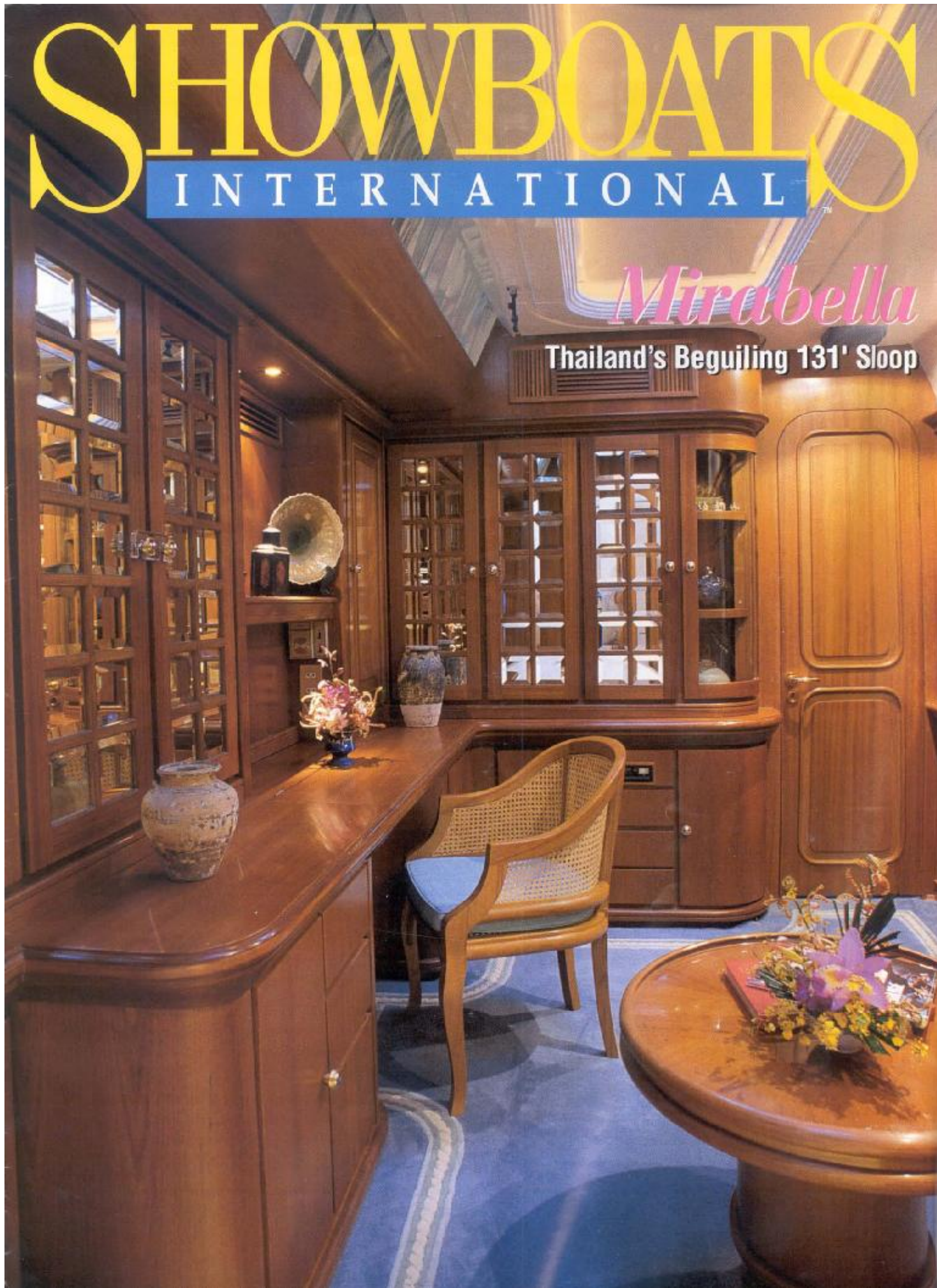


# SHOWBOATS

## INTERNATIONAL

*Mirabella*

Thailand's Beguiling 131' Sloop





# Exotic Vision

*Three years  
in the making, Joe*

*Vittoria's 40-meter  
production sloop*

*Mirabella is launched  
in Thailand.*

SPRING OF 1990 WAS A LOW point for Joe Vittoria and his Mirabella 40, the 131-foot prototype sloop under construction at his new shipyard in Thailand.

The first hull was accidentally dropped and, although repairable, the decision was made to destroy it and begin anew. The project was a full year behind schedule and considerably over budget. To make matters worse, labor unrest was rearing its head.

