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CUSTOM BOATS

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High-tech



SEPTEMBER 2003 0 9 0 7 0 7 1486 01285 6 \$4.99 US/\$5.99 CAN

Exclusives: Crescent's Crescent Lady (above)

and Tiara 3600, plus Mays-Craft 42 and Sea Ray 420

By Capt. Bill Pike / Photos by Ken Hannas

Mayea Boat Works puts a modern-day spin on gorgeous, old-fashioned, plank-on-frame masterpieces.

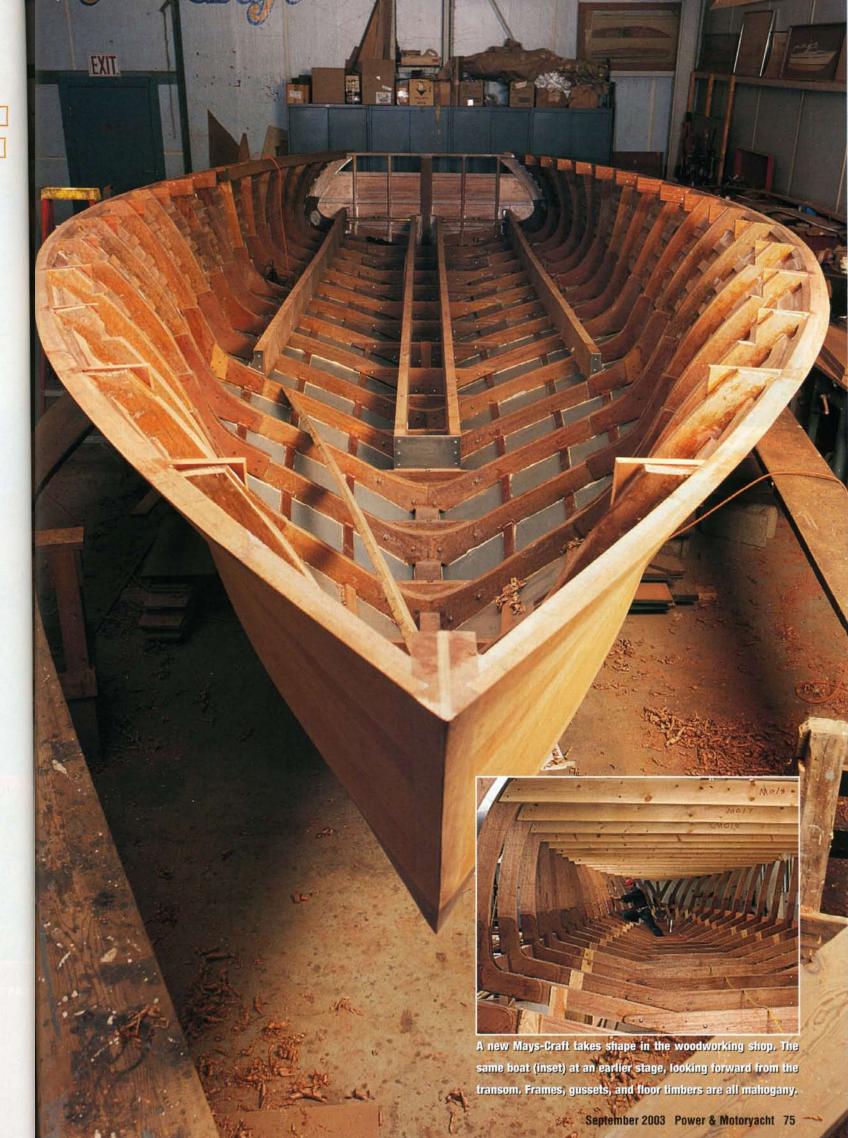
t's an unpretentious place, Mayea Boat Works: little more than a bunch of corrugatedsteel sheds, barns, and boathouses hunkered by the waters of Michigan's Lake St. Clair. If you were in a hurry and intent on getting to better-known lakeside vacation spots like Algonac or St. Clair Shores, you'd probably just drive on through the notice the sign by the side of the road that proclaims

town of Fairhaven and never For the Mayeas, boatbuilding is a family affair. Left to right: Larry, Herb, Norm Plettl, and Donnie. That's Chad kneeling.

"Mayea Marine Store." Such an oversight would be truly unfortunate, though, because inside the store, in addition to the shiny new cans of varnish and the shelves full of WEST SYSTEM® epoxy paraphernalia, you'd likely come across a lady named Flo. And Flo's the gal who, when she's not answering the phone for Mayea Boat Works, keeping the company's books, ordering parts, and paying the bills, can tell folks where they can find Larry Mayea.

Mayea's a fascinating guy, but hard to keep tabs on, for any number of reasons. Maybe it's because he's got the kind of metabolism that inhales a 60-hour workweek and keeps right on truckin'. Or maybe it's because, having got his start by sweeping floors in the woodworking shop when he was just ten, he's simply accustomed to hard work and staying abreast of all things great and small, both hither and

yon. Or maybe—and this is what I personally believe— Mayea's just like the other four principals of Mayea Boat Works: his 83-year-old father Herb (who continues to walk three miles a day for exercise, although he just cut back to a 45-hour workweek), his younger brother Donny, his brother-in-law Norm, and his son Chad. They're all so synched into plank-on-frame mahogany boatbuilding that trying to keep up with just one of them for two days 'bout



wore me plumb out, as we like to say in the sunny South.

