

Down East Designers

Meet some of New England's best designers — and their boats.

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BODY OF WORK. Doug Zurn, the designer, at the launch of Billy Joel's Vendetta (right). His new MJM 40z (above) was designed with Bob Johnstone.



On a sweltering midsummer afternoon a few years ago, Billy Joel unveiled his new 57-foot *Vendetta*, a gorgeous update of a 1920s commuter boat, with Doug Zurn, the designer, at his side in the Derecktor's yard in Mamaroneck, New York. As Joel made a few comments about how beautiful the boat was, Zurn beamed with pride. Standing in the audience, Zurn's wife, Kerry, turned to my wife, Renée, and said: "All Doug's ever wanted to do is design pretty boats. He's always wanted to be a yacht designer."

Now 46 and working out of his office in Marblehead, Massachusetts, Zurn is one of New England's leading designers, a group that has a rich history dating back to the tough, take-any-seas, Down East lobster boats of the past century. Originally built in wood and then changed to fiberglass, the single-diesel working lobster boats — with their clean lines, low freeboard, graceful sheer, big cockpit, straightforward cabin and rock-steady keel — were designed to take their captains and crew out to sea to make a living no matter what the conditions were, day after day. They were simple, reliable and economical, with heavy displacement hulls and enough horsepower to run out to the lobster traps quickly, but with relatively flat sections aft to provide stability for the crew (often just a single owner) to work in the cockpit without getting tossed overboard. Over the years, this group has included powerboat designers for Wilbur Yachts, Ellis, Jarvis Newman, Duffy, Dyer Boats, CW Hood, Ted Hood, Hunt Yachts, Hinckley, Shelter Island, Grand Banks, Eastbay, Sabre, Back Cove, MJM Yachts, True North, Samoset, Lyman Morse and Brooklin Boat Yard, among many others.

To my mind, the prototypical Down East boats are those made by Wilbur Yachts, Ellis and Jarvis Newman. Lee Wilbur started Wilbur Yachts 36 years ago in Southwest Harbor, Maine; his son-in-law, John Kachmar,

now runs the company. Their Wilbur 34 has become iconic for its classic Down East lines; they have built 75 so far. This is a straightforward, semi-displacement, hand-laid, solid fiberglass hull with a fairly high bow, a straight flowing sheer and some traditional teak trim. With a single Cat 3116, it's capable of topping out at 20 knots.

Ellis Boat Co. was founded as Bunker and Ellis back in 1945. Also in Southwest Harbor, they built wooden lobster boats. Don Ellis, the company's second-generation president, says that's a good heritage to have: "A lobsterman has to have a boat that's comfortable to work from in any sea condition. The boat is always moving, and the fisherman is working hard. There's a lot of stress on the knees, back and feet. It's no coincidence that a boat that works well for the commercial lobsterman is also going to be



CLASSIC LINES. The Wilbur 34 has been a Down East icon for many years (top). Zurn's rendering of his Inland Sound 48 cruiser (above).

comfortable and safe for coastal cruising." One repeat owner who agrees is Joel, who launched his new Ellis 36 last summer (see "Billy Joel's Latest Hit," October) with a massive single 670 hp Cummins diesel that moves the boat to 30 knots. (He previously had an Ellis 28.) Joel worked with Don Ellis and Brian Walls, Ellis' designer, for a distinctive retro look — with more rolled windows and cabin top — on the strong lobster boat hull.

For its part, Jarvis Newman started making lobster boats more than 50 years ago in wood, and then essentially produced the same hull in fiberglass — a Down East icon with low, clean lines and legendary rough-weather performance. CW Hood now handles the Jarvis Newman line in Marblehead, with five models from 30 to 46 feet.