In retrospect, Vittoria said, those difficult days proved to be a watershed for Concorde Yachts Ltd., his fledgling company. Vittoria is an energetic, visionary entrepreneur who masterminded the employee buyout of Avis (see "Players" SBI July '90). Then, as CEO, he carefully orchestrated the huge car rental company's rise to the top of the industry. It became clear to Vittoria, who earlier in his career had spent 10 years working and living in Italy and England, that Concorde had to reconcile its strong, *farang* (Thai for "foreigner") dominated management structure with the company's talented

religious and social practices of Concorde's predominantly Buddhist employees. A shrine was built on the premises. Monks were permitted to bless the yacht and its builders at crucial junctures of production. English lessons were offered to the Thai workers — and Thai lessons for *farang* supervisors.

After that, construction on the 40-meter sloop proceeded swiftly and smoothly. Last September, amid great ceremony and expressions of Thai pride, *Mirabella* splashed into the warm waters of Sattahip, Thailand.

The roots of the Mirabella project and Concorde Yachts go back to the Concept 80, a Bruce Farr-designed yacht built in Taiwan by Pekka Koskenkyla, the founder of Nautor's Swan. The first and only Concept 80 was finished in 1987, after which further production ceased due to insufficient capitalization. But Koskenkyla retained his vision of building a monster sloop that could both outsail and outclass other yachts its size. In 1988 he arranged a meeting with Vittoria. Koskenkyla had sized up Vittoria, who previously had represented Camper & Nicholson in Italy, as a possible buyer for the first boat. "At that point," Vittoria jokes, "I was nothing but a dabbler in boat ➤



*Joe Vittoria at the flybridge helm station*

Thai craftsmen. "We had to learn a lesson in Thai culture," Vittoria said. "We had to remember the fact that you can't go to Thailand, or any other culture for that matter, and do business like you would in your own backyard."

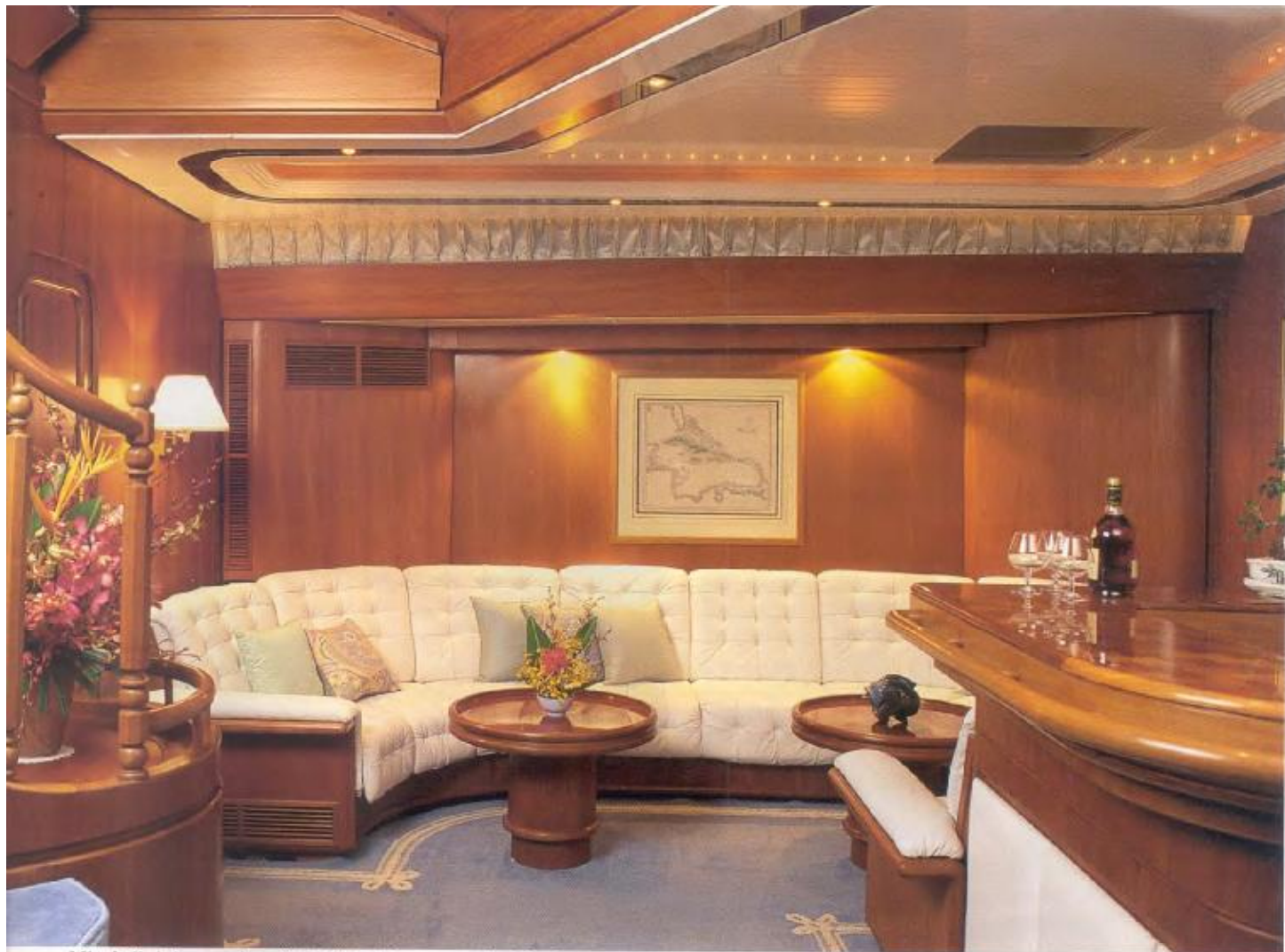
Practically, it meant balancing production schedules with the strong



