

This workboat hull has made the rounds

By Michael Hauenstein

STAFF WRITER

William Colbert runs a one-man shop, building one of the most popular small-boat designs in New England, a proven Royal Lowell lobster boat hull that once went by the name Sisu 22. After selling the Revere, Mass., boatyard where he worked for most of his life alongside his now-retired father, David, Colbert bought a former cabinetmaking shop a couple years ago in Newton, N.H., and struck out on his own as Grey Barn Boatworks.

"I'm just a one-man show," says Colbert, who is 43. "I'll answer the phone, and then after I hang up I'll get back to work. I look at that as a plus, because everything I do on the boat I do myself."

William and David Colbert built six North Shore 22s together, mostly during winters, while running their North Shore Boatworks in Revere. (The boat still carries the North Shore name.) These days, however, William Colbert enjoys the lifestyle of a full-time boatbuilder, compared to the hustle, bustle and headaches of running a full-service repair yard for 28 years. And now he gets to see projects through from start to finish.



— enough for us to take care of but not burdensome."

The Newhalls live on the harbor and use their North Shore 22 to cruise Marblehead waters. William Newhall says the semidisplacement boat delivers a comfortable, dry ride and is good in a chop. Beyond the hull, he says he's also impressed with Colbert, whom he found to be a helpful and accommodating boatbuilder.

"We got just about everything we wanted in the boat," says Newhall. "There's plenty of room for anyone's idiosyncrasies."

John Trotsky, another Marblehead resident and North Shore 22 owner, previously owned a Sisu 22 with a friend. He wanted a boat for himself with a similar look, but preferably without a cuddy cabin. Through a random chain of events, the 48-year-old financial advisor found the Colberts, and in the end he bought North Shore 22, hull No. 1, built in 2000.

"Being close by the manufacturing site, I was always in, looking and talking and asking questions," says Trotsky. "William's built every boat by hand, and he brings the love and attention to detail that only he can. Every boat is unique."

While every North Shore 22 is unique, the lines should be familiar.

The original builder, Sisu, produced more than 500 of the 22-footers between 1977 — when his uncle designed the boat — and when the New Hampshire builder closed shop in the late 1980s/early '90s.

Colbert has built the North Shore 22 in center console and bass boat configurations.

"Not many people get to see that in their job," says Colbert. "It's quite an enjoyable way of life, in my mind, and the best part of it is to hear what other people have to say about the finished project. It's just gratifying."

The North Shore 22 is based on a seaworthy Down East design measuring 22 feet overall, with an 8-foot, 4-inch beam and weighing 3,500 pounds. Power comes from a 110-hp Yanmar diesel or a 115-hp Suzuki 4-stroke outboard, delivering cruise speeds in the low 20-mph range and topping out at about 30 mph.

A handful of Sisu 22 molds were built, including inboard, outboard, round-bilge and hard-chine versions. Colbert owns the mold to an older round-bottom hull designed for inboard power, which is laid up in Maine and brought to Grey Barn for finishing. The deep inboard keel can be capped, though, so Colbert can add an "outboard keel" that stretches from the stem to about 6 inches short of the stern. He says he has built the North Shore 22 in center console and bass boat configurations, with inboard or outboard power and to varying levels of luxury. As such, the price can range anywhere from around \$60,000 to \$90,000.

This summer he delivered hull No. 9, fitted with a teak cockpit and teak toerails, and is building hull No. 10, which he hopes to finish in time for the Newport (R.I.) boat show in September. William F. Newhall II and his wife, Suzanne, of Marblehead, Mass., own hull No. 8, a center console version they bought in 2006. It has a teak transom and 125-hp Yanmar (the previous engine offering), and even has a head on board.

"We like the fact that it was a custom boat," says William Newhall, who is 74 and retired from the insurance industry. "It's a center console with a fair amount of teak



After Sisu folded, Portsmouth Boat Works of Dover, N.H., built a few as the Portsmouth 22, and the molds were subsequently sold off. Grey Barn purchased its hull mold from another builder about 10 years ago.

Colbert says he will continue to build the North Shore 22, one at a time, for the foreseeable future. "I'd love to do four a year if I could," says Colbert.

Maybe, just maybe, one day a line will form outside his shop.

For more information, contact Colbert at (603) 382-0055 or visit www.greybarnboatworks.com. ■