

The Zurn File

Doug Zurn's star as a designer is rising. He's earned it, having logged many anonymous years in supporting roles around the country not just in yacht design but also in boatyard operations, FRP tooling and manufacturing, purchasing management—even marine financing.



here's a saying, probably made up by an inspirational speaker at a corporate leadership training course, that goes like this: "Success is where preparation and opportunity meet." In many ways, that defines the life and career of 43-year-old yacht designer Doug Zurn. Based in Marblehead, Massachusetts, his small firm is enjoying a steadily increasing workload, but not before Zurn spent years slugging it out at just about every job in the marine industry. So success is all the sweeter to him; to us as observers, there's a satisfying element of poetic justice. Sometimes the tortoise really does beat the hare.

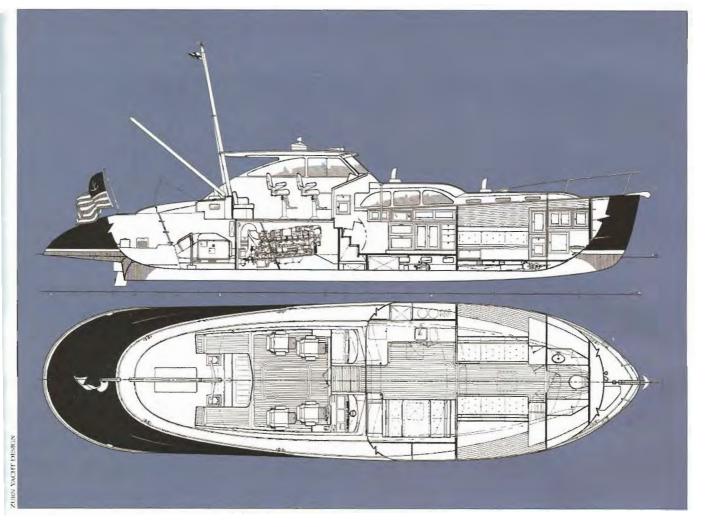
The Apprenticing of a Yacht Designer

One day last spring I wound my way through the backstreets of



Marblehead to visit with Zurn. His office is on the second floor of the former Graves Yacht Yard, where in 1958 designer C. Raymond Hunt's lone America's Cup contender, Easterner, was built. The stairs are old and steep. After meeting Zurn's wife, Kerry (who brings engineering project management experience to the firm), and assistant Craig Gorton (former yacht captain, boatbuilder, and Westlawn student), Zurn and I talked about his life in boats.

Zurn was born in Erie. Pennsylvania. His father was what some would call a boat nut-owning everything from Dyer dinks to Boston Whalers to a wood McCurdy & Rhodes 50 (15.2m), built by Abeking & Rasmussen; later, the elder Zurn acquired another McCurdy & Rhodes sloop, that one a 60-footer (18.3m)



built by Palmer Johnson (Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin). Young Zurn spent a lot of time aboard the family fleet, also attending a sailing camp through his teen years. As one so often hears when designers reminisce. Zurn liked to doodle boats in class. Ah, how the bored mind wanders! He was artistic. yet more of a numbers guy than a words guy. "I did better in science and math than English and history," he says.

As he neared the end of high school the doodles turned more serious. He read Skene's Elements of Yacht Design, and felt sufficiently informed to design "a couple of boats" and to build half-models. An acquaintance from Erie, Bill Lasher, was a University of Michigan graduate who'd worked for C&C Yachts in Canada. Lasher had opened his own office and took on Zurn as an intern-Zurn's first exposure to a design firm.

Zurn's parents, however, weren't too keen on their son becoming a yacht designer, so off he went to the University of Vermont, ostensibly to major in engineering. "But I didn't take any engineering courses my freshman year," he remembers. "In fact, I didn't take any courses at all."

Back he went to Erie to work parttime for Bill Lasher. Lasher didn't have a lot going on then; his main income came from teaching at a local college. Still, Lasher was able to give Zurn assignments on a Carter 42 hull that a client had purchased. "I worked on the arrangement plan and deck geometry," Zurn says. "And I got to sit at a drafting table."

