

ON DESIGN

BY TONY FLEMING



Essential elements of a serious cruising yacht

My intent, in designing the Fleming, was to create a boat with pleasing lines, built on a capable, seakindly hull and designed for serious offshore and coastal cruising — easily said but, as always, the transition from concept to reality lies in the details.

I resolved to take a critical look at every aspect of design and to shape my decisions around a sense of aesthetics anchored in tradition. For example, I sketched the sheer line to provide a faint echo, at least to my eyes, of the rakish look of a traditional Down East schooner. We tend to be drawn to people and objects we find attractive, but to judge real worth we must look beyond a pretty face. The most exotic building is

only as good as its foundations, and so it is with a boat. In this case, it is the hull upon which the integrity of the whole vessel depends.

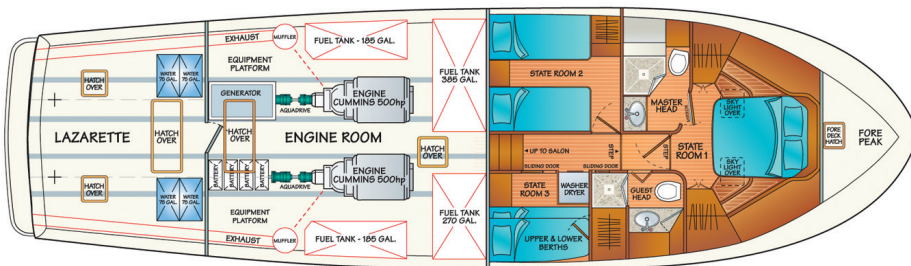
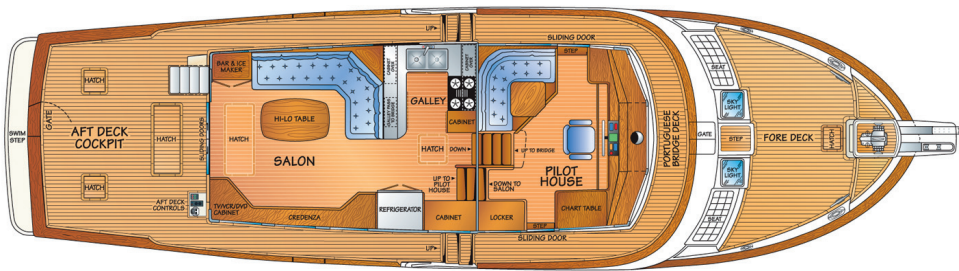
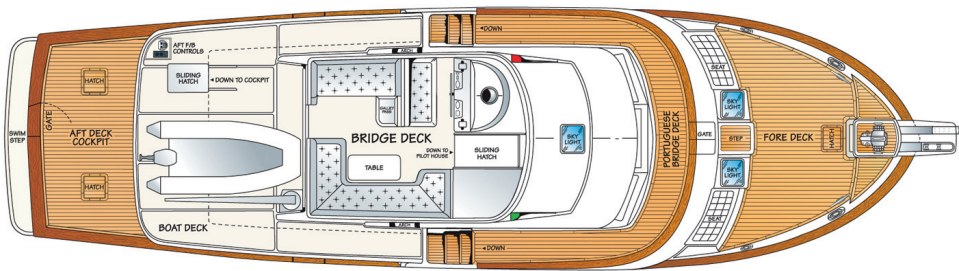
I wanted flexibility in performance — good fuel economy at hull speeds, but a boat capable of 20 knots when required. A flared bow to deflect the waves but with no chines close to the waterline forward to avoid that annoying slapping while at anchor. A semidisplacement hull with a sharp entry, rounded bilge sections forward, and hard chines and moderate deadrise aft.

Good design is key, but it's meaningless without structural integrity, the evidence of which lies mostly hidden from view in a finished boat. Here, it may be best to rely on the reputation of the builder, along



Fleming pilothouse motoryachts (55 pictured) are designed for serious cruising, with seakindly hulls and thoughtful features.

NEIL RABINOWITZ (TOP)



Smart features include an uncluttered foredeck with the rails mounted inboard of the rail cap and an accessible engine room. The semidisplacement hull has a sharp entry, rounded bilge sections forward and hard chines aft.



with the certification authorities, such as National Marine Manufacturers Association and European Union classifications. The latter has grades A through D, with A (Ocean class) being the toughest. NMMA-certified boats must meet the stringent standards of the American Boat and Yacht Council and comply with Environmental Protection Agency requirements for emissions and wastewater systems. Obtaining such certification is not a casual undertaking. NMMA certification requires rigorous annual inspections during the building process, and even of the yard itself, as well as close surveys of completed vessels, wherever they may be.

