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THE BOATING ISSUE

SEAWORTHY ELEGANCE

Decades of handcrafted luxury at Hinckley Yachts

✦ DESTINATION
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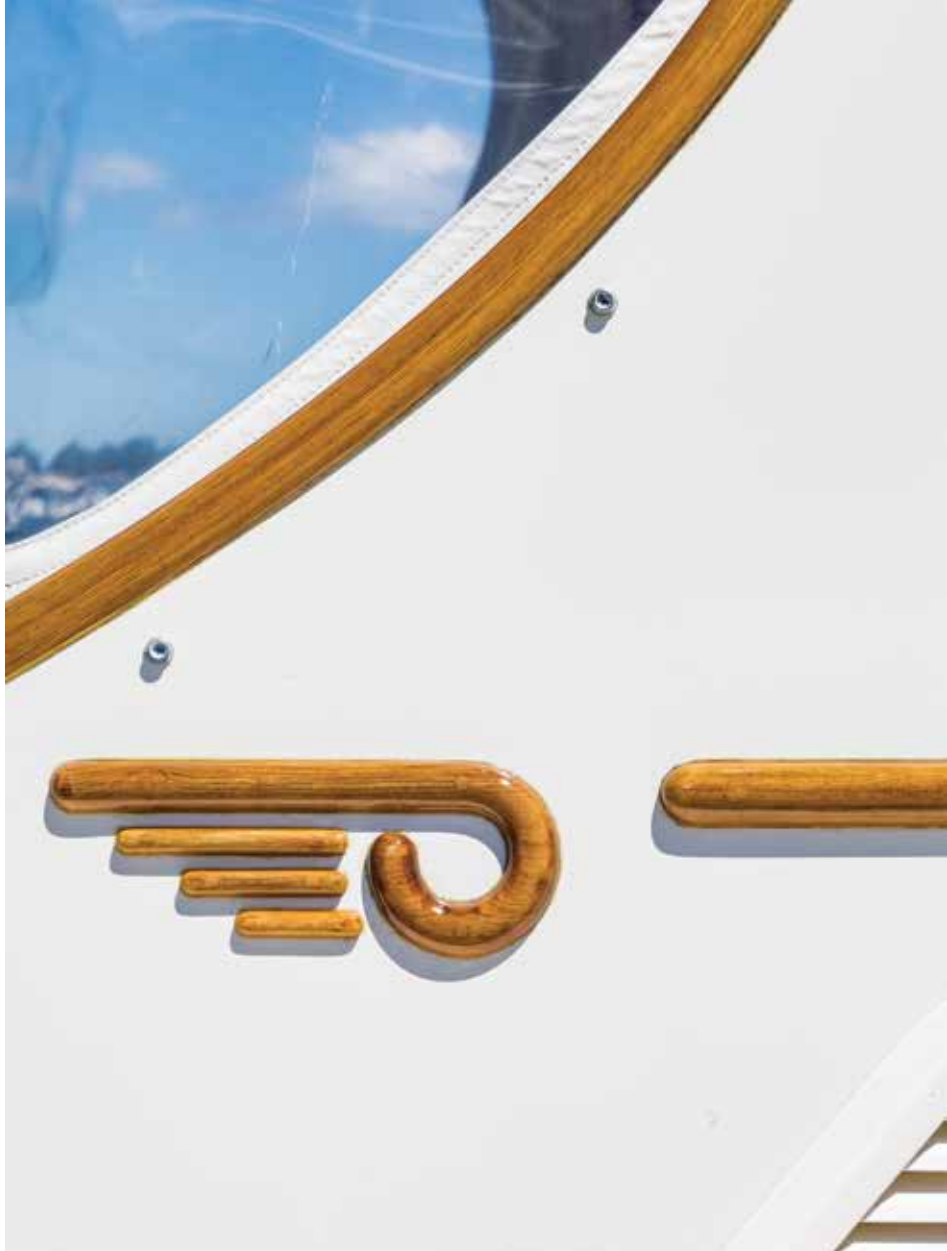
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SOMES BOATS