His next brainstorm was to study music-piano and classical guitar-at the University of Arizona. "I enjoyed that immensely," he says, "but after awhile I started looking into schools for naval architecture. I looked at Webb Institute and the University of Michigan, but those are, of course, full four-year programs. By then I'd already been in college more than three years. So I enrolled in the Westlawn [Institute of Marine Technology] correspondence program."

Opposite, top—The Zurn-designed Shelter Island 50 (15.2m) is powered by MAN diesels and a surface-piercing ventilated drive system, giving it a top speed of more than 55 knots.

Opposite, below—Designer Doug Zurn at the helm of a Bruckmann Daysailer 42 (12.8m). Above-Vendetta's profile and arrangement plan show the retro styling-including, in this case, a torpedo stern-that has become Zurn's trademark. She is Zurn's second design commission for singer/songwriter Billy Joel.

In January 1986, Zurn moved back to the Midwest, to Cleveland, Ohio, where his mother now lived. And he set some goals for himself: specifically, where he wanted to be in five years. "The first priority," he says, "was getting a job and earning a living."

Recognizing that his chances would be much improved if he were on the East Coast, Zurn drove to the Chesapeake Bay area and began his hunt. He had his sights set on The Hinckley Company, headquartered then in Southwest Harbor, Maine, but stopped for several interviews along the way. These included naval architects David Pedrick and Rodger Martin, both based in Newport, Rhode Island, but neither had openings to offer. Next stop: Marblehead, Massachusetts, where a family friend, Linda Warren, was working for Ted Hood, whose yard and design office were located there at the time. She had a few suggestions, but Zurn headed north to Hinckley, where he was offered a position in the service department. Southwest Harbor, though, seemed kind of dead socially, especially offseason, so he drove back to Marblehead to mull things over. Before he knew it, he had a job as rigger at the yard known as Marblehead Trading Company. Nights he worked on his Westlawn courses. Warren next told her friend he ought to talk to naval architect Dieter Empacher, who had an office in town. The two reached an agreement and Zurn began an apprenticeship with Empacher. Because he was drawing all day, Zurn hadn't much motivation left to do his Westlawn studies at night, but he persevered and made progress.

After two-and-a-half years with Empacher, Zurn wanted to round out his training by working for a builder, so he secured a position at Able Marine in Trenton, Maine. Under the tutelage of Dale McCafferty, Zurn was involved in a number of interesting projects, including a Nelson-Marek 90 (27.4m), the Able 42 (12.8m), and the Wolf series of express cruisers—his first exposure to powerboat design.

The way of the apprentice is long and peripatetic. When business slowed at Able, Zurn went to work for Chuck Paine (Camden, Maine), designing mostly sailboats again, such as the Apogee and Bougainvillea. Zurn: "I learned a lot from him and his brother, Art, about drafting,

and styles, and details like line weights, for example. Chuck and Art used ink on Mylar. Up until then I'd been drawing primarily on paper and vellum. I loved working on Mylar." Alas, Paine's work slowed, too, and in 1991 Zurn decided to again move back to Cleveland.

Still interested in working for a builder, to learn the practical side of his chosen profession, Zurn's logical choice was Tartan Yachts, in nearby Grand River. The company had recently reorganized under new owner Bill Ross, with Tim Jackett running the design office as well as managing the shop floor. The Tartan 3500 and 4600 were then new models in development, and Jackett hired Zurn to help with their drafting. Over the next two-and-a-half years, Zurn learned a great deal about production boatbuilding, including tooling. The interaction with people on the shop floor was particularly helpful in addressing the age-old problem of shop personnel arguing they can't make the part from the drawing sent down. [For more on Tim Jackett and Tartan, see Professional BoatBuilder No. 92, page 48-Ed.]

