

COASTAL CHARACTERS



Big Fish was designed for Richard Beattie, an entrepreneur with a love for megayachts and a case of five-metre-itis.

Greg Marshall, Megayacht Designer

Having designed some of the world's finest megayachts, local yacht designer Greg Marshall has built a reputation as one of the top naval architects around. He's also seen into the lives of the super rich and lived to tell about it

BY MARIANNE SCOTT

WHEN WE THINK OF superyachts, images of elaborate boat shows held in Fort Lauderdale, Monaco, Miami and Dubai flash into our minds. We read about the megayacht builders in the Netherlands, Germany, the United States and New Zealand. What likely doesn't spring to mind is that one of the world's top five designers, Gregory C. Marshall, draws these jumbo yachts in a vintage farmhouse in the middle of an old apple orchard just north of Victoria. He and his business partner, naval architect Gordon Galbraith, work on the glassed-in front porch, while the rest of his 16 staff squeeze their drafting tables and multiple computer screens into bedrooms,

kitchen and basement.

For more than 35 years Greg Marshall has designed ever-larger megayachts for some of the world's super rich. He and his team sketch and draw and use the most sophisticated software to create marine mansions.

Over the last six years the firm won a slew of awards for the 32-metre *Calixas*, 34-metre *VVS1* and 45-metre *BigFish*, including the World Yachts Trophy, the International Superyacht Society Design Awards, the Showboats Design Awards and the Asian Boating Awards. He also won the engineering award for Best Refit at the World Super Yacht Awards for *Attesa IV*, a 111-metre yacht owned by Seaspan president Dennis Washington.

"We received those awards during the recession," said Greg. "The publicity

came when we really needed it and it saved our bacon."

THE BACKSTORY Greg has been fascinated by boats for as long as he can remember. "I've been a boat nut since I was three years old," he said, blue eyes sparkling. "I sketched boats on many surfaces, including my school's blackboard. When they were erased, I'd start again. I always liked powerboats. And I devoured yachting magazines."

His father, Victoria architect Donovan Marshall, recognized his son's obsession and introduced him to Bill Garden, the famed yacht designer living on Johnston Islet near Swartz Bay. Garden asked the 15-year-old Greg to sketch a yacht for a customer. Greg made batches of drawings and although the yacht was never

built, it focused his attention on the immense amount of detail required when designing a big boat.

After high school, he roamed the California coast looking at yachts. But when Garden offered him a few weeks of drafting work, he returned to B.C. and the few weeks metamorphosed into six years. He worked for Garden while also completing a naval architecture degree at Newfoundland's Memorial University. Garden, a down-to-earth designer, taught Greg the practical details of yacht design that inform his concepts to this day. Then he inadvertently landed in Houston, Texas, when a friend of Garden's, Ed Fry, requested some styling concepts. Greg's month-long stint at Fryco turned into eight years.

Thus he had luck, opportunity and talent but as Malcolm Gladwell writes in his book *Outliers*, it takes at least 10,000 hours of practice to become a master of your craft, be it violinist, computer guru or yacht designer—and you must start young. Having more than those hours under his belt, he left hot and humid Houston.

"I yearned for the gentle marine climate I grew up in," he said. "And I was asked to design some aspects of the Washington-based Pacific Mariner 65. This was the first job under my own shingle, although I worked from my dad's office."

The eventual move to the farmhouse—an unlikely place for a naval architecture practice—has been propitious. "In our electronic world, we can work anywhere," Greg explained. "Our badminton court

gives staff a chance to change gears when they grow bug-eyed looking at computer screens. We focus better here. Yacht design is a high-pressure business and timeline oriented. Sometimes you have to step out, stretch and wander around."

SUPERYACHT DESIGN The firm has completed many yacht designs since that first Pacific Mariner. They've designed entire yachts—or portions of them in today's collaborative and outsourced world. Designs include

the Westport 112 and 130 and a 60-metre behemoth for Vancouver's Crescent Yachts. He designed the San Juan 38 and 48, sometimes called "picnic boats," or "the little Gatsby." Trawlers, 34-metre displacement expedition yachts, catamarans, refits, cold-molded boats—even a powerboat with a sail—all these have left the firm's drawing board. Presently, he is working with such boat builders as Burger, Ocean Alexander, Coastal Craft, Westport, Christensen and New Zealand's McMullen and Wing. ▶

Greg Marshall (left) wins the World Super Yacht Awards for VVS1.



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A rendering of a Marshall-designed 65-footer from local builder Coastal Craft.



In 2013 he's designing *SwordFish*, a 55-metre yacht. It's the third "fish" for British-born Australian entrepreneur, Richard Beattie, who now resides in Hong Kong. Small boat owners may be accused of three-foot-itis, but this businessman makes leaps of five metres (sixteen-and-half-foot-itis?). His first yacht, *Big-Fish*, measured a mere 45 metres; the second, *StarFish*, grew to 50 but was destroyed by fire before completion. No point to stopping there, however, and thus the next one will extend to 55 metres.

"*BigFish* was a landmark boat for us," said Greg. "Beattie let us design it the way we wanted. What we doodled got built. We met him in Monaco and he told us, 'I hate stuff. No art work, please, and I want to look out, not in.'"