Of course, I loved every minute of it, although in actuality two days

isn't a real long time to get a proper handle on what goes on at Mayea Boat Works, where Mays-Craft boats are built. For one thing, the

> place is inscrutably old—it first opened its big double doors in July 1903, which made it 100 years old the day I arrived to begin gaping and scratching my head in amazement. Mayea Boat Works has withstood the building of Navy seaplanes during WWI, the hard days of the Great Depression, a couple of Prohibition shootouts, the creation of prototype landing craft during WWII, and a vast and disastrous fire that almost burned the whole shebang to the ground. Even most of the tools the guys use are old.

The big planer in the woodworking shop, for instance, is about the same age as Herb, who refuses to switch over to a fancy new one. The old one's made of solid-cast, he says, and heavy enough to stay put while a fellow single-handedly planes a mahogany plank. Then there's the adze Herb uses to swiftly, unerringly, and gracefully hew stems and prepare the outboard surfaces of frames for planking-the darn thing's 150 years old, according to Herb, the Michelangelo of South American mahogany. And finally there are the numerous drawers in the shops and sheds filled with ancient block planes, jack planes, spoke shaves, and other fantastically shaped woodworking implements, many borrowed from the realm of the violin maker. Many of these date back four generations when Herb's French Canadian grandfather built boats in the wilds of our neighbors to the north.

But here's a detail that was a little tough to get my mind around during my stay at the Boat Works (at least at first): Despite the elemental nature of the raw materials and hand tools the Mayea family uses to fashion custom Mays-Craft runabouts, speedboats, sport cruisers, and fishboats, there's a considerable amount of cutting-edge technology that goes into each new launch. Moreover, much of the very same tech-



nology is subtly applied to each restoration the Herb Mayea hewed our test boat's stem with this adze. It only took him an hour.

Larry Mayea plies his trusted badger-hair brush—he's a wizard with Awlgrip and varnish.

DRIVING MISS ABBRACCI

think I've handled a 42-foot woodie before...at least not a Mays-Craft with a thanks to Larry Mayea's artistry with a \$1,650,000 price tag. This little trip three-inch, badger-hair brush—Mayea should be interesting."

No lie, guy! My first glimpse of Abbracci—that's "hugs" in Italian, which reportedly captures the essence of the boat for her owner, Texas electronics entrepreneur Paul Andrews-dang near blew me out of the water. Not only was

efore I left my home, Mullet Man-she looked like Mozart, Beethoven, or sion, to go up to Michigan, I was some other big-wig genius had done the saying to myself, "Ya know, I don't composing. Her white Awlgrip-coated topsides shown with flawless grandeur, Boat Works doesn't own a paint sprayer and never will, he says. And Abbracci's stainless steel deck hardware, custom fabricated locally by a German who the Mayea family has known for years, exquisitely accented her deck and superstructure, an amalgam of South Amerithe boat entirely composed of wood, but can mahogany, teak, walnut, and pure,

ineffable artisnal flare.

I got behind the wheel ASAP. While waiting for the two hulking 750-hp BPMs to warm up, I'll be darned if I didn't feel like I was waiting for a classical concert

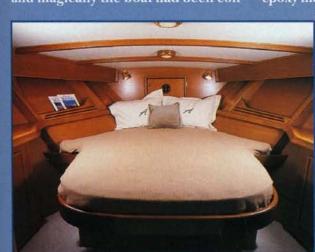
Clockwise from below: a BPM behemoth; thrills 'n chills; and yes, that's a mahogany arch.





works for a long time. It takes five years to a new project and then two more to complete it. Larry's only half-joking when he opens conversations with prospective clients by asking them how healthy they are!

As I drove Abbracci toward the sunny diamonds of Lake St. Clair, I reflected on just how meticulously, systematically, and magically the boat had been con-



Interiors feature a satiny, honey-hued, proprietary stain.

to begin—one that had been in the structed. Key to the process was the first step-the creation of a scale model, for the busy Mayeas to even get around carved by hand from a solid block of mahogany with the same knives, shaves, hollowing planes, and other tools violin makers use. Although computer-generated offsets taken from the model for lofting had come next, then the automated cutting of components on a CNC milling machine, and then the application of the latest WEST SYSTEM® epoxy methods and products, there was

> little doubt in my mind that the heart of the boat was artistry, not technology.

walled Abbracci's ZF/Mathers electronic engine controls, letting the big BPMs vociferously out of the bag. In five seconds flat I was skipping across Lake St. Clair like a stone, carving turns, swooshing figure-eights, and generally feeling like a kid.

