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Yachting & Architecture

-A Love Story

Architect, Educator And Life Long Sailor Erik Evans Shares His Passion For Yacht Design

BY ERIK EVANS

FOR A LONG AS I CAN REMEMBER, I have been drawn to the sea. My father was a sailor and a yacht racing enthusiast, and as soon as he could find a way to secure me safely into the cockpit of his sailboat, he took me along on his adventures. I remember spending glorious, sunlit days, sitting on the aft deck of my dad's classic Nordic Folkboat, as we sailed to Catalina Island for a

weekend lying anchor in one of the cozy coves there. I had a fishing rig that Dad had made for me and taught me to use, and the instant we would clear the bell light at the end of the breakwater, I'd have my line in the water, troll fishing for bonito or yellowtail. As I sit here tonight writing this, it seems to me that I can still hear the water rushing exuberantly off the bow of our



boat, and I can smell the tangy salt on the warm breeze. And I think about how much I still miss my father.

America has been from the very beginning a seafaring nation. Eras have come and gone, political and social fashions have waxed and waned, but yachting has marked the time. Great Americans of industry and politics, from the Vanderbilts to the Kennedys, were embedded in the yachting culture. And yacht designers and manufacturers such as the great L. Frances Herreshoff brought beautiful and practical sailboat designs within reach of middle-class America. I am the indebted beneficiary of this great tradition.

I have always been intoxicated by the beauty and the majestic grace of sailboats. As a child, I gazed at the elegant profile of classic sailing craft and was filled with wonder. To witness the power and grandeur of a beautiful yacht under full sail can be a moving experience. For many, it is life-changing. The magnificent shape of the hulls of great yachts has always seemed to me to be the perfect synthesis of form and function. As I got older and spent so much of my time cruising and racing sailboats, my appreciation for the finer points of yacht design became more acute. Today, in my career as an architect, it is clear to me that my sense of aesthetics has been shaped and refined by my time spent in and around sailboats. There are important lessons to be learned there, and important parallels between the design of great sailboats and the design of great buildings.

Perhaps the most exceptional design wisdom I've gleaned from the world of yachting is the vital relationship between beauty, form, and function in design. The design parameters of successful sailing vessels are born first by functional constraints. Specific hull shapes allow the water to slip over them more smoothly than others. Particular configurations of the hull above the water are more conducive to protecting the crew from waves when the boat is charging through choppy seas. Specific designs of sail plans allow the boat to use the wind more efficiently and to move faster through the water. All of these pragmatic constraints, and all of the science and engineering behind them, must be considered carefully in the design of sailing yachts. But none of this is of any consequence if it results in yachts that are not beautiful to the eye.

Beautiful boats inspire us. They stir the soul, and the naval architect who designs craft that can inspire us both functionally and aesthetically has achieved something truly remarkable. He has created a crucial blending of form and function and has achieved something akin to real and lasting art.

So it is with architecture. We can create great technological marvels. We can solve practical problems and produce buildings that efficiently address functional constraints. These are essential concerns for any designer. But if we do not also create beauty, buildings which inspire us and stir our souls, buildings which excite our senses, as if we were children again, then I believe we have fallen short. ❧