

# Cape Dory and rec.boats

Pages for defunct builder combine Web and Usenet features

By Bob Steppo

Several "virtual communities" of boaters intersect on the World Wide Web pages operated by San Francisco's Walt Bilofsky, and like members of more conventional yacht clubs, the participants might even be recognized on the water by their burgees fluttering in the breeze.

The bright blue triangle with a golden bear and the letters "CD" is for the California Cape Dory Owners Association (CCDO), and the half-black, half-white triangle with a royal blue circle is the burgee of "rec.boats," one of the oldest boating discussion groups on the Internet.

Both the rec.boats and CCDO burgees can be ordered from Bilofsky's Web pages, but he's quick to point out that selling flags isn't the point at all.

The Cape Dory Web pages (<http://www.toolworks.com/cape-dory/>) provide information and connections to "orphaned" Cape Dory owners nationwide, not just the 60 or so members of the California Cape Dory Owners Association itself, of which Bilofsky recently became commodore. The CCDO Web pages include lists of news and events, a logbook of photos from past club gatherings, and information about other Cape Dory resources — from parts

Software consultant, writer, photographer and webmaster Walt Bilofsky has designed a Web page for the California Cape Dory Owners Association. The site provides information to Cape Dory owners nationwide.

suppliers to other owner organizations like the Lake Michigan Cape Dory Owners Association and the Cape Dory Sailboat Owners Association, located on Chesapeake Bay.

The Web pages themselves have no geographic boundaries. They are a resource for people anywhere who want to swap questions and answers about the Cape Dory line of boats, as long as they can tap into the World Wide Web (which you can do at many public libraries these days).

While most Web pages are a one-way affair, Bilofsky, founder of a successful software company, has spiced in a program that allows readers to add their own messages to a "Cape Dory Information Exchange" page. Anyone with a question about cabin wiring or bilge pump problems — or someone

shopping for a Cape Dory — can post a message and later readers can add their replies. (See <http://www.toolworks.com/cape-dory/board/>)

"If you only look at one of our Web pages, this is the one," Bilofsky said, in an electronic mail interview, "a perfect illustration of what the Web can do for owners of a make of boats, particularly one where the factory and dealer support is gone but the darn boats were built so strong there are tens of thousands around."

In fact, some of the first messages on the "exchange" page were from Vermont and New Hampshire, considerably closer to the now-defunct Cape Dory company's old home port in Massachusetts and its founder's successor company in Maine, Robinhood Yachts.

The Cape Dory Information Exchange is similar to the larger-scale boating discussions that have been going on for a decade or more through the Internet's "Usenet" or "News" bulletin boards.

Once available only to university and corporate network connections, the bulletin boards are available today through most Internet service providers. Some Internet access companies provide a separate "news reader" program. The same "browser" programs that access the Web, such as Netscape and Microsoft Internet Explorer, also can read the News bulletin boards. (Instead of a Web address like "http://toolworks.com/bilofsky/", for example, browsers address newsgroups in the form "news://rec.boats/"). The main differences are that unlike picture-filled Web pages, "News" is dialogue, and is primarily text — essentially a form of public-discussion electronic mail.

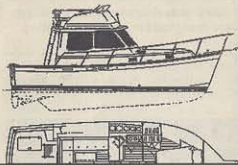


Walt Bilofsky



## Specifications: Cape Dory 30 Power yacht

Disclaimer: The CCDO is a private voluntary social club. The CCDO and this Web site are not associated with and do not represent Cape Dory Yachts, which is a division of Newport Shipyard Corp., nor any other yacht builder.



Specifications	
L.O.A.:	32' 0"
L.O.D.:	30' 3"
Beam:	12' 0"
Draft:	2' 10"
Displacement:	12,800 lbs. (diesel)
Headroom (salon):	6' 4"
Headroom (cockpit):	6' 1"

Although Cape Dory owners were "orphaned" when the company went out of business, the CCDO Web site contains information like this spec sheet.



WALT BILOFSKY

Bob Bruce brings the CD Typhoon SR, 22 Dorus Mor alongside the CD 27 Skylark at the California Cape Dory Owners Association annual rendezvous last summer.

## Would-be Webmasters: 'Provide content'

Walt Bilofsky is clearly having a good time — both on the water and on the Web as writer, photographer, designer and programmer for three boating-related Internet sites.

