

Ted Hood, Jr.

In the intimate world of yachting in New England there are first families, and many have fond memories and a deep admiration for Ted Hood, Sr. I doubt there was ever a boat that he didn't love. He was a remarkable man and I'd like to add, kind, a trait he has passed on to his son, Ted Hood, Jr. Ted continues to share his father's passion for the industry with his company Wellington Yacht Partners and his father's joy of a challenging race at sea.

What was life like in the Hood household, you must have some great memories sailing as a family, any you care to share?

Growing up in my family, life was constantly evolving around boats. My father being the industry icon that he was, was doing everything at the same time; building boats, designing, sail making, racing boats. Probably the most time we spent together, which was special, was racing together. He would recruit my brothers and I as crew, we were quite young, my first ocean race was when I was 10 years old in 1969.

He was always joking that he designed and built his own boats but he also made his own crew.

Having him as a father was a wonderful experience, we had a lot of quality time with him doing some really adventure type stuff, particularly when we became teenagers, old enough to do more things with him, like the long-distance races. I really had the chance to get to know him as a sailor and a businessman because I also worked with him later for much of my career. I was extremely lucky to have grown up in that environment. Living on the water in Marblehead, since I was a toddler, I was always on boats.

I read you once found boat foam and strapping under the Christmas tree?

Yes, that's a true story. His work ethic was inspirational, he worked hard but he also liked to do a lot of things with his hands, and he was quite talented at it. I was always watching him, taking an interest in boat design and carpentry, building things, I finished off a dingy when I was little and then at 16, I designed and built a rowing shell. He knew I was getting into this project, so under the Christmas tree that year, he gave me some foam and some lumber to build the hull, that was an exciting Christmas.

Your career in boating then, was probably always a given?

It was certainly a possibility, it always existed because of my surroundings, but it was a choice that I ultimately decided to make, because most of us who are in this business today, like to be around boats, otherwise, we would not enjoy the job as much. I definitely think growing up in a nautical family the natural inclination would be to spend my life continuing to help people on the water, trying to make their time on the water more enjoyable and more productive, most of us in the industry have that belief. Whatever we are doing, building or designing or doing service work we are all trying to keep that boat owner happy on the water and having an enjoyable experience; it helps keep the industry afloat and certainly helps the owners' personal life when the experience is good. I think we have a belief that boating is one of the few things you can do today that really keeps your family together when you want to get them away from the shore base distractions. It is also something you can do later in life in your

golden years by finding the time to go off on long voyages, now that the kids are gone and really get away from it all and experience places and destinations that most people don't ever get to; that's what those of us in the industry like doing the most when dealing with our clients.

How did you prepare yourself for this career, what is your background?

I went to a public school in Marblehead, Massachusetts which has a good school system and it's a nice place to grow up. Then I was lucky enough to get into Brown University and got an engineering degree, which gave me a solid background of thinking. I started out of school working with my father in his design office for a couple of years and really had more interest on the business and marketing side. I dove into Little Harbor custom yachts for 15 years or so in the mid 1990's when we were developing that brand. I was fairly active in the business dealing with all our customers and doing product development; it really was a fun time for me.

Have you delved into boat design yourself?

I decided a few years after school that it was not something I wanted to do full-time. I enjoyed it but I felt there were other people who were better at it than me, in terms of all the nitty gritty drafting techniques. I just didn't see myself working at a drafting table all my life. But I did and still enjoy the process and have a good understanding of the design and naval architecture of why some boats will sail better than others, it remains an interest of mine. But the development and sales side of things is where I have had the most fun. After the mid 1990's and 15 years of working with the Little Harbor brand, I returned to school for my MBA degree, to advance my skills while I continued to work with my father and two brothers for a while. Then my father sold one of the larger companies here in 1999, at the time I was working more on yacht brokerage and consulting work, helping people find and sell boats and it was something I enjoyed doing, talking to the clients. Then finally in 2008 I felt I just wanted more control and to do something on my own.

With the help of two other partners that I knew from the industry, that I reunited with, in 2008 we started Wellington Yacht Partners. One of the partners I had worked with for a while and the other was a younger guy. Within a short time, I had more of my former colleagues join us and it has been kind of like reuniting the old band from Little Harbor days to some extent along with some new colleagues.

