

# RAPID EVOLUTION

MIKE ARIETA STEPS UP TO THE HELM AT HINCKLEY AS THE BUILDER TAKES  
HIGH-TECH CONSTRUCTION AND MAINE CRAFTSMANSHIP INTO THE FUTURE

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**Left:** Arieta stands in the new oven that's used to cure epoxy-infused hulls in Trenton, Maine.



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Mike Arieta doesn't like to sit still. Rather than talk in a conference room, he asks if we can chat while we tour the Hinckley Company's Trenton, Maine, boatbuilding facilities. A recent snowstorm has made walking between the sheds icy and precarious, but Hinckley's new president is undeterred. As we make our way, Arieta is reluctant to talk about himself. "I'm the son of a coach and two teachers," he says. "It's not about me. It's about the boats and the people who build them."

The trade workers started at 5:30 a.m. Despite the activity, the work spaces in the metal sheds are quiet and clean. And even though epoxy is everywhere, the usual chemical smell is barely noticeable.

Many of the workers are old hands. Composites Manager Barry Archilles has been with the company for 41 years, and employees with 20-plus years of service are not unusual on the line. Pride of craftsmanship is a company trademark.

Hinckley was founded in 1928, and during the next 60 years developed a reputation as a builder of high-quality cruising sailboats drawn by some of America's best naval architects: John G. Alden, Sparkman & Stephens and Bill Tripp, Jr., among them. The company's Bermuda 40s and Sou'wester 50s are still considered some of the best production sailboats ever built. In the 1990s, the company began offering Downeast-style, jet-powered motorboats. The 1994 Bruce King-designed Picnic Boat created a whole new class of boats and made Hinckley a powerboating tour de force.

Arieta became president in November 2018, when he was a 16-year veteran of the company. He joined Hinckley in 2002 as the director of quality control. "I was in Rhode Island, and they were building a 29R," Arieta says, smiling at the memory. "I looked at the beautiful lines, and as I ran my hand along the hull, I knew. I was in." Soon after, he was asked to manage Hinckley's Trenton manufacturing facility. He then served as general manager for products, and more recently spent a decade as chief operating officer.

When he's not at work, he runs a 28-footer out of Plymouth, Massachusetts, often with his wife, Kristen, and their two children aboard. "We striper fish in the Inner Cape and run over to Martha's Vineyard a couple of times a year to visit my brother who has a house there," he says. "If I have a three-hour window in an afternoon, we get out to some kind of tidal spit or bank and look for hermit crabs."

Dressed in blue jeans, comfortable shoes and a Hinckley jacket, Arieta climbs in, steps on and crawls through various boats on the production line. As he walks through the sheds, he chats with carpenters, mechanics and supervisors, and points out features that Hinckley has recently added to its boats. One is the remote-controlled hull-side door that premiered last year on the Picnic Boat 40. Another is the collapsible aft enclosure on the Talaria 43.

Standing on a Talaria 43 Flybridge, Arieta explains the design and engineering that allow the glass enclosure to disappear from sight. The glass can be raised for security and climate control, and lowers to open the cabin to the cockpit. Hinckley wanted the windows to disappear from view at the push of a button, so the company engineered a mechanism that sinks the glass sections through the cabinetry and 18 inches below the deck. Because the glass wouldn't be able to support the rooftop, craftsmen made that out of carbon-fiber epoxy. "We wanted it to be as open as possible," Arieta says. "On other boats, you would need a pillar."

Overcoming engineering challenges is not a foreign concept to Arieta. He has an engineering degree from Union College in Schenectady, New York, where he also earned an MBA. His first job was with the Ford Motor Company. "Boats and cars are my two passions," he says. "I like to get my hands on the product."

