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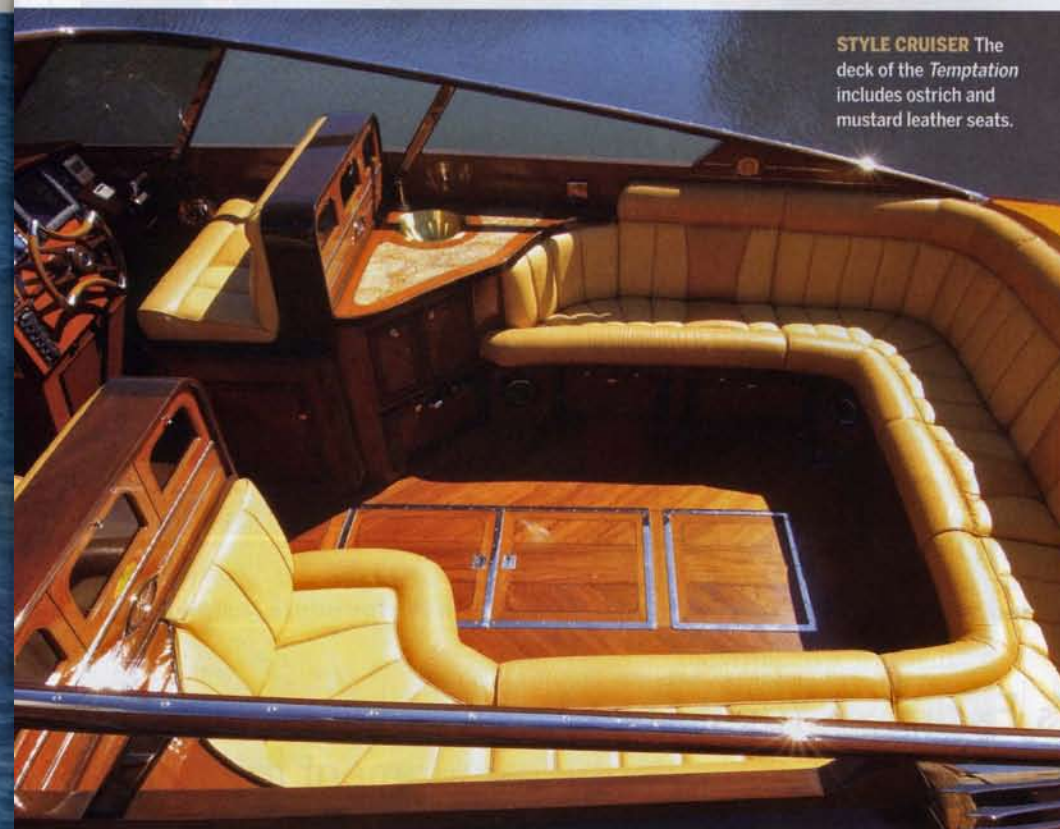
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CRYSTAL BLUE
Designed and built by Mayea Boat, the 47-foot *Temptation* is powered by two 850-horsepower SeaTec diesel engines.



STYLE CRUISER The deck of the *Temptation* includes ostrich and mustard leather seats.



DECK ORNAMENT
Temptation's front deck is adorned with a goddess-inspired custom pop-up cleat.



THE CREW Mike Malik, second from right, has proved a steady client of Mayea Boat.

Beauty on the Water

WITH ITS TIME-TESTED PRODUCTION METHODS, A FOURTH-GENERATION CUSTOM MAHOGANY BOAT-BUILDER IN FAIR HAVEN, MICH. CREATES SOME OF THE WORLD'S MOST LUXURIOUS WATERCRAFT BY R.J. KING

Few companies have back orders spanning five years, and even fewer would attempt to build vintage mahogany boats using century's old methods and tools. "We create and build custom boats the old-fashioned way — by building scale models," says Larry Mayea, president of Mayea Boat and Aeroplane Co. in Fair Haven. Once a client approves a boat design, Mayea takes exacting measurements, called offsets, to produce full-sized components like a keel, frames, stringers, and battens. we

It's not that Mayea, 57, resists using computers to design luxurious watercrafts that top \$1 million. Rather, computers can't replicate the slope of a hull during construction, he says. Still, Mayea's son, Chad Mayea, creates three-

dimensional computer drawings of the boat designs to make sure the crafts look and perform as they should.

Once a basic hull and deck are completed, the fourth-generation boat builder — Larry Mayea's father Herb Mayea, 87, still comes to work every day — makes cardboard cutouts of air-intake panels, exhaust chambers, and other personalized features. "That way, we can get the look right before designing and building with brass, stainless steel, or what ever the client desires," Larry says. The company, founded in 1911 by Louis Mayea, produces mahogany boats under the brand name Mays-Craft (sometimes with an apostrophe, sometimes without).

In recent years, Larry Mayea, his brother, Don Mayea, 52, and their

father have built or refurbished mahogany touring and speedboats for Detroit developer and entrepreneur Mike Malik, Jim Walgreen (from the Walgreens drugstore chain), Dean Griffith of Griffith Laboratories, and many others. The company has more than 300 clients, many of whom are return customers. "We customize a lot of fiberglass boats because the owners want something different from everyone else," Larry says.

Malik has proved to be a loyal customer. The casino investor commissioned the *Lil' Rascal*, a 25-foot mahogany speedboat powered by a 377-horsepower MerCruiser engine, the 25-foot *Obsession*, and the 47-foot *Temptation*. The latter craft — believed to be the longest mahogany boat

powered by diesel engines — is outfitted with numerous custom features, including ostrich and mustard leather seats, granite countertops, a hand-pounded sunken brass sink, mahogany liquor cabinets, and Burma teak flooring inlaid with black walnut. There's also a power hatch that folds out into a table, mahogany drawers that can chill wine and food, a nuclear submarine-like shifter, and a stainless-steel figurine of a prone lady that pops up into a cleat (the ultimate front deck ornament).

"Mayea has always been considered one of the premier boat builders in the world, and it's tough to get a boat from them because so much of their work is tied to restorations," says Malik says. "The other nice thing is that the Mayea boats appreciate in value, and only a very exclusive club of people own one." He recently commissioned a 37-foot mahogany craft and has plans to order a 60-foot boat in the future. He also owns the *Sea Stag*,

a 38-foot mahogany craft whose previous owners included actors Fess Parker and James Dean.

Mayea Boat and Aeroplane Co. got its start when Detroit native Louis Mayea teamed up with several partners to build speed and pleasure crafts at the



CRAFT MAKER Starting in 1911, founder Louis Mayea operated from this wood structure in Fair Haven, Mich.

turn of the last century. After winning numerous speed records, Louis cashed in his stock in the Ford Motor Co. (Henry and Clara Ford were good friends with Louis and Mary Mayea) and moved to Fair Haven, which at the time was a booming maritime center.

The company also built what's believed to be the first airplane outfitted with pontoons. "The Wright brothers commissioned my grandfather to make the various components like propellers and pontoons, or floats as they were called back in the early days," Larry says. Over the years, the company founder built luxury boats for the Fisher and Stroh families, among many others, before passing the business on to his sons.

Today, the Mayea family, including brother-in-law Norman Plett, who serves as the resident expert of motors and running gear, are eager to cut into their backlog, but the seven-person crew doesn't want to rush things. "In our business, everything is subject to change," says Don Mayea. "Our father always taught us to keep an open mind and satisfy the customer. That's why we work seven days a week." Compounding the backlog problem, the company never builds the same boat twice. db

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MAYEA BOAT & AEROPLANE CO.