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TAKE AN ANGLER WITH A WILL, ADD A SKIPPER WITH A WAY, AND MIX IN CHALLENGING CONDITIONS AND WORLD-CLASS BLACK MARLIN. HERE'S WHAT YOU GET.

# The Grand Plan

TEXT BY JASON Y. WOOD PHOTOS BY SCOTT KERRIGAN



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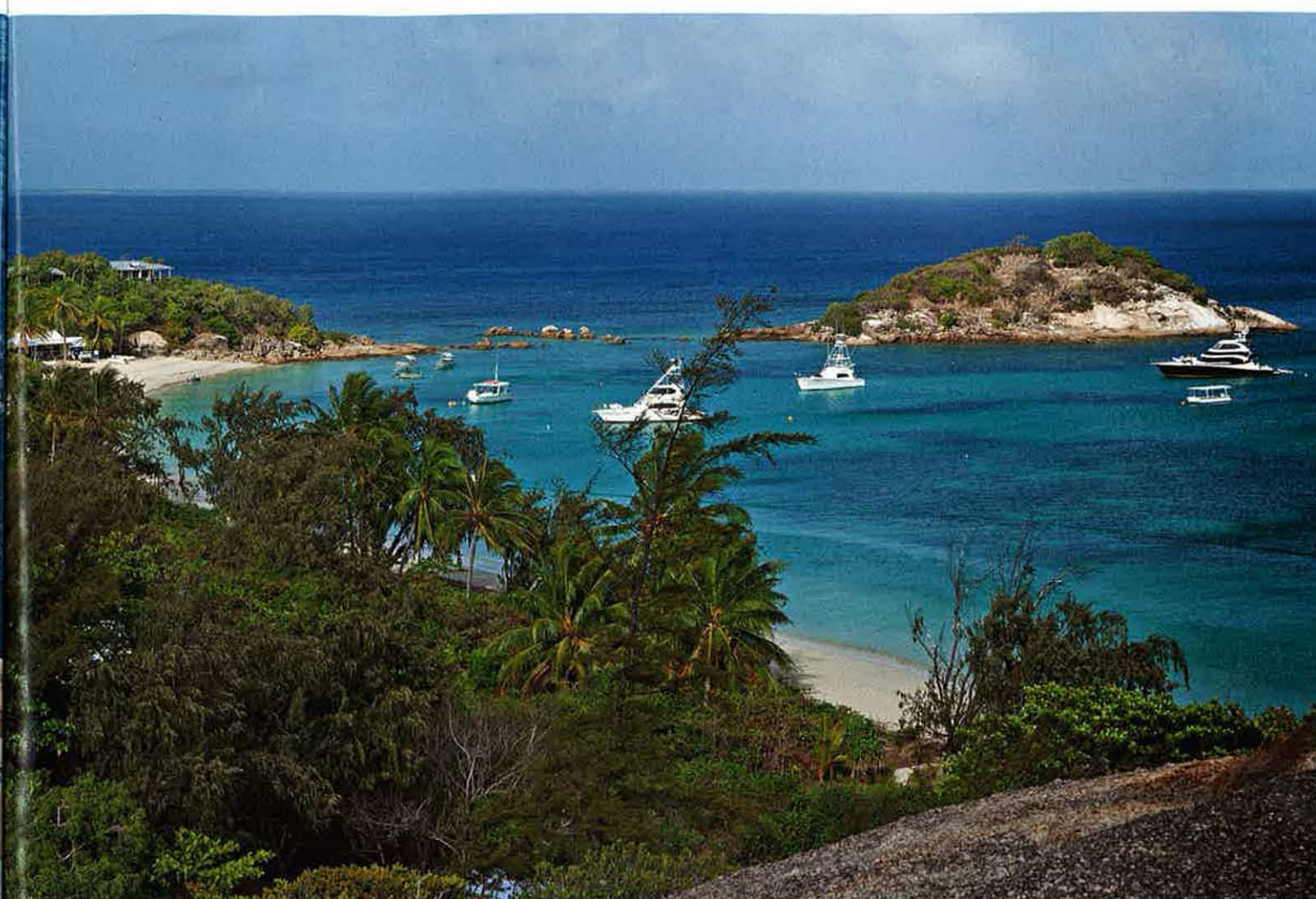
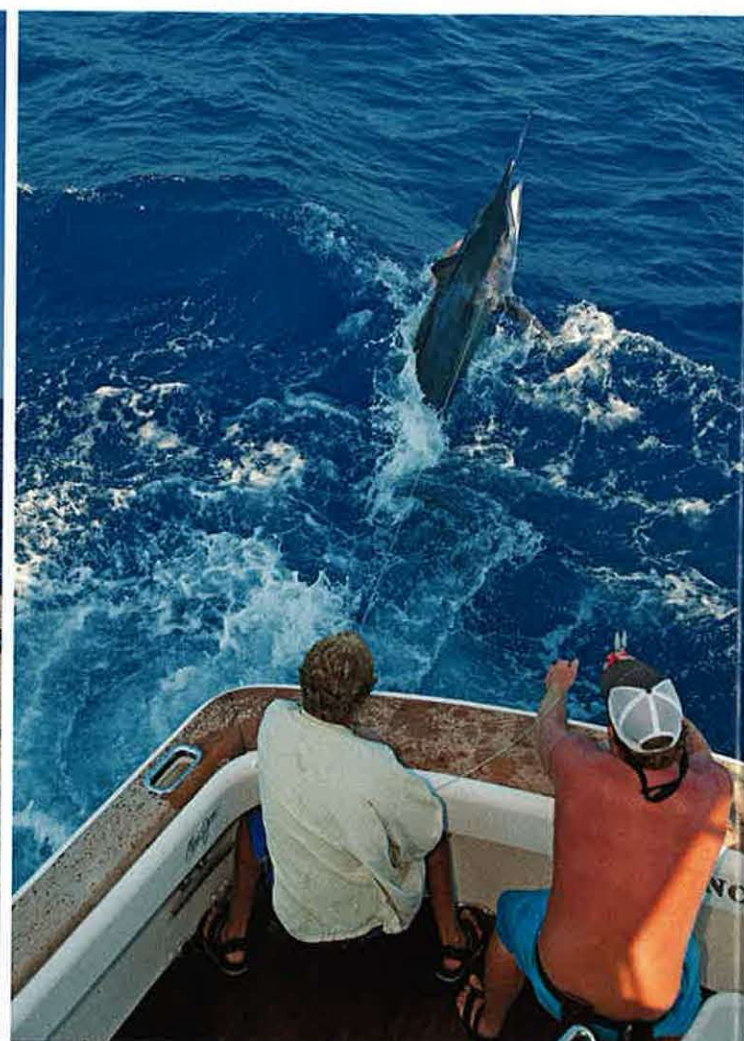
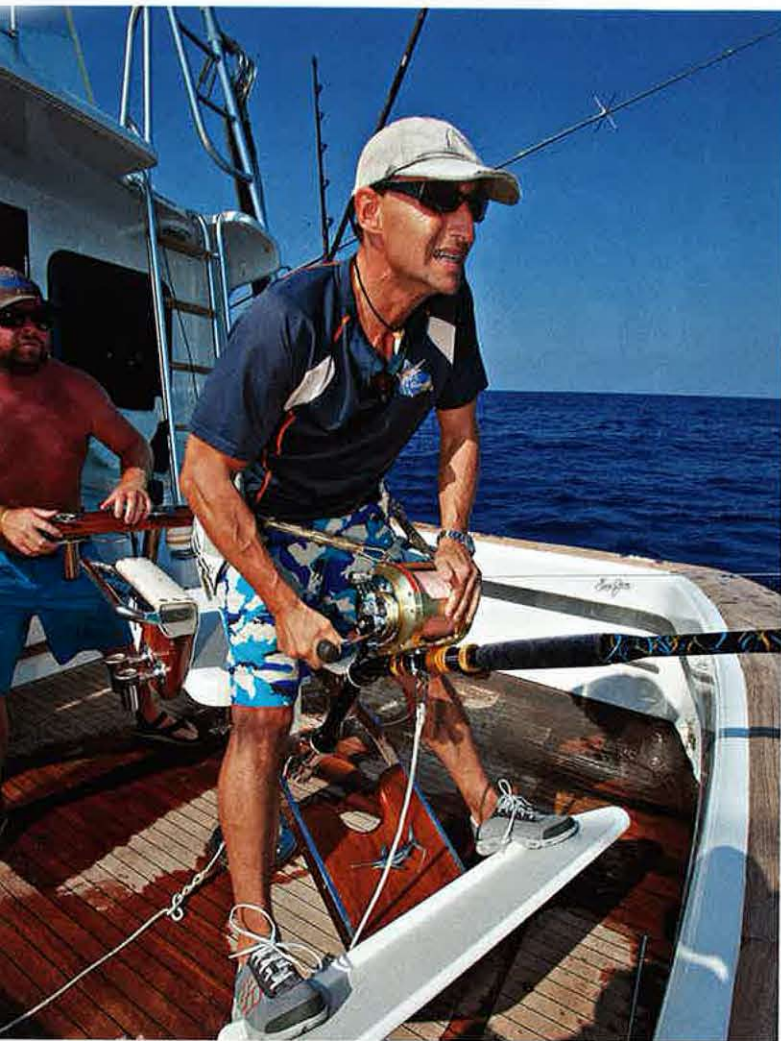
hose who fish for sport do so by following different paths, the choice of which depends on their goals. There are anglers who enjoy a day on the water, where the catch is secondary to the experience and fellowship. Then there are tournament fishermen who compete for huge cash prizes, fame, and the respect of their peers. Finally there are the record seekers who fish for the largest specimens or use the most challenging tackle in hopes of having their names committed to history—a shot at immortality. But regardless of the amount of planning or budgets or time they commit to success, all fishermen are governed by the uncertainty of the sport, best captured in the old saw: It's called *fishing*, not *catching*.