BY SANDY LANG // PHOTOGRAPHY BY PETER FRANK EDWARDS

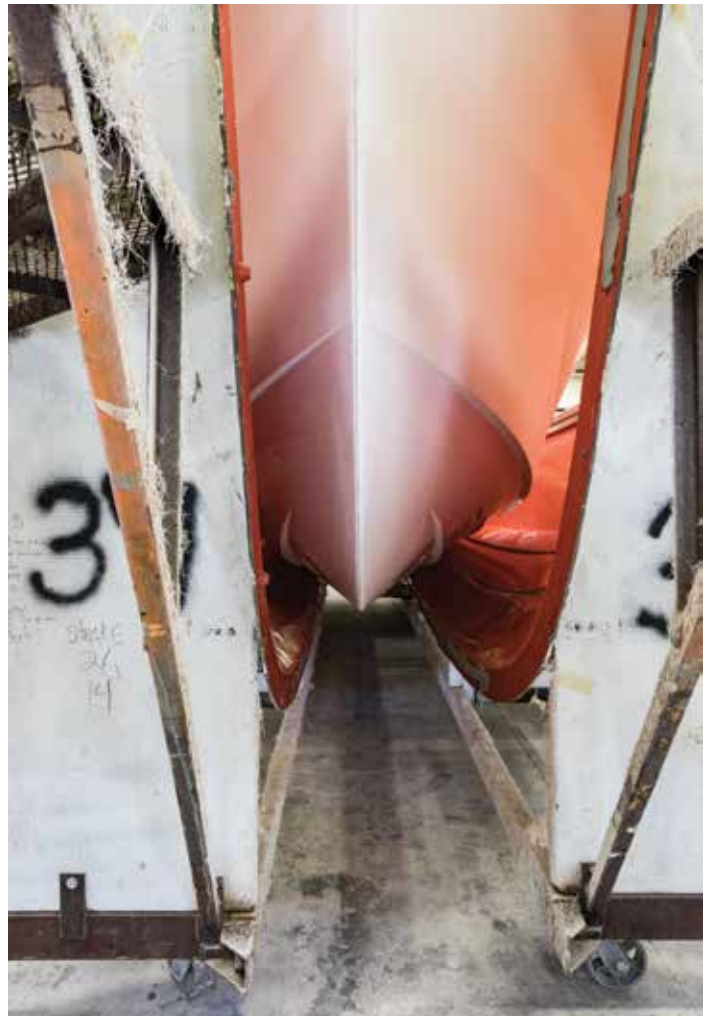


Acadia Mountain rises up from Somes Sound behind us, and we're aboard a Hinckley. These coveted yachts are still built by hand a few miles away, known for their iconic curves, polish, and posture.

Opposite page: Founded in Southwest Harbor in 1928, the Hinckley Company uses a winged talaria as its logo.

This page: A Hinckley motoryacht in Somes Sound's Valley Cove.





What I know when I start driving toward Mount Desert Island on a sunny day earlier this summer is that Hinckley Yachts are beautiful, and prized. A boat captain friend back in South Carolina happens to call while I'm on the way, and he actually gasps when I mention that I'll be visiting the Hinckley boatyard. "Wow, wow, wow," he repeats. "To have one of those beauties would be my dream."

I can remember hearing the buzz about Hinckley when Martha Stewart commissioned the Southwest Harbor-founded company to build one of its famous "picnic boats" for her, and she had them paint the hull an exclusive-to-her color that's a heathery soft green. (The yacht's name is *Skylands II*, after her cottage, up high in Seal Harbor.) But I've never gotten nearer to a Hinckley than to see the gleaming, million-dollar yachts in pictures or when passing through harbors. I'm ready.

HARBORSIDE START

Steam's rising from the lobster pots at Lunt's, and there's a lineup of private planes at the Bar Harbor airport when I turn into the industrial park just across from the runways. Phil Bennett, one of the Hinckley Company's vice presidents, is meeting me here, at the hangar-sized warehouses that make up Hinckley's boatbuilding headquarters. The Hinckley Company got its start nearly 90 years ago on the shores of Southwest Harbor when engineer Henry Hinckley's father bought a small boatyard facing directly into the mouth of Somes Sound. In the 1930s Hinckley built luxury pleasure boats with the swooping, curved features of the grand automobiles of the day, and by the 1950s the company was pioneering the use of fiberglass in boatbuilding for its powerboats and sailing yachts. Bennett compares Hinckley boatbuilding acumen to "something like watchmaking in Switzerland."

On MDI, the Hinckley Company still operates a service yard at the original site of its founding in Southwest Harbor. (With the Hinckley Company's acquisition of Morris Yachts in 2016, it added the sailboat builder's service yard in Northeast Harbor, too.) But it's the Trenton facility that's home to the real "toy shop" now, Bennett explains as he shows me around the former woodland property near the bridge to MDI. "This is where every Hinckley begins."

