

WEST COAST BOATBUILDERS PT. 2 —

Last month we reported that West Coast boatbuilders have evolved from the plastic-boat production capital of the world to more niche-driven, custom manufacturing. Dramatically fewer boats are being made compared to the heyday, but designers and builders are creating interesting, specialized vessels, and are as busy as they've ever been. West Coast Boatbuilders are making everything from bluewater boats to ultra-fast racers to simple, fun daysailers.

What's Old is New in the Pac NW

Located in Port Townsend, Washington, Cape George Marine Works has been building stylish bluewater boats since the 1970s. "Our vessels are built to go offshore," said owner Todd Uecker, describing the niche his yard fills. "Most clients have dreams of sailing to foreign lands. We build full-keel cutters, and they aren't made for racing around buoys." Cape George makes two lines of traditional offshore vessels: the 28-ft Bristol Channel Cutter, which used to be built in Costa Mesa, CA, and was inspired by famous cruisers and writers Lynn and Larry Pardey, and the namesake Cape George Cutter.

"Our main stock-in-trade is the Cape George Cutter," Uecker said. "It's a modern, fiberglass-hull interpretation of William Atkin's vintage designs from the 1930s and 40s [which was re-drawn with the help of famed naval architect Ed Monk]." The Cape George Cutter comes in 31-, 34-, 36-, 38-, 40- and 45-ft models. "They're all semi-custom, and built to order. There's lots of wood on them; they're very labor-intensive. Some people refer to them as cult boats — it's a cult of tradition." The cutter has a wood deck structure atop a fiberglass hull, which makes an ideal platform for customization of

A Cape George Cutter 34's classic lines and bluewater abilities make it a "cult of tradition" boat among its aficionados.



W.D. SCHOCK



CAPE GEORGE MARINE WORKS

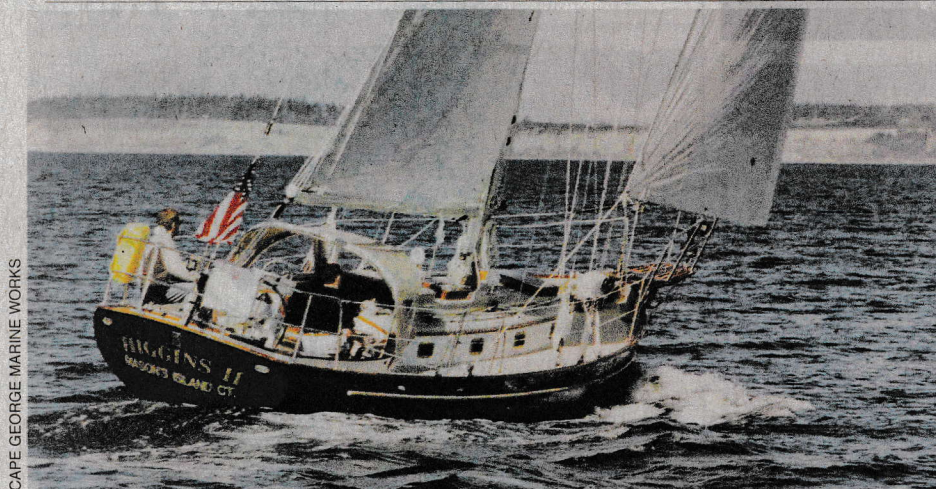
design and interior layout. "They're custom boats for individual clients," Uecker said, adding that his yard has a small crew, and each boat requires two to three years to build.

Todd and his brother Tim bought Cape George Cutters in 2004 from original owner Cecil Lange, a New Zealander "who had an

outstanding reputation as a boat builder," according to www.bluewaterboats.org. "I worked for Cecil for 10 years before we bought the business," Uecker said, adding that he originally got his degree in journalism, but always liked working with his hands. "I worked at various boatyards as I went through college, and built a couple of wooden boats. I was living in the Great Lakes area, and I had enough of a portfolio to land a job here, in Port Townsend."