Today there are 10 of us that make up Wellington Yacht Partners, eight of us have worked together for a long time and the other two are younger guys that we are happy to have with us. We have many years of combined experience, coming from backgrounds such as yacht captains and engineers, with a lot of stories to tell and a lot of expertise!

People must approach you all the time, offhanded or professionally to get your boating advice?

We do some of that on the brokerage and consulting side, it's what I have been doing for the past 20 years. You know, you can't always find an existing boat for someone. So, on the custom side, not production built, it is a fun project to propose ideas and pull together a designer and builder to help the client through the process and be also involved with the project. We have done that a few times with

larger power and sailing yachts and it has been a fun experience to see a project through from start to finish and rewarding in that the client gets exactly what they want.

With your understand of boat design and engineering, what features would you like to see on boats in the future?

For sailboats, having grown up around my father's designs, he had a particular style of boat that was more traditional in appearance, more unique in that it was a shallow draft, heavier boat with a centerboard, I very much like that design philosophy. I think it makes a lot of sense for many people, it's more sea kindly and the boat performs well upwind, which has often been proven with a lot of his race boats. But as far as the trend today, it is for racier looking, displacement, wide beam boats that are modeled more around the Volvo and Grand Prix race boats. More and more designers are heading their cruising boats in that direction and I am not sure that is the right way to go, based on what you are trying to do with the boat, which is cruising. I am sort of trying to look more towards the modern mainstream, and the traditional look of a boat still appeals to a lot of even the younger clients that we have now. They are still attracted to some of the retro style boats as long as they can sail reasonably well. The reasons being because they look nicer, they are more comfortable, the cockpit layouts and living spaces are more practical for pure cruising boat. If you want to race a boat and have a racer cruiser design then that is another story; you want a boat that has a lot of those modern design attributes to be competitive.

Do you think the technology from the America's Cup race boats will be trickling down to mainstream boating, features like the foils? What do you think of the design, a long way from the 12 metre that your father raced on during AC racing, it seems they have turned it into an extreme sport, catering to the younger generation.

I think they have catered to a younger market, I am of the school which a lot of people share, that it made the event more exciting for a more broader market for TV, shorter races maybe 30 minutes long for fast boats. But I don't see nearly as much trickle down as we use to see in the monohulled AC class boats up until 2003; the rigging, sails and hardware innovations were trickling down all the time. With this last race in Bermuda I don't see much trickle down except in the fun day sailer with the foils, but it is not going to appeal to the main market. We are all waiting to see what happens with the announcement shortly when New Zealand announces protocol; whether it will be a monohulled or foiling class.

What do you think will be the result?

It definitely leaked out that it will be more of a nationality class with nation against nation with boats being built in country of origin. But a lot of people are thinking, including myself, that it will be some kind of boat that comes back with a spinnaker and a real mainsail that might make it look and feel like a real sailboat, hard to guess what else they will do.

The AC is just a small segment of the whole sailing industry, it is exciting, people follow it but it doesn't effect that much what I do on the cruising and racing side. I think it is one of many interesting events that can attract more people to sailing which is one of the main things we are all trying to do, but talking about people in Bermuda wearing flak jackets and having helmets on boats is not something that will make the guy sitting and watching at home think I should go out and get a sailboat.

I don't hear so much about green energy, carbon footprint, is it just taken for granted that owners will be more eco-conscious or has the subject just fallen off the radar in the marine industry?

I think the green movement is alive and well and is moving forward in even the home and auto industries. While the energy efficiency of an engine on a sailboat might not keep an owner up at night, there is more and more a desire to be self-sufficient, and that inspires green energy. Solar panels, wind power, better technology in batteries, I can't speak for others but I am sure there has been growth in that market in the last 5 years.

I think the bigger concern is how we are ruining the ocean and the plastic pollution, that movement is picking up speed because it effects everyone, not just boaters. It effects the quality of our food and the future of marine life that are literally getting choked by ingesting micro pieces of plastic that are out there and will be forever. I think boaters are getting more and more careful about avoiding pollution getting directly into the water.

