

FIELD GUIDE

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**DORM ROOMS
TAILGATING
MALLARD MANOR**

supplement to





a seacraft with

STYLE

*Caribiana Skiffs are custom-built
to blend style and versatility.*

by lucy schultze

I t cuts a long and elegant silhouette across the horizon. Skimming over the water like the marriage of grace and power, the Caribiana Sea Skiff won Curt Morse over the moment it caught his eye.

“It was one of those true coveting experiences,” says the Greenville native, recalling the first time he spotted a model of the Pensacola, Florida-based boating line he owns today.

“I just fell in love with it,” he says. “And that’s how it is for a lot of people when they want one of these boats. It’s just a matter of timing until you can justify getting one.”

With a shape that echoes the traditional workboats found in the Caribbean islands and a craftsmanship that bespeaks an earlier age, the skiffs promise an uncommon blend of style and versatility. On any given day, Morse’s own Caribiana might be found pulling his kids on a tubing ride, carrying friends into the sunset on an afternoon cruise, or easing into knee-deep inlets where he’ll cast flies for speckled trout.

Like all love affairs, this one involved some pursuit. After that first glance in 2005, Morse tracked down the boat’s original makers — only to learn that company founder Lynn Rabren and his wife, Joanne McDonough, had ceased production in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

After a few months of getting to know Morse, Rabren agreed to sell the company to him and to remain onboard as a guiding force, ensuring the new skiffs stayed true to his original vision.

“He had set out to build a boat that would mimic the spirit and look of the Caribbean workboat,” Morse says. “Over the years, he tweaked the

design and made it more refined and comfortable.”

Today, Caribiana Sea Skiffs offers 23-foot models with a host of options. Each is custom built in the Pensacola area, with teak rub rails, floorboards, and helm seats that are handmade by local craftsmen. Depending on a customer’s requests, each skiff may take as little as eight weeks or as long as sixteen weeks to complete.

The company operates on a boutique scale, with only four people managing the day-to-day business.



For Morse, it is a continuation of his career in the lifestyle product arena. Prior to moving to the Gulf Coast, he spent 16 years in Atlanta, where he was the North American division manager for an Ireland-based manufacturer of equestrian products.

“It is all about giving people that part of their lifestyle that they really

want to accentuate,” he says.

Delivering his customers’ new additions to their lifestyles is something Morse does himself, in person. When a custom skiff is completed, he loads it onto an aluminum trailer, wraps it in its protective mooring cover, and drives it right to the client’s dock.

“There is always that moment when you get to show off a piece of work and witness the reaction that people have,” says Morse, recalling his days as an art major at Delta State University. “That reaction is what I love most about it.”

His customers’ pleasure pays off in other ways, too. From Chesapeake Bay to the Great Lakes, Morse is able to connect inquiring clients with people in their areas who already own a Caribiana Sea Skiff.

“They are our salespeople,” he says. “They will take you out for a ride and talk your ear off, because they love them so much.”

The custom-made crafts are economical to run, Morse says. Whereas he once used a 200-horse-power engine to drive his earlier 23-foot boat, his Caribiana reaches 30 mph with a 60-horse-power engine. The main reason is due to the slender hull, at only 6.5 feet wide.

Although Morse and his wife, the former Connie Lucas of Hattiesburg, have enjoyed their own simple white skiff, they are currently crafting a new model with a lime-green hull and rich teak accents. It will serve to take out prospective clients and to share the joys of life on the water with their three daughters.

“There’s no telling how many different types of boats will take you out to the beach,” Morse says. “But there is only one boat that feels like this, and gives you that experience of being so close to the water and just enjoying life.” FG



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—Curt Morse

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
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LEFT, TOP TO BOTTOM: Each boat is custom-built and features teak trim and floorboards. Caribiana Skiffs were designed to mimic the Caribbean workboat. Morse says his Caribiana Skiff reaches 30-mph with its 60-horse-power engine.