In 1993 Zurn completed the rigorous Westlawn design program. His final thesis required a full set of plans and calculations for a sailboat and a powerboat. He drew a 51' (15.5m) aluminum ketch that Robert Perry reviewed in his Sailing magazine column, and a 27' (8.3m) walkaround powerboat that Chuck Paine reviewed in Yachting. That pair of published reviews gave Zurn some needed exposure, which led a Nantucket, Massachusetts, family to commission a design for a shoal-draft daysailer, which he named the Monomov 21.

Thus emboldened (one five-year goal had been to have a boat built to his own design), Zurn decided to leave Tartan, move back East again, and open his own office. There, Ralph Anderson, who owned Marblehead Trading Co., cleared out a storage room for Zurn to occupy as an office, without charge. Another friend, temporarily relocated to the West Coast with Bill Koch's America's Cup campaign, let Zurn house-sit. Zurn: "Michael Kent couldn't rent it and didn't want to leave it. He said, 'Hev, you can keep an eye on it for me.' So for about a year I lived on short

money. That was another break, because I don't know that I could have gotten started without their help. The other thing was, in the spring and fall, when the yard got busy, I'd put on my boatyard cap and go out and help in the yard, rigging or derigging boats or whatever was needed. I was living on the cheap, and when it was busy or convenient I'd get some money there."

The Big Break

Ted Cooper, a member of the management team at Able Marine, suggested Zurn draw up a powerboat: "Something in the 30-foot [9.2m] range and we'll see if we can promote it." Zurn drew preliminary lines and did calculations for a 27, 37, and 50 (8.2m, 11.3m, 15.2m)—a series he called Harbor Island. In the spring of '94, Cooper displayed those drawings at the Maine Boatbuilders Show. [For more on this atypical boat show, see PBB No. 77, page 3-Ed.] Peter Needham of Coecles Harbor Boatyard & Marina (Shelter Island, New York) happened by and was struck by the designs. He wanted to know who'd drawn them. Cooper said he'd have Zurn call.

Zurn explains what happened next: "I called Peter and he sent me a bid package. We chatted for a while. He had a client, a Mr. William Joel. 'Okay,' I said to myself, 'that's pretty wild.' They were looking at the market, at what else was out there. So I put a nice little proposal together for him—a pencil rendering of how I envisioned the boat, along with specs, tooling cost estimates, production cost estimates, and so forth. Fortunately, I'd learned all this working at Tartan and Able Marine. I included a little history on myself and collected all the paper in a nicely bound volume.

"To make a long story short, Needham and his colleagues were impressed with what I'd put together. After a few phone calls between us I said, 'Why don't I come down and introduce myself to you?' And I did. It was on a nasty April day that I showed up at Peter Needham's shop. I was 31 at the time. When I introduced myself he was kind of looking over my shoulder, as if he were looking for my father or someone older. He gave me a quick tour of the shop and the marina. And, then we went over to Billy's house."



Zurn's first design for Joel was the 38' (11.6m) Shelter Island Runabout Joey, built by Peter Needham's Coecles Harbor Boatyard & Marina in Long Island, New York. The company has built 41 since.

Mr. William Joel, of course, was popular singer/songwriter Billy Joel, who wanted to build a customdesigned powerboat. And he had very specific ideas about what he wanted.

As they approached Joel's Long Island house, Needham warned Zurn about Joel's "interesting lawn ornaments.'

Zurn: "We pull into his driveway and there are these three lobsterboats, 40-footers [12.2m], buried up to their waterlines. And lobster pots everywhere. He gave me a tour of his place. Then we sat and talked about the design. Finally Billy asked Peter, 'What do you think? Can this guy do it?' Peter looked at me and said, 'Yes, he can.' Billy said, 'Well, then, let's g(),"

For Zurn, this is where opportunity and years of preparation met. His presentation was clean and clear. Plus, he was the only designer who'd bid on the project who got in the car and drove to meet Needham and his client. You can't do everything by e-mail and fax.

