



Clean architecture all serves a purpose. Nigel Irens' chine redirects water along the side of the boat keeping spray off the decks. Gently radiused bows reduce windage considerably and also help keep spray below the wing deck. The Gunboat 55 dispenses with a traditional forward crossbeam, instead the carefully engineered bow structures incorporate 110 layers of carbon unidirectional in the primary hull infusion. Note the large topside main cabin windows and the all-round vision that characterises the main living space

# Acceptable no more

Gunboat founder and CEO Peter Johnstone introduces us to a new generation of fast cats...

The acceptable is no longer acceptable. Our goal is to deliver the spectacular. With this bold notion Gunboat set out to develop its new 55 Series.

Fifteen years of continuous development and refinement of the Gunboat concept has culminated in the highly successful Gunboat 60 Series. It is difficult to imagine a better-designed 60ft performance/world cruising cat that boasts four staterooms, crew quarters, along with traditional salon and Gunboat cockpits. Her all-carbon construction and cloud of sail are already proving her a worthy successor to earlier Gunboat series in this summer's racing skirmishes. It is also noteworthy that Gunboat 60-06 is being built for New York Yacht Club rear-commandore Phil Lotz: a future twin-hulled flagship.

Since the conclusion of the Gunboat 48 Series in 2007 Gunboat's model offerings

have been too large for the avid owner-operator market. The Gunboat 60 requires a crew for typical seasonal sailing between USA/Europe and the Caribbean, so we set out to develop the new Gunboat 55 to address the needs of owners who prefer to run their own boats.

Managing a brand's development over many years and 41 projects presents significant strategic and product development decisions. Do we endeavour to repeat the successful formula and simply deliver a smaller-scale Gunboat 60? After all, the Gunboat 48 delivered a smaller version of the original Gunboat 62. While these early models set a new standard they had only applied raceboat technology and design to the cruising cat segment. The Gunboat 48 had not delivered anything new beyond its larger predecessor, other than its smaller size. We were experiencing the creative rut that so many brands and designers only recognise years down the road.

To gently probe the market with different sizes of a refined offering would be an acceptable brand extension. With our history in mind, we were faced with a defining decision: do we accept the acceptable,

or dare to deliver a challenging design brief that promises that breakthrough concept, albeit at much greater risk?

We took the road less travelled.

The new design brief aimed for a simple result from a complex set of parameters. Further improvements to cutting-edge technology have led to the advent of increasingly larger owner-operator yachts. High-tech systems are necessary to enable lighter weights, reduced loads and easier push-button handling. The customers for today's high-tech yachts are titans of technology in their fields. Innovation and boundary pushing are expected. These improvements to yachts' systems enable owners to do more with greater enjoyment.

If technology is the enabler, design has become the enticer. Our customers work with the finest architects in the world on their homes. An impeccably designed living environment is their expectation. Traditional yacht designer-style salons, cockpits and cave-like cabins are no longer an option in a world of glass houses, convertible indoor/outdoor spaces and cantilevered protection eaves. Our owners expect an intelligent architectural approach to living



spaces on their yachts just as in their homes.

Observation of 14 years of owner use led us to believe a better main-deck living solution could be possible. On Gunboat's prior series back doors and windows were opened by owners immediately upon stepping onboard and remained so until they departed. The Gunboat 62s extended their aft cockpit visors for sun protection to make the outdoor space more livable. The Gunboat 66 series owners enlarged and protected the aft cockpit sides until it felt like an outdoor extension of the salon. The Gunboat 48 owners began to enclose their aft cockpits to create an added interior space to the smaller salon. All of our owners have been moving towards a merging of these two prime spaces.

Clearly the owner modifications offered clues to a better solution. Why not extend the roof aft and remove the door and window bulkhead between the salon and aft cockpits? One large, convertible main living area would greatly increase the sense of livable space and offer the design team the opportunity to explore and deliver a truly indoor/outdoor experience – by simply enclosing and protecting when conditions are uncomfortable, opening and letting the air in when favourable.

Further considering owner operation, a primary design initiative was to reduce the interior maintenance and cleaning demands. An open and convertible main living area with a simple, hardwearing raw



**Top: the business end with integrated helm/navigation and instruments. A team of just three can race the Gunboat 55 hard. All halyards are 1:1 on Hall Spars locks – rope weight has been reduced by 70% compared to previous Gunboats. Using advanced construction, the carbon mullions (above) are minimised to maximise sight lines. A high-end semi-rigid screen seals the main living enclosure in the case of bad weather**

teak floor enables one to simply hose the entire space out of the transoms.

In a world of reluctant reason our species has gradually demonstrated a preference for the indoor operation of automobiles in the 1930s, aeroplanes in the 1940s and powerboats in the 1950s. For wind in the hair, autos and powerboats have long offered sunroofs. Gunboat has offered indoor helming and navigation since 2001,

with sail handling which led to an outdoor forward cockpit. Moving all operations indoors seems inevitable for owner comfort and protection, with some nice windage and weight savings as secondary gains.

The 55 Series offers an integrated helm and navigation pod linked to the sail-handling area, making any TP52 pit jockey feel very much at home. A retractable sunroof and forward sliding doors allow

complete visibility and ventilation or shelter from the weather. Push-button control of sail trim may be performed in the open air or with complete protection.

