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Q: What do Dave Martin, Jack Hargrave, Tom Fexas and Dave Gerr have in common?

A: They're all Westlawn alumni and celebrated yacht designers.

BY JAY COYLE

WESTLAWN INSTITUTE OF MARINE TECHNOLOGY celebrated its 80th anniversary recently, and yachting enthusiasts of all stripes owe the design school a tip of the hat. If you are a boat owner, there's a good chance that a Westlawn graduate had something to do with your boat's design. The list of alumni reads like a who's who of yacht design. Graduates of this home study course have played a major role in shaping the sport, and some very dedicated designers have played an important role in shaping Westlawn.

Boat designers Gerald Taylor White and E.S. Nelson dreamed of a correspondence school that could serve those who shared their passion for small-craft design. They founded Westlawn in 1930, naming it after White's Montville, New Jersey, farm. At the time, the U.S. population of recreational boating enthusiasts was estimated at 1.5 million and growing. Inspired by Henry Ford, boatbuilders had begun standardizing production, so the creation of a school to standardize design practices and train designers was timely. By 1968 the population of recreational boaters had surged to 8.4 million, and hundreds of Westlawn graduates and enlightened students were serving the industry.

FROM LEFT: Yacht designer Dave Martin Sr., his grandson Dave Martin III and son Dave Martin Jr. sailing on the Martin's catboat.

While there are many outstanding examples of students who made good, 80-year-old Dave Martin's 55-year career as a yacht designer is one of the more compelling. Growing up on the Jersey shore in Atlantic City, Martin loved boats and managed to land a job on the planking crew at the Egg Harbor Boat Co. fresh out of high school. "I walked my dog back and forth in front of Russell Post's [a company partner in Egg Harbor] house until I cornered him one morning and begged him for a job," Martin said. Martin arrived for work and was given a broom, but he eventually wound up on the planking crew. "A fella called Peckerhead Armour was in charge, and I figured I should know at least as much as Peckerhead did about boat design and construction," Martin said. After seeing ads for Westlawn in the back of Yachting he signed up for the course in June 1948.

THE OCEAN 62SS DESIGNED BY DAVE MARTIN SR.

Martin moved from Egg Harbor to Pacemaker Yachts and then quit work to devote all his effort to completing his Westlawn studies. "I locked myself in my bedroom and worked full time until I ran out of money," Martin said. With half the course under his belt, Martin felt confident enough to apply for a job at Sparkman & Stephens in New York. "I was interviewed by a human resources guy retired from the phone company — he didn't know a damn thing about boat design," Martin said. "Things got a bit loud and Gil Wyland [S&S's chief engineer] came out of his office to see what was going on." Wyland looked at Martin's work and hired him as an ink tracer. "I was working at Sparkman & Stephens and my old boss was driving boats — Capt. Peckerhead," Martin said with a chuckle.

After replenishing his bank account, Martin took a leave of absence and completed Westlawn in March 1953. He returned to Sparkman & Stephens as a draftsman and began moonlighting on the side — a practice Olin Stephens frowned on, Martin admits. "Several of my peers managed to design an oil tanker on the side, and Olin was pretty sore — I was only working on a 30-footer!" Martin was paid $750 for the design, and he quickly calculated that given 10 commissions a year he could make more money as a designer than as a draftsman. Martin returned to South Jersey and hung up his shingle. "I figured it was far enough away from S&S that I wouldn't be tempted to give up and go back," he said, laughing. Over the last five decades Martin has built an impressive portfolio of custom designs, both power and sail, and penned production designs for Egg Harbor, Pacemaker, Ocean Yachts and others. Martin's secret to success is a love for his work and boating. He's still designing boats and enjoys sailing aboard a 28-foot catboat he designed in 1980.

THE 108-FOOT *ILONA* DESINGED BY JACK HARGRAVE

THE 41-FOOT COASTAL FLYER DESIGNED BY DAVE GERR

Over the years Westlawn has persistently tweaked its program in an effort to keep pace with new technology. The school was purchased by the National Association of Engine and Boat Manufacturers (NAEBM) in 1968 and led by designer Jules Fleder. At the time the school taught only design in wood. Designer and alum Bruce King had to get special permission to do a fiberglass vessel for his final exam. Textbooks on fiberglass and aluminum construction were added to the syllabus, and the course went through a major upgrade under the leadership of alum Norman Nudelman. A textbook on multihull design written by alumnus Bob Harris was added, as was a new

volume on sailboat design by alum John Ammerman and Halsey Herreshoff.

Westlawn is now owned by the American Boat & Yacht Council (ABYC) and is headquartered at The Boat School in Eastport, Maine. Alum Dave Gerr is currently at the helm. Gerr finished Westlawn while serving as a naval architect at MacLear & Harris. He established his own firm in 1983 and has penned a number of books and a broad portfolio of designs. Under Gerr's leadership Westlawn has been further refined with the addition of a technical reference manual written by Gerr and a text on yacht interiors by Lisa Hix. Gerr said the Internet has enhanced the program as well. "Thanks to the virtual office the Web allows, we have been able to assemble a great team of instructors and advisors," Gerr said. "On the other end, students typically have more immediate access."

