

DESIGNERS

Bill Shaw



Bill Shaw talks about the "philosophy of design" that has carried him through more than 20 years at Pearson Yachts.

Bill Shaw, 58, is Executive Vice President, General Manager, and Chief Designer at Pearson Yachts, one of America's largest sailboat manufacturers. In the 1950s, he co-founded the Midget Ocean Racing Club (MORC), and worked as a designer under Olin Stephens at Sparkman & Stephens in New York. He moved to Pearson in 1964.

In a recent interview, SAILOR asked Shaw how he manages to design boats at Pearson while dealing with general management tasks at the same time. He explained: "I have a design staff of about seven fellows, and they do the bulk of the work, really. I still participate in the design to the extent that I can put my name on it...and I guide them. Perhaps they have been brainwashed a little bit into my philosophy of design, and thus we get along very nicely." His

"philosophy of design" sounded to us like an interesting topic, and we pursued it.

Let's talk about the Bill Shaw "philosophy of design."

My thoughts about that are pretty simple. I think that cruising boats, first of all, should be rather nimble. I have no tolerance for cruising boats that literally can't get out of their own way. I think they are dangerous, and the cruisers, particularly, want to have a very able boat because they often get out there either by themselves or with a very short-handed crew. That's the nature of cruising, as opposed to a racing boat where you've got quite a work force to go to bat for you in the event of a serious problem. But when you're out there by yourself, or with your wife or another couple, who may not be that adept as sailors, the boat has got to speak for itself, in very strong terms. It should be well-balanced

and fast because sometimes you need to outrun trouble. And certainly, it has got to have the ability to sail to windward as well as a racing boat because the alternative may be a lee shore, which is the end of the line right there.

There are compromises between the factors that make a boat fast and those which make a boat comfortable; I am constantly balancing them. And like anyone else, my batting average shows that some of the boats I've designed have been good cruising racers and some of them haven't had as much speed potential as I had hoped for because the compromise was more towards the comfort side.

Your Pearson 35 centerboarder, a nice boat for gunkholing, is no longer being built. Do you feel that the old shallow-draft centerboard concept is dying?

Far from it. To my pleasure, we are seeing a lot of centerboard boats still being pumped out of here. They fill a very important part of the marketplace. It's those little gunkholes that people like to stick their noses into every once in awhile that make centerboard boats so great. And they sail well too: you can balance them out.

The market dictates what we offer, and if the market wants keel boats, we give them keel boats. Certainly, they're considerably cheaper than centerboarders, but centerboard boats are far from dead.

With fewer moorings and dock spaces available, do you think a trend will develop toward larger trailerable centerboard boats, perhaps 30 or even 35 feet long?

I concur with the fact that waterfront property is disappearing. I also feel that the idea of putting a 30-foot boat on a trailer is a good one, but I am not really convinced that dragging your boat behind your car is the solution, other than to take it from home to the place where you normally sail, maybe twice a year. The real solution is to have access to the water through a properly designed system. I think systems will be developed that will dry-store a heck of a lot of boats, including big