RICK AND DEBBIE HEINIGER JUMPED INTO BUILDING THEIR FIRST YACHT WITH BOTH FEET, CREATING A "SECOND HOME" THAT WOULD ALLOW THEM TO ENJOY RETIREMENT AND EXPLORE THE WORLD.

TEXT BY **MARK MASCIAROTTE** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **STEVE CRIDLAND**

ELIANA

From even the most experienced owner's perspective, the process of having a yacht built can be daunting. For someone who has never owned a boat, the concept is likely to be downright intimidating. Unless, that is, you happen to be Rick and Debbie Heiniger.

Residents of the Midwest, the couple had built a successful business that over the past few years began to allow them to create a detailed plan for retirement.

"When I was ready to retire," Rick says, "we had begun thinking about a second home and, after some looking, realized that living aboard would suit our purposes better than a house. We decided that we could be comfortable and have a boat the way we liked, but we'd be able to move, to see places we've always wanted to see."

As part of their education, the couple traveled to Florida and chartered a Grand Banks trawler complete with a captain who would teach them the practical basics of operation and navigation. Debbie has vivid memories of their first onboard encounter.

"When we arrived, it seemed as though the boat hadn't been aired in quite some time. It was awful," she says, laughing and shaking her head, "but it all got sorted out, and we ended up having a nice time."

Then came an opportunity that helped in the decision-making process: they were offered the use of their friend's 39-foot SeaRay in return for sharing expenses. "He hardly used the boat—in fact, one of the things we learned from that experience was how bad boats could be if you don't use them," Rick says, chuckling. "We determined that we didn't want a coastal cruiser or fast boat; we wanted to be able to go anywhere. So, we wanted a displacement

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The space aft of the pilothouse (above) offers a small sun-worshipping area. The full-beam master stateroom (below) combines dark, light and mid-toned joinery alongside red accents.

boat, one with good volume that would provide us a fair amount of living space."

After educating themselves on the market for cruising yachts, the Heinigers settled on a 76-foot Nordhavn and commissioned the build, which, when she was delivered late last year, they christened *Eliana*.

Early on, the couple developed a close working relationship with Dan Streech, the president of Pacific Asian Enterprises (PAE), the Dana Point, California, company behind the highly popular Nordhavn line. As the project got underway, the Heinigers had a conversation with Streech about commissioning an interior designer.

Debbie explained to him that she wanted to make the boat somewhat unique and added that she was concerned about lighting. Rick told Streech that "the reality of today is that you're building homes, and your clients are going to want some individuality."

Streech recommended a meeting with Scott Cole, whose Seattle, Washington-based Ardeo Design had been involved in six previous Nordhavn projects.

"Dan tells his customers, 'Scott is the designer we hate the least,'" Cole says with a laugh. "The Heinigers had never owned a boat, so I recommended they contact several of my Nordhavn 76 and 68 [clients] for advice. The boat would eventually become their full-time residence, so they wanted it to feel and function like a home."

As the couple would have family and guests visiting frequently, considerable time was spent reviewing and discussing the guest and laundry areas, eventually deciding that the guest cabins should have the same level of interior finish as the master suite.

"And," Cole notes, "Debbie enjoys cooking, so much time was spent designing the galley, dining table, bar stools and cockpit table."

Rick Heiniger is no stranger to how businesses operate and how quickly costs can mount without proper planning and procedures. In one of his first conversations with Cole, he emphasized that he and Debbie were not interested in making a "design mark" and that the goal was to "communicate a plan to the factory that gets the project through."

"In the end," he told Cole, "if no one says it's beautiful, that's fine with us, provided it's a comfortable, functional interior that we can live in and call home…and love it."

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The traditional interior morphed to include modern elements such as the medium-tone, quarter-sawn, horizontal-grain African cherry joinery and woven textural wall coverings.

Cole said that over the course of the project, the couple's styling direction took an interesting turn. "Initially, the owners had a more traditional interior in mind," he says. "They had seen another Nordhavn 76 interior I had designed, and we started designing their new boat to have a similar look. Then, we saw another boat with a modern interior and lots of dark, horizontal-grain wood. There were some elements of this modern style that they liked, but the wengé interior was quite dark and too dramatic for their lifestyle. And we all knew the square corners looked cool, but that they would result in bruised hips and thighs. So, we decided on a medium-tone, quarter-sawn, horizontal-grain African cherry wood joinery, combined with a woven textural wall covering above a minimalist wainscot to create a lighter, more casual ambiance."