A 136-FOOT KETCH DESIGNED BY BRUCE KING

Westlawn's full program, Yacht and Boat Design, includes four modules: small-craft naval architecture, powerboats, sailboat and multihull design, construction methods and systems, and equipment. Study materials include 34 textbooks that cover a wide range of subjects including hydrostatics, stability, performance, hull forms (power and sail), systems and construction methods. To graduate, students pass 38 lessons including a final thesis with two complete boat designs. A condensed version of the program, Elements of Technical Boat Design, was developed specifically for captains, surveyors, marine writers and others who need or want a basic working knowledge of boat design. Should those who complete the basic course want to pursue the full program, they receive credit for their studies and investment.

Westlawn serves both those interested in yacht design and those who want to focus on commercial small-craft design. There are few accredited schools that offer programs in either. Students have 12 months to complete a module and can make arrangements for extra time if necessary. Lessons that are not graded 75 percent or above are returned marked "preliminary," and students can resubmit them until they pass. Westlawn averages about 28 graduates annually, and it typically takes a student four to five years to complete the full course. While 80 percent of those who start it never finish, Gerr points out that this number is misleading. "Many students get far enough along to find a job or design a boat and simply never bother finishing."

Like Dave Martin, I was drawn to Westlawn by an ad in Yachting and managed to graduate in 1980. Since I had drooled over Martin's book *Naval Architect's Notebook*, he was on my short list when I circulated my resume. Like Martin, I too had suffered humiliation at Sparkman & Stephens when, during my interview, it was discovered I was more a stinkpotter than a windblown Corinthian. I found a warmer reception elsewhere, and I still have Martin's kind letter of encouragement. Although he had no openings at the time, Westlawn alums Jack Hargrave and Tom Fexas did. I signed on with Fexas for five years before hanging up my own shingle in 1986.

I owe Westlawn a tip of the hat for teaching me how to make a buck doing what I love — and Martin feels the same way. "I knew Jerry White personally, and he really cared about helping young folks," Martin said. "He not only taught them boat design, he taught them how to get a job! That's something they don't teach in college." Happy anniversary!

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What Students, Alumni and Industry Say About Westlawn

"Last Friday we did the stability test of our recently launched 43-meter motoryacht (I am working in the study office in JFA Shipyard, France). I am glad that for the first time I was directly involved in the process and could understand all of it easily. Before that I had just a rough idea of what was going on . . . and this is just one of the numerous examples of the applications of ETD [Elements of Technical Boat Design] in my work since I started so I am really glad to follow it!"
Guillaume Bihet-LeRouzic – March 2011
JFA Shipyard
Concarneau, France
www.jfa-yachts.com

"I could have saved the Gov. money if I'd only had [Westlawn course] TT 500 Metal Corrosion in Boats] years ago!"
Roger Mays – June 2009
Small Boat Manager/Captain
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)
www.noaa.gov

"Westlawn has made the entry into yacht design effortless. Even now, 17 years after graduation, I still refer to the old text books. We get more than 10 enquiries for job placements every month from all over the world, and the first advice I give them, regardless of whether they are doing a naval architectural degree from a university, is to enroll in Westlawn on the side. It will give them a better grounding for that art and science than university degrees give."
Kevin Dibley – February 2009
Design Director
www.dibleymarine.com

From an Employer
"It was a wonderful day for me personally to be able to present a second diploma to a Westlawn graduate since taking over the Hargrave company. I want to thank Westlawn for making all this possible not only for Greg Boyko, but for the entire Hargrave family. We take great pride in our company's long history with Westlawn, and the list of honored recipients to receive a Westlawn diploma who not only played an important role in our company, but in the yachting industry overall is impressive indeed. Keep up the great work!"
Michael Joyce – July 2007
CEO Hargrave Custom Yachts

In addition, Hargrave Custom Yachts carries on the distinguished tradition of the famous naval architect Jack Hargrave, who himself was a Westlawn graduate.

"I was offered a job at a fairly up & coming boatyard as overall projects manager (I supervise the individual project managers.) I also have quite a lot of input with product development and alterations including a new 65-ft. Ron Holland design. Coupled with a few hundred thousand sailing miles, it should be mentioned that it was the Westlawn schooling—helping me formalize any expertise I may have gathered over the years—that played a key part in helping me secure the job!!"
Cal Tomlinson – February 2007
Overall Project Manager
Discovery Yachts Limited
Southampton, England
www.discoveryyachts.co.uk

"Westlawn gave me the training, background and confidence to make the jump from a yacht carpenter to a yacht designer. I have worked as Chief Engineer at Mako Marine, designing flats boats to cabin cruisers, as the Designer and Prototype Manager for Pursuit, and have been at Jamestown Metal Marine Sales for the past 10 years.

I started in the marine industry 30 years ago, as a carpenter building plank-on-frame sport fishing yachts in South Florida. Today, I am a Project Engineer for a major outfitting company. Some of my projects include the SBX, part of our missile defense system, the DDG program at Bath, the new Woods Hole Ferry under construction at Halter, polar tankers constructed at Avondale, articulated tug barges under construction at Bender.

As a Project Engineer I supervise a staff of designers who have attended various institutions. None match the background and depth I got from Westlawn. I would like to find Westlawn students interested in ship interiors, outfitting, and/or HVAC to employ here at Jamestown.

The training I received Westlawn has been responsible for my career, not only the knowledge in vessel design, but also the work habits of self motivation and extra effort.

Has my Westlawn training been useful?

Yes, worth every penny, every hour of extra effort."
D. C. Reiher – November 2006
Project Engineer
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Boca Raton, Florida

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