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ST. CROIX'S GOLD COAST YACHTS

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY CHRIS GOODIER

If you've taken a Caribbean day sail or seen a charter catamaran with a gaggle of partying snorkelers, chances are good it was built by Gold Coast Yachts alongside the mangroves of Salt River Bay on St. Croix, United States Virgin Islands.

The company's cats serve Aruba, Grand Cayman, Jamaica, Curaçao and even Hawaii, for big name companies like Red Sail Sports and Sandals/Beaches resorts. Many owners are repeat customers—and why not? They can sell a Gold



Roger Hatfield (left)
and Jeff Bisson (right)
on a sea trial



Hatfield in the workshop

Coast boat later for more than they paid when they bought it. For 25 years, this low key company has earned an international reputation for innovative multihull designs and quality construction.

In June 2010, Gold Coast conducted sea trials at 25 knots before delivering boat #95, *Jonalisa Too*, a 54' high speed charter cat that would soon be headed to Curaçao to transport 50 snorkel guests for Bounty Adventures. At any given moment, the company has three boats in various stages of production. And within the coming year, Gold Coast Vice President and designer Roger Hatfield believes it's quite possible that company co-founder and President, Richard Difede, will sign a contract to build vessel number 100.

"Boat number 96 is in the shop and 97 is under construction in an outbuilding," said Hatfield this summer. In addition to sail and power cats, he has designed highly-regarded wave-piercing cats used as ferries and water taxis.

A swimmer and triathlete, Hatfield built his own boat in a Maryland back yard in the 1970s, cruised for a few years and raced often after ending up in the Caribbean. The idea for the wave-piercing design came to him during a 16-hour trip enroute to the St. Maarten Heineken Regatta—he suffers from sickness.

"When you go to the beach, you go under the waves for body surfing. But if you were to have a picnic basket in your hands, it would

"Some clients care only about what it looks like. For some it's strictly price," said Hatfield. 'Our job is to meet all of those peoples' needs.'"

left after three months. Today Difede and Hatfield employ around 45 craftsmen they have trained—fathers and sons, several pairs of brothers, and supervisors who have been with them for 15 to 20 years.

Hatfield says they have shifted from being sailboat builders to more and more a power boat company, a transition facilitated by the addition of Jeff Bisson to the systems design team. Boatbuilding technology has changed, of course. Gold Coast built their first 70 or so boats of wood and epoxy but has shifted and mastered all foam/glass boats, some with carbon fiber.

Despite the lingering recession, Hatfield said, "We're still surviving. We must be doing something right."

With boat 98, a new design has come to the Gold Coast drawing board—a state-of-the-art water ambulance proposed for the island of St. John, USVI. Number 99 could be yet another variation, a 42' police boat.

When it comes time to bid on hull number 100, Hatfield and Difede will approach the design and engineering requirements of the project as they always do—in a flexible, pragmatic way that best serves the customer. "Some clients care only about what it looks like. For some, it's strictly price," said Hatfield. "Our job is to meet all of those peoples' needs." www.goldcoastyachts.com



Chris Goodier is the editorial director of All at Sea. Her freelance articles and photographs have appeared in numerous publications including Caribbean Travel & Life and Caribbean Meetings & Events.