



The Mississippi Man

Get an intimate glimpse at Jon Overing, a man who has made a name for himself designing world-class yachts deep in the delta, despite a lifetime of advice from others in the industry that should have influenced him otherwise.

Text and photos by Lisa Knapp

“My world is actually very small and tranquil,” says Jon Overing, passing an alligator as he turns into his driveway, which sports a trailer. It strikes me as strange that one could have both an alligator and a trailer in their life and remain in harmony with the universe. But I quickly surmised that Overing is the real deal: a calm, patient, big-picture man with an assuring voice. His confident, quiet tone calms and reorders his immediate environment with the impact of a mild tranquilizer.

I did hear him raise his voice a few times....but it was in laughter, which resulted in a complete ruckus. Overing has an infectious, hearty laugh and is a prankster with a leprechaunish grin. It’s kind of a circle in his life: work hard, have some fun. Repeat.

Overing is low maintenance by design. Once home, his refuge is his evening cigar and beer, usually enjoyed with friends while playing darts. Then he surrenders to hypnotic contemplation in front of a roaring mahogany fireplace, where he closes his eyes and dreams.

While designing and building luxurious, tri-deck megayachts for the world’s yachting elite by day, Overing restored his own country manor to its former glory by night, when he wasn’t traveling. His watchful eye knows every detail of the millwork and each subcontractor’s daily assignment. His house is one of the first non-floating projects to capture his interest in 30 years. The canal behind his three-story bayou home rose 22 feet during Hurricane Katrina, flooding the first floor, which was 19.5 feet above sea level. Today, this naval architect’s home is having a retrofit.

Besides building yachts deep in Mississippi’s delta, Jon Overing also enjoys time with loved ones at his country manor.

“I took the house down to just the first floor brick veneer, everything above that as well as inside was removed,” Overing says. “All the floors are tongue and groove teak; all the doors, handrails, shoe plates and fireplace mantle are custom made solid mahogany.”

Overing actually made most of the mahogany and teak millwork himself and painted the house, too. He handpicked the mahogany rough-cut lumber that was milled into the finished product in his garage with the same anal-retentive detail that he puts into every \$40 million megayacht he builds.

Welcome to Jon’s world

Rebuilding his house is probably not so daunting compared to creating his own, unique world. Personally procuring build orders from millionaires was a seemingly impossible task in a locale where megayachts were unknown: Ocean Springs, Mississippi.

“I always wanted to be in yachting, even though it wasn’t indigenous to this area,” he says. “When I told my friends what I wanted to quit my job at Cemco designing government vessels and start my own business designing yachts, everyone thought I was crazy. There was nothing around here like that and I knew that the business would have to come from abroad. I knew if I didn’t do it then, I would probably never do it.”

Overing, whose family hails from New Orleans, has built and refit 10 yachts from his Ocean Springs headquarters since 1989. As a child prodigy sketching hulls freehand since he was 10, the southpaw cannot remember a time when he didn’t know how to draw. The lines to sketch a sailboat or powerboat just came naturally to him as a child. Sailing to Horn Island on the Mississippi Sound, the family pastime, nurtured his innate ability. He remembers the first time he saw his Dad’s Alden ketch, *Sunshine*, when he was six or seven.

“Dad said, ‘This is our new boat,’ and I was thinking how beautiful this boat was and didn’t know it was for us,” he says. “I was overwhelmed and walked down below to hug the main. That sailboat made me who I am today. I understood the framing of the boat, how it went together. It was all just automatic from the get-go.”



Feadship has expressed interest in Jon Overing's 300-foot *Chaperone*, a remarkable feat in that the European yacht builder has never had an American design a series for them.

As an understudy at the age of 14 to Frank van Bentem — the Dutch naval architect who pioneered the use of computer parts to cut ships — Overing designed Ingalls' last nuclear submarines and DD993 class destroyers a few years later. He's one of the few naval architects in the world who works on a handshake without a written contract, something he has done since designing and overseeing the 174-foot *Noble House*, the largest megayacht ever built in New Zealand. "Your word is your bond," his calm voice says with conviction. "If something happens, you don't want to be suing a yacht owner, you just make it right."

His latest creation is a new support yacht, the 300-foot *Chaperone* series. Feadship is eyeing it, which is remarkable in that they have never had an American design a series for them. "*Chaperone* is my whole background rolled into one design, with an evolved, European hull form," he says. The expedition support-style yacht has a certain military flavor to it resembling the DD963 class destroyers Overing designed in his previous life, carefully blended with commercial-vessel and yacht-design characteristics.

Building tough yachts

Overing designs yachts like they are small ships, not big boats. That mindset is a plus as today's yachts grow increasingly bigger.

After years of designing commercial, U.S. Navy and U.S. Coast Guard vessels to take the pounding and punishment of the Gulf of Mexico, Overing's portfolio emerged into megayachts that reflect

more commercial-grade systems. Overing built the first megayacht in the state of Mississippi, *Bon Bon* and its 100-foot tri-deck aluminum encore, *Carib Queen*. "The structural integrity of our vessels is well beyond what you'd find on an average yacht," he says. "Even our semi displacement hulls have a reputation for going out when others have to stay in port." *Bon Bon* and *Carib Queen*, both hard chine semi displacement hulls, are a departure from his copywrote Overing Fast Full Displacement Hull Design. It's a highly-evolved and efficient hull with a bulbous bow and a round bilge that is a deeper draft with a European style, a credit to his Dutch training.

Stickin' to his guns

"Jon and I contemplated for years moving to another part of the country for business," says Geoff van Aller, senior designer at Trinity Yachts. The two have collaborated on many vessels. "I give him credit for staying in Mississippi and sticking with it instead of moving to open a yacht design office."

While he spends significant time in Fort Lauderdale, everything in Overing's life has always revolved around boats and Ocean Springs, where he caught snakes in the bayou as a mischievous teenager. No doubt, he was just a few precarious steps away from that alligator. "I'm a son of a son of a son of a sailor, and I'm paying it forward with my son, Jon, raising him as my father raised me and his father raised him," he says. "My most sincere hope is that Jon follows in my footsteps." 🇺🇸