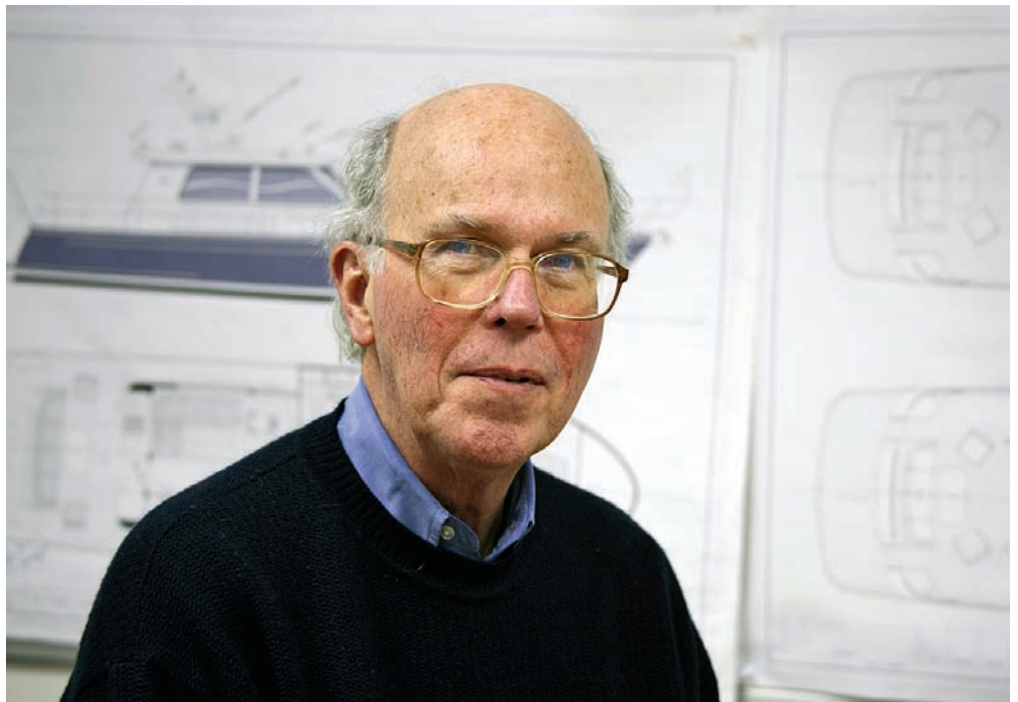


TALKIN' BOATS

WITH **JOHN DEKNATEL**

PRESIDENT AND OWNER OF
C. RAYMOND HUNT ASSOCIATES



By Chris Landry
SENIOR REPORTER

When you think deep-vee powerboats, the legendary Ray Hunt comes to mind. Think of this man, too: John Deknatel, president and owner of C. Raymond Hunt Associates in New Bedford, Mass.

A Harvard graduate, Deknatel studied architecture and began working for Philip Rhodes in the early 1960s. He hooked up with Hunt as his business partner in 1966. Since then, he has concentrated on planing-hull design and fine-tuning the Hunt deep-vee hull form.

C. Raymond Hunt Associates (www.crhunt.com) has designed the entire Hunt Yachts fleet, which includes cruisers, coupes, inflatables, center consoles and flybridge yachts (www.huntyachts.com). The firm has penned

boats for Alden, Bertram, Black Watch, Boston Whaler, Chris-Craft, Little Harbor, Lowe, Palmer Johnson, Robalo and Wellcraft.

Deknatel runs a Hunt Surfhunter 25 and sails a 34-foot Sabre, enjoying the waters of southern New England with his wife, Carol Taylor, and his three grown children when they're visiting. The couple lives in Brookline, Mass., and has a summer home in South Dartmouth.

Q: You believe a well-designed deep-vee powerboat can be quite efficient. Can you please explain?

A: Some people will tell you a flatter bottom is going to be more efficient. There is no simple answer. There is a lot more to what makes an efficient boat than just the shape of the bottom. We believe we can put up, pound for pound, our well-engineered vee-bottom boats against any other boats in terms of performance. When people say deep-vees are hard to push, they are really talking about a whole generation of boats that was overweight to begin with, such as the Bertram 46. The engines were not very powerful, and the boats were heavy and kind of low-tech. If boats are overweight, they are not going to be efficient no matter what kind of bottom they have.

We do a lot of our engineering based on bot-

tom loading. You can screw up any design. Just because you have a good hull doesn't mean you are going to have a good boat. There is a lot more to it.

Q: How has the deep-vee changed since you first worked with Ray Hunt?

A: If you look at the Bertram 31 as an early successful boat, it was basically a very good rough-water boat with a lot of power. They were known for rolling while you were trolling because they had small chines and a lot of deadrise all the way to the stern. One of the benefits of 24 degrees of deadrise is if you fly through the air and land on the stern like a raceboat, you want all the deadrise you can get. But with 90 percent of the boats today, nobody does that except by accident. You don't need 24 degrees at the stern, so we've evolved the geometry of the bottoms, and the chines and the chine flats have gotten larger. So you maintain the ride of the old deep-vees, but the boats are going to be drier, with their center of gravity farther aft than those Bertrams.

The 31 was known for being wet and fast and a great rough-water boat. [Modern deep-vee boats] don't rock and roll as much at trolling speeds, and they carry weight better. And with our hulls, they are optimized to do the jobs they are intended to do. Is it going to be a 25-knot working pilot boat that is active 24 hours a day year-round or a 35-knot pleasure boat that is going to run 25 knots most of the time?

Q: Is transom deadrise an overused — even misused — specification?