The programming part is nothing new — he dates his computer days to when the machines had tubes. Following the Silicon Valley model, he founded a company called Software Toolworks in his Los Angeles garage in 1980. It eventually turned into Mindscape, a very successful software company known for everything from typing tutorial programs to chess games.

For other boaters, clubs or boat businesses thinking of creating Web pages, Bilofsky has some advice: "Provide content — people are more and more looking to the Internet as a primary information

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— Walt Bilofsky

source. If you just want a presence, keep it simple. If you want to build traffic, figure out what people need that isn't already on the Internet."

Bilofsky's Cape Dory Information Exchange is a case in point. It draws dozens of messages (and scores of visits) a month. This kind of discussion board for a class of boat is "a prime example of what the Web can do that can't be done any other way," he says.

Bilofsky, 50, is no longer with Mindscape. He does some software consulting, "between boat projects" and is active on the boards of a couple of nonprofit groups — a social services agency in a minority community and a national nonsmokers' rights group, also represented on his Web pages.

Besides his Cape Dory and rec.boats burgee sites, he is webmaster for the 150-member Tiburon

Yacht Club (<http://www.tyc.org/>).

And, no, he says, he hasn't rigged things up so he can spend time on the computer from his boat: "When I work, I focus on work. When I relax, I focus on nothing. (Actually I focus on what the next boat project should be ...)"

Back ashore at the computer, Bilofsky estimates that he spends a day or two a month on maintenance of the Cape Dory Web site. "It grows incrementally whenever I get an attack of energy. Probably I spent a couple of weeks of effort to get it started. Little maintenance chores take a few minutes to half an hour. Adding a complete new page or a bunch of specs might take half a day to two days."

— Bob Steppo

**"All this illustrates how the Internet allows Cape Dory owners all around the country to support each other, which is kind of handy since there are no more dealers and the darn boats last so long."**

—Webmaster Walt Bilofsky

#### From previous page

The boating discussion on Usenetnews began as a single bulletin board called "rec.boats" about a decade ago. (The "rec" is the prefix for all of the recreation-topic bulletin boards, not meant to suggest any water hazards.)

With the wider use of the Internet in the past few years, recboats proved so popular that it spawned specialized area rec.boats markets for rec.boats.cruising, rec.boats.racing and more. The general rec.boats is still there, too.

As an old hand at rec.boats, Bilofsky took on the job of offering burgees to its participants. "Please mention that I prefer people to swap rather than buy them — it's much more fun," Bilofsky says.

The "rec.boats.burpee" Web page (<http://www.toolworks.com/burpee>) reprints burgee designer Dave Kinzer's explanation of his creation, which was selected in a vote by "rec.boats" followers in 1994. "The blue sphere represents the global nature of rec.boats," says Kinzer, in a message first sent to rec.boats itself. "The black and white backgrounds, equal in area, stem from the digital means of our communication, and the round-the-clock nature of our network. Maybe it also comes from the power versus sail discussions frequently seen here."

When an on-line boater swaps a club burgee for a rec.boats burgee, Bilofsky adds a photograph of the incoming burgee and a short write-up about it. The result is another Web page, "the rec.boats International On-Line Museum" at <http://www.toolworks.com/burpee/museum.htm>.

The attractively photographed collection includes colorful contributions from as far away as Germany and South Africa, and from vessels as exotic as Steve Roberts' "Microship," which Bilofsky describes as "a 30-foot trimaran wired to the gills with audio, video, radio and, of course, computers." (Roberts also created a 105-speed recumbent bicycle packed with networked computers, weighing 580 pounds and named "Behemoth.")

Links to Roberts' on-line site about his computerized-nomadic adventures are included in the burgee museum. A sketch of Microship, under development, already shows a rec.boats burgee. Microship didn't have a burgee to trade, but Roberts sent along a Behemoth/Microship T-shirt that became part of the museum artwork.

The German contributor sent along a flag of the Free State of Saxony, complete with a coat of arms dating to before Columbus. From closer to home, the museum also includes the flags of the Savvie Island Yacht Club in Portland, Ore., and a special one for its "Ladies Cruise," as well as the burgee of the Stevens Yacht Club at the Stevens Institute of Technology, Hoboken, N.J.

Bilofsky notes (with appropriate links to more information on the Web) that the school was founded through a bequest of Edwin Stevens, a member of the syndicate that built



Members of the California Cape Dory Owners Association keep in touch with one another through their Web site on the Internet when they are not gathered together for events such as this annual rendezvous.