An aerial photograph of a sailboat, the Mirabella, sailing on a body of water with a highly textured, choppy surface. The boat is viewed from a high angle, showing its white hull, a large white cabin, and a tall, dark mast. Two large, light-colored sails are deployed, catching the wind. The boat is moving towards the bottom right of the frame, leaving a dark wake behind it. The water's surface is covered in small, dark, irregular waves, giving it a mottled appearance. The lighting is bright, casting a sharp shadow of the boat onto the water.

*Mirabella is easily driven by a sail plan that includes a carbon fiber mast and boom and over 7,000 square feet of working sail area.*





*Mirabella's large salon reflects Vittoria's conservative interior tastes. Fabrics were designed by Luciana Vittoria.*



*Pilothouse lounge*

projects, most of which had cost me a considerable amount of money.

"When Pekka showed me the boat I really flipped," Vittoria said. "I have to give Pekka credit. He found me. He thought I might be interested. But in truth I was not a buyer until he showed me the drawings of the boat."

From the start, Koskenkyla, known throughout the industry for his demanding standards, was convinced the best place to build was Thailand. Not only was labor inexpensive there — artisans can be hired for the equivalent

of \$1.80 an hour — but the quality of the work is excellent. Early on, for example, Koskenkyla discovered Thai workers were very good at welding and finishing stainless steel. Not only could they fabricate steel items for less money than off-the-shelf products, but because they could hire polishers at a fraction of the skilled labor price, the finished quality was far superior. As a result, the stainless steel detail work on *Mirabella* is splendid. Anchors, piping, gooseneck fitting, toerails, cleats, intake grills — even inlays in the bathroom floors — are exquisitely finished stainless steel.

Another example of Thai artisanry is evident in *Mirabella's* woodworking. Koskenkyla ordered Finnish-built furniture for the first hull for the sake of expediency, and also to instruct the Thai workers as to the standards that would be expected in their future joinery and finish work. Their first efforts at copying the Finnish-made pieces proved so superior, Vittoria said, Koskenkyla decided to use the Thai furniture in *Mirabella's* interior.

Vittoria likes to say he started building yachts in Thailand as a hobby more than as a profession. "I never went into this project with the idea of making money," he said. A self-made man, Vittoria grew up sailing catboats at Long Island Sound's Sea Cliff Yacht Club — but not as a member, as the club's launch driver.

What is remarkable about Vittoria, however, his financial aspirations for *Concorde* notwithstanding, is the extraordinary amount of patience he demonstrated over the course of the project. Never during the building of *Mirabella* was Vittoria tempted into cutting corners. At every juncture, he was willing to invest, often heavily, in gear and technical expertise. Starting with her Farr-designed hull, *Mirabella's* pedigree includes a Peter Sijm interior scheme, Andy McNab rig engineering, fixed and running rigging installed by Spencer of Cowes, and hydraulic systems developed by Rod Taylor of *Aquel II* and *Taramber* fame. He and Koskenkyla hired Jim McEwan of Vosper Thornycroft/ Camper & Nicholson to serve as *Concorde's* general





Galley (note stainless steel details)



One of two identical VIP staterooms



Mirabella's dining salon seats up to 10 guests.

manager, and as production manager hired Brian Venison, formerly of England's Southern Ocean Shipyard.

*Mirabella's* unique features include a 46-meter (off the deck) carbon fiber mast, designed by Bruce Farr and built by Concorde under the direction of High Modulus of New Zealand. From the start, Vittoria said, the philosophy at Concorde has been to bring in whatever expertise and hardware necessary to make the boat a success. The result is a boat that is 25 percent more expensive than the \$6 million pricetag he originally envisioned for his *Mirabella* 40s, but still less than the price a yacht of similar size and quality would command in other parts of the world.

