



Love for Sail

ALIX BROWNE FATHOMS ARCHITECTS' AFFINITY FOR BOATS.

Photographs by Ari Marcopoulos

On certain nights, the California Yacht Club in Marina del Rey can feel like a gathering of the American Institute of Architects. There, out on the patio, is Frank Gehry with a couple of people from his office. At another table, Greg Lynn is knocking back a few beers after a race with the artist Casey Reas and some other fellow faculty members from the U.C.L.A. School of Arts and Architecture. Men who spend their days dreaming up monolithic buildings — or, in the case of the artist and sailor Charles Ray, 18-ton sculptures in solid machined steel — would seem to possess some fundamental attachment to terra firma. So what's up with all this sailing? "A sailboat is the ideal microcosm for a self-sufficient dwelling," says the architect David Hertz, perhaps hitting the nail on the head.

Ray, a Los Angeles-based conceptual artist, seems happiest when it's just him and the open sea. "My dad bought us boats," says Ray, who spent childhood summers on Lake Michigan. "I think he thought sailing was a wholesome way to spend time." These days, Ray sails

C-Squared, a custom Wyliecat 44 from the San Francisco designer Tom Wylie. (The name, Ray explains, refers to the speed of light, "but C is also for Charles and a pun on sea.") It makes you think of one of his sculptures, cool and smooth and almost entirely white — a pure archetype of a boat. And in fact, it's an edition of one. Built for speed, it has a free-standing carbon-fiber mast that bends in the wind like a fishing rod and a wishbone boom that makes it look like a giant windsurfer; the square footage of the mainsail is larger than an average New York City one-bedroom apartment. "It freaks people out, which is why no one else was interested in buying it," Ray says. The streamlined cockpit is designed for shedding water but not for comfort, and the head is in the middle of the cabin. "Women aren't so crazy about it," he adds. "But it's a good boat for solo sailing." Ray, who was the commodore of his club, P.S.S.A. (Pacific Singlehanded Sailing Association), admits that technically, solo sailing is illegal because you cannot keep a constant watch. "The danger is being hit or being washed overboard," he says, bringing to mind the Dutch-born California artist Bas Jan Ader, who disappeared in 1975 after setting out to cross the Atlantic for one leg of a three-part conceptual project, "In Search of the Miraculous." "As soon as you step into the water, you are part of the food chain, you're part of the wilderness. That's why I like solo sailing. You can be macho, but at least you can be macho on your own."

For Greg Lynn, on the other hand, sailing is above all a social pursuit. "I could have either recruited super-hot racers or come out with friends and teach them all how to sail," he says, listing the architects Kivi Sotamaa and Heather Roberge among his regular crew. Lynn, whose studio is just down the block from Ray's in Venice, Calif., captains Kraken, a Beneteau First 36.7 named for the sea monster celebrated in the poem by Alfred, Lord Tennyson and later thought to have been a giant squid. His daughter wanted him to name the boat Bubbles. "No one would take us seriously on the starting line with a name like that," says Lynn, a dedicated racer. (His laid-back Southern California demeanor on land all but evaporates on the water.)

Lynn is currently designing the cabin for a friend's 47-foot catamaran and putting together a book about sailboats for Rizzoli; he is into sailing as much for the materials as for the fun. He has integrated boat building into the curriculum for the classes he teaches at Yale, the University of Applied Arts in Vienna and at U.C.L.A., taking field trips to local shipyards. And, like Ray, he can quickly leave you

scrambling for a lifeline when he starts talking about things like composite construction and Kevlar sails. “Architects and artists love that stuff — the rigging and the material culture of shell construction,” Lynn says. Some of that knowledge and enthusiasm was applied to the house that he designed for Jason and Jackilin Bloom. As it turns out, the contractor, Oliver Garrett, is also a sailor and has a boat identical to Lynn’s called By Design. “I’m always racing my nemesis!” Lynn says.

David Hertz also sees a material connection between sailing and his chosen profession. Hertz is salvaging cut-up boat hulls for a project in Nova Scotia. “We turn them upside down and use them for roofs,” he explains. The 44-foot ketch with teak decks and a spruce mast that Hertz is restoring has turned him into something of a wood fetishist. “People basically want Clorox bottles for boats,” he says. “All-fiberglass boats don’t have the emotional relationship to the water.”

Frank Gehry might beg to differ. Gehry sails a fiberglass-hulled Beneteau First 44.7 named Foggy, a play on his initials. He bought the boat for his office, and some 30 of his current and former employees sail and race it. Gehry, who is currently designing a sailboat for a client in New York, started sailing in the ’50s when he was a student at the University of Southern California. “A bunch of guys in the architecture department were sailors,” he recalls. “They liked me, so they invited me to go with them.” His sailing pals had a 23-foot sloop but not a lot of money. “I bought the anchor,” Gehry says. “I think at the time it cost 20 bucks.” He couldn’t afford to buy his own boat until many years later, but he had caught the bug. “We used to go out in high winds; we were nuts like Greg is,” he says, referring to Lynn, a close friend and frequent sailing companion. “One day we were going out to the boat and we passed John Chamberlain,” the artist, “standing on a corner in Venice and brought him with us,” Gehry continues. “He was in a suit. He got soaked. He loved it and learned how to sail.”

The geometry of sails has inspired some of Gehry’s most famous works. “I love the sails,” he says. “They make an architectural space. The Disney Hall is wing-in-wing.” But like the others’, Gehry’s affinity for sailing is more primal than professional: “There is a freedom about it, a purity about it. There is nothing like going out there and cutting the engine. It’s the one thing that quiets me down.” ■



PACIFIC HEIGHTS THE ARTIST CHARLES RAY ON HIS WYLIECAT 44, C-SQUARED.



FRANK GEHRY AT THE HELM OF FOGGY.



GREG LYNN OUT FOR A SPIN ON KRAKEN.