As changes were made, Rick would check with the builder to verify that the project budget remained secure. "This was not an inconsequential purchase for us," Rick says. "It's not pocket change, and we didn't want any big bills at the end. I

eliana | 76' NORDHAVN

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told myself, 'I am going to try to pick the path of least resistance through this factory. So, I'm willing to do whatever I can to make my boat unique, but I am not going to do anything so crazy that it's going to throw the factory.'

"You have to understand the factory's DNA. So, I'd take everything to the project manager on the floor and ask him if there was going to be any trouble [doing it]. We had one of the best relationships, because we always talked about what we were going to do," says Rick.

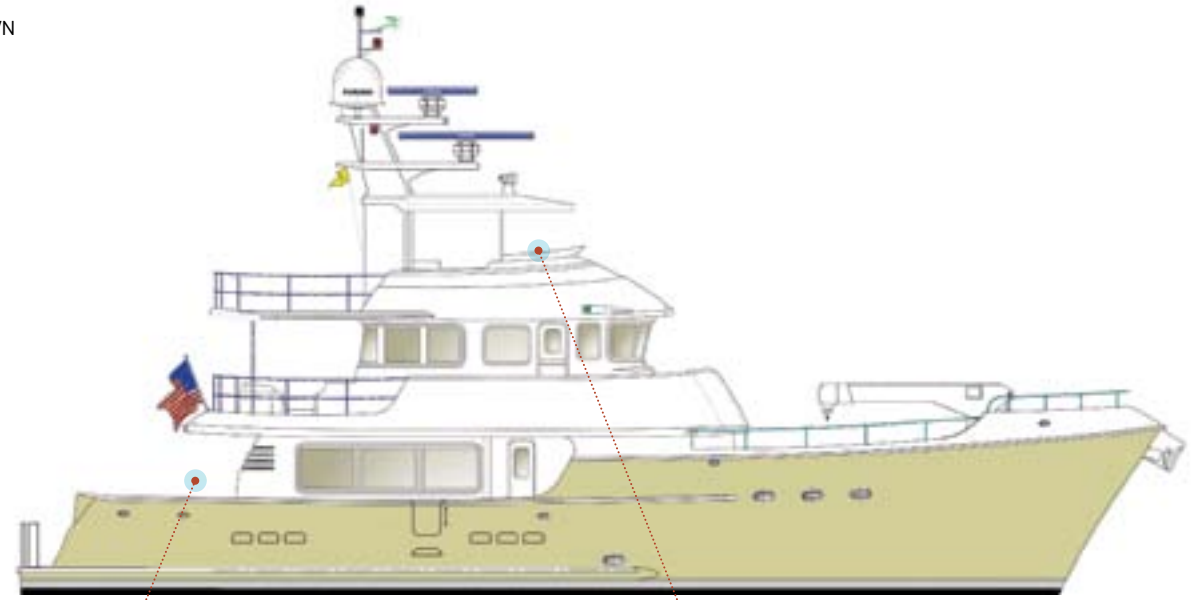
Although the couple took several trips to the Ta Shing Yacht Building Company's shipyard in Taiwan (which has a 30-year-plus relationship with PAE), they relied heavily on communications, using technology to closely follow the project while maintaining close contact with Cole and receiving progress photos by email each week, which were then discussed via teleconference.

"You need to do everything you can to close the [knowledge] gap," Rick acknowledges, "so you can be well informed and make the right decisions. That process helped a lot. I learned quite a bit from this project. One of the most surprising was that there are no simple solutions. It's a constant series of compromises."

Standing around the computer in the wheelhouse, the Heinigers show me photos and videos of their cruise to Mexico: Debbie on the foredeck, calling dolphins; *Eliana* anchored in the bay at Isla Partida (northeast of La Paz); the couple on a shore excursion in Aqua Verde; a diver freeing the props after an unexpected night encounter with a kelp forest.