What has been your experience, you are out on the water so much, what have you seen?

You see it even when walking the shoreline of the beach at home, but when you get out in remote areas like the Pacific gyre, you see one of the biggest examples of plastic collecting, polluting the ocean for miles. Sailing around in general, you see stuff in the water, big pieces of trash, garbage; it's not pretty.

Racers are now trying to make news of this plight. One of the Volvo teams in the race, the local US team, 11th Hour Racing, is making the health of the ocean their theme, writing about conditions they see as they race around the world.

Members are concerned about diminished interest in sailing, what are your thoughts?

If you are asking about boating in general that could be the case. But if you want to compare the interest in sailing as opposed to power boaters, it appears that there are more obstacles for people to get into sailing. People are afraid, maybe they have not sailed much since they were a kid, they feel more intimidated by a larger sailboat and the prospect of learning how to sail it. Whereas they can buy a power boat, turn the key and go. Limited navigational experience is a factor. I think fear and intimidation of sailing versus power, are factors. Sailing is more complicated, you must understand the sails and rigging, etc., but I think, contrary, sailing offers an escape and a platform that you just can't get with a power boat.

Most powerboats are not sea worthy offshore, you can't take a 40ft express boat out of sight of land for too long because you don't want to be stuck out there on it, but with a 40ft sailboat you can be much more secure even in a big storm offshore. You have much more range and obviously you can venture further out because you are burning less fuel, sailing most of the time, hopefully. Sailing opens a much wider potential use and much more adventure potential, I think for a family or for a retired couple or even just friends getting together.

Who is the typical buyer right now of a sailboat?

Good question. We ask ourselves that all the time, it varies, because we have a diverse group of buyers. One class of buyers that are coming in are the later baby boomers, in their 50, 60's. They are successful enough now to get their boats, finally, and they have been thinking about it for a long time while working hard. They want to get on their boat and do an adventure, while they are still healthy enough to do it. We had an interesting couple who are going down through the Pacific, they have the resources, they don't have children anymore and they want to do this adventure while they still can. Another example is a couple we had last year, a family, the parents might be in their 40's, the kids are young enough to home school, so they decide it would be great to get away, they sold everything, bought a boat and they are cruising around for a couple of years. Some very successful couples have shown up, quit their jobs, knowing their can come back when they want and get a job again, do something with the kids while they are still young enough, and then you have everybody in between who work and look forward to getting away for a month or two a year. They keep the boat in the Caribbean and try to use the boat as much as they can; in all those cases the boat becomes therapy, something to work on and look forward to.

Are they experienced sailors or newcomers to the sport?

Some have had little boats for a while and used them while working full time, "time" is the thing that always comes up. "Don't have time, that's why I am selling", or "I have time and that's why I want to buy". People who might have been into sailing on a smaller boat but nothing like long distance, now that they are retired they will make a move up to something big that they can live onboard. Some do come in who have not had much experience since junior sailing, now in their 20's, working hard in the City, they might decide to come out sailing now after a long break.

Do you feel learning how to sail as a child is the key?

It helps grow a passion that might stay inside someone, though dormant, while working although I don't think learning to sail as a child is a necessity. We have had a lot of clients over the years who have had no experience, they might have had a friend who had a boat and they got invited to come along and started to get more involved, quickly moving into a role where they want to get their own boat now. It is very rare that they come to us not having spent an hour on a sailboat! It's good to have some sailing experience, sailing with friends or an offshore sailing school; they won't be allowed to take the boat out by themselves with no experience. Those support systems and everything else that is out there to teach people, manufacturers installing equipment created to make navigation and sail handling easier, all of this is supporting the industry.

Touching on something that always happens. It is usually one of the two that come in, usually it is the husband but sometimes it is the wife, all fired up to buy a boat. The key is to get the not convinced spouse to come onboard as much as possible to make it comfortable and finding a boat that will satisfy both in a unique way. It's got to be good to sail and feels fast but it also should have the comforts of home built in, so it's not totally camping out.

What do they look for when buying or chartering a boat, they must have a list?