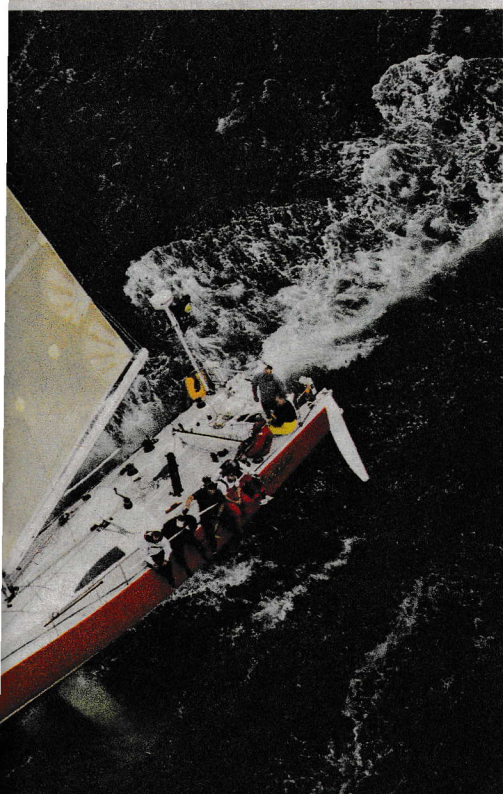
We asked Uecker how the boatbuilding business has changed over the years. "Way back when Cecil ran the show in the 1970s and '80s, he sold a lot of bare hulls and kit boats — there were more do it yourselfers back then. At least half of the business was building kit boats. Now I think people spend their free evenings watching sailing videos on the Web instead of building boats in their backyards."

Uecker also said that he's not seeing as much new construction for middle-class clientele. "The market is changing pretty drastically and I don't know if it will come back. The number of new sailboat builders is shrinking pretty dramatically. Labor rates are going up, and custom boats are



CAPE GEORGE MARINE WORKS

CONTINUING TO EVOLVE



Clockwise from top right: Betty Schock sailing a Sabot; The Jim Antrim-designed 'Rapid Transit', a 49-ft canting-keel rocket built at Berkeley Marine Center; the Cape George Marine Works-built Cape George Cutter 34.

Antrim's current portfolio of builds is as impressive as it is varied. He designed a custom 42-ft junk-rigged scow-bow cruiser for windsurfing guru Barry Spanier, construction of which will start soon at Berkeley Marine Center. He's designed a 9-ft custom carbon dinghy with 'three modes': a sailboat, a tender with a 10 horsepower outboard, and a rowboat with a sliding rigger designed to fit on the foredeck of a cruising boat.

Antrim is also designing Lia Ditton's new ocean rowboat after she postponed her record-setting attempt to become the first woman to row the North Pacific from Japan to San Francisco (Ditton was featured in the September 2017 issue of *Latitude*). This will not be Antrim's first ocean rowboat. "I developed a trimaran rower, which set a Guinness Record for the first trimaran [or multihull rower in general] to row across the Atlantic." That boat, called *Orca*, also set the record for most miles rowed in 24 hours.

"I really enjoy the challenge of an ocean rowboat," Antrim said. "What makes it fast downwind makes it slow upwind. It's all about how much structural weight you can afford to carry, how much food you're going to carry. It's all very weight-sensitive."

Jim Antrim grew up near Boston, studied naval architecture at the Webb Institute in New York, and came to California in 1976 to work for Gary Mull. "Well, I really did everything," Antrim said of his work with Mull. "I sort of specialized in preliminary designs, hull lines, and deck and interior lines." Around 1979, Antrim branched out on his own. "I started drawing boats and trying to sell designs. I was mostly doing a lot of small redesign jobs."

