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Got concerns about having a full-fledged, semi-custom boat built? **Hunt Yachts** packs stacks of fun and satisfaction into the adventure. **By Capt. Bill Pike**



Don't Worry,
Be Happy

The term “semi-custom” gets tossed around a lot these days, especially by marine journalists. We use the term to describe virtually every sort of boat, from fully optioned runabouts to behemoths with alternative propulsion packages, modifiable layouts, individualized décors, and a veritable slew of other combinations and permutations for prospective purchasers to play with. Whether spec’ed-out center consoles, motoryachts with custom soft-goods packages, and teetotally trick bowriders all strictly qualify for semi-custom status is a matter of personal opinion I guess. But, regardless of how you splice it, there’s no question that such watercraft are literally worlds away from a serious, semi-custom vessel like the Hunt 52 Express Motoryacht shown here.

Hunt Yachts specializes in semi-custom builds, of course. Thanks to its long-standing and synergistic relationship with the fabled naval architecture firm of C. Raymond Hunt Associates of New Bedford, Massachusetts, the venerable little Rhode Island-based company is commonly and routinely acknowledged for its semi-custom capabilities. Indeed, a quartet of owners I recently interviewed, some deep into a semi-custom project, others currently enjoying the results of one, all seem to agree—Hunt Yachts is a semi-custom top-shelfer with a can-do, pull-out-all-the-stops attitude.



Highly engaged boating enthusiasts, Hunt Yachts’s Peter Van Lancker and boat owner Mr. G always seem to have plenty to talk about.



“Coincidentally, Hendricks worked as an outpatient psychiatric counselor before he began a highly successful career in yacht sales more than three decades ago.”

HUNT YACHTS



► For more photos of the Hunt 52, cruise on over to www.pmymag.com.



Credit the semi-custom approach for a galley and dinette (inset) that work!

Powerplant Pastiche

“We asked for a lot of changes—a lot,” says Mr. G, the male half of a privacy-protecting couple who’ve owned and enthusiastically used the brand-new 52 for a couple of months now. “But Hunt never turned us down on anything. They always figured a workaround. And besides being super detail-oriented, they’ve always been gracious.”

The changes G speaks of were significant, and precisely coordinated with Global Yacht Builders, the Taiwanese yard that Hunt uses for big-boat construction. On the mechanical front, Volvo Penta IPS pods were substituted for the straight-shaft-inboards that are standard issue on the 52, a swap that necessitated the relocation of tankage, the reconfiguration of internal strengtheners, and the installation of special IPS mounting collars with the extra laminates Volvo demands. Additionally,

to nix noise in the accommodation spaces, some air-conditioning componentry was relocated to the heavily sound-insulated engine room. To keep the boat’s nether areas bone dry and odor free, an Arid Bilge System (see “Fresh Air” on page 104) was installed. And to facilitate oil changes from outside the engine room, the oil-change system was re-plumbed and conveniently installed just below the ER’s cockpit hatch.

“They even put effect lighting under the engines,” G says with apparent glee. “So when I’m showing off my engine room—hey, it looks fantastic.”

Big Block Island Breakfast

Changes to the boat’s interior were almost as dramatic as what was done mechanically.

With an assist from the Hunt Associates engineers and designers in New Bedford, the yard enlarged the saloon by moving some bulkheads and then seriously (albeit subtly) reconfiguring the saloon’s furniture. Also, the helm was significantly widened to accommodate extra electronics, a modification that called for challenging alterations to the companionway opening and stairway leading belowdecks; the galley was outfitted with a big four-burner stove (with full oven), extra refrigerator/freezers, and custom granite countertops; and an extra stateroom was added to the rear of the accommodation



HUNT YACHTS



JODY DOLE

Sea-stompin’ running surfaces have been Hunt’s claim to fame since C. Raymond Hunt first developed the deep-V back in the late 1950s.

area, thanks to IPS-related space savings. “We love to cook and entertain,” enthuses Mrs. G. “Just a few weeks ago, we were in Block Island and we had lots of people on-board. In fact, one morning we had about ten people around the table for breakfast and, thanks to the changes we requested, it worked out very nicely with director’s chairs from the cockpit and ottomans. The grandchildren love it. And I love it. I’ve got a big microwave, lots of extra refrigeration, a stove, an oven, a microwave in the galley—I’ve even got a panini maker!”

Imagined Use? Real Use?

There’s perhaps one overriding reason Hunt can make its semi-custom clients so seemingly happy—a deep commitment to first discovering what they really want and then giving it to them in the most practical, responsible, and timely manner possible. “When I begin work-

ing with a customer,” says John Hendricks, Hunt’s go-to guy for semi-custom construction, “the first thing I want to know is what their boating background is. Are they experienced? First-timers? Do they want one of our smaller boats, which we build here in Portsmouth? Or do they want something bigger? Have they been involved with a semi-custom project before? What did they like about the process? What didn’t they like?”

Not so coincidentally perhaps, Hendricks worked as an outpatient psychiatric counselor before he began a highly successful career in yacht sales some three decades ago. Over the ensuing years, he’s come to see himself as an adviser or counselor more than a sales person, with precise, detail-oriented communication (amongst himself, his clients, Hunt’s designers and engineers, and whichever yard’s involved) being the primary objective. And he’s also seen a phe-

nomenon of sorts develop with the passage of time that makes his job both a bit more interesting and a bit more complex.

