

Sailing: Annapolis' Brady guides design of new yacht

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Gavin Brady has been involved with several new boat programs during his illustrious professional sailing career. None has been nearer and dearer to Brady's

Beau Geste, an 80-foot racer custom-designed and built for Hong Kong owner Kark Kwok, is Brady's baby. The Annapolis resident created the basic concept, was deeply involved with the design process then oversaw construction of the boat.

"This is by far the most rewarding project I've ever been involved with," Brady said. "It's amazing to have a hand in creating something like this from start to finish."

Beau Geste was conceived as a racer-cruiser that had the performance capabilities to win major ocean regatta, but also the interior amenities to allow Kwok and his guests to comfortably enjoy leisurely sailing to ports in the Caribbean or on the Mediterranean.

Thanks to Brady's innovative thinking and thorough oversight, Beau Geste has certainly achieved that goal. Brady worked closely with the team at Eastport-based Farr Yacht Design to ensure the hull shape, appendages and ultimate performance capabilities met his vision.

"I told Bruce Farr from the get-go that I was going to be a royal pain because I would be calling and stopping by all the time to talk about the boat and review the design work," Brady said.

As usual, Farr Yacht Design hit the mark - producing a light but sturdy 80-footer that weights 24 tons and has an extremely deep (18 feet) and heavy (16 tons) keel configuration.

"We tailored this boat to Gavin's and Karl's needs. They wanted a high-performance yet durable offshore boat that was not too complicated to sail," said Farr, founder of the design firm that bears his name. "I would say Beau Geste is

most similar to a Volvo 70 in terms of hull form, although it is a little fuller forward."

Unlike a Volvo 70 or other offshore boats of similar size, Beau Geste does not have water ballast or a canting keel. Farr explained the 80-footer gets stability and lift from the massive fin and bulb.

"In terms of actual sailing weight, the boat is actually quite light," Brady said.

Beau Geste has a mast that extends 120 feet above the deck and thus the sails are enormous. It carries a Code 0 asymmetrical spinnaker that is 350 square meters that puts five tons of load on the winches. Brady said the breaking load on the bow prod off which all the asymmetrical sails are flown is 50 tons.

Brady lived in his hometown of Auckland, New Zealand for a year while fully participating in the construction of Beau Geste at Cookson Boats. He was actively involved in the entire process, from building the mold to shaping the hull to attaching appendages.

"I basically did an apprenticeship as a boat builder. It was very enlightening and will help me immensely down the road with other projects," said Brady, who worked alongside Mick Cookson himself.

Because Brady held the entire concept in his mind and was the sole project manager, decisions about design and construction could be made quickly and costs could be contained. While the hull, deck and appendages of Beau Geste are all carbon-fiber, other pieces of equipment are not in order to save money.

Because Kwok intends to go cruising aboard Beau Geste, Brady took great pains to create a spacious interior with amenities. Bunks were built longer and wider than those on Volvo 70s or other similar offshore racers. There are aft and forward cabins along with a full galley complete with microwave and refrigerator.

"The creature comforts in the boat put all my previous racing yachts to shame. I finally believe a cruiser-racer is a reality," said Kwok, whose first trip aboard Beau Geste was a cruise to the islands off New Zealand.

Beau Geste has already compiled an impressive resume - placing second in the Middle Sea Race, breaking the record in the Trans-Atlantic Challenge by a full day, winning the Caribbean 600 on both elapsed and corrected time, being first-to-finish in the Fastnet Race and winning the Maxi Worlds.

Now Beau Geste is set to tackle the East Coast with Brady and Kwok attempting a rare double - winning both the Bermuda Ocean Race and the Newport-to-Bermuda Race, which start just seven days apart.

The Annapolis-to-Bermuda race, co-organized by Eastport Yacht Club and the St. George's Dinghy Club, begins tomorrow on the Severn River. Brady estimated it will take Beau Geste 2½ days to complete the 753-nautical mile course.

In order to compete in the Newport-to-Bermuda Race, Beau Geste needs to make port by Wednesday evening. That gives the crew a day to make any repairs and re-provision in time for the start.

"I understand to be able to do this back-to-back, one would need a fast boat as well as having the wind gods on their side," Kwok said. "I believe I have the former, but the latter may still be elusive at present. It will surely be very exciting if we can do a double Bermuda this round!"