A dapper dresser in yachtsman style, Bennett is a longtimer at Hinckley and in the boat world generally. His grandfather was a boat maker, and Bennett himself decided to move to Maine and join Hinckley after first getting to know the company while visiting to sell Hood sails back in the 1970s. "Most people know that a Hinckley is expensive and shiny, but they may not fully know why," Bennett says of the yachts that typically take a year or more to build and customize for each owner. "They haven't yet seen what goes into making them."

Opposite page, from left:

In a fiberglass workroom with Phil Bennett, who began with Hinckley nearly 30 years ago and is vice president of sales. The "birth" of a Hinckley hull as the mold is pulled away. **This page:** The iconic fit, finish, and wooden detail of a Hinckley yacht.





Each Hinckley yacht can take a year or more to complete. Here, craftspeople in the wood shop build interiors that will be dropped into the hulls when complete.



THEY EVEN ONCE DESIGNED A COMPARTMENT LINED WITH A MINK PELT, CREATING A NEW USE FOR THE VINTAGE MINK FROM A CLIENT'S FUR COAT.

IN THE WORKSHOP

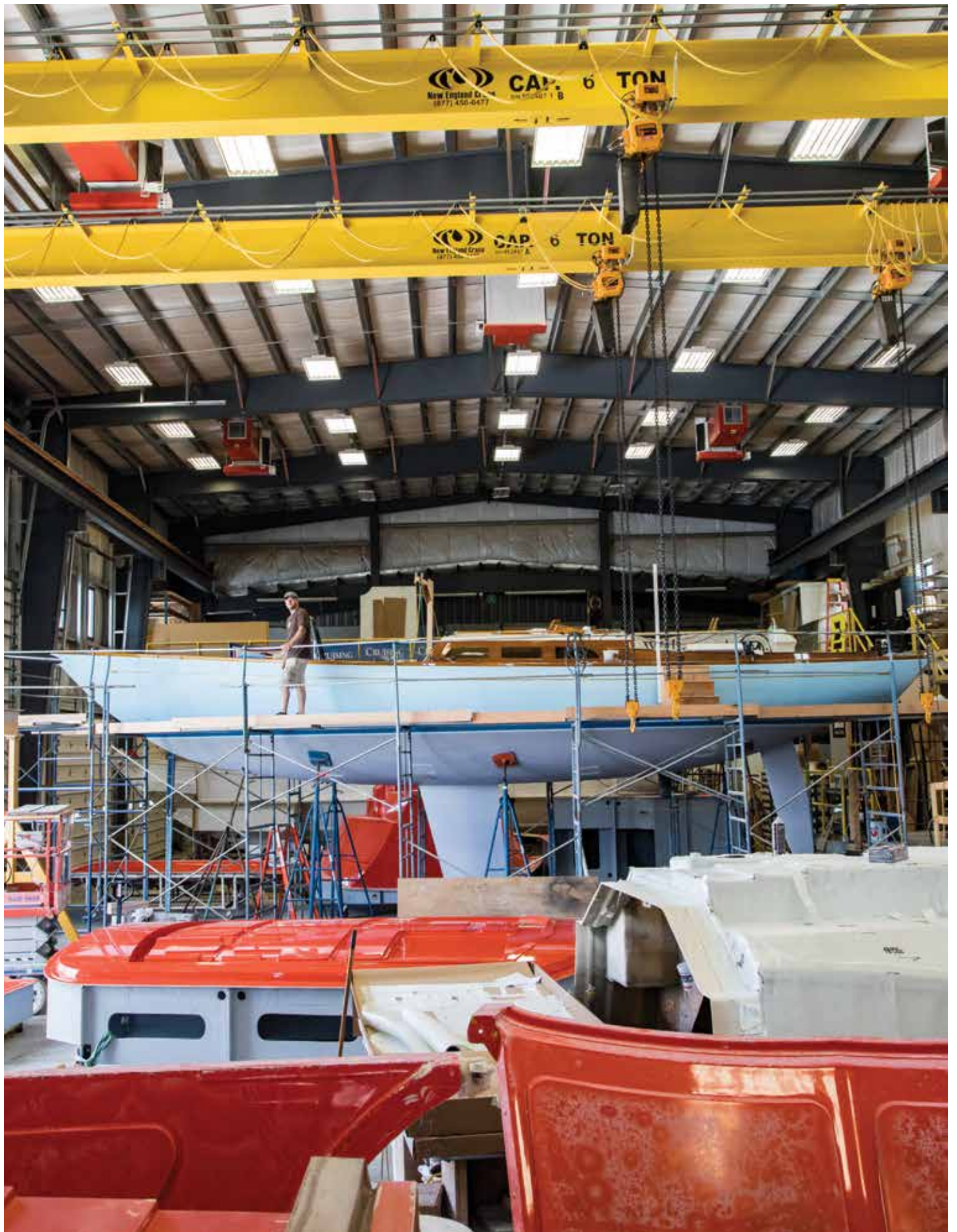
The smell of wet epoxy resin is like a wasabi jolt.

