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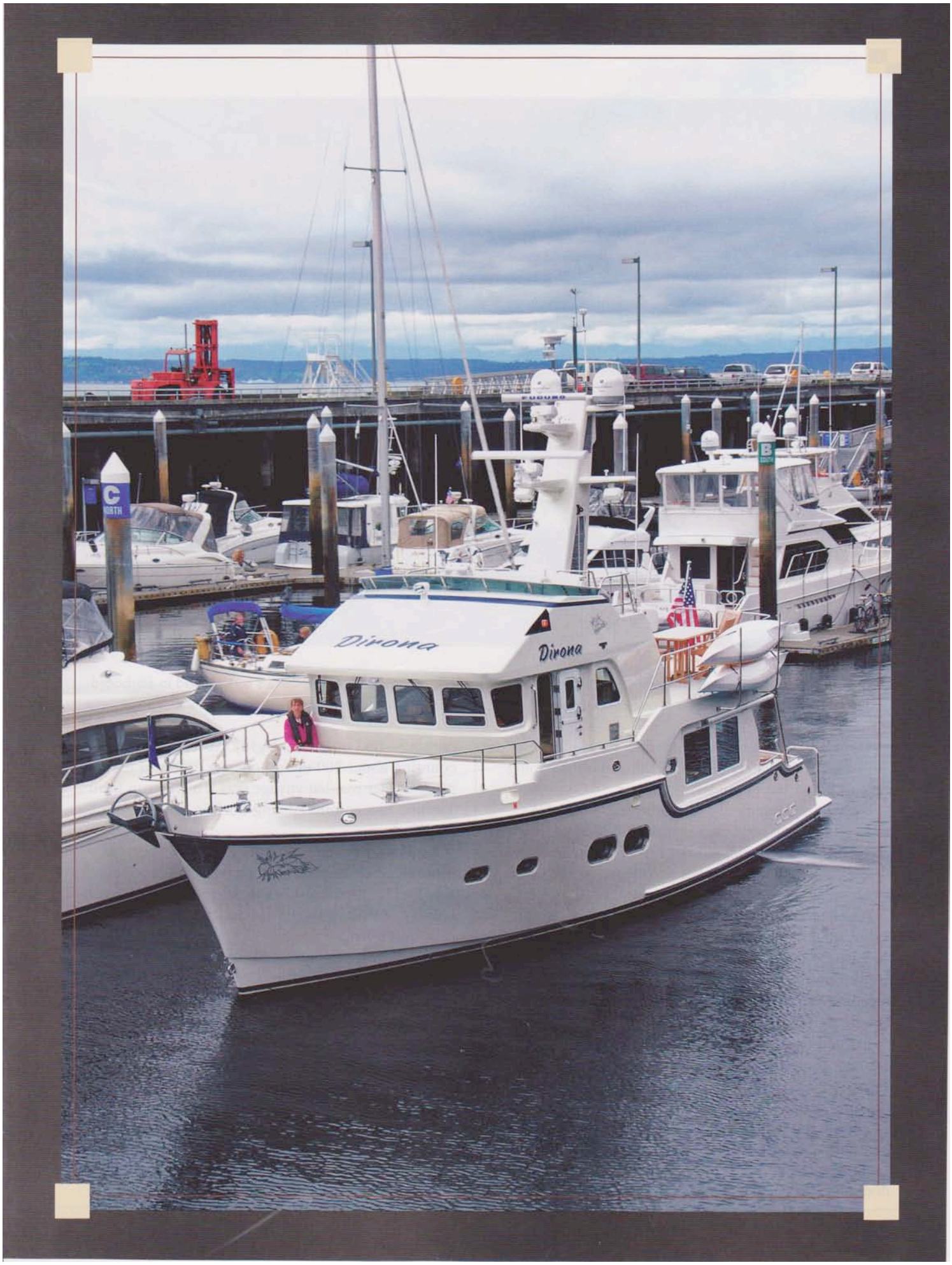

Dirona
Dirona

Story And Photography By Robert M. Lane

The Hamilton · NORDHAVN

A 52 CUSTOMIZED FOR WORLD CRUISING

Jennifer Hamilton and her husband, James, own two bicycles, live (with a black cat) aboard a sparkling new Nordhavn 52 in the heart of Seattle's downtown business district, and go cruising almost every weekend. Could life be any better?