A COMPLICATED JOB To design a megayacht takes more effort than building a mansion: the product lives in salt water—a hostile environment—and it moves. To complete a large yacht

COURTESY GREGORY C. MARSHALL NAVAL ARCHITECTS

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Stern view of a 75m Burger boat showing pool and helicopter pad.



requires originality, creativity, styling, space and interior design, balance and ballast, composites, naval architecture, engineering, mechanical and electrical systems, joinery, propulsion and business savvy. The yacht must exceed classification society standards. The naval architect works intimately with builders and suppliers, while always pleasing an exacting client.

"We design it all in-house," explained Greg. "No outsourcing. We design the layout, the systems and all the details and show them to clients in 3D so they can see how the yacht will look and work."

Greg's confidence has grown over the years. "I am able to look a 'squillionaire' in the eye and ask him to give me one good reason *not* to design a yacht for him. Then I try to reflect the guy's personality. Our clients generally have a high level of curiosity, short attention spans and buckets of money. They can afford yachts that cost \$10 million annually to operate."

Before the first sketch, he spends time with the clients to gauge their lifestyle, interests, likes and dislikes. That's how he passed two weeks with an Egyptian billionaire on a private jet from Wales to Tokyo with many stops in between. He asked many questions like, Do you like to wake up with or without blinds? Do you read books in the evening? Do you like a nightclub atmosphere? Traditional teak or super-edgy modern?

"That's where our yacht design is now," he continued. "We create experiences, all a bit different. One client even has a teppanyaki bar on his yacht's stern."

Over the next decade he intends to design "super-intelligent" superyachts. "Just as iPhones and

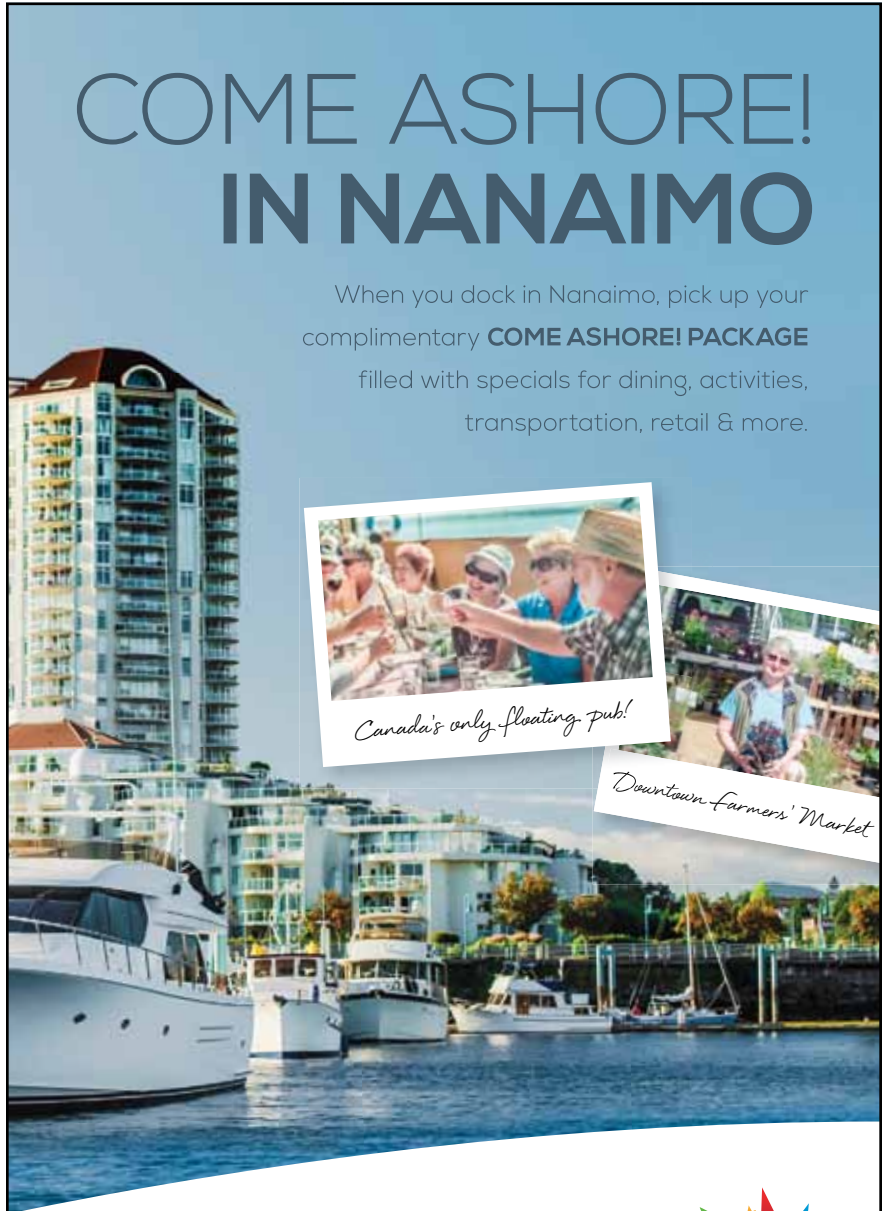
tablets have changed the way we live, technology is changing yacht design. Everything now uses touch screens. Or take the QR code on parts. We point a phone and it tells us the brand and part name. I see piezoelectric sensors in blinds capable of sensing temperature changes.

"It's an exciting, challenging time in yacht design. Fun too. My greatest success as a naval architect is that after 36 years, I still love going to work." 📍

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