



...BUT CAN HE JUGGLE?

The Many Talents of Dave Gerr

WHEN CONVERSATIONS TURN TO YACHT DESIGN, SOME NAMES MAY SPRING TO MIND MORE FREQUENTLY THAN DAVE GERR'S, BUT NONE IN A GREATER RANGE OF DISCIPLINES, IN THIS CASE EDUCATOR, AUTHOR, SURVEYOR AND INDUSTRY ADVISOR IN ADDITION TO NEARLY THREE DECADES SHAPING VESSELS IN A REMARKABLE VARIETY OF SIZE, SHAPE AND PURPOSE. Story Jerry Stansfield

His father, a ship's carpenter during World War II, Gerr grew up a likely candidate for a marine-related career. He designed his first boat at age 14, and built his first at 17. After high school and following initial studies as a physics major at New York University, he transferred to Pratt Institute to study industrial design, then enrolled in the yacht design course offered by the Westlawn Institute of Marine Technology. Apart from an inherited affinity for boats, Gerr's attraction to yacht design was driven in large measure by his appreciation for the way it balances the complementary disciplines of hard science and aesthetics. "In boat design," he says, "you truly have the perfect blend of art and science. A boat must be graceful and beautiful, but must also be functional and meet rigid engineering and performance criteria."

In 1979, well into his Westlawn coursework, Gerr

took a job at the New York naval architecture firm of MacLear & Harris, an especially beneficial tenure for him if only for the enormous variety of projects he was able to work on, including private and commercial craft, power and sail, mono- and multi-hull, fast, slow, large and small. His Westlawn studies complete and armed with a broad base of hands-on experience (having also built several of his own designs), he founded Gerr Marine, Inc., in 1983. Since then his firm has grown in size and scope, amassing a portfolio that includes private and commercial designs, even consulting work on nuclear attack submarines. Along the way, he has written a number of technical books, and more than 380 articles for marine journals.

As if that resume weren't sufficiently diverse, Gerr in 2003 was asked by the American Boat & Yacht Council, the organization that writes the safety stan-

dards for U.S.-built boats as well as educating marine professionals, to serve as director of his alma mater, the Westlawn Institute. ABYC at that time was about to acquire the 77-year-old institution from the National Marine Manufacturers Association, and saw in Gerr the depth and breadth of experience they knew would be required to oversee operations and to update and expand its curriculum.

Currently, Gerr still is involved in his New York-based design firm in addition to his duties at Westlawn. He is a fellow of the Royal Institution of Naval Architects (RINA), an associate member of the Society of Naval Architects and Marine Engineers (SNAME), a member of ABYC, and a charter member of the Society of Boat & Yacht Designers. *Yachts International* caught up with him (It wasn't easy) on his way from New York to Westlawn's headquarters in Mystic, Conn.

...boats should
embody beauty,
seakindliness,
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Contact

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YI: Are there any areas of special interest to you within the broad scope of yacht design, naval architecture and marine engineering?

DG: Rather than pointing to any small group of disciplines, I would say just the opposite. It is the entirety of boat design that absorbs me. I tell my clients and students that most of the individual aspects of small-craft design aren't that difficult. What is really very, very difficult is getting all the numerous disparate aspects of a design to work together harmoniously. This is the key to the art and science of boat design, and mastering this takes a lifetime of study.

YI: How would you describe your design philosophy, in terms of how you would approach a project?

DG: I believe strongly that boats should embody four things: beauty, seakindliness, strength and efficiency, and in equal parts. This is what guides my design process.

YI: Which of your current or past design projects do you consider most significant, and why?

DG: Three of those would be:

The *Summer Kyle/Peregrine* tunnel drive boats. These are shoal motorcruisers, with wonderful traditional lines. They are the first of this unique ultra-shoal, tunnel-drive hull built in over 60 years and have exceeded all expectations, particularly in seakindliness. We're talking about 42-footers that draw just 22" and 47-footers that draw just 28" and are fully beachable. They go comfortably over hull speed and are not just good but exceptional sea boats. The largest of these, the 76-foot *Kestrel/Walrus*, was just launched a few months ago. She draws just 44", is fully beachable and has transatlantic capability.

Imagine, the *Kanter 57*. This aluminum voyaging motorcruiser (with transatlantic range) was designed as the ultimate sea boat. She'll take her crew through about anything and she embodies my often-used moderately slender hull form.

The *Santa Cruz Coastal Flyer*. This is a 41-foot production composite jet-drive motorcruiser. Santa Cruz Yachts builds them superbly. Again, this is an exceptionally good sea boat, particularly for a 41 footer with a 20" draft. I think the Coastal Flyer is the most beautiful powerboat from my drawing board so far.

YI: You have several books, papers and many magazine articles to your credit. Describe the most significant of these.

DG: Of the five books I've written, *Propeller Handbook* seems to have become the boating industry standard reference on this subject. *The Nature of Boats* covers nearly every aspect of boat design, performance, behavior and construction in a form easily accessible to the average boater, but not stinting on technical information. *The Elements of Boat Strength* seems to have been widely accepted as a reliable, conservative scantling rule and construction guide for all boatbuilding materials, and a guide that is very easy to use. It is used as a text in the naval architecture program at the U.S. Naval Academy. All three of these books are approaching their 10th printings.

YI: Describe your activities and tenure at Westlawn.

DG: As Director, I oversee all operations, from managing staff to accreditation reports and financial operations. I grade the most advanced students' lessons and handle the more technical questions. I also am in charge of updating the curriculum, introducing new courses, promotion and advertising, and working with ABYC.

Since I took over, we've introduced the largest single curriculum upgrade in Westlawn's history, moved the office into and affiliated with Mystic Seaport, moved much more of the program online, and forged a new joint continuing-education program with SUNY (State University of New York) Maritime, Westlawn and ABYC.

Now in its 77th year, Westlawn has trained more practicing small-craft designers than all other such schools in the world combined. Westlawn alumni include Tom Fexas, Bruce King, Jack Hargrave and scores of other prominent designers.

YI: Any thoughts on the future of yacht design?

DG: The only thing I can say here is that the boating industry is huge and—with the usual fluctuations of any industry—can be expected to get larger over time, and that a real dedication to quality will ensure market success in the long run, whether it's in design, construction or service segments of the industry.



**GERR'S 41' SANTA CRUISE
COASTAL FLYER RECALLS THE CLASSIC
CONTOURS OF THE 1930S-ERA
COMMUTER LAUNCH, TOP LEFT. THE
KANTER 57' *IMAGINE* HAS OCEAN-GOING
CAPABILITY AND A 2300-NM RANGE**