Probably. That will be a few years from now when they're able to flee their day jobs and truly test the Nordhavn on routes leading to the Aleutian Islands, the Antarctic, or romantic and historic ports on the other side of the globe.

James and Jennifer owned a Bayliner 4087 for a decade and explored nearly every waterway and cove along the Inside Passage in Washington and British Columbia—including secluded anchorages reached only with careful navigation through shallows, rapids, and rocky passes—clocking 4,000 hours of running time in 10 years.

Even more impressive, they generously have shared their experiences and cruising knowledge in magazine articles, with PowerPoint presentations at Trawler Fest programs, online at www.blog.mvdirona.com, and in a book, *Cruising the Secret Coast: Unexplored Anchorages on British Columbia's Inside Passage.*

The book is superb in describing where to find their favorite hidden spots and how to do it safely. It also excels in telling how to make a modestly sized Bayliner, with limited fuel and water capacity and not much in the way of storage space, suitable for extended summer (or winter) cruises.

The Nordhavn 52 saloon and galley were modified to meet the needs of the crew of two: there's a day head to starboard, added storage space in the galley, and custom carpeting atop the spruce-and-teak sole.

The Hamiltons attended their first Trawler Fest in 2001 and immediately began thinking about stepping up to a larger world cruiser.

"We were planning ahead," James explained. "We thought it might be a decade before we retired and could cruise the world, so why not buy now and enjoy it and still have the boat when we retire? It won't wear out."

Planning and designing was a long process that culminated in December 2009 when their new yacht—the first fully configured Nordhavn 52—arrived from China aboard a freighter on a foggy morning. James and Jennifer rode their tender from Seattle to the Port of Tacoma, ordinarily an easy trip of about 30 miles, but found themselves navigating through the murk with a small compass on a jacket zipper pull. They probably wished they had carried a handheld GPS aboard.

The reward was worth the discomfort and risk of blindfold navigation. Pacific Asian Enterprises is a semi-custom builder and the Hamiltons—from their decade of experience and expectations for future world cruising—had ordered a highly customized yacht, counting about 200 design-change orders in the process. Her maiden voyage was a happy run from Tacoma to a commissioning dock in Seattle. And the fog lifted.

At times, production yachts with many custom features satisfy only the first buyers. The changes specified by the Hamiltons make sense for extensive cruising and likely would appeal to other yachting couples, as well.

The Nordhavn, named *Dirona,* is moored at Bell Harbor Marina in Seattle. The moorage adjoins the shops, restaurants, and other businesses in the heart of the central city. Better, it's close to many weekend boating destinations.

James rides his bike to work at Amazon.com near city center, and Jennifer bikes to a bus stop where she loads her two-wheeler aboard for a crossing of Lake Washington on the congested Highway 520 floating bridge. On the other shore, she reclaims her bike and pedals to her job at Microsoft in the suburban city of Redmond.

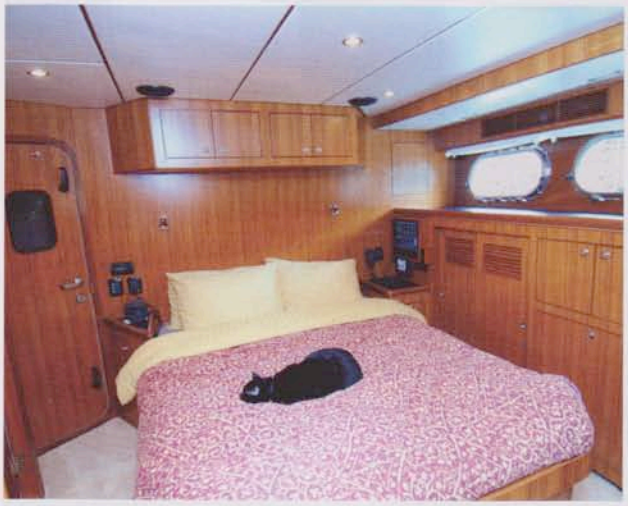
Top: Because they are serious bluewater cruisers, the Hamiltons keep the saloon free of decorative items and other accoutrements that might fly away in heavy-water conditions. Sea covers for the windows are carried aboard. Above left: The massive helm supplies space for a quartet of monitors and other instruments. The Stidd chair provides comfort and an expansive view. Above right: James and Jennifer Hamilton proved their skills and the capabilities of their new Nordhavn on a recent nonstop cruise to Southeast Alaska.