## rec.boats International On-Line Museum

Walt Bilofsky set up this Web page to showcase burgees swapped through the "rec.boats burgee" site (<http://www.toolworks.com/burpee>). It includes contributions from as far away as Germany and South Africa.

the yacht America, which in 1851 won the cup that still bears its name.

While recboats has diversified into specialized sub-groups, a "rec.boats.capedory" might have too small an audience, so last fall Bilofsky tapped into an archive of Web-page-enhancing software (available via the Internet, of course) and adapted a discussion-area program to create the Cape Dory Information Exchange. As summer approached, visitors were still adding replies to discussions begun in October, unlike rec.boats discussions where the traffic is so heavy that messages fade in a few days.

Still, Bilofsky says his pages have been registering about 2,000 "hits" or visits a month.

The Cape Dory site includes drawings and specifications from the com-

pany's long-out-of-print advertising materials, much of the material sent to Bilofsky by visitors to the Web pages. Other buyers of used Cape Dorys have used the Web pages to track down owners willing to help them find or copy the owners' manual that Cape Dory provided when the boat was new.

"All this illustrates how the Internet allows Cape Dory owners all around the country to support each other, which is kind of handy since there are no more dealers and the darn boats last so long," the webmaster said. His own boat, Golden Phoenix, is a 30-foot flybridge powerboat.

Bilofsky has had a little contact with the original Cape Dory builders and says they've been cordial, although not directly involved with the Web pages. "My impression is that they are concentrating on building Robinnood sailboats and not on the past."

As for the readers of his pages, Bilofsky reports getting "a couple of encouraging e-mails a month, and it's nice when someone mentions in a post on the Information Exchange that they appreciate having it..."

"What is most rewarding is seeing all these Cape Dory owners helping each other on the message board, and knowing I created a place that allowed all those connections to happen. A professor told me 30 years ago that there are many more uses for computers than there are good uses for computers. Maybe that's why it's so satisfying to find a good one."

Bob Stepto, a former Soundings staff writer, cruises the Web from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he is a doctoral candidate in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication. He also maintains some boating Web pages based on his earlier Soundings Data Waves articles, at <http://www.unc.edu/~rbstepto/boats>.

# A powerboat amongst a sea of sailboats

How did a San Francisco sailor wind up with a classic 30-foot powerboat launched in New England waters?

Walt Bilofsky had owned "half of a 14-foot sloop" for a few years and he'd rented a houseboat a couple of times. But when he moved to the shores of San Francisco Bay in 1990, he says, "a boat seemed mandatory." His first was a 25-foot flybridge Bayliner, which he calls "a fabulous boat for the size and for the price."

"It taught me lots of things, particularly what I wanted in a San Francisco Bay boat that it didn't have. Boats will do that."

He estimates he looked at "every good quality 30- to 32-foot powerboat within 50 miles without finding the perfect boat" — until a local broker pointed him to a Cape Dory 30 flybridge in San Diego. "When I saw it, I thought, 'That boat will stand out on San Francisco Bay.' And it does draw lots of compli-



Walt Bilofsky's 30-foot powerboat Golden Phoenix was in the minority among a number of sailboats at a Cape Dory raftup in August 1996.

ments. The lines are classic, and it is as sturdy as it looks."

The Cape Dory is named Golden Phoenix and cruises with the Tiburon Yacht Club as well as the

Cape Dory association. Bilofsky says he especially likes boating out to Angel Island, a state park in the middle of San Francisco Bay, where he can do some hiking. Captain Walt

(he got his master's license last year) also admits to "occasionally waylaying the odd salmon as it heads upriver in the fall with lust in its eye."

The California Cape Dory Owners Association was born when Bilofsky met two more Cape Dory owners at a San Francisco marina — Mike Fahy, skipper of a 28 flybridge powerboat, and Sandy Smith, who Bilofsky says Fahy had talked into a 30-foot motorsailer. "We had a three-boat rendezvous in '94 and grew from there."

"Kind of ironic," he adds. "Most Cape Dorys are sailboats, but the California Cape Dory Owners Association was started three years ago by two powerboats and a motorsailer, so here I am commodore of a 90 percent sailboat fleet."

"But then, Cape Dorys are the sort of powerboat that sailors are willing to grab docklines for."

—Bob Stepto