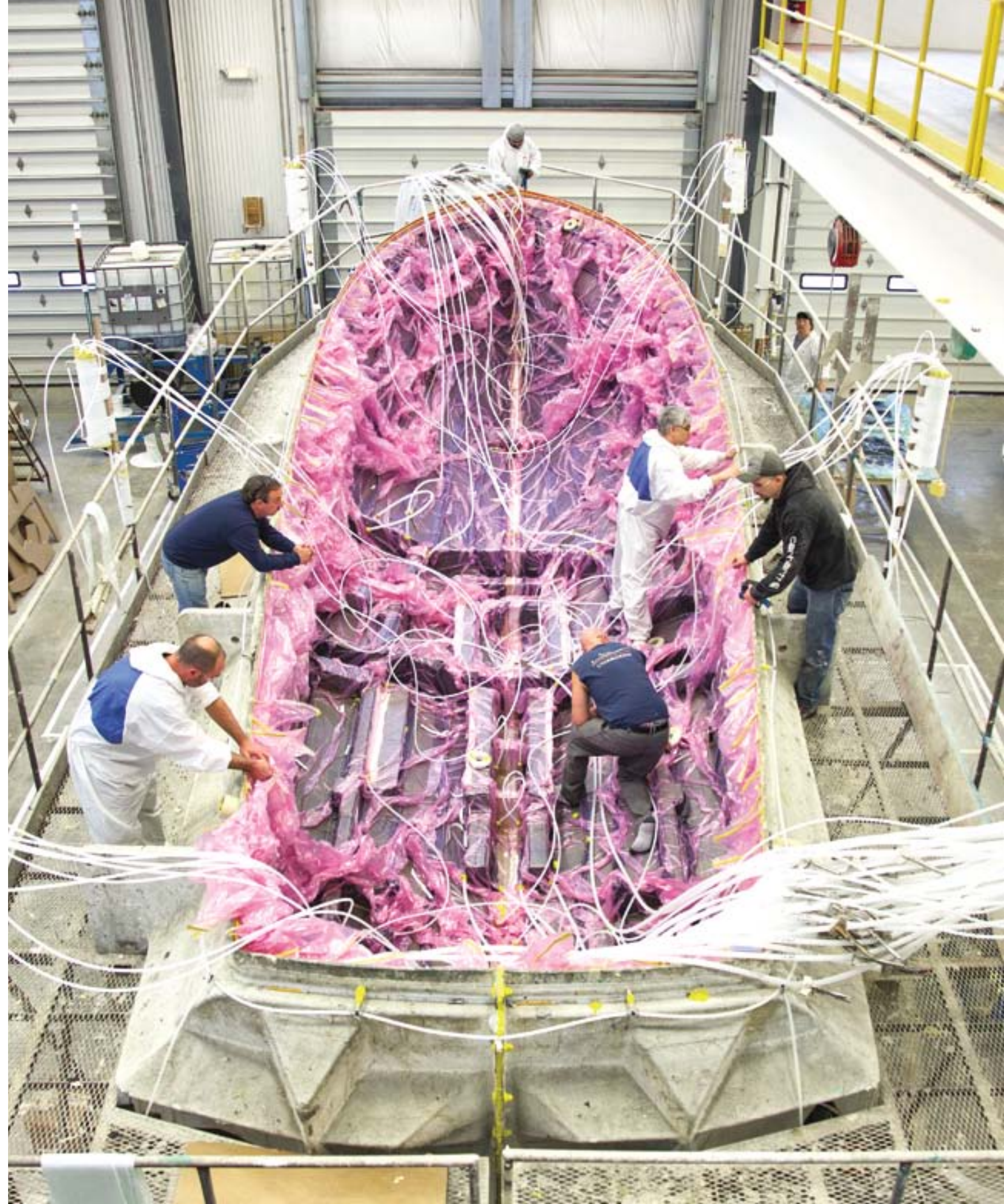
Farther up the assembly line, mechanics connect helm controls to a pair of jet drives. Hinckley now uses digital switching. "It allows you to tune the steering," Arieta says, adding that the fly-by-wire technology gets rid of oversteering at lower speeds.

In another building, as technicians mill around a brand-new Thermwood Five Axis CNC Router, Arieta describes how it will allow Hinckley to make some of its own molds. Small molds can take six months for an outside contractor to deliver; Hinckley can now make one in as little as two months. The capability saves time and allows for incremental changes to boats. If a customer wants a king-size island berth in the bow of a Picnic Boat 40 rather than the standard queen, the builder now has the mold.

Such advancements are not new to Hinckley. In 1959, it was among the first production builders to switch to fiberglass construction, a material then derided as "frozen snot." In 1994, Hinckley was the first production builder to use the Seemann Composites Resin Infusion Molding Process (or Scrimp).

The builder has also evolved through acquisition. In 1999, it bought Ted Hood Companies of Portsmouth, Rhode Island. The purchase was a double whammy. It gave Hinckley expansive waterfront real estate just 7 miles from Newport, Rhode Island, and control of a major competitor, Little Harbor Yachts. (The brand was eventually discontinued.) The Portsmouth location now serves as Hinckley's headquarters and is one of its nine service

**Right:** Inside the Advanced Composite Center, workers check the plastic and hoses before infusing the hull of a new Picnic Boat 37 with epoxy.







**Left:** Arieta (center) oversees a team of experienced tradesmen who employ traditional and cutting-edge boatbuilding practices to make multiple boat lines.



centers located between Maine and Florida.

During the past 20 years, yacht service has become a major component of Hinckley's business. In 2003, it opened a service center in Stuart, Florida, and subsequently opened more in Georgia, Connecticut and the Chesapeake Bay area. "Every year, we deliver over 600 jet boats in as-new condition back to our customers," Arieta says. "It's huge."

In 2013, Hinckley purchased Hunt Yachts. Arieta says the purchase gave Hinckley three things: another authentic New England boat brand; capability in Taiwan to build larger vessels; and an ongoing relationship with Ray Hunt Design, which had outboard-engine experience. In 2016, Hinckley bought Morris Yachts, creating more production space and control of another admired sailboat brand.

