



3-D computer-aided design of the Pandion 25 runabout.

# the Golden age is now



Zeus pod system joystick.

Perhaps no other period has seen as many advances in boating as the past two decades. Experts give us their top picks

BY CHRIS LANDRY

**W**hen Michael Peters began designing boats in the 1970s, he thought he had missed boating's Golden Age. "If only I was old enough to be a designer in 1959 or 1960 when you had fiberglass replacing wood boats, the deep-vee coming on, the invention of the stern-drive," says Peters, president of Michael Peters Yacht Design in Sarasota, Fla. "I always thought that must have been an incredible time to be developing boats."

Peters says he now realizes the most fruitful period of innovation has been from the mid-1980s until now. "I thought I had missed the show, but I didn't miss it at all. It's just different stuff. Just look at the America's Cup," he says, referring to the AC72 catamarans that reached speeds of 50 mph on hydrofoils.

Peters and a half-dozen other leading designers, builders and safety experts say GPS-generated electronic navigation, joystick helm control and computer-aided design stand out as the top innovations of the past 20 years. These innovations as a whole — which fall under the categories of electronics, boat design and construction, safety and propulsion — have made boating easier, boatbuilding more efficient and boats stronger and lighter. The development of the 4-stroke outboard; cleaner, more efficient diesels; the increased use of resin-infused composite construction; the EPIRB; and inflatable PFDs also rank high on the list of important innovations.

For Doug Zurn, president of Zurn Yachts, a design firm in Marblehead, Mass., computer-aided design ranks as the No. 1 innovation, with joystick helm control — and the engines and drives that utilize it — placing second. "From our standpoint, the most influential development has come in the form of CAD products," Zurn says. "From the smallest widget to the fully assembled yacht, CAD products have enabled us as designers and engineers to develop far superior products with vastly improved features than our counterparts 20 years ago."

Steve French, owner of the design firm Applied Concepts Unleashed in Stuart, Fla., has been designing boats for more than 30 years and has watched computer use evolve. "Designing and building went from napkin sketches and paper drawings to 2-D CAD and then to 3-D CAD," he says. "We 3-D-model small parts like latches and hatches and consoles in sufficient detail to work out new solutions and provide a customer with the confidence