The bikes are versatile: Once, the couple hauled a full-size dehumidifier to the boat. Another time they carried two spools, each loaded with 600 feet of line.

THE BOAT

The 52 Nordhavn is a stretch from the 47. She has an overall length of 54 feet 4 inches and a waterline of 48 feet 3 inches. This gives the 52 a much larger aft deck, with a roomy utility/storage area beneath, and a bigger boat deck (with space for a tender, davit, and table and chairs). The beam is 16 feet 1 inch, and because her only side deck is to starboard, interior spaces are open and generous.

Custom touches are obvious with the first step through the transom gate: an enclosed propane barbecue (with space to store three 20-lb. tanks) and an aft steering station with an instrument monitor. A portside flopperstopper can be deployed in anchorages to reduce



The family cat enjoys the master berth while the owners are out and about.

rolling. Hydraulic stabilizers will steady the yacht while she's under way in rolling seas.

Also on the aft deck, the Hamiltons placed a teak table and chairs that can be fixed in position for rough-water situations.

Fuel fills are inside the boat's bulwark, which should reduce the possibility of spills. However, the fills are directly above the deck drains; if a spill occurs, diesel might flow into the water. James said he covers the drains with layers of oil-absorbing padding while filling.

I've recently been aboard 50- and 57-foot Nordhavns, and the new 52 has similar interior arrangements. James and Jennifer noted the differences they requested in their customizing of the saloon area: a day head was placed on the starboard side, forward of the settee, while preserving space for a combination washer/dryer and a hanging locker. This displaced the TV from its common location forward of the settee. Instead, *Dirona* has a 46-incher that rises from a cabinet on the port side.

The standard 52 saloon has two large windows on each side, rather than the three smaller ones found on the 47. The windows appear larger than what you might expect on an ocean-capable yacht. I later noted sea covers for the windows, stored on the bridgedeck.

Dirona was delivered with standard teak-and-spruce interior decking, but the Hamiltons added carpeting. It was cut to fit the angles and curves found in living spaces, and the edges were bound, making a snug installation without damaging the finished wood sole.

Modifications in the galley left James and Jennifer with a spacious area just right for two to prep and cook. There's a pair of slide-out spice-and-etc. pantry shelves, larger drawers, a dishwasher, a compactor, a garbage disposal, and a four-burner gas range with the most substantial sea rails I've seen on a yacht. I had to bend at the knees a little to catch the view aft beneath the dish cabinet suspended from the overhead; it's a custom height and hangs lower than standard. Jennifer, however, acknowledged that she's short and assured me the view is great.

Pacific Asian Enterprises built *Dirona* in Xiamen, China, and continues to produce yachts in Taiwan. Obviously, Nordhavns are built to the same high standards in both nations. Woodwork is flawless on the new 52, and the matching of grain patterns is precise. James said that's because the company cut veneers used in *Dirona* from a single teak log.

The raised pilothouse was designed for serious navigation and also will serve as an important social center. It has a huge helm, with four monitors, and a navigation system built around Furuno NavNet 3D. Maretron monitors display the status of all ship systems, from weather sensors to fuel and water tank levels. Distribution panels near the helm control 12- and 24-volt DC systems and 120- and 240-volt AC circuits.

Doors open on each side of the pilothouse; both provide access to the foredeck, while the port door leads aft to the steps to the bridgedeck, its helm, the tender, and a teak table for dining in the best of weather.

After researching, the Hamiltons chose a 154-lb. Rocna anchor and loaded 500 feet of 7/16-inch anchor chain, stored in the bow beneath a watertight Freeman hatch.

Pilothouse guests will gather along the settee, with coffee cups and snacks on the table. James was working there with his computer when I arrived. A pilot berth allows off-duty crew to relax—while having all of the monitors in full view. The person in charge gets the Stidd helm chair.

This meets the Hamilton's cruising goal, which, essentially, is that the two of them want to be able to take *Dirona* anywhere in the world.