The Trenton facility has three Morris 36s under construction, and this summer, Hinckley plans to launch the first Sou'wester 53, which Arieta calls a modern version of what a proper pilothouse cruising sailboat should be. "We remain one of the few companies building sailboats for discerning yachtsmen," he says. "Sailing is in our DNA. It's about going to sea. I can't announce it yet, but we have a lot going on with the America's Cup. We have exciting developments in our service footprint."

The Hinckley Company now consists of four brands and 25 models between 26 and 76 feet in length that are built in three locations: Trenton, for the Hunt, Hinckley and Morris models; Portsmouth, for the Hunt 26 and Hinckley 29; and Taiwan, for the Hunt Ocean Series of fast expedition offshore yachts. Hinckley just completed its 1,100th jet boat, and in the past two years has added a fully electric model, and created Hinckley Sport Boats to get into the outboard-powered boat market. The Sport Boat 40c launched last year; the 40x is scheduled to launch soon.

We head over to Hinckley's Advanced Composite Center, where the first 40x is among five hulls in various stages of dry layout. The boat, Hinckley says, will be capable of 50 knots with standard power, and will exceed that with optional twin 627s from Seven Marine. To meet the market's demand for more speed, the builder recently announced that all its future Jet Boats, Sport Boats and Hunt Coastals will be capable of at least 40 knots with optional power.

Just down the line from the 40x, workers use knives to cut Corecell at precise angles for a Dasher, Hinckley's first fully electric model. This particular Dasher will become a tender to a megayacht, but Arieta says the electric boat is also ideal for inland lakes and intracoastal areas, including Miami.



BOAT DETAILS COURTESY OF HINCKLEY

**Top to bottom:** On the line in the Advanced Composite Center, a Hunt 32 mold is prepped while dry materials are fitted inside a Talaria 48.

"We believe the battery capacity and performance are on a trajectory for viable growth," Arieta says. "We're pretty certain people will follow us with electric. At some point in the future, I could see some kind of hybrid drive where we have electric or silent propulsion at lower speeds,

but then the ability to power up and go hard for distances."

In the Advanced Composite Center, hulls are prepped and infused with epoxy resin. Hinckley continues to build its hulls using SCRIMP. It involves putting all the hull materials inside a mold, sealing them in airtight plastic, and then using hoses and pumps to create a vacuum that sucks the two-part resin into the mold, fusing everything together.





**Left to right:** Hinckleys are stored in the heated facility in Southwest Harbor, Maine; the fully electric Dasher is just one of the company's latest offerings.

The company will now make all of its Hinckleys, Sport Boats and Morris hulls—from bow to stern, including the structural grid—with Kevlar, carbon and epoxy. That's reportedly a first for a production builder. Hinckley says others use carbon and epoxy, or Kevlar and carbon, but only Hinckley uses all three in its hulls, which the company guarantees for life, along with its decks.

Next door to the Advanced Composite Center, a new oven will be used to cure the epoxy hulls. Capable of accommodating a hull up to 85 feet in length, the oven fills an entire shed and will cure a hull at 180 degrees Fahrenheit in 24 hours. "Epoxy 'kicks' at a higher temperature," Arieta says explaining why they built the oven, and adds that the oven curing process will make Hinckley's hulls stiffer, stronger and lighter.

Old-fashioned, handmade craftsmanship is still happening at Hinckley. In the carpentry department, workers laminate 1/16-inch veneers to create the company's signature, curved teak trim. And in the finishing department, workers build layer upon layer of varnish to achieve high-gloss finishes. But Hinckley is aware that today's boat owners have less time to care for things like teak. "We're making sure we have

alternatives in our product line," Arieta says. On the Dasher, for instance, there's what Hinckley calls artisanal teak. The molded composite is hand-painted with wood grain; it looks like teak, but requires less maintenance than wood.

The next iteration of it is called molded composite artisanal teak and will be used on the 40c and 40x. It is less labor intensive to create than the hand-painted version, further reduces maintenance for the owner, and allows for what Hinckley calls a wash-and-wear approach to boating.

Hinckley continues to expand. In 2017, the company broke ground for a 20,000-square-foot heated storage facility in Southwest Harbor, Maine. And currently, Hinckley is finishing a 40,000-square-foot, category 5 hurricane-rated storage facility at the Stuart, Florida, Yacht Service Center.

"The last three to five years have been about continuing to evolve," Arieta says. "At the same time, we've brought our world-class technology and unique customer care reputation to other segments of the market through both acquisition and new product development. We've really broadened the niches within the market that we serve. We have a commitment to using the best technologies, the best practices and craftsmanship. We're never going to move off that commitment."

"I'm talking about being America's greatest yacht company," Arieta adds. "That's how we go to work every day." 🌊

BOAT COURTESY OF HINCKLEY