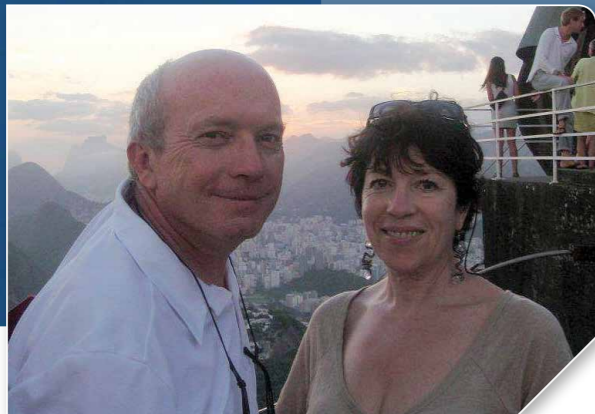


Gérard Dubreil with his family.



LIFE AT SEA

Gérard Dubreil has been a Master at sea for over twenty-five years, captaining ferries, sailing vessels, cargo ships and offshore construction vessels before joining the *Seven Oceans* one year ago, following a 10 year-spell on the *Seven Polaris*.

Currently working in Brazil on the Guarúlula NE project, his first year with the vessel has already reflected the diversity of skippering one of the most versatile and highest-performing vessels in the industry.

"I started on Statoil's Skuld project in Norway, which is just outside the Arctic Circle, and then we spent the winter on Total's Laggan-Tormore project West of Shetland – both very challenging projects. Brazil is a pleasant contrast, especially in a weather sense, although

still harsh from time to time with crossing swells and sudden wind gusts," he says.

Although not from a seafaring family, Gérard and his best friend in his native Brittany, France, decided to go to sea in their late teens. More than forty years on, he is one of a very small proportion of graduates from the French Merchant Navy school to stay the course.

Gérard's experience has taught him always to prepare for the worst, and never to relax standards on board.

"You don't want to be caught working on safety housekeeping during a storm," he stresses.

Like many experienced mariners, he relies on both advanced satellite predictions and traditional warnings of impending bad weather. "When you see little seabirds landing on the bridge of your vessel, you know there is very bad weather ahead," he reveals. "In the Gulf of Mexico I saw hundreds of birds sheltering on the helideck, and they were right – it was a very bad storm!"

He is full of praise for the crew on the *Seven Oceans*. "Although we have many different nationalities on board, there is great teamwork. We all communicate very professionally, and everyone is totally dedicated to the vessel, which is not necessarily always the case at sea.

"As Captain, it is my responsibility to ensure everyone is attentive at all times to the safety of their colleagues and the vessel itself. This commitment is maintained in a number of ways.

"We can have up to 35 different nationalities on board, and everybody has a role to play in ensuring safe operations are sustained, so one of the great challenges is effective communications.

"The greatest satisfaction every Captain can experience is very simple – it's when nobody has been injured in any way during a campaign."

Looking back to his early days at sea, Gérard reveals a unique first posting as a Captain when he was thirty. "As part of my National Service, I served as a skipper for fourteen months on a three-mast schooner sailing all over the Atlantic.

"The unusual thing about this posting was the crew. The vessel was owned

by a humanitarian association and five of the thirty people on board were drug addicts undergoing rehabilitation. The theory was that being at sea, mixing with people with different motivations in a clean environment with no previous associations and no medical assistance, gave them a chance to break their old habits and change themselves for the better.

"I found this posting tremendously satisfying on a human level, but, although successful, my military service ended and I had to move on to a more conventional career at sea."

Despite having spent a sizeable portion of his life at sea, Gérard is equally content in his native Brittany, cycling along the coast, kayaking and exploring his favourite vineyards with his wife Michelle. "Perhaps you have heard what they say about skippers – 'lions at sea, sheep at home'?" he jokes.

Away from the family home, his other favourite place, is much further north. "I greatly enjoy sailing up the Norwegian fjords when we head to Vigra for pipe spooling – this great vessel makes an amazing sight in such spectacular surroundings."

Despite his lengthy career at sea, Gérard has lost none of his enthusiasm for the world of offshore construction and pipelay. "I still get a buzz out of working in this dynamic, innovative industry," he reveals. "Although we have been working offshore for about fifty years, this is still very much a new industry and I want to go on working in it for some time yet.

"I'm currently learning Portuguese because of the all the work we have coming up in Brazil, and I aim to be fairly fluent in what will be my third language in a year or two.

"It's good to go on setting yourself fresh challenges – I've done this all my life and I think it's why I still enjoy my role as Captain as much as ever."



One of Gerard Dubreil's favourite places: sailing the *Seven Oceans* through Norwegian fjords on her way to our spoolbase in Vigra spoolbase.