We've entered the fiberglass shop, a garage-style building arrayed with elephant-sized boat hulls inside even larger molds. Vacuum fans whirl and rumble, and at least a dozen men are working among the raw boat shapes and spools of silken-looking fiberglass cloth.

From a lobstering family, Barry Archilles started at Hinckley about 40 years ago and figures he's helped build about 1,000 boats. He's seen the fiberglass processes develop and improve to be lighter, thinner, and stronger, he says. "It's a lot more technical now."

"Years ago, all you would do is build layers of fiberglass," he says, and the result was rugged, heavy construction that was about 65 percent resin. Now Hinckley uses techniques similar to those used to build airplanes, Archilles says, so that a hull is about 65 percent fiber and only 35 percent resin. That's where the technical know-how comes in—this is composite construction that makes use of super-strong materials like Kevlar and carbon fiber, lightweight core and resin infusion processes, and engineered laminates.

Archilles is explaining all of this in his downeast accent and with the fervor of





Opposite page: At the start of 2016, the Hinckley Company bought MDI sailboat builder Morris Yachts, which was founded by Tom Morris in the 1970s. Ian Ashley in the Morris Yachts facility near the runways of the Hancock County-Bar Harbor Airport. **This page:** Both Hinckley and Morris are known for wow-worthy, elegant details.

telling great sea stories. When an owner bumped a rock ledge recently while out on his new yacht, Archilles hurried down to the boatyard to take a look. “That boat was in the water for about two weeks afterward, because the man didn’t want to tell anyone at first.” Since Archilles had helped to build the yacht, he was curious to see how it had fared after the accident. “I was excited to see for myself and make the repair,” he says, “and do you know what? It never leaked in all that time. The rock had punctured all the way into the core, but the water didn’t migrate.”

That means the high-level finishes in the cabins and on deck were just fine. Hinckleys are known for well-varnished wood cabinetry and trim: teak with a

swirling grain, rich-toned mahogany, and American cherry, tulip, and red cedar. Bow-front drawers and other curved details are throughout, and even the toe rails are shaped into a tapered curve. We soon meet Ronnie Nelson, another Hinckley longtimer who started in the yard about four decades ago. Bennett says Nelson is known as a magician when it comes to carpentry. Quiet and busy, Nelson is sanding long, serpentine cherry rails when I stop by his workbench. Barry Buchanan is nearby, inspecting the woodwork of a finished console. He says he came to Mount Desert Island specifically to build wooden boats, and notes that a Hinckley has so many wooden features, it’s often thought of as a wooden boat inside of fiberglass. “It’s one thing to build a table,” he says. “But it’s another to build a boat that goes somewhere. I like that movement.”

THE WOW FACTOR

To see more, we continue walking through the hive-like action and industry in all corners at Hinckley on this early summer’s

day when many of the tall bay doors are open. On an upper level above the carpentry floor, Carlando Grant is focused on one thing: carefully brushing on coats of varnish by hand—10 to 15 coats onto cabinet doors and other wooden pieces of each yacht’s interior. Born in Jamaica, Grant moved to Maine to go to college to study engineering and to work. But first, he took a job with FedEx. One day he brought a delivery to Hinckley and saw the Talaria 55 Motoryacht being built here (the largest of Hinckley yachts), and he applied for a job immediately. That was over three years ago. He still daydreams about a Hinckley of his own, but for now he and his wife own a 21-foot Bayliner to which he’s been adding wooden touches. “I’m a perfectionist,” he says. “I want you to look at a piece that I’ve varnished and say, ‘Wow!’”