Catching is the point, and the point gets sharper as the fish and goals get bigger. Take Stephan Kreupl, a German who has caught a 1,150-pound Atlantic blue marlin and a 1,238-pound Pacific blue. "After my grander in the Cape Verde islands [in the Atlantic] in May 2011, many of my fishing friends said: 'Now you have to catch a black marlin grander as well,'" Kreupl says. "I wanted to know, of course, if any angler had caught these three marlin granders." His investigation revealed that no angler had caught Pacific and Atlantic blues and a black weighing over 1,000 pounds.

Fortunately Kreupl's success in Cape Verde provided more than a grander. Fishing there with Capt. Zak Conde aboard *Amelia*, a 36-foot Bertram, he became acquainted with "Scuba" Steve Hall, a deckhand who jumped overboard to secure the tailrope on a 1,150-pound marlin before sharks could reduce it to backbone and gristle, à la *The Old Man and the Sea*. Hall goes where the big fish are, and so he naturally spends time in Australia on a boat prowling the Great Barrier Reef for world-class billfish. The boat is *Tradition*, a 49-foot convertible built by Dick Ward of Cairns Boat Builders, powered by twin 600-hp MTU diesels, and run by Capt. Tim Richardson. Hall suggested Kreupl book a charter with Richardson to try to catch that grander black.

Richardson and Kreupl settled on a two-week window in October 2011. "We chose this time period based on years of experience fishing the Great Barrier Reef, and [because] we generally have good conditions with 15 to 20 knots of southeast trade winds," Richardson says. "This year we had the opposite for the first week, with almost flat-calm conditions but with good southerly current, which is what we need for good fishing here." Kreupl met the boat after a multi-leg, 36-hour jaunt from Frankfurt, Germany, to Cooktown, a remote port in northern Queensland with access to the reef. The bite seemed slow that first week, but the crew wasn't surprised in light of the calm seas.

The fishing grounds here stretch 150 miles from Cairns to Lizard Island and begin 30 miles offshore. The crew spent



**Above:** Angler Stephan Kreupl uses *Tradition's* fighting chair to put pressure on a black marlin. **Above, right, and on previous pages:** Mates Carl Copeland and "Scuba" Steve Hall (shirtless) leader the first fish of the voyage.

nights anchored behind the reef, which let them fish into the evening rather than running back to port. Thus they were able to enjoy light-tackle fishing and bring in fresh bait on poppers. The baits for grander marlin would qualify as trophies for many anglers: The kingfish, skipjack, mackerel, yellowfin, and rainbow runner used as bait can weigh up to 50 pounds.

Richardson is a student of fish in the area. "[They] move in from out in the Coral Sea," he says. "The good southeast wind helps them swim into the reef where they come to breed each season." Such knowledge has led to success. The week prior to Kreupl's arrival Richardson and his team boated a 1,103-pound black.

The technique for catching big black marlin is to troll large, bridle-rigged baits off outriggers at about seven knots, the baits skipping 100 feet behind the boat. The weapon of choice is 130-pound-class tackle—better for the angler but also the fish. A stout outfit can take on the biggest fish but is also useful to quickly horse in smaller fish. "After a hookup, the angler has to get the marlin to the boat as fast as possible," Kreupl says. "Otherwise the fish can be eaten by the sharks around

the reef." This is critical because Richardson practices tag and release on marlin using tags from the Billfish Foundation, unless a fish is to be weighed. In that case *Tradition* carries IGFA-certified scales that can accommodate any record fish.

The first day Kreupl hooked a black off a section of reef known as No. 10 Ribbon. The crew leaedered the fish, tagged it, and estimated its weight at 500 pounds. That would be the catch of a lifetime for most anglers, but this crew was hunting granders. For that first week, the crew saw four to six bites on some days, none on others.

In the second week the weather took a turn; the middle of it saw 20-plus-knot winds gusting to well over 30, mixed with rain squalls. It was in these conditions that the team on *Tradition* had its chance. "We worked hard for our big bite, and [it] came while fishing up on Day Reef," Richardson recalls. "We got the bite on the big bait in the turn and after coming tight, [the fish] just started trucking out to sea. No jumps at all, just a solid pull as she swam east." Richardson suspected that this was the fish Kreupl had come to catch. "I knew it was a big one on the bite," Richardson says. "The boys had the gaffs

ready in case she was big enough, but after 30 minutes we pulled the hook with the fish fairly close."

While losing that fish was frustrating, the crew nevertheless put up some impressive numbers during the two weeks: They saw 29 marlin, had 12 bites, and leaedered ten fish of up to around 500 pounds. And Kreupl is not deterred. "Fishing on the Great Barrier Reef was a great time for me—even without a grander," he says. "But even there, the fish don't jump voluntarily into the boat."

Kreupl's goal, while elusive, remains unchanged. "We were a great team and had a lot of fun together," he says, and he vows to return and try again.

"Until next year and the next try." PMY

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**The crew spent nights anchored behind the reef, which let them fish into the evening rather than running back to port.**



**Above:** Lizard Island was a rare stopping point on the voyage that let the crew touch dry land.

**Left:** Kreupl uses the cockpit bait station to rig a marlin bait. **Below left:** Changes in water color tell fishermen where bait and fish may be hiding on the reef.