Some designs concentrate on maximizing interior space at the expense of functionality. For example, they eliminate side decks, reduce the size of the engine room and raise the height of the superstructure, increasing windage and decreasing stability. Safety should, of course, take precedence, and this manifests itself in many ways, some apparent and others less so. The manner in which the vessel handles is clearly an obvious factor, as is the quality of construction. Less

“A boat should be a blend of art and engineering where form and function work in harmony. To my mind there is no excuse for ugliness, even in the design of the lowliest bracket.”

evident are features such as having a keel that extends below the running gear. This not only provides protection for the vital rudders and propellers, but it also improves tracking in a following sea.

Ease of boarding or stepping off a boat is another factor that isn't always apparent during a boat show, where all of the boats are tied stern to the dock. Being able to step ashore only at the transom can be hazardous under anything less than ideal conditions. A lack of decks along both sides obviously limits safe access when mooring alongside, and high decks require steps. All too often it seems to be



The pilothouse can be closed off from the saloon and affords good sightlines from the helm.

properly designed, with the width of the treads correctly matched to the height of the risers — difficult to achieve with a spiral staircase. In-board access to the flybridge, up easy-to-negotiate stairs, is much safer than a long ladder down to the cockpit. I recall on many occasions seeing people stranded on the flying bridge, afraid to descend when the seas kicked up.

For equipment, I carefully selected the best available and installed it with ease of access in mind. Being an engineer by philosophy and training, all technical installations were based on the sound engineering principles I learned during my apprenticeship in the demanding aeronautical industry.

Although practicality was paramount, I also paid much attention to aesthetics. A boat should be a blend of art and engineer-

women who are expected to loop the lines around the awkward rails that substitute for cleats these days while “sir” pulls a few levers and issues instructions from the bridge.

Handrails should be plentiful and naturally fall to hand. Your arms always lead your feet when you ascend and descend steps, so the placement of rails must take this — and the height of children — into account. We locate our foredeck rails inboard of the rail cap for better support and to keep the stanchions off the teak.

Bulwark and transom doors should open inward so an inadvertently unlatched door does not precipitate you over the side. Stairs need to be

ing where form and function work in harmony. To my mind there is no excuse for ugliness, even in the design of the lowliest bracket. The look and ambiance of a vessel are very important, and although you may not recognize the reasons, they should be instantly apparent from the moment you step aboard.

The scale of each and every piece of furniture and the harmonious blend of shapes, textures and colors contribute to an instinctive feeling of comfort that should pervade the entire vessel, from its outward appearance to the tiniest detail. There should be no sharp corners, and you should be able to look comfortably through the windows

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Shapes, textures and colors work in harmony to create a comfortable interior.

when seated. Noise and vibration lead to fatigue, and we spared no expense to make our vessels quiet and smooth.

Good food is an integral part of pleasurable cruising, and this means having a well-designed galley. It shouldn't be in the pilothouse, where there are significant drawbacks when it comes to serious cruising. I prefer a dedicated pilothouse that can be closed off from the saloon when running at night or during critical moments. For cooking under way, our fully equipped galley is centrally located at a less elevated level. An induction cooktop has the speed of gas without its safety concerns and comes equipped with potholders that I consider to be essential. Without them, even an errant wake can result in a nasty accident.

Clients often tell me that after owning a Fleming for three years they are still finding out why things are designed a certain way. This stems from features included because of experience acquired over many years. There is no substitute for builders actually using the boats they build.

Naturally, all of the features I have described are in Fleming yachts because they reflect my experience and what I believe to be correct. Not everyone will agree with my beliefs, and different features will have different priorities for different people. I will say simply that it is important to do your homework before investing your money — and the safety of yourself and your loved ones — in a boat that has the potential to provide personal voyages of discovery that cannot be taken by any other means.

I have learned much from the extensive cruising I have experienced during the past few years, not least of which is the need to grasp opportunities that come your way with both hands before the passage of time snatches them beyond your reach. ■

Tony Fleming is the founder of Fleming Yachts. The Costa Mesa, Calif.-based company offers four models of passagemaking cruising yachts from 55 to 78 feet, all of which are built by the Tung Hwa boatyard in Taiwan. www.flemingyachts.com