



BEAUTY *on the* WATER



Curt Morse grew up in true Huck Finn style, playing on the banks of the Mississippi River in Greenville, Mississippi. And, as did Mark Twain, Curt grew up with boats, something that served both of them well later on in life.



After graduating from the University of Southern Mississippi, Curt embarked on a 15-year career in the world of retail equestrian products, a business that eventually took him to Ireland for three years.

The lure of the beach eventually got to Curt, and he and his wife Connie moved to Pensacola. This led to a chance encounter that would change Curt's life and vocation. Curt was spending a leisurely day at Pirate's Cove, a waterfront bar and restaurant on Arnica Bay in Josephine, Alabama, just across the border from Florida. He saw an interesting boat tied up at the Pirate's Cove dock, one like he'd never seen before. He walked up, touched it, and "felt the life and energy in the boat." He was mesmerized.

"It was a Caribiana Sea Skiff," said Curt. "I met the boat's owner there who turned out to be the original founder of Caribiana, Lynn Rabren. This was in '03 or '04. Lynn was by trade a videographer. He's done stuff for "60 Minutes" and filmed Bob Dylan before becoming a boat builder. I got to know and respect him. He and I were kindred spirits."

Then Katrina hit. Curt saw the effect on Lynn. "It floored him. After the storm, he went to New Orleans and filmed the damage and recovery efforts. I think it got to him. Katrina also knocked out the production facility for Caribiana and I talked to Lynn about getting involved. Lynn and his wife Joanne McDonough (who was a T.V. producer) had the artistic vision to design the boat, but the daily production chores weren't what he liked. I thought I could handle the production side and marketing. We had the classic right brain versus left brain difference. Lynn was a creative, I was more business oriented. So I picked up the reigns from Lynn. I think the boat business had sidetracked him; I believe his true love was videography. After filming the effects of Katrina, he went back to it. Lynn and his wife had the



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design expertise and had perfected the boat. Now he needed someone else to take the business to the next level. Lynn said that Caribiana was like a kid. He had raised the kid and gotten her through high school, but she needed to go to college. He thought I could get the kid to college. So I started looking into what it would take to get things up and running again. Now we're building the boats in Pensacola."

Curt didn't have any formal education in the boat business, but he'd had plenty of business and marketing experience, which he put to good use making Caribiana a sought after boat. "Boats are a lifestyle. That's how people see them. The equestrian industry was a lifestyle, too, so I had experience selling a lifestyle. We've sold our skiffs from the East coast to the West coast, and to some notable people. A lot of our sales come from our owners' friends, who see the boat and say, 'Hey, I want one of those'."

A Caribiana Sea Skiff is 23' long and 6' abeam. Each is custom made. The fiberglass hull is hand laid. She's rated for 90 h.p. but Curt and others say the craft works fine with a much smaller motor due to the narrow beam of the boat. Curt explained, "The Caribiana is based on a dory design from the Caribbean. You see them all over the



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narrow beam of the boat. Curt explained, "The Caribiana is based on a dory design from the Caribbean. You see them all over the Caribbean and there's a reason they are so popular. They work. They don't require a lot of engine to push them. They are very efficient. They glide through the water."

Pricing for a boat with engine starts at around \$30,000, but since each boat is custom made, there are lots of extras available. The standard fittings are stainless, but bronze is available as an option. Curt says the bronze turns to a wonderful patina finish that gives the boat an Old World look. And there's lots of teak. There are options for a teak pedestal for the wheel, a teak rub rail with rope inlay, teak floorboards and a teak breastplate. All woodwork is done locally, too. Decked out in all that teak, the Caribiana is a beauty to behold.

It was the beauty that hooked Sid Klein, Clearwater, Florida's police chief. Chief Klein went to the boat show in Pensacola in 2001 to see the Caribiana. He took a demo ride in Pensacola Bay. "I was impressed. The bay was really rolling and we didn't get wet," he said. "I loved the way it rode. And I fell in love with its looks. I wanted to buy it on the spot, but talked myself down. Then I got out to the car with my wife and she said, 'You know you want it, why not go ahead and buy it?' So I walked back in and bought it on the spot. It's hull number 39, and I named it the 'Lady Lo' after my deceased wife."

The Chief uses the Caribiana every chance he gets. "I take it out fishing, out in the bay island hopping. And it's great for picnics. It has a fold down picnic table that folds right out from the center console. You can have dinner just like eating at your table."

Powering Chief Klein's skiff is a 50 h.p. Honda. "It sips gas," he said. "And it gets me anywhere I want to go at 25-30 knots." One of the things he enjoys about the boat is the attention. "Every time you launch it, it turns heads. Someone always comes up to me and says, 'That's the most beautiful boat I've ever seen.'"

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The affection Chief Klein has for his Caribiana Sea Skiff is shared by most other owners. The Chief declares, "It's the last boat I'll ever own." That's a good thing and a bad thing for Curt Morse. Why? Lack of repeat sales. That's the price you pay when you build something beautiful that lasts.

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