Close to 300 men and women work in the Hinckley Company’s boatbuilding yards here in Trenton and another 85 or so work at the service yards on MDI; that includes the crew at the sailboat-focused Morris Yachts across Route 3, another formidable yacht builder on MDI that was begun in the 1970s

Yacht broker Wythe Ingebritson demonstrates how easy it is to maneuver a Hinckley motoryacht in Somes Sound with one hand on the Jetstick control.

and that Hinckley acquired in 2016. Since the purchase by Hinckley, Morris Yachts is still operating much as it has, with its name on new boats and the boatyard at Northeast Harbor.

It's Friday afternoon, and some of the Morris Yachts crew have left by the time we call out a "hello" to someone on a narrow, deck-style platform built around a 42-foot sailing yacht that's underway. Up there is Ian Ashley, a former residential carpenter who invites us to climb the temporary stairs and take a look at the deck up close. Once up on the scaffolding, Ashley tells me he came to work at Morris about four years ago and "fell in love with building boats." This one he's finishing has an extra-long keel for racing, and it almost looks like the yacht's in graceful motion, even as it's securely parked upright and steady in a wooden frame.

Throughout the day of taking in all the sights and sounds, I keep noticing that the carpenters and craftspeople are working on different parts of the same boat at the same time—the hull might still be in the mold in the fiberglass shop, while carpenters are already constructing the bunks and galley spaces. Bennett explains that's possible because everyone's following precise design and engineering plans that were generated for each boat. In a small office of computers with big screens he introduces me to nautical engineer Peter Smith, who has also been with Hinckley for decades. Smith is part of the team that works out each boat's design and engineering particulars, including figuring out how and where to incorporate features that a boat buyer dreams up. Those options have included pull-down cabinets for wine storage, retractable deck awnings, bait wells, Italian espresso makers, and disappearing television screens. He says they even once

designed a compartment lined with a mink pelt, creating a new use for the vintage mink from a client's fur coat.

A YACHT'S DAY

Finally, we'll get out on the water. At the shop earlier in the day, we'd seen a gorgeous blue-painted motor yacht with a Swedish homeport painted on the stern. A Talaria 43, the boat will be shipped to its owner soon, so it's going through another sea trial first to check its systems and performance. In mirrored sunglasses and a t-shirt, Shane Dowsland is the man for the job. He must have the coolest gig in the harbor.

Dowsland is a licensed captain who was a deckhand on a schooner based in Bar Harbor and then worked in the boatyard for Morris Yachts before landing the sea trial job. Now he tests the new boats before delivery. Shoes off and on-deck, we join him for a couple of sea trials departing from Southwest Harbor.

It's my first time on a boat that moves by water-jet propulsion, and immediately I feel the airplane-like stability—even at 30 knots and higher. We're in a smooth glide as we cruise past Beal's Lobster Pier and the Coast Guard field office in Southwest Harbor. The docks and moorings at the Hinckley yard are flotillas of Hinckley and Morris yachts this time of year. In a quick glance, I count more than a dozen picnic boats that I'm finding easily recognizable since seeing them crafted up close—the highly varnished, teak-trimmed, well-upholstered takes on classic lobster boats, often with million-dollar-plus prices.

We thread through the moorings and pass several lobster boats, too. It's like an informal





I COUNT MORE THAN A DOZEN PICNIC BOATS—THE HIGHLY VARNISHED, TEAK-TRIMMED, WELL-UPHOLSTERED TAKES ON CLASSIC LOBSTER BOATS, OFTEN WITH MILLION-DOLLAR-PLUS PRICES.





From left: Wherever the owners take them, the yachts all have Maine DNA. About 300 craftspeople, many with decades of experience at the yards around Mount Desert Island, work to build the motoryachts and sailboats of the Hinckley Company, which now also includes Morris Yachts.

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A Hinckley motoryacht cruising
through Somes Sound.



water tour of Maine boating. At one point, Dowsland points out another classic boat, a 40-foot Friendship sloop, and mentions that he has one like it. Originally from upstate New York, he married a local woman and says he knows most of the local lobstermen. And the lobstering crowd doesn't mind seeing a Hinckley pass near their trap buoys, he notes, because the jetboats don't have exterior propellers that might damage the buoy lines. Plus, he says, "They know these aren't just rich, plastic boats. They know the local craftsmanship that goes into every one."

When we motor into Valley Cove, where the seaside mountains of Acadia National Park

create a vertical wall of rock and trees that rises straight from the deep water, I step out from the comforts of this brand-new Hinckley yacht's cabin that's all windows and wood paneling and soft, couch-like seating—and I look across the teak and holly lines toward the bow and feel the rush and cool of the early summer air. So, I think in those moments on the water, this is what yacht dreams are made of. ✚