“Years ago,” says Hendricks, “large-boat buyers tended to be pretty knowledgeable—they’d typically owned many boats and had a very good idea of what they wanted, what they needed. But today, things are different. Now and then we encounter less experienced buyers who are not so sure, perhaps even a little anxious, about the whole process. At least at the start, they worry they’re not going to have the time or the expertise to see things through.”

Hendricks does two things for this latter type of client. First, he helps them distinguish between real and imagined use. For example, a couple may envision sleeping on-board in an expansive master, but ultimately conclude with Hendricks’ help that they’ll be dayboating mostly and sleeping either

Get The BOAT You Want

Semi-custom boats offer a great solution for those who either have, or can develop, perhaps with a manufacturer's help, a real grasp of their cruising needs. Set the boat up the way you want her and let the designers and engineers figure out the tricky parts.



JODY DOLE

The Hunt 52 (above) rides the running surface of Hunt's two-fisted, 52-foot pilot boat. Nice forward stateroom (below), though. Very yachty!

at home or in hotels, a finding that dictates a smaller rather than the imagined larger master. Second, he helps them make informed, timely decisions and option choices by carefully simplifying difficult issues. "I tell people I'm the guy who's supposed to put in all the time worrying and dealing with complexities," he says. "They should have fun, enjoy the journey, be happy."

Musical Portlights

Hendricks considers it his duty to emphasize resale value with his customers as well, whether they're old salts, newbies, or somewhere in between. The 44 Express Motoryacht that's currently abuilding for a couple of highly experienced Florida-based boaters, Barbara and Franklin Carson, nicely illustrates the point. When the Carsons first came to Hendricks, they'd decided to downsize from a 52-footer to boost manageability. But they also wanted a



super-large master with an en suite head, a super-large shower stall, and a raft of other appointments that would facilitate cruising long distances by themselves. Interest in resale value? Negligible!

"But I respectfully advised them," says Hendricks, "that trying to sell a 44-foot boat someday with just one stateroom would be pretty darn tough. Wouldn't they perhaps be satisfied with a slightly different approach?"

A modification to one of the 44's two standard layouts was what Hendricks finally sold to the Carsons. After nixing one head, the modification split the other into two halves port and starboard, one with a giant shower stall and the other with an MSD and sink. Then, across from an ample galley (and in keeping with the couple's need to stay abreast of business affairs while cruising even after their retirement), it substituted for the standard second stateroom a much-customized office/lounge space, with a nifty convertible berth.

"Why have two heads," enthuses Barbara, "when you can have a huge walk-in shower? And although we don't think we'll ever want to ever sell the boat, we nevertheless have the option now because, thanks to John, we actually have a second stateroom."

"And get this," adds Franklin. "Because of all the layout alterations, the yard had to change the configuration of the portlights on one side

Better Boat: Views of Hunt Yachts



While Hunt's larger models are built in a yard in Taiwan, smaller vessels (as seen here) are crafted in a smaller plant in Portsmouth, Rhode Island. The bow-on photo (lower right) shows Hunt's sea-slicing hullform. The profile view (lower left) illustrates the company's traditional, New England styling. And the open hull (top) shows a center console currently abuilding.



PHOTOS BY JODY DOLE

of the boat. No problem, though—they had it figured out in just a couple of days.”

Let's Hear It for the Engineers!

When asked how his company can so speedily and smoothly reconfigure layouts, move bulkheads, redesign furniture, mix and match propulsion packages (the Carsons have a Cummins/Zeus pod system with both helm and cockpit control stations), and keep customers clam-happy, Hunt president Peter Van Lancker replies with customary jocularity. “Hey,” he says, “we got way more engineers and designers than bean counters.”

The statement's true in the extreme. C. Raymond Hunt Associates is a naval architectural powerhouse with a worldwide reputation, especially for the high-deadrise, exceptionally seaworthy running surfaces patented by C. Raymond (Ray) Hunt in the late 1950s and today called the Hunt Deep-V. Not only does Hunt Associates formulate virtually all the design and engineering solutions for Hunt

Yachts, it does considerable design work for a bunch of other recreational builders including Regal Boats, Grand Banks, Southport, and Grady-White. And even more significantly perhaps, Hunt Associates supplies and licenses designs for pilot boats, ferries, and other commercial, military, and law-enforcement watercraft, a state of affairs that benefits buyers of Hunt's semi-custom yachts big time.

“The fact that we do so many commercial vessels tends to instill confidence on the recreational side,” says Winn Willard, director of Hunt Yachts and vice president of Hunt Associates. “The 52 Express Motoryacht, for example, has virtually the same running surface and power as our 52-foot pilot boat—and the pilot boats are in service, doing, say, about 2,000 engine hours a year, all over the United States. So, when a customer for a 52 thinks about it, he realizes that his boat's been thoroughly vetted performance-wise, well before she was ever launched.”

There's one last enticement Hunt Yachts

offers the buyers of its larger semi-custom models—a Carefree Purchase Program with two-year warranty assurance, a free two-year BoatU.S. membership (with the full towing package), VesselVanguard (with digital maintenance schedule, and alert and log service), and, last but not least, lots of operational and technical training, a feature that, for Mr. and Mrs. G and their new 52 Express Motoryacht, has transformed a relationship that was once all business into a lively, boaty friendship.

“Yeah,” says Van Lancker, “Our wives met and liked each other immediately—they just sorta hit it off, I guess. So we're all going cruising in the new boat in a couple of weeks ... Nantucket, maybe Martha's Vineyard, who knows? I can't say this kind of thing happens with every client, every time, of course. But it's cool when it does. And hey, I mean totally cool.” □

**Hunt Yachts, 401-324-4201;
www.huntyachts.com**