



BY MICHAEL PETERS

SIGHTLINES

Setting New Sights

MICHAEL PETERS, ONE OF TODAY'S MOST RESPECTED BOAT DESIGNERS, JUMPS INTO TOM FEXAS' WAKE. WITH BOTH FEET!



Peters' Predecessor: Tom Fexas onboard a Midnight Lace. Have a question for Michael? Give him a shout at inbox@pmymag.com.

The first time I met Tom Fexas was at the 1978 Fort Lauderdale Boat Show. He was introducing the 44-foot Midnight Lace and I was 25, newly married, and working for Halter Marine in New Orleans, the new owner of Cigarette Racing Team. I later watched Fexas' career grow from the character-boatish Midnight Laces to more mainstream designs, although his boats always maintained a quirky style unique to him.

Along with thousands of readers, I began to know Tom through his monthly column in *Power & Motoryacht* called Spectator. Although I only crossed paths with him a few other times, I felt I knew him personally through the 18 years of monthly columns. I was always a little jealous of his notoriety, not the least of which I attributed to his column. How did he get so lucky to get such a great gig?

I guess it must be partly a measure of age as well as career that I have been asked to revive Tom's column nine years after he quit writing it and indeed six years after his death. The new column will be named Sightlines, out of respect for Tom's far-seeing contributions. Sightlines will feature my own observations and perspectives, however, shaped by 40 years as a boat designer.

I was born in Southern California and went to school in inner-city Los Angeles, but my boating childhood was strictly Catalina Island, where my father ran a summer camp for 20 years. He was a bowtie-wearing university professor for nine months of the year and a 6-foot 5-inch shirtless Tarzan for the three summer months. When we were young, my mother took me and my two brothers fishing every morning to keep us out of everyone's hair. Our boating was not yachting. Our boats were all hand-me-downs and donations. I don't think we ever had a boat with more

than 50 horsepower and that was the camp ski boat. There was no road into the camp and the only transportation was by water. I learned to repair boats and build them out of necessity and as I grew up the camp boats became my domain. These are the boats I learned from and fell in love with.

My childhood dream was to design boats. It is with complete wonderment that I have spent my entire career as a boat designer. And now I have a monthly column where it will be fun to spark discussion and share my often unorthodox views of the boating world. I have close friends like Mark Masciarotte at *Showboats* and Jay Coyle at *Yachting* who will soon, I suspect, make excellent fodder for my lobs across the boating industry.

I still have a copy of one of the first issues of *Power & Motoryacht*: Volume 1 No. 4, April 1985, with the 87-foot *Ocean Pacific* on the cover. While I have kept hundreds of boating magazines over the years, I purge the collection from time to time to make room for newer issues. That issue with *Ocean Pacific* never gets thrown out, partly because I love that Monk-designed 87-foot mothership with its piggyback 33-foot sportfish on the stern, and partly because the OP clothing brand was one of my last holdouts

from California as I moved east, first to New Orleans, then later to Sarasota in 1981. At a Miami Boat Show I had a chance to meet Jim Jenks, the owner of *Ocean Pacific*, and tell him how much I loved his boat and was proud to tell him how I moved his clothing brand eastward, like only a Californian could. I sometimes think that I chose the boating profession as much for its dress code as anything else. I converted to Hawaiian shirts a few years later and have often been criticized for not dressing appropriately. Hey, I thought this was supposed to be a fun, laid-back sport? Who are all these uptight people in blazers?

Since starting my office 31 years ago, our designs now number over 400. We have designed boats for Cabo, Viking, Sea Ray, Intrepid, Chris-Craft, Azimut, Jeanneau, Zodiac, and Cheoy Lee as well as about 30 other companies. We have built boats in the United States, Canada, Norway, England, France, Italy, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, China, Malaysia, Korea, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand. Our offshore race boats have won 16 world championships and were the first to ever break the 200-mile-per-hour barrier. I suppose I have enough stories and experiences to share. I hope to keep you a little entertained and informed and not bore you. I have a tough act to follow—the first guy lasted 18 years! □