James said they intended to test themselves and their plan by cruising from Seattle to Southeast Alaska in four days, running day and night. They would take the outside route—out in the Pacific—rather than follow the Inside Passage and its protected waterways. It's about 700 miles from Seattle to Ketchikan, and at the Nordhavn's speed of 8 knots, that's not quite 100 hours of nonstop cruising—four days, in other words.

"This will be an incredibly good way to experience the ocean," James added. "We wanted a boat that can go absolutely anywhere in the world. We wanted a boat that would be very, very safe."

Several months after touring *Dirona,* I spoke with the

For efficiency and nearly continuous operation, the Hamiltons specified the largest John Deere diesel engine that would fit: a 265hp PowerTech 6068AFM.

Hamiltons about their successful test run. "We had a great time," Jennifer reported. "We did end up running 24/7 offshore and got there in about five days. It was an excellent test of the boat and gave us some confidence and good experience. It was definitely an unusual way to go, but we're really glad we did it."

GOING BELOW

A curved stairway leads from the pilothouse to the accommodations and engine room on the lower level. The folks at Nordhavn deserve credit for providing space for wide, safe-to-maneuver steps and good handrails.

The guest stateroom is forward, with a portside berth for two and a cabinet whose top serves as a desk. In the bow is a head with shower. The Hamiltons customized the guest quarters, making the bed wider and the cabinet larger. If a crowd comes aboard, a pipe berth can be pulled out over the standard berth.

The master stateroom is beneath the pilothouse. It has a fore-and-aft queen bed, hanging lockers, and a large electronic panel that displays weather and other data. A similar monitor provides the same information in the saloon.

Those electronic repeaters are the closest thing to art you'll find aboard *Dirona*. While most boaters stack knickknacks on shelves and hang pictures and pose vases, the Hamiltons have not. And for good reason.

"We like to go," James said, "and if we go and if it's rough, we don't want things thrashing around."

The adjoining master head has a separate shower stall and marble countertops. The Hamiltons installed a woven vinyl floor covering called Bolon over the standard teak in all three heads and in the galley. Bolon resembles wool or other carpeting material, but it is moisture proof, and cleaning is easy.

Out of sight below the master berth are storage tanks: 400 gallons for potable water, 110 for gray water, and 120 for black.

A heavy, well-insulated door in the aft bulkhead leads to the engine room.

Top: An engine room walkway leads aft past the main engine and generator to a huge storage and equipment area beneath the aft deck. Above: Space that cruisers dream about: the storage area beneath the aft deck houses an array of gear, from spare fluids and scuba equipment to hydraulic pumps, an emergency water pump, battery chargers, and more.

AN IMPRESSIVE PLACE

The Nordhavn 52's design creates stand-up space around the engine, although one must watch for the light fixtures attached to the overhead, which hang down into head-bumping range.

The engine represents one of the Hamiltons' major change orders. A 165hp Lugger L1066T.2 is standard; Jennifer and James, seeking a larger engine offering greater efficiency and rated for near-continuous operation, conducted a detailed technical survey of options and chose the 265hp John Deere PowerTech 6068AFM.

In an article in *PowerSource,* a John Deere publication, James said: "On the horsepower front, the PowerTech is rated at a conservative 265hp and has an M2 rating, meaning that it can run at that speed for 16 of 24 hours, and it can run at 231hp continuously.

"We also wanted an under-stressed power plant, so we had a goal of at least 2.5hp per 1,000 pounds of vessel. The PowerTech engine provides 2.65hp per 1,000 pounds, which is more than the standard engine, and at 6.8 liters it's the largest displacement engine that would fit our boat."

Fuel consumption ranges from 3.7gph at 7 knots to 13gph at 9.4 knots, according to heavily instrumented sea trials conducted by John Deere. For coastal cruising, at 8.3 knots, James estimates *Dirona* will have a range of 2,010nm. Slowing to 7 knots at 1400 rpm for ocean crossing, her range will be about 3,200nm, with a 10 percent fuel reserve.

James is aware that there is concern in the industry about prolonged operation of engines at the low rpm required for a slow cruising speed.

"The rule I use is, as long as the engine is at full operating temp, I'm fine with it at any load from 40hp to 266," he said. "High-pressure common-rail engines are more comfortable than mechanically injected engines over fairly wide operating ranges. I know many recommend against light load, and I'm sure that a constant speed and constant load would be better and may last longer.