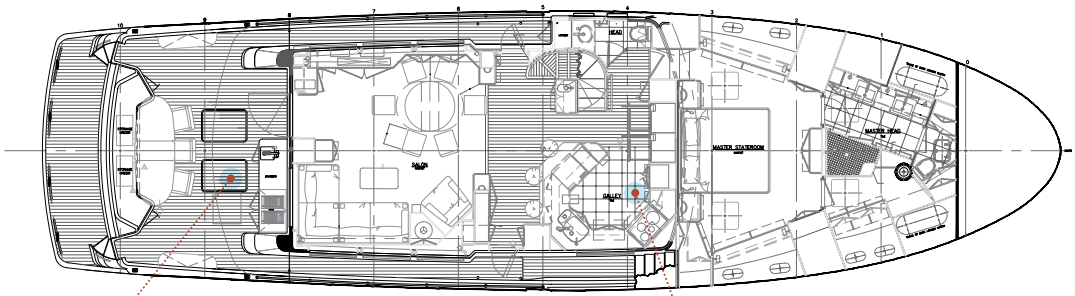
"I've spoken to people in large marinas who had been to the Sea of Cortez," Debbie sighs, "and they've said, 'Until we got here, that's what we thought Mexico was. There was nothing there.' And I thought, 'Isn't that the point?'"

"It is," Rick exclaims. "This boat was made to sit in the middle of nowhere and provide you life support. It's been the most incredible experience." SB ENHANCED DIGITAL CONTENT ON THE IPAD APP



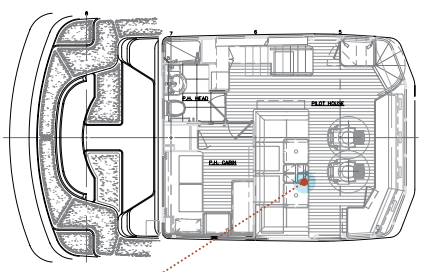
MAIN DECK AFT: This area triples as an al fresco dining area, a fishing cockpit and a sun deck.

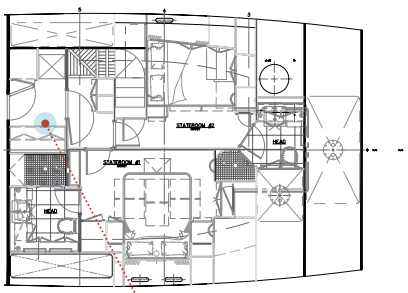
FLYBRIDGE: The flybridge offers a second helm station with chairs beneath a hardtop, which adheres to the central mast.



SHADE: A removable awning extends aft from the overhead to shelter guests seated at the dining table.

GALLEY: The open galley is large and comfortable with Sub-Zero and Miele appliances. Overhead cabinets increase storage.





WHEELHOUSE: A viewing settee is included on the bridge for spectators; the captain's cabin is conveniently located aft.

GUESTS: Two en suite guest staterooms round out the accommodations below; a laundry room is located abaft the stairs.

Specifications:

Nordhavn
c/o Pacific Asian Enterprises
34179 Golden Lantern
Suite 101
Dana Point, California 92629
Tel: (949) 496-4848
Email: info@nordhavn.com
www.nordhavn.com

LOA: 76' 3" (23.2m)
LWL: 69' (21m)
BEAM: 21' (6.4m)
DRAFT: 7' 8" (2.3m)
DISPLACEMENT: 114.3 metric tons
POWER: 1 x 535-hp MTU series 60 40L
SPEED (MAX/CRUISE): 11/8 knots

RANGE: 3,500 nm @ 8 knots
THRUSTERS: American Bow Thruster
STABILIZERS: TRAC by American Bow Thruster
GENERATORS: 1 x 40kW Onan, 1 x 27.5kW Onan, 1 x 11.5kW Onan
FUEL CAPACITY: 4,100 gallons
FRESHWATER CAPACITY: 600 gallons

OWNERS AND GUESTS: 6
CREW: 2
CONSTRUCTION: FRP
YEAR: 2010
NAVAL ARCHITECTURE: Nordhavn
EXTERIOR STYLING: Nordhavn
INTERIOR DESIGN: Ardeo Design/owners