We usually try to sit down and ask what do you want to do with the boat, how do you want to use it so we can start to take into consideration certain attributes they should have on the boat, we don't try to sell that what we have sitting in the back yard. We are always looking for boats around the world. Some clients come in with an overall use in mind, but others focus on that one special need, like having room for their 6 grandchildren for that one special weekend a year. They might get a boat with a layout that accommodates that but, they might use it so little that we try to get them to consider boat features that will be used 90% percent of the time, not 10% percent. Questions asked, how far do you plan to travel, shallow water or not, what kind of wind conditions, and then how much do they like high maintenance items or do they want just a simple boat.

Are they looking for the latest technology, what is the selling point?

Electronics can usually all be upgraded, that is not usually a factor, when you are looking to buy an existing boat you know you can do a small upgrade, but the subject of internet connection offshore or in remote areas become a selling point for people who want to still stay in touch, some prefer to stay off the grid entirely and just have the SAT phone for emergencies.

Cabin layouts, salon size, galley too big or too small these are the things that factor in when choosing a boat, every boat has its plus and minuses, it's part of the process, there is no perfect boat. In a given size, say 50ft, you can only do so much so people have to weigh the plus and minus and that is where someone to discuss all of this through, clarifies the thinking.

With people who build the new boats, they like the process and as soon as the boat is completed they are already thinking about the next one. Even smaller buyers of mainstream boats do the same thing, they get tired of the boat, they like the latest and greatest or they just want to try something else. While there are others who are happy to keep their boats, 20, 30 years.

What size range do you see the most activity?

I was just talking about this with some other people, Boats.com and Yacht World in the industry, the activity level has gone up in sailboats this year, in sailboat transactions. We are seeing in our office and with my colleagues elsewhere, that more and more sailors are definitely coming back into the market. We are not sure why that is, except for the fact that sailboat buyers are more conservative, they take a while to make a decision and economically are more cautious. The equity market and the real estate market are doing well lately, irrespective of any political thing going on out there, because of those trends in the market people feel more confident getting that sailboat finally.

Whereas the power boat buyer is more impulsive, they will just go out and borrow money to buy their boat and then it will just sit there. It is just a different decision process; that is just one theory we have why the market has improved. Fuel prices has been stable, that has been the driver in the past, when it spikes way up people think it would be more economical to sell the powerboat and buy the sailboat but that not the case at all.

I would say it has been active for us in all sizes lately and busy across the board. We've had a few 70, 80ft in our office this year as well as lots of small ones. But we are diverse in the boats we have and the

size length we deal with, there is a little day sailor, a Leary 28ft day sailer that we deal with quite a lot, a beautiful little boat, we have a couple of boats listed at 110ft, that is about the largest size.

What about power boats, how is that market?

In general, the powerboats that we are dealing with are the types that appeal to sailors. Because a lot of our client base will also decide as they get older to leave sailing and get into power, either they are no longer physically able to move around as much or because they have younger families and don't have any time. Time is challenging for sailboat people to get families to commit more time to boating. With a power boat, you can go out for 4 hours and come back, it may not be the same adventure, just bumming around out there, or go somewhere quickly, spend the night and come back, but that style of boat is very popular with former sailors and new power boaters. There are a lot of brands that provide a high level of finish and pretty highspeed boats that are nice, in the 30 to 60ft range.

What are some of the entry level boats that you would recommend?

Some of the high brand that appeal to sailboat owners and power boat buyers are on the semi-custom side. You have Hinckley doing a lot, the Little Harbor is no longer being built but is popular on the brokerage side, another American built that is doing very well is Sabre, semi production side. We deal with them quite a bit, they designed a good range of boats that appeal to that market. Eastbay Grand Banks is another one like Sabre, they are strong in the market. Regarding the slower, displacement type boats that sailors can move on to because they have offshore capabilities with stabilizers and all of that, some of the brands that we deal with a lot are Nordhavn, and Selene, they may not go more than 10-12 knots, but these boats are more self-sufficient and liveaboard, the types sailors favor.

What is your relationship with charter?