A: Deadrise at the transom tells you something; it is not a useless piece of data.



BILLY BLACK (BOTTOM)

The Surfhunter 29 is one of Deknatel's favorite Hunt designs.

But there is a huge amount of variation from there. A lot of boats, if they have 20 degrees at the transom, also have 20 degrees in the midbody and have a very fat bow to hold a lot of accommodations and fail to get the benefits of that kind of hull because they are making compromises for the interior space. If one of our boats is 20 degrees at the transom, it'll have a 25- or 26-degree deadrise in the middle of the boat. And we don't fatten the bows of our boats much. We make the hull the way we want it and then put the interior in it.

Q: How would you characterize the Hunt Yachts fleet?

A: We are certainly not building a price boat. We are building the best boat we can for its size. We are not a volume shop that grinds out the same boat every week. Our boats are just about as customized as any boat under 40 feet. And you can get all these types of propulsion — you can get a 25-foot boat with a diesel, a jet, an I/O, an inboard drive. This is the benefit of the Hunt design group working with the builder and carrying out the engineering. Our boats are traditional-looking and we want people to fall in love with the look. We are not a Euro-style boat



The 94-footer Electra, the last big boat the firm designed, tops out at 30 knots.

to any extent. We are more traditional, and that's what people have told us they want.

Q: What are some of your favorite Hunt designs?

A: I really like the Surfhunter 29 because, for a boat under 30 feet, it really does everything that people want. It is big enough, it has a full windshield with a hardtop or soft top or a coupe cabin, and it has this sort of excessive flare, which

is characteristic of the line of boats. We have people who look at many different models, and a lot of them end up with that boat because it does everything well. They realize they don't need a bigger boat.

I also like the Electra, which was the last big boat we did — a 94-footer built by Lyman-Morse. It was a really neat project because the owner is a real technical wizard. He had a boat called Tumblehome, which is an 89-foot Lyman-Morse, and he did a lot of updating and modifications to

BILLY BLACK

that boat, and then he decided he wanted to do a bigger and better one. And that's what Electra is. Tumblehome went 22 knots, while Electra's top speed is 30 knots.

Q: What are some of your favorite non-Hunt boats?

A: I like some of the sophisticated sailboats. I like Swans and Farr designs. I really respect the J/Boats guys because they keep coming up with a range of performance boats and cruising boats and have kept improving them and making better boats. For powerboats, I don't have any particular favorites. I respect a company like Tiara. It is a solid company, and they've been innovative, particularly in the early years of fiberglass, with molding and assemblies and techniques. I think they build solid, quality boats.

Q: What was Ray Hunt like?

A: A real gentleman, and quiet. He was thinking about [boat design] 24 hours a day. He had that kind of a mind. He was clearly an unusually good sailor. As a kid he won the Sears Cup twice, which is the national junior championship. In his 50s, he won the 5.5 Metre World Championship sailing a boat he designed. He had never raced a 5.5 — that class of boat — before. That's pretty special. And, in between, he won all kinds of races. He really came from the world of sailing and was an innovative thinker.

Most yacht designers in his era were more concerned with traditional looks, and Ray focused more on the function of the boat. The 5.5 Meter he designed, called Minotaur, was built for the 1960 Olympics. It was in Naples, where there was light air, so he optimized the design for light air, and he made it the longest and heaviest anyone had ever built, with the lowest amount of wetted surface. And [the U.S. team] cleaned up and didn't have to race the last race in the Olympics because they were so far ahead.

When I worked with him, he felt there was more opportunity to make better powerboats than sailboats. Sailing was wrapped around rating rules and particulars like that. But there were a lot of poorly designed powerboats and that was his focus. He felt he could make an impact with better ideas for powerboats.

Q: What's wrong with today's powerboats?

A: There is a tendency to put more into a boat — washers, dryers, AC in the pilothouse and multiple heads, just stuff. So you're making the boat more complicated and harder to take care of and expensive, and maybe not efficient because they are carrying all this extra weight. People end up with boats they don't like because they are not comfortable riding. They get on their boat thinking it should be capable of getting from A to B in certain kinds of weather, and it's not. People who are turned off by boating really had the wrong boat for the job they wanted it to do.

Q: What do people want in a boat today — value, speed, durability?

A: First of all, I think the buyers of today are primarily serious boat people and obviously can afford it. And if they buy a boat, they feel like it is going to be a better boat than in the past and have good resale and quality and durability. New bells and whistles, such as pod drives and joysticks and increased space due to these advancements, are getting people to buy new boats. We were surprised how quickly the pods were accepted and how important a joystick was in clients buying a boat. But you make the boats more complicated, so that is the downside, but marinas are crowded

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A pair of Hunt pilot boats running hard.



and harder for people to dock their boats. Some boaters who want a bigger vessel end up not buying that 30-footer because they won't be able to get it in and out of the slip. But today that boater can get a 40-footer that will practically dock itself.

Q: Where do you see the future of boating headed?

A: The larger yachts from Hunt, like the 52 and 44, represent a trend of taking bigger-boat features and putting them into smaller boats. For instance, the stern of boats has changed. You used to have to climb over the transom to get to the swim platform. Now the stern of a 44 looks like the stern of a 150-foot megayacht; it may have a Euro-style transom with stairways and platforms

and garages. They are like mini-motoryachts. And builders are not just jamming more stuff into the boat. They are configuring them for what people want. Dinghies have been a problem. They were up on the roof or towed. Now they are in garages. Ease of use and how people are using these boats differently is evolving. We are seeing boats that reflect what we've learned from big boats. ■

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