

ForbesLife

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ISTANBUL STYLE

**THE VERY RICH
HOURS OF
NATHAN MYHRVOLD**

**THE HAPPIEST
HOTEL ON EARTH**

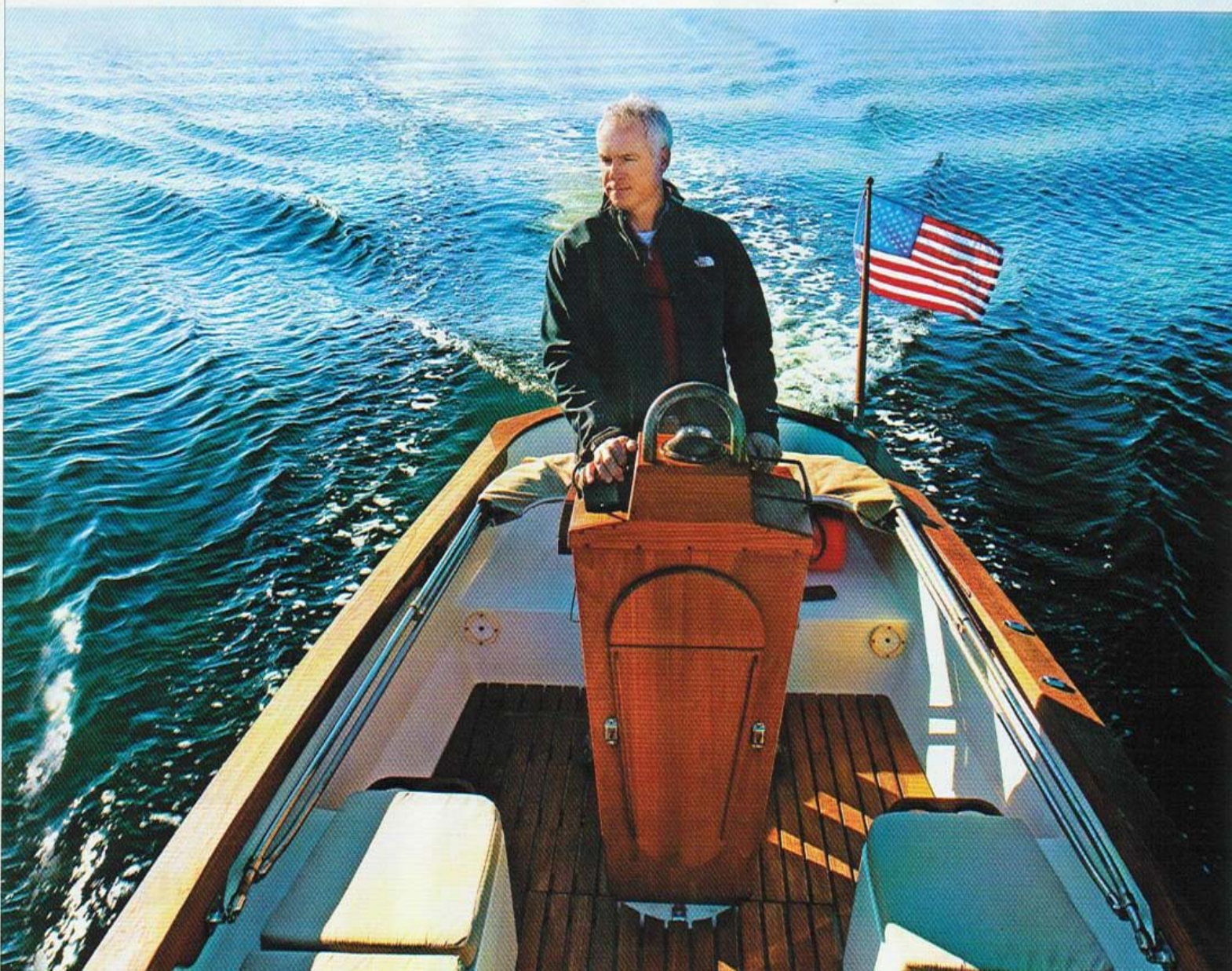
**BENTLEY'S NEW
CONTINENTAL GT**



Caribiana Sea Skiffs

The coolest boats on the water • By Ann Abel • Photography by Eric van den Brulle

For Curt Morse, it was love at first sight: She was beautiful, stylish, and at perfect ease in her element. She was also green and 23 feet long—a Caribiana skiff. As Morse recalls, “I walked up and touched it and it just resonated, like: This is a phenomenal boat.” • A few years later he heard that the boutique Gulf Coast boatbuilder had fallen on hard times in the wake of Hurricane Katrina; Caribiana Sea Skiffs was in fact on life support. Morse tracked down the company’s owner, and in 2007 he bought it, trading his former career in the horse business for one in the boat world. The transition was easy, he says, in that boating and horseback riding are both lifestyles rather than mere



hobbies, and now he's having tremendous fun running Caribiana.

Based on the svelte lines of Caribbean workboats, and available in a bouquet of vibrant colors, Caribianas are eye-grabbers. "It's not just transportation," Morse says proudly. "No one ever says these boats are ordinary-looking." And they ride as well as they look: Slicing the water with their raked bows, they're slim and trim at 6.5 feet wide, and with a 50 hp motor they can run flat-out (about 25 mph) for an hour on 3 gallons of gas.

The skiff you order is very much your own. Once the fiberglass hull arrives in the Foley, Alabama, shop, Caribiana's craftsmen customize the details: cushion fabrics, engine type, rails, ropes, fishing-rod and cup holders, picnic tables, Bimini tops, bronze hardware, and of course all the hand-finished teak you can handle in the floorboards, rub rail, steering pedestal, and helm seat. All told, at least 200 man-hours go into building each skiff.

Morse shepherds buyers through the process, monitors each boat's progress almost daily, and then—this is something you probably won't find at Chris-Craft—delivers the boat personally. (He's driven them as far as the Chesapeake Bay.) Your first ride in your new skiff is a shakedown cruise with the personable Morse himself, who ends up remaining in touch with many owners for years afterward.

Of course, all the Caribiana owners in the world would make up a pretty modest Christmas card list. The company can craft only about 12 boats a year, and there are roughly 110 in existence. It's an exclusive club, with notably loyal members—a couple dozen attend a get-together every year.

One enthusiast is Gilbert Lamphere, who works in private equity in New York and uses his Caribiana at his homes in Florida and Maine. He was first attracted to the way it looks but notes that "as you delve into it, you realize that it's unsurpassed in its ability to take on heavier water. It's easy to maneuver and easy to dock, and it turns on a dime." Other boaters take notice, too: "It's quite a showpiece when people look at it compared to their boats." Many owners report that they're asked about their Caribianas virtually every time they take them out.

In fact, when Morse boated over to pick me up at a Pensacola Beach marina on what he called a weather-perfect "Chamber of Commerce morning" last January, he was late because the marine patrol had stopped him to admire his Caribiana.

As he drove us to lunch and I drove us back, everything he'd told me about the skiff's getting close to the sea came into clear relief. The lightweight boat has a draft so shallow that you can float in just a foot of water and take it where similarly sized boats can't go. You can park it on the beach. It handles like a dream—smooth, responsive, quiet. All true...but what sold me in the end was simply thinking how great I looked at the helm. ■

➤ \$35,000–\$65,000. 850-232-8356, caribiana.com



Clockwise from above: Curt Morse in a Caribiana on Pensacola Bay; boatbuilder James Dean resets caulk on a teak bow; Caribiana owners at one of their annual gatherings; loading a Caribiana into the water; a teak and bronze helm.