Antrim started to find a foothold in high-tech materials. "I'd say late '70s is when carbon came on the scene. People started doing carbon in rudder posts, but most didn't understand how to engineer with it. It was

years of starvation. It took a long time to get your name around." Antrim's breakthrough boat was *Aotea*, a 40-ft trimaran built for Peter Hogg. "We broke a lot of records with that boat. I got a lot of notoriety out of it."

Jim Antrim was on the map.

He went on to design the Antrim 27, which he said was a "reasonably well-accepted class that used to be fairly strong in the Bay Area." There were 26 built, and you'll still occasionally see one out on the water.

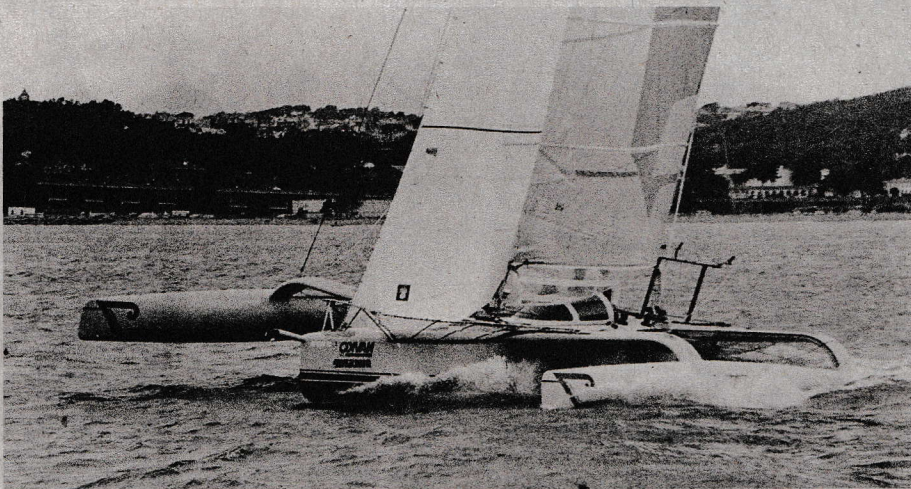
Like most West Coast designers, Antrim considers himself in the custom boat busi-

"If people have an unusual idea, I have a reputation for designing it."

ness. He said that most big boat brands — Beneteau, Hunter and Catalina — have in-house designers. But Antrim wants to constantly be doing something different. He said that even in the custom building niche, there's been an obvious decline over the years. The constant evolution of the West Coast industry is, without a doubt, trending smaller, though still quite busy.

"Some guys have gotten old and disappeared," Antrim said, adding that his business is hanging in there. "All of the survivors are swamped with work. I'm constantly overloaded — I'd say I've been pretty darn busy for 10 or 15 years at least, and even more so lately; I've been turning more jobs away recently. I think a lot of the builders

Peter Hogg's 'Aotea' tore up the Bay after she was first built, smashing all kinds of records, and putting Jim Antrim on the map.



ANTRIM DESIGN / LATITUDE 38

expensive. The mega-yacht market is doing well, and the repair market is pretty solid. A lot of people are buying fixer-uppers. We have a Factory Rebuild Program for older Cape George and Bristol Channel cutters that is quite cost-effective compared to new construction."

The Fast Boats of Jim Antrim

"If people have an unusual idea, I have a reputation for designing it," Jim Antrim told us. "I lean toward performance boats — fast boats. From way back in the early 80s, I became one of the leading composite engineers, and that helped define my career. I just like doing different things and taking on different challenges — especially the challenge of doing a variety of projects. I would get bored doing the same thing over and over."

Antrim said he drew his first boat while on a sailing trip with his family. He was frustrated that he couldn't bring his toys, so he drew a boat with a toy room. Over his 40-plus-year career, all of Antrim's boats seem to have a "toy room" feel, which is to say they're fun, unique, and overwhelmingly fast, fast.

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and designers that are still around are closer to the end of their careers than beginning. I hope there's new blood."

