair or not is part of the game and that altogether it was a wonderful experience."

There was another surprise. Before the Olympics, Bart had been practising with fellow Dutchman Jan Boersma on the North Sea, off the Scheveningen coast, and had beaten him to the one place on the team for Pusan. Jan went on to get citizenship of the Dutch Antilles and, amazingly, won silver. "He came out of the blue", Bart says. "I never, ever, had thought he would finish in front of me."

Bart didn't win an Olympic medal he always had dreamt of. What he did win, however, was an everlasting friendship with New Zealander Bruce Kendall, gold medal winner in Korea. The two still meet. Relationships in the yachting world are as important as anywhere else.

Bart went to build yachts in England during the winter and in the hot and warm months of the year sailed in France, Spain and Italy. He became something of a gypsy, revelling in the sea, sun, harbours and girls.

In 1991, he was different man to the angel face who in 1983 had been introduced to Annemarie by a friend, and spoken with her for an hour. Eight years later he saw her cycling by in the famous Vondelpark in Amsterdam. "Hi Annemarie" he shouted. She was attractive, and he was unlike any of her other friends. At that moment he told her, "I'm going with you, I want to discover other things in my life. My gypsy life ended [so he said! BvH], I chose Annemarie for the love of my life."

He had been introduced to boating by his father at an early age. Of his father he said: "He had built bridges in the war but worked as an advisor thereafter. To escape from work, he went out to sail. Every holiday we had was in a sailboat. He was a dabbler and I became a dabbler too. I made the *smeedvuur*, forging heat, made ironwork. If you can handle a shovel, you can handle everything." Bart went to technical schools "until I ended on the windsurfer". After the Olympics and boatbuilding, he read a magazine about fine woodworking "and was hypnotised from that moment. I started to spend all my money on woodworking machinery."

Bart and his wife and children started to rebuild a tram garage in the western part of the Dutch capital and convert it into a home. The couple both worked part-time, and shared the care of the children to save money on kindergarten. For ten years he built everywhere, earned a lot of money, but lost his identity: "I lost myself", he says. "I wanted to be out in the open, and I got depressed. My wife lost the sailor in me. After two



years I found out the pressure during the professional sailing had been too much." Moreover: "because of the constant tugging the on ropes, my hands, – and in particular my tendon ducts, – had suffered from overloading. I sought and found a place where I could work."

He shows relief: "My wife saw me coming alive again, I got my confidence back and thought: This is the moment I have to succeed. The city offered groundland, we bought it and built a house much cheaper than you if could you buy one. After all this these years I can really say: I'm a lucky man."

When after a few minutes outside the room he asks me on return if I'd like a baked egg.

"I would very much love that", I reply.

"I thought so," says Bart, "it's already done". ■

**Bartolomeus „Bart“ Verschoor: from the sonnyboy of 1988 came a self-made man who builds houses of sustainable material.**

Photos: Bep van Hout



Sir Hugh Robertson (right) has succeeded Lord Coe as Chairman of the British Olympic Association (BOA). A former Minister for Sport, he continues of long tradition of parliamentarians in this role. In 1905, the founding BOA Chairman Lord Desborough had been a member of parliament (MP) and two of Robertson's immediate predecessors, Coe and Lord Moynihan also served in parliament. (PB)