It might seem a long way from a wooden lobster boat to the new MJM 40z (for Zurn), designed by Zurn with Bob Johnstone (the co-founder of J/Boats, the hugely successful sailboat company). But a lot of the underlying fundamentals are the same, and the MJM's lines reflect its Down East heritage. Zurn started collaborating with Johnstone on the 34z — MJM's first boat — a few years ago. The 34z — with its high-tech construction, superior performance and ease of ownership and operation — helped to modernize the genre. A 29z was next. Look for a full review of the new 40z next month.

The president of Zurn Yacht Design, Zurn grew up in Erie, Pennsylvania, messing around with the family's Boston Whalers and Dyer dinks. He started drawing boats before he got to high school, and he hasn't stopped since. After stints at the University of Vermont (engineering) and the University of Arizona (music), Zurn decided to go with his passion, finally graduating from the Westlawn School of Yacht Design with honors. His first major powerboat was an instant hit — the 38-foot Shelter Island Runabout he drew for Joel. It was a great-looking boat with a sleek, low profile and long sheer that ran at more than 40 knots. (Joel wanted a boat with Down East looks but that could also go fast.) Zurn

also designed the Marlow 65, an 18-knot, long-range flybridge cruiser; an innovative 62-foot flybridge cruiser for Lyman Morse with roll-stabilizing trim tabs; a cold-molded single-diesel Samoset 30; and a Gloucester 20 center console with some sweet tumblehome and lots of bow flare (a feature-heavy 30 is coming soon). "Today people are looking for value in their boat, and not just dollar value," Zurn says. "It means more quality throughout. The boat must be economical, from a functional point of view, and not trendy. They want boats that look good and will retain their value."



SLIPPERY HULLS. Zurn's retro look for Joel's new Ellis 36 (top) and his 38-foot Shelter Island Runabout (above) produced a turn of speed for two very different models while retaining Down East lines.

One of the most established New England design firms is C. Raymond Hunt Associates (see "A Rich History," February), founded by the legendary Ray Hunt in 1961. Hunt virtually invented the deep-V hull in 1960 with what became the Bertram 31, one of the most famous powerboats of all time. John Deknatel (a graduate of Harvard and the Harvard University Graduate School of Design) went to work for Hunt in 1963; he's now president of the firm. Winn Willard (naval design at the University of Michigan) is a relative newcomer, joining Hunt Associates in 1970;



RICH HISTORY. The Hunt 33 has Ray Hunt's classic deep-V hull and rough-water performance.



CRUISING BEAUTIES. Grand Banks' Eastbay 55 (above) is queen of the fleet, drawn by Hunt Associates. The new Sabre 40 (below) is designed in-house and has much of the high-quality fit and finish found in the company's 52. The sedan will be launched soon; a flybridge version will follow.

he's now vice president and CEO. Hunt Associates designs for Hunt Yachts, which makes beautiful, fast, seakindly boats from 25 to 36 feet in Portsmouth, Rhode Island. (We'll have a story on their new 52-foot motoryacht next month.) Hunt Associates also has designed for Grand Banks, Hinckley and Lee Wilbur, among other Down East lines (plus commercial and military work).

Hunt Associates designed all of Grand Banks' Eastbay series since the first 38-foot express version in 1993. The idea was to create a modern interpretation of a traditional lobster boat with a dash of luxury and a turn of speed. The original Grand Banks displacement trawlers were designed by Ken Smith; later models by Sparkman & Stephens, among others. The new 41 (see "The All-New Grand Banks 41," February) with Zeus pod drives was the first designed in-house by a team that includes Earl Alaro, who worked with the late Tom Fexas. The latest Eastbay — at 55 feet, the queen of the fleet (now starting at 39 feet) — features classic lines, a raked stem, long sheer, Hunt's signature deep-V hull and 30-knot-plus performance with up to twin 1,000 hp diesels.