Moving below, we took inspiration from our Rhoades-Young designed Gunboat 90 cabins which placed the queen berths in a transverse orientation, so guests could see the water racing by the hull windows from their pillow. Leapfrogging that concept, Nauta Design delivered spacious refined versions for the new Gunboat 55. A panoramic window offers views from along the entire cabin's length – no more submariner claustrophobia typical of most performance multihulls.

Perhaps the Gunboat 55 layout excels due to what has been left out. The two master cabins and ensuite heads are standard. To meet each owner's needs various layout options are available. A third ensuite cabin may be added. Galley may be up or down. The Gunboat 55 is a sailing enthusiast's machine yet is fully featured with air-conditioning, fridges, freezers, washing machine, ample storage and a towering Hall Spars package delivering performance polars similar to the Puma Volvo 70, according to North Sails president – and Puma skipper – Ken Read.

Gunboat has an enviable record of delivering excellent results wherever produced. Three different subcontractors and a Gunboat-owned yard produced most of the brand's early work in Cape Town.

The recent Gunboat 60 is wrapping up its run at Hudson Yachts in China after a



five-year effort. An ancient Chinese proverb says that the signed contract is just the beginning of the daily negotiation; with rapidly increasing costs and an eye on bringing manufacturing back stateside, it was time to establish a base at home in the USA. Gunboat has set up an all-new yard in Wanchese, NC, an area rich in epoxy boatbuilding experience. The Gunboat 55 series is up and running with a dozen contracts and two boats launched. The all-carbon production line at Gunboat's

American campus is a sight to behold.

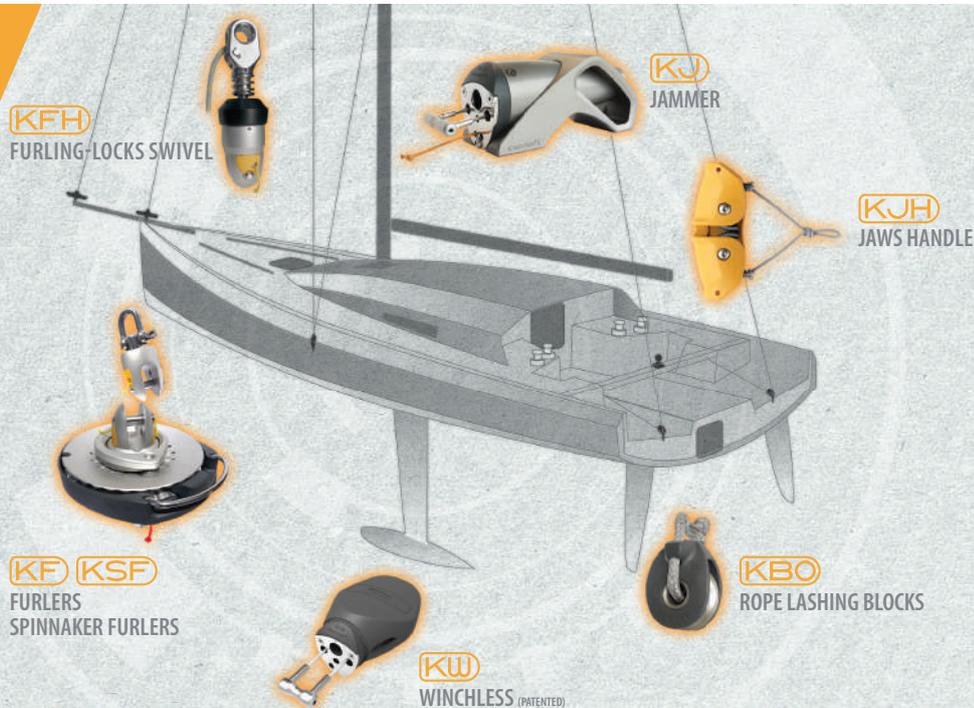
Arriving at the globally designed solutions to the above owner requirements and design parameters required an international team of specialists including naval architecture, structural engineering, performance evaluation, industrial design, interior architecture, electrical and mechanical engineering and electronic expertise. The design process would have suited a yacht four times the size.

Many tangents of the concept were pursued over a two-year design phase and more than a few difficult conference calls nearly led to some merely acceptable solutions. When world-leading talent is pressed by a brand on a mission with a difficult and challenging brief, frustration can ferment until the excitement takes over. Where passion can be harnessed great results will follow. We'd like to salute Nigel Irens, Richard Oliver at ASTA, Massimo Gino at Nauta Design, Christophe Chandal Anglay, JB Braun at North Sails and Henry Maxwell at Hall Spars for their particular contributions to the Gunboat 55's result.

Brian Cohen, the original investor in Pinterest, is the owner of Gunboat 55-01 *Rainmaker*. With two months of sailing, Brian observes, 'Gunboat's vision with this new 55 is going to disrupt the marketplace. You step aboard and are immediately blown away by the commonsense of the design, the sight lines and cleanness of it all. *Rainmaker* is changing the focus of our lives. We want to be on her every day.

'She is spectacular!' □

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