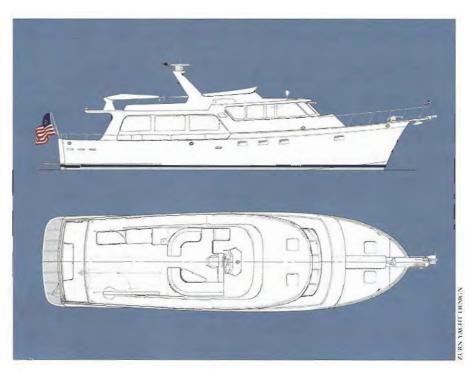
The direct result of Zurn's meeting with Needham and Ioel was the 38' (11.6m) Shelter Island Runabout. Since Joel took delivery of hull #1 in 1995, Needham's Coecles Harbor yard has built another 41 of them. Zurn says that on the used-boat market, the boats sell for about 95% of their original cost.

Also of significance in terms of Zurn's development: This was the first

design he executed entirely on the computer, using MultiSurf and Visual CAD. Today, he operates with four primary pieces of software: MultiSurf, Visual CAD, AutoCAD, and Rhino.

The success of the Shelter Island Runabout-that is, the publicity derived from Billy Joel's ownership and the sales that followed—helped Zurn gain name recognition, but it still wasn't enough to make a living.

Nevertheless, he felt sufficiently confident to quit a part-time job he'd taken in marine finance, though he still found it necessary to work parttime at the Marblehead yard. And, when he got married in 1997, he found it prudent to take full-time employment, this time as purchasing manager at Boston BoatWorks (an enterprising shop featured in PBB No. 99). Zurn was fortunate to be able to perform his duties at BBW and still maintain his design practice, fielding inquiries and keeping lines of communication open. That lasted for about nine months, until he secured commissions for the Shelter Island 50 (15.2m) plus several Taiwan-built motoryachts in the Marlow Explorer series, at 57' through 65' (17.4m-19.8m). Since then, Zurn has worked nearly full-time at vacht design. Like a lot of designers, he's taken on staff when times were good, and let them go when times were bad-just as he was hired and released in the formative years of his employment history. Zurn's current associate, Craig Gorton, has been with him for three years. His wife, Kerry, works parttime, as does Michael McKissick, a graduate of the vacht design program at The Landing School (Kennebunkport, Maine).



David Marlow commissioned Zurn to design several composite motoryachts for construction in Tainan, Taiwan, and Xiamen, China. The first of the Marlow Explorer series was the Marlow 65 (19.8m); a dam in the mold allows the yard to also laminate several other models from the same tooling.

Defining Moment

All right: If you're smart, work hard, and gain some experience, then there comes a point in your career when you really do know what you're doing, and can stand up to others in your business with confidence. If not earlier, that moment certainly occurred for Doug Zurn during sea trials of the Shelter Island 50, the design for which had been commissioned by the owner of Shelter Island Runabout hull #4. Also built by Coecles Harbor, this new 50 was SCRIMP'd with vinyl ester resin, and cored with end-grain balsa in the hull and deck, four stringers, eight floors, and five structural bulkheads.

As with so many projects, the owner had belatedly added items not present in the original specifications, such as a refrigerator, freezer, chairs, and a lot of woodwork. Zurn was a little concerned. The night before trials he was up late pecking away at a laptop computer, rechecking his weight studies.

"I went out that morning," he remembers, "and put some tape marks on the boat where I thought it would float. The guys in the yard said, 'What are you doing?' For a moment I worried. Then we launched the boat. She floated right on her lines. The yard guys were pretty impressed.'

Next came the sea trials and performance checks.

Zurn recounts the day's events. "We'd installed a pair of MAN diesels in the boat, and the engine manufacturer had sent up two men from Texas. One asked me, 'What does the boat weigh?'

"I said, '39,000."

"'What do you expect it to go at?'

"'Well,' I said, 'we're expecting it to top out around 50 knots.