The end result of *Mirabella's* long construction process is Vittoria's growth in confidence in the capacities — and the financial potential — of Concorde. Besides seeing a market for some of the items, such as the spars and the stainless steel work, Concorde has also contracted its finishing services to two other Thai-built vessels, a pair of Koskenkylä-designed, canoe stern 35-

meter motoryachts under construction at the ItalThai yard in Bangkok.

Vittoria also is ready to branch out from the production 131-footers (two others are also under construction, including one scheduled for delivery this spring for an English owner) into fully custom yachts. "The reason we haven't been more aggressive in selling the yard's capacity is I didn't think it was appropriate to do so until we had something to show potential clients." He added, "We're going to start looking at other products, including limited production runs. Most likely they will be bigger, rather than smaller, projects." Vittoria, noting the low cost of building tooling in Thailand, said he would also entertain investing in one-off GRP designs with serial-production potential.

*Mirabella*, which will leave Thai waters this spring and begin sailing for the Mediterranean, has, after all, the proportions of an 80-foot high-aspect sloop. It isn't until you get close, or see people walking on her park-size decks, or standing next to her huge rig, that



Stainless-steel inlays finish bathroom floors

you comprehend *Mirabella's* true size and proportions. Her sleek, low profile befits a yacht that reaches along easily at 16 knots in 14 knots true wind. The raciness of her lines is enhanced by her radically swept-back spreaders that eliminate the need for cumbersome running backstays.

The secret to *Mirabella's* overall success lies in her combination of deep draft (12 feet with winged keel) and





*All of Mirabella's stainless fittings were cast and polished in Thailand*

## SPECIFICATIONS

**LOA:** 131' 3" (40m)  
**LWL:** 119' 4" (36.3m)  
**Beam:** 29' 6" (9m)  
**Draft:** 12' 8" (3.8m)  
**Displacement:** 785,000lbs. (1/2 load)  
**Mast height:** Above water 164' 5" (50m)  
**Fuel:** 3,850 U.S. gallons (17,500 lt)  
**Water:** 3,150 U.S. gallons (15,000 lt)  
**Hull & deck material:** Cored G.R.P.  
**Power:** 470-hp Luger  
**Gensets:** 2x Northern Lights 70Kw  
**Range under power:** 2,500 nm  
**Sail area:** 7,190 sq.ft. (668m<sup>2</sup>)  
**Sailmaker:** Lidgard, N.Z.

wide 29.5-foot beam, design elements present in many modern racing hulls. And, aside from aiding the resulting Farr-inspired performance, the yacht's extraordinary beam provides a voluminous interior, with comfortable berths for a total of 20 guests and crew. The combination of macho, high-tech rig and performance, with sybaritic belowdecks comfort makes her virtually unique in the world of 40-meter sailing yachts.

Accommodations include two identical master suites amidships just forward of the combination lounge/formal dining area (with seating for 10). Two large twin cabins, also with ensuite baths, are located forward of the VIP suites. Five additional cabins,

two doubles and three with twin beds, each with ensuite baths, are located in the bow and stern sections of the yacht. The three aft cabins located off another lounge are primarily intended for crew. But the accommodations could be used either for guests or crew.

*Mirabella* boasts the same type of flexibility in her sail handling. While her rig was designed for easy short-handed sailing with captive hydraulic winches and roller furling providing fingertip control of sheets and halyards, the yacht also features a pair of large deck-mounted Lewmar winches for back-up, or for the pleasure of string-pulling sailors. Another interesting feature is *Mirabella's* boom, into which the mainsail flakes when it is lowered.

The yacht has four helm positions: two outboard wheel stations with excellent visibility down the side decks, and two joystick-controlled stations, including an unusual flybridge helm station located atop the salon cabin. The flybridge, with seating for four, is accessed via port and starboard cabin steps, and offers excellent view of sails, rigging, and water. The last helm position is located in the large pilothouse salon.

Vittoria likes to describe his yacht as being "full of Pekka-isms," meaning the intriguing and visionary design details including such features as a huge, hydraulically operated transom door, which opens to create a large swim platform with access to a lazarette voluminous enough for two sailboards, two jet skis, two tenders, scuba gear, motor scooter, etc.

Concorde is in the process of building the third *Mirabella* 40 hull, which will serve as Vittoria's personal yacht. The second, featuring a more contemporary-styled interior than *Mirabella*, will launch in June. Where is Concorde heading? The plans, Vittoria said, are to keep at least one hull abuilding on speculation at all times, while at the same time exploring other potential profit centers. Does Vittoria harbor any ulterior motives? "Well," he says, the schoolboy-sailor grin spreading across his face, "I'd like to see an exclusive one-design class of large sailing boats. Wouldn't it be something to see six or seven *Mirabella's* on a starting line?" □



*Mirabella has four helm positions including a flying bridge helm station atop the deckhouse.*