The best was yet to come,



Galley highlights include custom, polishedbrass hardware and black-wainut accents.

though. Once I'd ascertained that Abbracci would do 43.7 mph WOT and 14 mph on one engine (should difficulties arise with the other), I headed the test boat cheerily for the barn. (See specifications box on page 78.) However, while Vrrrrooooooooom! I fire-turning the corner into the scarily narrow and shallow canal that serviced our slip, I said to Donny Mayea, "So Donny, you wanna take her in?" "Nah," he replied, "You're doin' great."

> Abbracci was so responsive, so balanced, so quick, that docking her under close-quarters conditions was like hearing the "Adagio & Fugue for Strings" or "Moonlight Sonata" on a warm summer -B.P. night. I loved it.

company does, whether it's of a 47-foot Chris-Craft Commander or one of Gar Wood's old Harmsworth Trophy winners (see "How Many Miles per Hour?" right).

"Not to do this kinda thing would be like saying I prefer manual steering because that's the way they used to do things in the old days," Larry laughs. "It's just not sensible."

So a brand-new boat from the Mayeas may look, feel, and even smell like a plank-on-frame mahogany antique, but at the heart of this charming illusion dwells sophisticated WEST SYSTEM® epoxy products, okoume and sapele plywood, Awlgrip paint, modern, computermodeled lines and running surfaces, and the supersize powerplants the Mayeas

sometimes favor (like big Hemi V-8s and fire-breathing 12-cylinder Italian BPMs). All these things will keep a Mays-Craft looking foxy-fine forever. And, more than likely, sounding that way, too.

HOW MANY MILES PER HOUR?



Besides building new boats, Mayea Boat Works restores old ones, like Gar Wood's *Miss America X* (left), a tabled fire-breather that the Mayeas just started work on. Affectionately called "Eight Tons of Dynamite," the boat set a world water-speed record of 124.86 mph in 1932, thanks to four 1,900-hp Packard engines that burned a lively mixture of gasoline, benzol,

and alcohol. Today's race officials would have been horrified by conditions in the cockpit underway, however. Gases from the straight-pipe exhausts blasted past with a vengeance. And boat-tester that I am, I'm convinced the sound levels Wood and throttleman Orlin Johnson endured would have blown *PMY*'s sound meter to smithereens.

I brazenly asked Larry Mayea if I could test drive Miss America X once she's fully restored.

"You're the first guy I'll call," he replied—quite seriously, I thought.

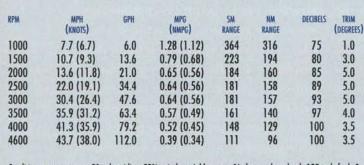
—B.P.

Mayea Boat Works ☎ (586) 725-6111. www.mayea.com.

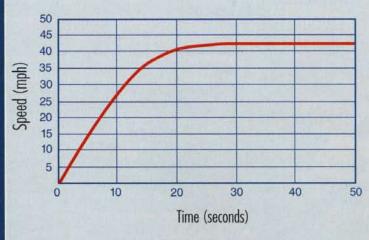
For additional photos, visit our Web site at powerandmotoryacht.com/webfeatures.



pmy tested: Mays-Craft 42 Sport Cruiser



Conditions: temperature: 81°; humidity: 58%; wind: variable; seas: 1' chop or less; load: 183 gal. fuel, 0 gal. water, 2 persons, 200 lbs. gear. Speeds are two-way averages measured w/Stalker radar gun. GPH provided by engine manufacturer. Range: 90% of advertised fuel capacity. Decibels measured on A scale. 65 dB is the level of normal conversation. All measurements taken with trim tabs fully retracted.



Acceleration based on average of 4 reciprocal runs using Stalker ATS radar gun and OceanPC laptop.

Base price: \$1,350,000 with 2/355-hp Cummins 370B diesel inboards

Optional power: 2/430-hp Cummins 450C diesel inboards or 2/750-hp BPM gasoline inboards

Standard equipment: sculpted-mahogany radar arch; SCM Tempesta opening ports; Danforth Constellation compass; Telcor Instruments; Force 10 cooktop; Sharp Carousel microwave oven; Norcold refrigerator; Black & Decker Spacemaker coffee maker; Newmar electrical panel; Promatic 50-3 Promariner battery charger; Florida Marine welded-aluminum fuel tanks; 4/1,200-gph Lovett bilge pumps w/built-in float switches; 7-kW Kohler genset (double-insulated, in soundshield);10,000-Btu Westerbeke A/C; Bennett trim tabs

Specifications

Length overall: 42'0" Waterline length: 39'3"

Beam: 14'5" Draft: 3'0"

Weight (dry): 25,000 lbs. Fuel capacity: 315 gal. Water capacity: 80 gal.

Test engines: 2/750-hp BPM gasoline inboards

Optional equipment on test boat: Connoly leather upholstery; ZF/Mathers electronic engine controls; Furuno CRT radar; Sea156 VHF; Northstar 952X GPS plotter; electric hatch and windshield-panel lifts; Robertson AP300 autopilot; 17,000-Btu Westerbeke A/C

Price as tested: \$1,650,000