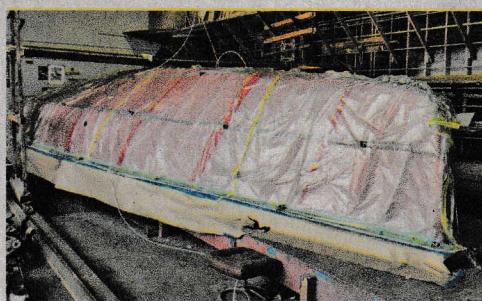
But this is a story about boatbuilding. Antrim has worked with Jim Betts in the Pacific Northwest, as well as Schooner Creek. He's worked with Marc Ginisty in Novato. In Watsonville, Antrim has had builds done by Craig Smith, Larry Tuttle, Dave Hopton and Ron Moore (who built the Antrim 30+ trimaran *Erin* and all of the early Ultimate 20s). He's worked with Westerley Marine in Southern California, and collaborated extensively with Cree Partridge at Berkeley Marine Center.

"The first time I met Cree was when I worked for Gary Mull. It's nice that's he's close by — it really helps to drop in and see how things are going. It's really good to have either client or designer near the builder. You want to see things as the boat develops, and as the customer gets to see the shape in 3D, because a lot of people don't have a good sense from the drawings."

Cree Partridge is currently building an especially interesting — and fast — Antrim 40 design called *Glass Slipper*. "It's my wife's boat," Partridge told us months ago, pausing for effect and smiling his big, mustachioed smile. *Glass Slipper* is sistership to *California Condor*, which was built at Berkeley Marine Center and launched in 2010. For those of you who race the Bay regularly, you've probably had the opportunity to watch *Condor* blast right by. But as fast as *Condor* is, *Glass Slipper* — which will be built entirely from carbon — will be faster.

"The concept for this boat started over

10 years ago," said Partridge. "I went to Jim Antrim and told him I wanted a boat that was *scary* fast, but safe. This is that boat." *Glass Slipper*, although 40-ft in length, will not have standing headroom, because standing headroom is a waste of weight. In



addition, the cockpit will be a 'winch forest'. "This will not be a short-handed boat like *Condor*," said Partridge. "I wanted a boat that would require a team to sail, and my vision is to blast around the Bay with a bunch of people in the cockpit giggling nervously."

Partridge was inspired by a picture he saw of an Aussie 18 flying along under spinnaker, the hull forward of the keel out of the water. As he was contemplating the boat, he talked with Kame Richards at Pineapple Sails, eventually asking how to make the boat plane like that. "It's all about luff length on the spinnaker," replied Richards. As a result, *Glass Slipper* will feature a 12-foot sprit to extend the luff and get the sail out in front of the boat (the sprit will not be retractable, but it can be demounted when the boat is not in use).

"We are definitely pushing the envelope," said Partridge, "and many small changes were made in the build as a result of exten-

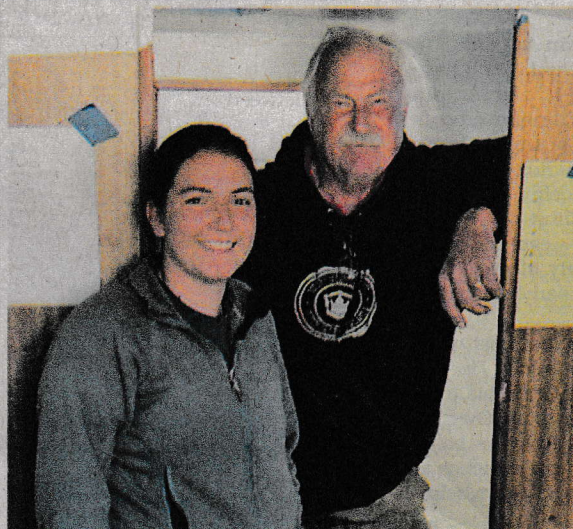


sive testing carried out by Friedel Pretorius under the watchful eye of Dave Collignon and approved by Jim [Antrim]."

