



French Yachts is helping affiliates plan entry into the marine complex in the satellite buildings.

From the Drawing Board to the Boatyard: An Interview with Steve French

His fingerprints have been all over custom boat designs for the last three decades, and it's clear that Steve French isn't slowing down any time soon. We caught up with French at his Stuart, Florida offices of Applied Concepts, the design firm he founded over 25 years ago, to find out where the future of sportfishing boats is headed.

ITB: You've designed over a dozen boats for Garlington including the 44 and 61-footers; Applied Concepts has designed for Smith, Kinchloe, Whitticar, L&H and Briggs. You've designed over 75 Spencers, more than 10 F&Ss, the new Makaira line and the 86 with Roy Merritt. In other words, you have always been behind the scenes designing some of the most iconic boats on the water. Why the move from behind the scenes to the spotlight of "builder?"

French: I haven't stopped building since I did my first plugs and molds when I was 19. We built many of Spencer's superstructures for years before training them in modern composite techniques. The market is overdue for a technologically advanced builder. And today's buyers are limited to a lot of the same stuff with different labels. French

Yachts will stretch the envelope and offer something different.

ITB: So what will be so different about French Yachts?

French: Many of the boats being produced today are very nice. They're esthetically pleasing, but don't make strides in function and economy. In the case of French Yachts, a whole new level of technology is being implemented. These will be the only yachts on the market offering positive flotation that we perfected in a 46-foot flybridge. All titanium hardware and fully composite tower and rigger options reduce maintenance dramatically. Advanced hull forms, hybrid power systems and clean, lightweight construction methods will make boats available that go farther, faster, stronger and

longer while making it easier for the crew to maintain than anything that exists today.

ITB: Let's talk about that. What will French Yachts do for the crew?

French: Unless the crew can operate at the top of their game, the yacht's functionality for the owner is compromised. French Yachts focuses on many areas ignored by others, like ease of crew movement throughout the vessel, easy access to maintenance areas, components that are easy to clean and maintain and storage that is manageable. Our engineering process assures they are not just afterthoughts. I learned from Capt. John Dudas on my first custom design on the Garlington 63 that the key to a great boat is in the details with the crew. His input drove us to build a great machine that is still in the fleet today as My Three Sons.

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ITB: Are you recruiting new talent or using veterans to build your boats?

FRENCH: I like a mix of both. It's important to have highly experienced crew, but I also like to train up fresh young talent with new ideas and ambition. We've pulled together an A-team for the management including Jim Greene, our exclusive marketing arm. He is as fired up and knowledgeable about fishing as anyone. David Carty, our Small Craft Director, has already done a great job in the construction of the 41-foot Jager for French Yachts. And Eric Bacigalup, our Composites Director for large yachts, has worked with us on some our most advanced carbon projects since 1988.

ITB: The past few years have been some of the toughest on boat building. Some might say this is a crazy time to be launching French Yachts. What do you say to them?

FRENCH: We are motivated by the number of owners coming to us to make vessels that are more creative and Orange Beach is poised to see the same explosion that we saw in the Outer Banks a decade ago. The resources and facilities they have provided are first rate in every way. Since we built the 86-foot Unleashed in 2006 we've talked about French Yachts, and I can't imagine a better time than now to bring it to life. There's a bright future for those willing to work hard. In good times or bad, we will still fish!

For more information contact www.frenchyachts.com or call Jim Greene direct: (251) 747-0468. 

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