"But that's not the way we use this one. All things are a compromise on a boat. I'll be disappointed if the main engine doesn't go at least 7,500 hours before being opened up, and I hope for more, but only time will tell on that one."

The John Deere has a dry stack exhaust and is keel cooled. It is linked to a ZF reduction gear that drives a 2.25-inch shaft and a five-bladed, 32-by-24.5-inch prop.

The engine carries two DC alternators. One, rated at 85 amps at 24 volts, charges the starting batteries. The other, rated at 175 amps at 24 volts, charges the bank of eight 225Ah 8D house batteries.

On the forward bulkhead is the fuel management system, including a polisher. The boat carries 1,860 gallons of fuel in two tanks. A 10-gallon day tank has a

sight gauge calibrated to show fuel use in increments as small as a tenth of a gallon, offering a precise measure of fuel burn. Fuel is filtered as it's pumped to the day tank, and again on its way to the engine. "We use the polisher every day to fill the day tank, and if we move fuel [between tanks], it goes through the polisher," James said.

A 40hp Lugger L844D wing engine drives the auxiliary get-home system and a hydraulic pump that is a duplicate of the Rexroth pump on the main engine. Either will power the windlass, thrusters, and an emergency bilge pump.

"When anchoring or maneuvering using the thrusters, we use the wing pump, since the main engine is at low speed and won't operate the thrusters at full power at idle," James explained. "Although both pumps are technically operating, it's the wing that is supplying the bulk of the volume. When under way, the main pump operates the stabilizers. If the main pump fails, the wing pump backs it up. If the wing pump fails, you can still use the stabilizers or windlass off the main pump if the main engine is at 1500 rpm or higher. Either pump can run the emergency bilge pump."

The engine room bulkheads are covered with thin perforated-aluminum sheeting. It looks Bristol, but it also supports the heavy insulation that makes the 52 a quiet boat.

The space aft of the engine room, below the large aft deck, is a treasure of gear: storage for hydraulic fluid, scuba tanks, the hydraulic system that powers the dinghy hoist, a 4kW inverter, a pair of 100-amp battery chargers, a separate backup starting-battery charger, a 600-gallon-per-day watermaker (with a back-flushing sand filter), and about 90 feet of 50-amp shorepower cable on a reel.

The batteries—and all the disconnect switches—are in the aft space. James indicated a pair of hydraulic autopilot pumps, and two spools of line, each holding 600 feet. There's an electric scuba air compressor and a gasoline-powered pump that can empty the bilge or be used for fire fighting. If needed, the pump can be hoisted through a hatch onto the aft deck, where it can be run safely.

Also in that space are a diesel-fired furnace, a water heater, the central vacuum system, and tools.

On many boats of this size, space constraints would require cramming some of this gear into the engine room and the rest into odd spaces throughout the boat.

WHAT'S A DIRONA?

Dirona is a genus of nudibranchs, small sea critters that come in a multitude of sizes, shapes, and extraordinary colors. Biologically speaking, nudibranchs are from the subclass Opisthobranchia. The species the Hamiltons honor is *Dirona albolineata,* also known as the alabaster nudibranch, an image of which adorns the bow of the couple's Nordhavn.

Dirona the vessel looks to be a superior craft, built on a quality Nordhavn design and carefully customized for world cruising by a couple who will take her to challenging destinations—but only with the same analysis and smarts they've applied to her design and construction.

With luck, the new *Dirona* may lead the Hamiltons to fresh adventures that will be the making of another book.

NORDHAVN 52

LOA	54' 4"
LWL	48' 3"
BEAM	16' 1"
DRAFT	5' 11"
DISPLACEMENT	90,000 lb.
BRIDGE CLEARANCE	29' 6"
FUEL	1,860 U.S. gal.
WATER	400 U.S. gal.
HOLDING TANK	120 U.S. gal.
GENERATOR	12kW Northern Lights
ENGINE	265hp John Deere PowerTech 6068AFM & 40hp Lugger L844D wing engine (optional); 165hp Lugger L1066T.2 (standard)
MAXIMUM SPEED	9.4 knots (optional power)
CRUISE SPEED	8.3 knots (optional power)
RANGE AT CRUISE SPEED	2,010nm (with 10% reserve)
DESIGNER	Jeff Leishman
BUILDER	Pacific Asian Enterprises
PRICE AS TESTED	$1,150,000

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