We don't do much direct charter but we try to get people to charter boats. We will recommend certain brokers, we also recommend if they want to buy a boat to charter it first to see if they like it and how the boat works. Sometimes we have clients who want to buy but put the boat in charter to offset expenses, especially when you keep the boat year-round in the Caribbean. We attend charter shows to understand the market better and we advise our clients to talk to brokers to get a better picture of the charter market and which boats do better in charters. When you own a boat over 70ft with a full-time crew, and only have 4 to 6 weeks free to spend onboard it makes sense to charter and to keep the crew busy.

What are clients looking for in the charter market?

The age and condition of the boats are obviously factors, along with the size of the cabins, having a cabin with two twin beds, or cabins that can convert is helpful for family charters. Have as many private baths as possible, and large areas outdoors for sunbathing and a well-designed interior space to relax and hang out.

More important than all when people are looking to charter is the crew. The captain and the chef on board are one of the biggest selling points on yacht charters. The clients will follow the crew from one boat to another, because they like the crew so much. Repeat charter clients are very loyal to crew. You can have a so-so boat maybe in terms of condition, but if it is a great crew, it can offset that.

I hear that turnover is a big problem?

Yes definitely, crews don't usually stay too long on any one boat. Sometimes the owner and crew don't get along, sometimes the crew is just looking for change, moving up or down in the boat size, often when there are couples, they might split up, or other issues with crew regarding health, habits, that sort of thing. On the rare occasion, you see crews staying with owners for 20 years.

Moving on to your racing life, it seems the constant thread throughout your life has been racing?

Yes, going back to when I was a kid. Growing up, I was able to race a lot of miles with my Dad, I sailed more miles with him than anyone and I was really lucky to be able to do that. I always got pulled out of high school several weeks out of the year to go racing. I never missed a day from school for being sick but I almost didn't graduate because I had too many days out of school from sailing with my Dad.

I just kept quite active in sailing, I was on a sailing team in college and after graduation just continued because I enjoy being on the water. I have to say though that my current regret is that all this time I spent on the water was primarily racing, not cruising. I want to make more of an effort to spend some time to experience waking up on a boat at some nice anchorage looking out and just enjoying a day on a boat and not have to think about going out racing, that would be my dream for the near future.

Tell us about some of the races?

I have done several transatlantic races, a memorable one was when I was 16 doing a transatlantic and we ran into a hurricane, just a couple of days out. The winds were over 70knots and for a while, it was all about survival, but then we ended up finishing up over in England in a 40ft boat and winning the race. There were 6 of us and my older brother and I were part of the crew, my father wasn't with us but we were sailing his boat over to be in the Admiral's Cup, that was a great experience for a kid like me.

I've enjoyed many good racing experiences and it has been certainly great to be on the winning team with many of these transatlantic, Bermuda and SORC races. You get to meet a lot of nice people racing around the world. When you are spending several days offshore you get close to your crewmates, as you get to know each other a certain trust develops that you need to have, knowing that you will cover each other's butt if the need came up.

The Newport Bermuda race was often a family affair?

I did quite a few with my Dad, the first one was when I was 17 and in all I'd say I've participated in about a dozen Newport Bermuda races. There was one time with my Dad on a 36ft in the Newport Bermuda race, where it took us over 6 days to complete the course. There was no wind for over 24 hours, we registered on the gauge something like only 16 miles in one day. We were swimming and fishing for food, we lost power on our batteries; it was an interesting race. But that race is always a challenge with

the wind, at some point you are just drifting knowing that someone else is going really fast 100 miles away while you are just sitting not going anywhere.

Of all these races, what is your favorite?

A couple of nice races I did was Middle Sea races; Malta, around Sicily, it is an interesting course around the Mediterranean where you are going by active volcanos and is about the same distance as the Bermuda race. Another one I like is the Montego Bay race; from Fort Lauderdale outside the Bahamas and passing by Cuba. But I still like Newport Bermuda race because I always like a challenge and it is a wonderful place to finish.

You've raced on some of the most exquisite yachts on the planet, particularly in the St Bart's and Newport Bucket races, how many of these races have you done and what's it like racing on a super yacht?

