



BY MICHAEL PETERS

SIGHTLINES

America's Finest

FOUNDED IN A TRADITION OF INNOVATION.

Over the 40 years of my career as a boat designer, I have had boats built in more than 20 countries around the world, including such diverse places as New Zealand, South Korea, China, Norway, England, France, Italy, Dubai, and here at home in America. For custom yachts, we have worked with builders in Germany and New Zealand, for advanced composite race boats, we have built in Italy and Dubai, and we have designed production boats for Italian and French manufacturers. As designers, we have to know the right fit for the right project, as each country offers its own special skills and technologies to the boatbuilding world.

America is not generally known as a boatbuilding nation, in the sense of how we think of the Dutch or Kiwis, but it actually offers boatbuilding diversity equal to all the world combined. It is simply spread all across the country in regional pockets. The United States can certainly claim to have the world's best sportfish builders in Florida and the Carolinas, some of the best aluminum welders in Louisiana and Mississippi, the best wood-boat builders in Michigan and Maine, and some of the finest large-yacht builders in the Pacific Northwest. There is a lot of boatbuilding tradition in America, you just have to know where to look.

I have a theory about the United States in general: All the die-hard hippies from the 1960s headed for the extreme corners of the country in an effort get away from society and live according to their idealistic ways, as far away from the pressures of places like New York City and Washington, D.C., as they could get. A lot of these granola babies gravitated towards woodworking to make a living, which allowed them to feel close to nature, without becoming sellouts and keeping to their altruistic values. Combine the idealism of making love to a piece of wood, and a couple of hundred years of traditional boatbuilding, and you have the perfect formula for the best-crafted boats built in America. You have Maine.

My hippie theory may not be correct, but Maine boatbuilding certainly is special. Maybe it is its four-century history of boatbuilding that sets it apart, or the Bath-built coasting schooners of



The Maine Boatbuilders Show showcases real innovation. Check it out for yourself, March 18-20, in Portland, Maine. www.58forestreet.com

the 1800s, or maybe it's shipyards like Hodgdon, with its 200 years of boatbuilding passed down through five generations. Maybe it comes from companies like Hinckley that reinvent themselves with modern classics, still hidden behind classic sheers and tumble-home, but sporting high technology and innovation. It is hard to define Maine's exceptionalism in boatbuilding, but it's there.

The industry association, Maine Built Boats, asked me to speak to a group of its members this last December. For the talk, I had to pinpoint why it is so special to build in Maine. I have worked with very talented craftsmen all over the world, and I have built exceptional boats in other parts of the United States, but after listening to the other speakers and assembled builders, I could finally put my finger on

Maine's uniqueness. While tradition is normally associated with a stodgy conservatism, and conservatism is often associated with dogmatic views, Maine boatbuilders have always adapted to changing times as centuries passed and schooners gave way to fishing boats and fishing boats gave way to yachts. Over the many generations of boatbuilding, grandfathers built in wood, fathers built in steel and aluminum, and the newest generation builds in composites. The constant need to adapt to new types of boats and building techniques has, over the years, bred a brand of open-mindedness rooted in conservative heritage, all of which makes for beautifully crafted boats built with the most modern of technologies. These Mainers can't help themselves, they became open-minded.

There is a can-do and why-not attitude with Maine builders. I am privileged to work with Hinckley on their Talaria series, and Hodgdon on its custom yacht tenders, and the first of the new Bertrams is starting construction at Lyman Morse. With all these builders, we speak the common language of traditional boatbuilding as we go about creating the most advanced boats of their kind. This can only be done with a willingness to try new things, not to become entrenched in old ways just out of stubbornness. Maine boatbuilders have mastered the balance of blending the past with the future and their craft is finer for it. □