Another legendary name is Ted Hood (winner of the America's Cup, among many other things), who now has a new line of trawlers, starting with the 52 Coastal Explorer, to be launched late next fall. It will cruise from 9 to 20 knots. With its twin 600 CMD engines, Hood says it will be very fuel-efficient from 10 to 12 knots, and then, "once it gets over the hump," above 16 knots. It also has Zeus pod drives. "A couple can operate this boat easily," he says, "and they can cruise comfortably." The master has 6 feet 6 inches headroom, plus a king-size berth; the engine room has 7-foot headroom.

In Warren, Rhode Island, up Narragansett

Bay from Ted Hood Yachts and the Hunt factory, True North (part of Pearson Composites) is ready to finish its new 47. Designer Clive Dent says the boat is "a logical next step from the 34- and 38-foot" boats that have classic Down East long, low lines, but with their own signature reverse transom that can open to make them SUVs of the water (see "A Class of Its Own," October). Dent plans to use Volvo Penta's IPS pod drives on the 47 to broaden its appeal.

Back in Southwest Harbor, a stone's throw from the Wilbur yard, Hinckley Yachts is making an updated version of its iconic Picnic Boat (see "Best of the Year," February). Bruce King designed the original version, a 36-foot single-diesel that is probably one of the most beautiful powerboats ever made, in 1994 with lots of input from Shep McKenney, who was running the company at the time. (McKenney now makes the Seakeeper Gyro.) The new 37-foot version, launched last fall, has twin diesels and a deeper-V hull (19 degrees instead of 15), developed by Michael Peters, the Sarasota, Florida, designer who's made everything from the new Chris-Crafts to megayachts. But the new Picnic Boat still has all the stunning looks of the original, along with the water-jet performance and Hinckley's patented Jetstick fingertip maneuverability.



In South Casco, Maine, Sabre and Back Cove are building modern versions of the traditional Down East look. The newest Back Cove — a 37-foot, single-diesel express (see "Down East Flagship," April) with clean, classic lines and pleasing performance — is the epitome of Down East design. Kevin Burns, the company's new designer, says the Back Cove 37 "is efficient to maintain and operate, a core ideal." Bentley Collins, the company's vice president of marketing, says, "Simplicity of the Down East boats is what makes them beautiful." Sabre's newest yacht, a 40, will be launched soon, first as a sedan and then as a flybridge model.

As someone who's now on the cutting edge of hybrid and green design, Bob Stephens of Stephens Waring White in Brooklin, Maine, couldn't have more of a Down East pedigree. One of his partners, Steve White, runs the Brooklin Boat Yard, started in 1960 by his father, Joel M.

White, in Eggemoggin Reach, in the heart of the state's best cruising grounds. Stephens Waring White specializes in "modern classic" designs, reflecting Joel White's philosophy of elegant simplicity. Stephens did the restoration of *Aphrodite*, the classic 74-foot commuter boat that was the inspiration for Joel's *Vendetta*. Stephens also designed an eco-friendly 29-foot hybrid launch with diesel/electric propulsion for a couple who lives in nearby Stonington, Maine, who wants to cruise around the local islands that Stephens says "are scattered like jewels on the sea" with minimal impact on the environment. A 75 hp Steyr diesel coupled with a 7 kW generator propel the narrow-beam, light-displacement hybrid to a top speed of 14 knots, or a cruising speed of 10.5 knots, burning only 1.5 gph. Under electric power, the hybrid cruises at 7 knots, drawing 48 volts from eight batteries in a totally silent, zero-carbon-footprint operation.

Finally, a lightweight carbon-fiber canopy provides shelter from the elements and serves as a platform for an array of solar panels that help recharge the batteries while providing 360-degree visibility for everyone on board.

Stephens' new hybrid, of course, does not look anything like a lobster boat, but it does answer a need. Meanwhile, Zurn thinks people will continue to buy boats that are built to be used — and to be dreamed about. "We'll persevere over the long haul," he says. "I just hope that people want boats that look good." ♦



MAINE MAN. Designer Bob Stephens, of Stephens Waring White (above). His new hybrid (top) is built to have minimal environmental impact.