



the SETZER WAY

CRUISING THE SEVEN SEAS IN STYLE

W by Anna Marshall Gauss

hat is it that makes cruising along crystal blue waters in a luxurious, custom-designed yacht so enticing? Ward Setzer, founder and CEO of

Setzer Design Group, specializing in the design of custom yachts and marine products, knows. The North Carolina yacht designer believes a yacht not only provides great freedom of movement, but a connection with nature as well.

"Yachts are like the finest waterfront homes and yet allow the owner the ability to change settings at will. Our clients sometimes only aspire to a quick weekend to a shore-side marina and, yet, most now want to disappear over the horizon on self-supporting explorer-type yachts destined

for remote Pacific islands," says Setzer.

Ward Setzer has been designing yachts for twenty-two years, and has earned great respect within the industry for his distinct and inimitable designs. "We do not draw rocket ships or vessels that cannot be built," he says. "We design robust, stylish, buildable and, yet, unique vessels from 30 feet to 200 feet."

Setzer clients are professionals, business leaders and entrepreneurs who have a passion for the yachting life and find freedom in the open seas. "My clients are successful people who, by in large, use their yachts for open water travel from port to port. They have confidence in the safety of their yacht and that the design will be up for the task of providing a comfortable platform for friends and entertaining along the way," says Setzer.

"Ward designed my 130-foot Northern Marine," says Merlin Hanson, the owner of Magic. "My guests always think the yacht is much larger because of the way it is designed. We have had a lot of visitors, especially CEOs of major companies, come through. All are impressed with Ward's talent."

BEFORE SETZER, A YACHT WAS SIMPLY A YACHT

Before pioneering Setzer Designs, Setzer worked with J.B. Hargrave Naval Architects in Palm Beach and as a designer and manager at Hatteras Yachts in New Bern. After several years of creating custom yacht plans and managing the construction of vessels up to 130' for Hatteras, Setzer decided it was time to advance his career as a designer.



"It was the right time to move on," says Setzer. "Designers feel a constant need to create beyond the limitations of production lines." He left the New Bern-based company to begin Setzer Design Group in 1991 and in 1993, Setzer Design Group moved to Cary, North Carolina.

But, Cary is landlocked within the Piedmont region of the state. Some may call this an odd location for a yacht design agency, but it is this location that attracted Setzer. He believes that Cary is a great environment for small businesses, and is conveniently located near Raleigh-Durham International Airport. This location allows his clients to fly in and tour the studio in person and makes his business travel to shipyards and clients very convenient. And, it's home for Setzer, he is an alumnus of North Carolina State Univer-

sity where he studied architecture.

BUILDING A LEGACY OF SUCCESS

Setzer Design Group has proudly produced over 200 designs in the past fifteen years. In the company's first year, Setzer and his team designed a line of 88-foot Sportfish for Broward Marine in Fort Lauderdale and quickly moved to larger projects, such as a 142-foot yacht for Christensen Yachts in Washington State. Today, the design team balances eight to ten active projects at any time, including designs ranging from forty to one hundred sixty feet.

And Setzer is planning for the future.

This year, Setzer Design Group will launch its second company, Windswell Designs—an entity offering Setzer products to a broader market. Windswell is

developing a more affordable line of smaller crafts, including a 38-foot Setzer Signature Sportfish and the 30-foot WaveDancer.

Setzer's vision does not end there. A new surfboard company is in the works. Using his wealth of experience as a naval architect, Setzer has designed each board utilizing 3D naval architecture software and has shaped each prototype himself, by hand.

"Someone once said that surfboard design is naval architecture in its purest form," he says, "We take that seriously and intend to create boards that incorporate the best and latest that naval architecture has to offer. That is, our boards will have clean lines that only years of drawing hull forms by hand can yield. I love to push the envelope whether it be in design, manu-

facturing, or in my own surfing. Ultimately, I have a mission and it is about performance in all those arenas."

Innovation is nothing new to Setzer, only the tools for creating his designs have changed. When Setzer first started, he created his designs using sketchpads, mylar and ink drawings. Today, the newest technology allows his team to utilize two- and three-dimensional modeling in the design process. Setzer, however, is known for his keen eye when it comes to creating unique lines in his designs that make his work stand out above all others.

"I still sketch by hand, even with the latest design technology. There are certain lines only the old training can bring to life beyond our computer dependence," he says.

Setzer's client Hanson believes the best feature of his yacht is the way Setzer designed the space utilization and detail, along with countless other features. His unique design made the owner's guests believe the yacht was ten feet longer.


"It is the lines on my boat that are outstanding and this is all due to Ward's eye," says Hanson. "When you put boats side-by-side, you can distinguish between a Setzer design and all others."

"Ward has that special ability to translate an owner's vision and description of what he desires into detailed plans, drawings and specifications," says Pete Murphy, the owner of Lia Fail, a 152-foot Northern Marine yacht. "Ward gets it right the first time. The styling and lines that Ward can bring together are unparalleled in yacht design."

Customer requests and the business climate of the yacht industry have not changed drastically over the past five years, however, customers have become more involved and discerning in how they define quality and luxury.

"Our clients love to create and build vessels, regardless of scale," says Setzer. "Bigger is the norm and no end is in sight." Although pricing and timing are tough for builders and designers, Setzer and his team are dedicated to walking the extra mile to seek builders for their clients around the world.

"We help our customers select builders that are going to be a good match for them and the type of vessel that is to be built. It takes time to build a yacht. We want to do it the right way."

"Ward Setzer has developed a reputation in the industry as an outstanding naval architect," says Hanson. "In my opinion he is in the top five in the nation. To have a Setzer yacht with his name on it gives my yacht a lot of credence. As an owner, I gain his reputation, which is excellent." 



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