

# RESTORING YOUR DREAM

**BY STEVE KNAUTH** / Soundings Staff Writer

John Stavola had a vision of the boat he'd own someday, a fishing machine something like the ones he'd seen over the years while crewing on a 61-foot Buddy Davis tournament sportsfishermen, "I wanted a 30 footer, something not too big," says Stavola, 31, an Old Saybrook, Conn., cabinetmaker. "I looked from Maine to Florida, and I quickly found my money didn't go too far."

He decided to find an older boat and customize it. "I get to see all these million-dollar sportsfishermen and custom boats when I'm out fishing," he says. "So I had some ideas of my own I wanted to try out."

Stavola found a 1972 Trojan 36 Convertible that suited his purpose. Described as a "flat-out fishing machine with ample cockpit," the boat enjoyed a 17 year production run beginning in 1972. At 36 feet with a plentiful 13-foot beam, the hull has a flared bow and nearly flat after sections. The result is a stable, fast ride (30 mph with its original 350-hp Crusader gas engines) that's won many adherents on the tournament circuit. There are two staterooms, a lower helm station, galley (with dinette), and full-sized head.

Stavola bought the boat in 1998. It looked rough, from the faded gelcoat to the poor hardware and leaky fuel tanks. In fact, it hadn't run at all in two years. "It was really just a floating summer bungalow", he says. "But between the glasswork and the engines, I had something to work with".

Stavola made some fixes and ran the 26-year-old Trojan for a season. "I thought, I'm going to fish this boat," he says. That decision made, he set about transforming the production boat into something unique, intending to do most of the work himself.

He set the boat in his backyard, built a plastic shed over it, and went to work. It was extensive. Stavola tore off the old flybridge and replaced it with one of his own design. He tore out the sliding glass doors and replaced them with a single sliding mahogany door with a glass panel. He cut new side windows, blanked out the windshield, and replaced the three forward hatches with a single hatch. He tore up the sword-fishing bow pulpit and bow rail and the teak toe rail and the cockpit covering boards. "I went through countless sawzall blades and vacuum cleaner bags, followed by 12 gallons of epoxy and \$1000 worth of primers and paint," he says.

Stavola went for clean Carolina-style look as he reassembled the boat. Lines and curves flow into and complement one another, accented here and there with wood trim. He built a mahogany control pod for the flybridge that stands out against the expanse of white fiberglass.

Other personal touches include the corner hardtop molding over the cockpit, which he formed from a 2-inch block of mahogany; slightly arched windows in the aft bulkhead to complement the curve of the hardtop; and a leaping Marlin etched into a galley mirror.

It took more than a year to complete the project, working evenings and weekends. Stavola estimates doing the work himself saved in excess of \$100,000 in labor. "But I'll tell you it was hard working on the boat after a full day on the job, especially in the summer," he says. The payoff is a boat that's unlike any other. "You put the effort in, and get something back."

And that's the combination that sparks some interest - the best of the old and newest of the new, all in a boat that's truly unique.

Ask Dave Bobrowski who eventually bought Stavola's custom Trojan. He first was taken by the Buddy Davis style, but he liked what he saw beneath the look, too." The fact that it's an older boat was a big consideration," says Bobrowski." I know that boats back then were overbuilt - this one has a 2-inch-thick fiberglass bottom. But I've also found it rides well. It's heavy, stable and with that deep-vee, there's a lot of boat in the water."

Most of all, the \$60,000 boat fit his family budget. "There's no way we could afford anything new, so we'd been looking at used boats - 1985 or so," says Bobrowski."Now here I am, with a boat that's virtually new and certainly unique."

There's no doubt that restorations like these make sense, says Scott, the Massachusetts builder. "There are lots of ways to go about it," he says. "One's inclination, motivation and economics will define the scope of the project."

There's a lot of help out there, too, Scott says. "Look at all the fiberglass and epoxy products there are," he says. "And the Internet provides us with countless sources for materials, parts and custom boat shops."

Stavola agrees. "I've picked up ideas from the boats I've been on, the people I've talked with, and in the boating magazines," he says. "I've learned from my father, from people I've worked with at the boatyards, and the skippers I've fished with. There are a lot of sources of information."

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