Like many Antrim-designed builds, the construction of *Glass Slipper* will require a complex layering of carbon fiber. *Glass Slipper* is being built upside down using a resin infusion process over a male plug — the same plug used to build *California Condor*, but beefed up for the infusion process so that *Glass Slipper* will be just a hair bigger. Carbon fiber cloth forms the inner layer of the hull, followed by a layer of bidirectional fiberglass. High-load areas are reinforced with unidirectional carbon strips, and then the whole hull is wrapped with a layer of unidirectional carbon cloth.

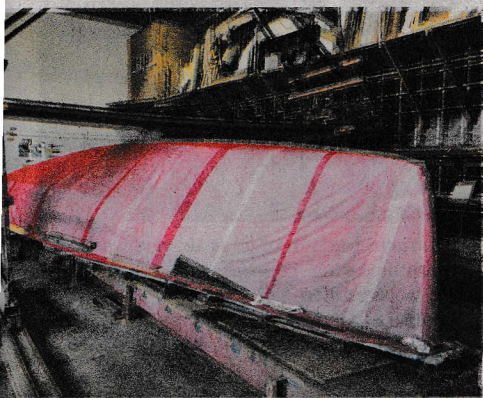
The boat will sport a 65-foot carbon mast designed by Antrim, which will also be built at BMC. "We have what I call a 'poor-man's autoclave,'" said Partridge. "Two 45-foot shipping containers are bolted together and heated, and we vacuum bag the mast inside the containers. The goal is to build a stick that will not crumble at 30 knots."

Left: Cree Partridge in a lower-tech phase of boat building; Right: Partridge with apprentice Friedel Pretorius onboard the Cal 40 'Sequoia'.



THESE PHOTOS LATITUDE / JOHN

CONTINUING TO EVOLVE



'Glass Slipper' being built one carbon sheet at a time. Clockwise from top left: Carbon reinforcements are put over bidirectional glass cloth; The hull has been covered in unidirectional carbon cloth, and peel ply is being wrapped over the carbon layer; The hull covered in peel ply; Flow media installed over the peel ply; The vacuum bag over the hull. The cloth channels used for infusion are clearly visible along the chine under the bag.

If all goes as planned, *Glass Slipper* will launch in late spring or early summer, so the flush-deck rocket could be blowing by you soon after. And as for Cinderella, Julie Partridge, who, when asked about her new boat, only responded with, "Oh, boy..." as she exhaled deeply and rated her level of excitement about the boat as "Immeasurable."

And why not? After all, how many Cinderellas get a carbon pumpkin from their Prince Charming?

A Schocking Amount of Fun

In the 1930s, W. D. "Bill" Schock started building skimboards in the garage of his family's home in Hollywood. After he served in World War II, the Schock family — including wife Betty — went into business in Newport, and would go on to become the first boatbuilder to "make a production fiberglass boat," according to a company statement. Schock went on to produce the Snowbird, Sabot, Schock 22 and popular Schock 35. In the late 1950s, Schock introduced the

Lido 14, one of the most popular and prolific double-handed dinghies ever seen on the West Coast. "It provided a comfortable family daysailer at a time when most boats in its size range were much more athletic one-design racers," the company said.

One of Schock's most successful designs is the Harbor 20, which the company called the most raced keelboat in North America. "No other keelboat comes close to the number of annual race starts. Upwards of 10,000 Harbor 20 race starts happen every single year," the company said.

"We moved to daysailers about 20 years ago, and the Harbor 20 has fortunately been an incredible success," said Alexander "Sasha" Vucelic, former owner of W.D. Schock (John O'Donnell is the current owner; he bought the company in 2014 after working for Schock for 27 years. The company is now located in Santa Ana). "The Harbor 20 is our key product — it's a simple boat. It doesn't focus on the engineering, but rather, why people sail. And why people sail is because they want fun. It's not complicated."