"They kind of chuckled at me. The boat had a surface-piercing ventilated drive system from Power-Vent Technologies [Pompano Beach, Floridal, and nothing on the bottom of the boat other than some lifting strakes; that was it as far as creating any sort of drag.

"So when we're running the boat up through the various rpm's with 13 people on board, the MAN engineer goes below with his headphones and computer. We were at 1,800 rpm; the engines top out around 2,300. We're doing 40 knots. He takes the headphones off and looks around. 'Damn,' he says, 'I think he might be right.'"

The skipper took the engine up to 2,100 rpm, and the knotmeter stopped at 47 knots. The prop had a little too much blade. After final tuning, the captain of Longevity now cruises at 50 knots, and has gone as fast as 56 knots. How about Palm Beach, Florida, to Sag Harbor, New York, in 30 hours' running time? Not too shabby, eh?

Other Projects

Billy Joel was sufficiently pleased with his own runabout that he commissioned Zurn to draw a larger boat, the 57' (17.4m) Shelter Island Commuter he named Vendetta-a reflection, Zurn says, of Joel's fondness for the phrase "Living well is the best revenge."

Equally visible has been the MJM 34z, a fast production power cruiser designed for Bob Johnstone and built by Boston BoatWorks, (For a detailed account of that model's development and construction, see PBB No. 99, pages 52 and 66). Zurn won the MJM commission on the strength of his designs for Joel. It's an offshore modified-V hullform with a powderhorn sheer and a Down East-style superstructure.

While retro-looking fast commuters have largely made Zurn's reputation, his portfolio is more diverse. David Marlow, whose Marlow Explorer series of motoryachts is built in the Far East, commissioned a 57-footer (17.4m), and then lengthened the hull tooling to 65' (19.8m) with provisions to dam it off for shorter models. From it were produced the Marlow 57, 61E (18.6m) with European-style transom, 61C with conventional transom, 65E, 65C, and a 71E (21.6m). The first few were built by President Marine



A Short Spin Aboard the Gloucester 20

It's one thing to look at drawings and quite another to get on board a boat and giddyup.

After meeting with Doug Zurn, I ran into marine surveyor, IBEX presenter, and Professional BoatBuilder contributing editor Jonathan Klopman, also of Marblehead. Together we drove out Cape Ann to Gloucester, where Joe Berkman and his Gloucester Boat Building Co. are producing the Zurn-designed

Gloucester 20 (6.1m), a center-console sportfisherman with 16° deadrise at the transom. She's a pretty boat, with a lot of flare forward and tumblehome aft—the latter feature a Zurn signature.

Berkman's shop is located on the eastern shore of the harbor, and has room for two or three hulls. Berkman, who worked a number of years for master builder Mark Lindsay (see PBB No. 99, page 52),



Marblehead, Massachusetts-based marine surveyor Jonathan Klopman, left, discusses G-20 construction details with builder Joe Berkman at his Gloucester waterfront shop.

made his own tooling. Lamination of hulls, decks, and small parts is outsourced to Amerol Composites in Seakonk, Massachusetts. Divinycell core is in the deck ring and cockpit sole. Berkman buys a Prisma Preforms grid stringer-and-floor kit

(foam and biaxial cloth) from Compsys Inc. (Melbourne, Florida). Everything is vacuum-bagged. The hull is single skin, ¾" (19mm) thick on the bottom and 1/16" (8mm) in the topsides. Penske board cores the transom. The fuel tank is the largest baffled poly unit he can buy. All up, the boat weighs 2,700 lbs (1,122 kg) with the standard 140-hp (105-kW) Suzuki four-stroke outboard. Berkman says half the boats go out the door with a conventional cutout transom, and half with an outboard bracket.

The wind was fresh from the south, piping directly into the harbor's mouth, but Berkman had no compunction about letting Klopman and me take out his demo boat. Once we were under way and heading out of the harbor, we got up on plane. Some reviews of this boat claim it doesn't pound. Nonsense. All boats pound, The G-20, with its

extreme flare, probably is a dry boat, but on this day, with the wind approaching 30 knots and us powering into a seascape of steep breaking waves, the spray flew. Then we smelled gasoline, and, deciding discretion was the better part of valor, we turned back. I can say with authority that the boat handled nicely downwind.

