

Designer Profile:

Ted Hood



Ted Hood is perhaps best known as the man who founded Hood Sailmakers, which during the 1960's and '70s was the world's largest sailmaker. By the end of the 1960's, Hood lofts covered the globe, from home base in Marblehead, MA, to Australia. *Yachting Magazine* (Sept. 1970) dubbed Hood, "Sailmaker to the Twelves" - the 12 Meter was the **America's Cup** yacht used from 1958-87. Ted Hood was the subject of a 12,000 word profile in the *New Yorker Magazine* (Aug. 26, 1967) simply titled "Sailmaker".

However, he is also very well known as skipper of *Courageous*, which defended the **1974 America's Cup**, the founder of Little Harbor Yachts and as an innovative marine inventory and yacht designer.

In 1956, Hood made his mark by winning the **Mallory Cup**, then the senior sailing championship of North America. He beat the famous - - or soon to be famous - - Buddy Melges, Bus Mosbacher and Bill Ficker. In 1959, he successfully skippered his first major design Robin in that year's New York Yacht Club Annual Cruise, winning four of seven races. Wrote *Time magazine*, "Ted Hood's record was roughly equivalent to a rookie batting .425 in the majors. What made the feat even more outstanding was the fact that Robin was the first boat he had ever designed..."

While his sailmaking business grew, Hood also designed, often built and skippered a successful series of keel - and centerboard - racing boats under the name Robin or variations on that theme. With Robin, he finished first overall in the 1968 Newport - Bermuda Race - his debut in that East Coast classic. He sailed other Robins to victories in the 1961 and '71 Marblehead - Halifax races, and Robin Too II took the 1974 Southern Ocean Racing Conference (SORC). That was perhaps Hood's most successful year in racing. As skipper of the new Sparkman & Stephens - designed *Courageous*, he won the **America's Cup** - - sailing away from Australia's Southern Cross 4 - 0. **He was Yachtsman of the Year that year.**

Three years later he campaigned *Independence*, the second 12 - Meter he designed (the first was the 1960's Nefertiti). Hood's *Independence* was runner-up in the defense trials to the **Ted Turner** - skippered *Courageous*, which Hood had redesigned.

As an inventor, Hood was the first sailmaker to weave his own Dacron (polyester) cloth. He had a patent on the cross-cut spinnaker, which was revolutionary in its day.

When in 1962, Gretel, the first challenger from Australia, surfed past Weatherly on that private wave of hers - there's a famous Rosenfeld photo of this - - she flew a Hood cross - cut spinnaker. If you've ever wondered about the country - of - origin "litmus test" in the America's Cup for sailmakers, yacht designers and boat - builders, look no further. In truth, it might just as easily have been called the "**Ted Hood rule**".

As *Nautical Quarterly* put it, "He's as important to yachting as was Nathanael Herreshoff. Whatever he touches - and he touches practically everything - ends up significantly better than what was there before".

He is also credited with early designs for grooved headstays, jib -

roller furling, as well as the Stowaway Mast and the Stow Boom. More than 2,500 of his yachts, from 35 to 75 feet, are sailing today. Perhaps the most famous of his designs, which he also built, is the 60 foot *American Promise* in which **Dodge Morgan** set a **solo-circumnavigation record** of 150 days in 1985 - 86.

In the early 1980s, Hood sold his sailmaking operation to concentrate on boatbuilding, a sideline. He started building and marketing his Little Harbor line of sailboats, built in Taiwan. By the end of the 1980's, Little Harbor had become known as one of the highest quality yachts one could own.

He long nurtured a dream to create a world - class yacht - service center. In 1985, he found an appropriate location: the Navy's surplus World War II fuel depot in Portsmouth, RI, known as "**Melville**". Hood purchased the land and by 1987 built the Ted Hood Marine Complex. The cornerstone was Hood's Little Harbor Marine yacht - service business, but the complex rented space to many marine companies to provide "one - stop shopping" for customers. Today it houses North Sails and US Sailing, among other concerns.

In 1987, Hood began building boats in Portsmouth having purchased the assets of the Black Watch Company. This was his first venture into building powerboats. The late 1980s and early 1990s saw a sharp decline in boat sales. As a result, he consolidated operations by moving sailboat building to Portsmouth from the Far East. At the same time, Hood moved aggressively into the powerboat market with his line of **Little Harbor Whisper Jet** water - jet - powered yachts. By 1998, Hood's boat production was 100 - percent power.

During the 1990s **Little Harbor Marine** grew to be the best and largest yacht - service facility in the Northeast. **Little Harbor WhisperJet** sales were strong as well, and Hood's yacht - brokerage and yacht - design divisions also did well.

In 1999, the opportunity became available to sell the company to the investor group that two years earlier had purchased The Hinckley Company. The Hood family thought the match was good - - adding to Hinckley's world - renowned boat - building business a more extensive and southern New England service operation. In March of 1999, the company was sold, and Hinckley and Little Harbor came under common ownership.

Today, **Ted Hood** continues to consult for **The Hinckley Company**, as well as working on his own new projects, including design and building of a power catamaran and the development of a large marina of land south of the Little Harbor complex that Hood retained. He is also presently writing an autobiography.

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