

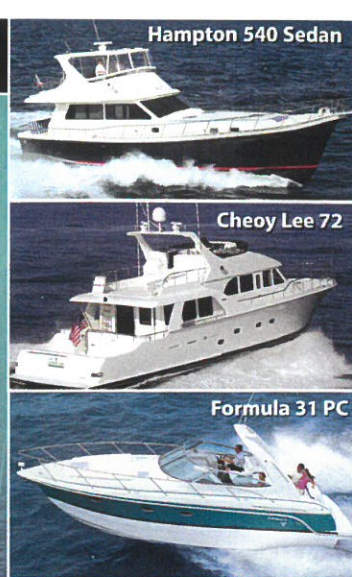
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Sea

America's Western Boating Magazine

Anchoring Tips From an Expert

End the Embarrassment Here



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June 2005
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WES WHEELER
WHEELER YACHTS
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Sea • Volume 97, No. 6, June 2005 Anchoring, Gallies, Trawlers, Huntingdon Harbour, Olympia, Washington • PLUS Formula 31 PC, Hampton 540, Rinker 360, Ocean Sport 30, Cheoy-Lee

Display un

review comes out in March 2004 with a couple of nice photos and me singing the boat's praises. I receive the usual e-mails about the article. ("My best friend's dad had one/Why can't boats look like this today?/I was a mate on one out of Montauk.") Over the next couple of months, I continue on, reviewing other boats, and the Wheeler piece fades away.

OUT OF THE BLUE

A couple of months after the article was published, I received a call from a Wes Wheeler from California. He hadn't seen the article when it first appeared but his business partner, Jim Scandura, showed it to him. "I thought you might recognize my name," Wes said.

Now I know a number of Wheelers and I didn't make an immediate connection with the article. He tells me he is the great-grandson of the original founder of Wheeler Shipyard (*Sea* managing editor Holly Simpson wrote a great article about the Wheelers in the last issue). So I prepare myself for a nice conversation about the good old days. Only Wes doesn't want to talk about the old days — he wants to talk about the present and future.

He comes right to the point and asks if I would be interested in designing a modern version of the 48-footer I reviewed. Would I be interest-

ed? Does Pamela Anderson have implants? Does Bill Clinton miss his desk job in the White House?

Every once in a long while, "dream jobs" come along in this business. Our Midnight Lace design was the first, followed by maybe four of five others over a span of 39 years.

I try not to show my excitement too much during that first phone conversation. I start sketching and scheming right after I hang up and, a couple of hours later, I have the whole boat worked out in my mind.

WHEELER RISES AGAIN

Wes and I corresponded by e-mail for some weeks and a meeting was set up with Wes and Jim at our office. These guys were serious!

Wes Wheeler was trained as an engineer but, via the convolutions of life, somehow wound up as the head of a large pharmaceutical company with Jim as his partner. Wes and Jim are avid boaters. Wes, along with his dad, who is a practicing naval architect in Connecticut, had always talked about resurrecting Wheeler Yachts after its sad demise in the 1960s, and my article was the impetus to do just that.

We signed a design contract for a slick, fast 55-foot sportfisher in July 2004 and the drawings are now completed. Hull number one is already sold and construction will have start-

ed by the time you read this.

The idea was to draw inspiration from the original boat without copying it. In fact, copying would have been impossible anyhow as the new boat would have to be much taller than the original due to the optional monster engines that had to be fitted below the salon (the original boat had a pair of Detroit 6-71 diesels that were more than a foot lower than the C-32 Cats specified for the new boat).

Of course, the original boat was plank-on-frame wood while the new boat would be of high-tech fiberglass composites. A unique interior arrangement was conceived. The exterior styling was, indeed, "inspired" from the original boat with a contemporary twist.

It's hard to mess with legends. Wheeler was one of the preeminent marine builders of the 20th century, pumping out 2,500 pleasureboats as well as subchasers during World War I and 300 83-foot Coast Guard cutters during World War II. The new design had to address the past as well as the future.

Hopefully, we got it right. ♡



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