Exactly how to build a fleet is an open question in sailing. There are countless boats that come and go with no apparent rhyme or reason. We asked Jim Antrim about fleet building — he said it takes a fair amount of luck to build a class, good marketing and lots of money at the outset. "It's a fad that people fall into. It's hard to put a finger on it."

But Vucelic disagreed.

"How much does a keg cost? How much do a few gallons of mai tais cost?" Breaking down Schock's philosophy about fleet building, Vucelic said, "It's twofold: The first part are social events. The second is women. You've got to get the wives to go. One of the critical differences with the Harbor 20 fleet is that half the people there are women, and between 25- and 35% of the drivers are women. In any other fleet, it's all dudes. And because there are actually women at our parties, it's actually fun. At any other regatta, it's just a bunch of guys standing around waiting for the trophies to come around. So yes, the Harbor 20 is comfortable, simple, has fewer crew and all that stuff. But it's not about the boat. It's incredibly important to have fun."

Most West Coast boatbuilders have said that changing economics and demographics have led to a decline in production. But Schock said they've managed to

capitalize on that change. Mind you, it's not a difference in actual population — rather, it's a more even representation when it comes to going sailing.

When we spoke with longtime California sailmaker Dave Ullman last year, he said

"Why people sail is because they want fun. It's not complicated."

that part of the reason the sport of sailing has been declining is that there are more decision makers in households, so there are exponentially more decisions to make about how a family spends their free time. "The kids have a say, both the parents have a say, and suddenly, life is more complicated than the patriarch just saying, 'We're going sailing,'" Ullman told us.

Vucelic said that Schock is more of a "series" builder, though they've been cranking out Harbor 20s for a while now. "Probably

The yacht 'XL' the first of many Antrim designs built by Cree Partridge.



ANTRIM DESIGN

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ALL PHOTOS THIS PAGE W.D. SCHOCK



today, we're very much a production builder," he said. "There's close to 600 Harbor 20s — we build 10 to 20 a year. We've built 15,000 boats over the years."

As we mentioned last month, this is by no means a comprehensive list of West Coast boatbuilders. In Oceanside, Hobie is still manufacturing their brand of unique craft, including the incredibly popular Island series, a sailable, paddleable, and pedalable trimaran. The Oceanside factory still produces "Rotomolded" catamarans such as the Wave, Bravo and Getaway, and still assembles the Hobie 16, but all the traditional fiberglassing has been exported out of California due to environmental regulations.

This year marks the 50th anniversary

of Hobie Alter's first boat, the Hobie 14. While the popularity of most boats waxes and wanes over the years, there are close to 150,000 Hobie Cats still sailing around the world — and the 14 is enjoying something of a renaissance.

Here in Alameda, Saildrone — which has been called a "shipyard of the future" — is building a fleet of robotic boats that sail all corners of the globe collecting vast amounts of oceanic data. And let's not forget all the wooden boat schools, as well as the countless boats being built in people's garages and backyards.

When we set out to write about West Coast boatbuilders, it could have easily been a doom and gloom story. The production of sailboats in California, Oregon and Washington — and in the US in general —

is a mere fraction of what it once was, and manufacturing continues to contract. But we were excited to hear about interesting boats being designed and built, and the different niches that manufacturers have carved out.

But what's not clear is who will replace the current generation of designers and builders, all of whom say they're plenty busy, and all of whom wonder where "the new blood is."

It's an important question — what man or woman will be the next Jim Antrim, Gary Mull, or Doug Peterson? Who will be the next Cree Partridge? Who will take the torch, and carry it into the future?

latitude / tim

With reporting on Glass Slipper
by John Tuma

Above: The ubiquitous Harbor 20 (with a ubiquitous Schock-made Lido 14 in the background) is said to be the most active keelboat fleet in the world. The reason? Fun social events and the participation of women in the fleet. **Bottom left;** this Corona Del Mar mom had stickered herself with the H20 logo when her husband snapped this photo. **Bottom right:** Racing with your partner is a common sight in the Harbor 20 scene.