So much for our test drive. Should you wish to read how others found the boat's performance, Berkman's Web site, www.gboats.com, has links to a number of published reviews. Professional BoatBuilder does not, as a rule, conduct boat tests as such. The Gloucester 20 has been favorably written up in the consumer boating press. That said, I'll just add that the G-20 is indeed good-looking, and well

—Dan Spurr

Tainan, Taiwan), applying Kevlar and inyl ester and epoxy "where approoriate." Twin 800-hp (597-kW) Cateroillar diesels in the 65 achieve speeds approaching 25 knots. Current manuacturing facilities are located in Tainan, Taiwan, and at the Norsemen Shipyard in Xiamen, China.

Smaller designs include the

Vanquish 24 (7.3m) runabout for Vanquish Boats (Wellesley Island, New York), the Samoset 30 (9.1m) for Samoset Woodworking (Boothbay Harbor, Maine), and the Gloucester 20 for Gloucester (Massachusetts) Boat Building Company. For a brief look at the latter boat, see the sidebar beginning on page 48.

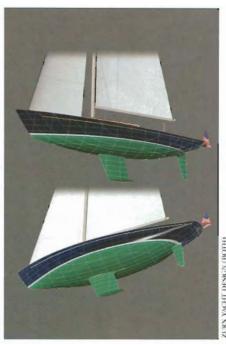
When Bob Johnstone began searching for a designer to help him develop the multi-role MJM 34z, shown here in sportfishing setup, he decided that the Shelter Island Runabout was the prettiest boat around. "Doug Zurn," he says, "has the eye."

An interesting project was commissioned by Rumery's Boat Yard (Biddeford, Maine), which had the lines for the last of legendary builder/designer Will Frost's fast lobsterboats, the 34' (10.3m) Leonard W. Here, Zurn was able to digitize the lines plan and move it into MultiSurf to fair the hull. Steve White and Bob Stephens of

Brooklin Boat Yard (profiled in PBB No. 84) helped with the construction drawings and methodology. Rumery's was then able to mold the hull and exhibit it at the 2002 Maine Boatbuilders Show, in Portland. Hull ≠1, Bat, is made of cold-molded Douglas-fir veneers over mahogany strips, sheathed with two layers of biaxial fiberglass cloth. Hull =2, Atina, has a fiberglass hull and house.

And then there's the inevitable list of designs commissioned but never built: a Shelter Island 46 (14m) for Billy Joel (changed his mind); two jet boats; a bassstyle boat for Hank Hinckley; a 50' (15.2m) daysailer for Chris Hood; and the Maine Island 46 with a single 1,500-hp (1,125-kW) waterjet for Lyman-Morse Boatbuilding in Thomaston, Maine (see PBB No. 97). What happened to that last project? The stock market dropped.





Left—The inboard-powered center-console Samoset 30 (9.1m), created for Samoset Woodworking in Boothbay Harbor, Maine. **Right**—The Bruckmann Daysailer is built by Bruckmann Manufacturing in Ontario, Canada. Its design brief called for a gentleman's daysailer in the same vein as The Hinckley Company's DS42 (12.8m) and Morris Yachts' 36 (11m). The generous overhangs and low freeboard, paired with a fin keel and spade rudder, support Zurn's Web-site slogan: "Classic ideas in contemporary design."





The Bruckmann Daysailer is intended to sail easily with large mainsail and self-tacking jib; note the traveler on the cabintop forward of the mast.