I've probably done about 15 Bucket races in the last 10 years. The principles are pretty much the same as in a small boat, it's just that it is all blown up in scale. Of course, things move in slow motion but if any problems occur, it is on a much bigger scale and the potential of collision. The organizers always go to great lengths to keep people safe, with communication officers and rule reviews and there have not been any mishaps. These boats are not designed to race, so what does happen is when people put a load on things and heel the boat more with bigger sails, sometimes hardware can break and you have major gear failure. Once in a while you see that happen. When they are cruising around before the race they are not loading things up and then suddenly doing the race for the first time, a lot more halyard tension is on our winches that are taking that much load so you see breakage, but that helps promote stronger hardware down the road and more backup systems for people when cruising, so it's all good. It's fun to see the biggest yachts racing around together, sometimes its close quarters and that can be really exciting.

I would think there is a big testosterone surge on board, with these tight races and superyachts?

Yes, probably a little scary for the guy at the helm sometimes. But it is just the extreme and one end of the whole spectrum. Today a lot of the sailing I enjoy is also one design, we race Lasers here in Newport; we call it Frostbite sailing here in the North. It is an idiotic desire to want to go out in the winter and sail. And that's what we do. There are a lot of us idiots that go out in Laser class every Sunday, sometimes 40, 50 boats on a decent day, with a dry suit with rubber gaskets or a wet suit and race; it is the most fun you can have with your clothes on. It is great competitive racing and you are out and back to shore in less than 3 to 4 hours and feel great. It keeps your skills up off season. We race from November 1st to May 1st, after that, the harbor is crowded with boats for the summer. Sure, it's cold but with the right gear on, once you get out there moving around you don't feel it. Keeping your hands warm is the only challenge. One Sunday you could be racing on a Laser and then the next Sunday you are off to St Bart's racing on a 180 ft, that is about as extreme as you can get.

The Newport Bucket Race is now called the Candy Store Cup and you have participated both years so far, how does it compare to the St Bart's Bucket?

I think a lot of the owners enjoy it because it gives them a chance to use their boats a little bit differently. Newport is a great area to race out of, there is usually a good breeze, this year we were able to race all 3 days of the event. It would be great to get more boats in the Newport race, but St Bart's has a certain appeal so there will always be great boats at that race and getting the full entry level of boats, I think 50, every year is never a problem.

I think the Candy Store Cup has a little more laid-back feel to it. You have so many paid crew that are permanent however you still need to have additional professional crew to make sure people don't get hurt. When you are dealing with a spinnaker that size on a boat like that, you really need to have professionals on board. You can have a mix of pros and amateurs and work together and that mix seems to work better in Newport, in St. Bart's you have almost 100% pro onboard and usually the superstars of racing, like Paul Cayard are flown in, these owners are very competitive.

I think Newport is relaxed in part because it is a smaller fleet, that helps, it's more about sailing and having some fun and beating the other guys or better yet win the party if you can.

I am usually racing on the modern racing boats, it's just good to see that extreme side of sailing and certainly we are dealing with some of those boats in the market. It is always nice to see how they sail, so you are knowledgeable when you talk about these boats with potential buyers.

Which is your favorite out of all these superyachts?

I think I would have to say, in all these boats in the last 10 years it would have to be Whisper, it had a Hood design influence. It's such a beautiful boat that sails well, I did a few transatlantic races and a few Bucket races on that boat but now the owner is busy with his race boat Belle Mente but he may come back. That's my favorite boat over 100ft to go sail and race.

On a personal note, I hear you make a mean carrot cake, how is your vegan lifestyle coming along? Has it been difficult?

It's been the best thing I've ever done, I feel better and I feel good inside for what I am doing, trying to help the planet, the environment and my own health. More and more chefs in the charter industry are pushing that healthy diet because their owners are asking for it. Plant based diets are a trend in the charter market and truly Vegan is the going trend. Vegetarian is only getting away from meat, many advocate staying away from dairy, which is worse than meat or fish. If you are going to give up something give up the dairy and eggs and keep eating the seafood while we still have it.

When are you going to get a megayacht?

I like to say that I already have my custom 70-footer, if I add up my two Lasers and the J24 and the little other sailboat, it is 70ft of boat. But it is something I am going to be thinking about doing at some point, my sister has a nice 47ft and all my colleagues at the office have one, I must make the time to get out there to cruise not race, soon.