Zurn's roots are in sail, and for a time it seemed to him he might never get work beyond powerboats and

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motoryachts. (After all, the late Jack Hargrave, who designed motoryachts and commercial vessels but was a sailor at heart, never landed a commission for a sailboat. See PBB No. 99, page 30.) A partial return to sail

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Computer renderings of a current Zurn project for a California couple: a 62' (19m) semiplaning motoryacht under construction at Lyman-Morse Boatbuilding in Thomaston, Maine.







occurred when Sabre Yachts (South Casco, Maine) asked him to work with designer Jim Taylor to engineer the Sabre 45 (13.7m), and, in a related project, design the pilothouse for a client who'd bought a stock Sabre 45 hull and deck, and from there on wanted a custom boat.

A full design commission then came from Mark Bruckmann at Bruckmann Yachts, a long-time fiberglass fabricator in Mississauga, Ontario, Canada. Under Mark's father, Erich, the company, in 1969, was one of the founding partners behind C&C Yachts. What Mark Bruckmann wanted was a large, high-end, gentleman's daysailer, similar in concept to the recently introduced Morris 36 (11m) and Hinckley DS42 (12.8m). The Bruckmann 42 daysailer has classic lines above the waterline, with a raked stem, a counter stern, and fairly generous overhangs. Two setteeberths make weekending possible. It debuted at the Newport International Boat Show in 2005.

Zurn's most recent project is a 62' (19m) semiplaning motoryacht for a California couple, under construction at Lyman-Morse. Eschewing the elliptical shapes of windows and superstructure currently in vogue, Zurn has drawn clean, sharp lines. The sheer is subtle, beautifully tensioned by the equally subtle reverse curve of the

coach roof, accented by eyebrows. Windshield and flybridge profiles are in line, sharing the same rake. Similarly, the aft pilothouse structural members are in line with the radar arch above. There appears to be moderate flare forward, and the transom has attractive tumblehome. As was done on the Vanquish 24 and MJM 34z, the swim platform is made to look integral with the hull, partly because rubbing strakes just above the waterline lead into the platform port and starboard.

Construction consists of infused vinyl ester resin, Kevlar/E-glass hybrid reinforcements, and Corecell foam in the hull and deck. The hull is strengthened with four foam-cored stringers and seven floors. Displacement is 72,500 lbs (32,843 kg). Powered by two C-18 1,000-hp (750-kW) Caterpillar diesels and carrying 1,500 gal (5,678 l) of fuel (450-gal/1,703-l reserve), the yacht has a projected range of 950 miles (1,530 km) at 21 knots. Top speed should be around 32 knots.

As of this writing, Zurn has nine projects totaling 347' (106m). Sounds like it's time to hire more help.

Style

Some designers simply have "the eye," and some don't. What exactly that means, though, is hard to define. Let's just say it's a matter of getting a line *right*, bringing together all the disparate elements of a design—sheer, freeboard, cabin, proportions, portlights, bow and stern—so that they seem to belong to one another.

Zurn says, "There can't be a single thing in the boat that stands out." That doesn't necessarily happen during preliminary sketches and drawings. Zurn says he settles on a particular style and then refines it until "everything falls into place."

How do you know when everything is in place? A friend of mine, an excellent cook, recounts his first day as a kid on the job at a fancy restaurant. An order comes in for a pair of New York strips, medium rare. My friend asks the chef how he'll know when they're done. The chef looks at him, and says, "They'll be done when they're done."

The yacht designer with an eye knows when he's done, too.

As but one example of failed design, Zurn says he's amazed at how

many boats he sees on the water and in the marketplace whose stanchions and pulpits are "going in every direction." On his boats, he tries to make them as parallel as possible from every viewing angle.

And what of the retro look, of torpedo sterns, tumblehome, near-plumb bows, and narrow hulls? Zurn calls it "past meets power."

Writing in Yachting magazine, naval architect Dudley Dawson commented,

"Designer Doug Zurn seems to have a knack for combining visual nostalgia with the best of modern construction and performance, returning us to a time that never really was."

Yes, not unlike Batman's Gotham City. Isn't that a big reason why Zurn's designs look so damn good?

About the Author: Dan Spurr is Professional BoatBuilder's editor-atlarge.

