

HELMSMAN 38E PILOTHOUSE

LONG RANGE, CUSTOMIZATION AND A COMFORTABLE INTERIOR DEFINE THIS UPDATED TRAWLER DESIGN.

LIONARDO DA VINCI was able to write backwards, from right to left on the page, in what is known as mirror writing. I'm sure there are practical applications for such a talent, but I assume he did it mostly to mess with people — though in an age when fewer than half of the people could read, the gag had limited scope.

I have no idea if Scott Helker and the crew at Helmsman Trawlers in Seattle can engage in mirror writing, but I do know they can engage in mirror building. I've seen it. The Helmsman 38E Pilothouse model I tested in San Diego is a mirror image of the 38E as planned, at least in the main salon/galley. On the plans (and in the photos we have), the salon is to port and the galley sits to starboard, but when John and Maria Torelli from San Diego looked at things, they had a da Vinci moment and saw things as if they were in the mirror. Their vision moved the salon (L-shaped settee that converts to a berth, two ottomans, built-in console with a drawer and shelves) to starboard and the galley (sink with a cutting board cover, oven, three-burner stovetop, microwave, refrigerator/freezer) to port.

Down a couple of steps to port — forward of the galley in the Torellis' boat; forward of the salon in the standard layout

They kept the 38E PH simple without sacrificing comfort, seaworthiness, safety or functionality.

— is a head, the second one on the boat, if we consider the one in the stateroom the first. In its forward bulkhead is a watertight door that leads to the engine room. It's a feature John considers a must, because he is fond of conducting hourly

engine room checks while underway, and moving the carpet to lift the hatch in the pilothouse floor every 60 minutes would be a hassle.

One feature John pointed out that I wouldn't have noticed is the window size. In the salon, the windows are 15 percent smaller than standard, at the Torellis' request, for two reasons. They wanted more wood in the interior — there's none on the exterior but teak dominates the walls and sole inside — and they felt the smaller windows would be safer at sea. So they ordered some modifications in the main living area of the boat, but they left the rest of the interior accommodations alone.

In the bow, down a couple of centerline steps from the pilothouse, is the stateroom. Its elevated island berth is surrounded by teak; it's on the sole, the bulkheads, the hanging lockers, the shelves and the doors. An overhead hatch and two opening

portholes supply natural light and airflow, and storage is built in under the berth, in the step leading up to the berth, in twin hanging lockers and in shelves to the sides of the berth. The head is split. To port is the toilet and a vanity. To starboard is the

shower. One person can't tie up the entire head this way.

The pilothouse, which the Torellis didn't touch — "I thought it was perfect," John said — is up two steps from the salon level. An elevated dining settee can seat four people to port, and the wood table can lower and serve as the base for a captain's berth. Forward of that is a cabinet with a large flat top perfect for a chart table and a shallow storage compartment underneath a section of countertop that's a hinged lid. On the starboard side aft is another wooden unit with a flat top and a four-cupholder rack. Forward of that is the helm. Its single captain's chair fronts a wheel and dash that are traditional and modern. The wheel is a wooden ship's wheel that will satisfy the traditionalist in all of us, while the Furuno suite of electronics in the slightly angled upper part of the dash will appeal to the smartphone-carrying 21st-century creature of today.

Between the captain's chair and the wheel is a sliding door to the sidedeck,



Teak dominates the interior, including the ship-like wheel, and the salon/galley area is customizable.

which has a twin on the port side. Those doors are important because the side decks don't run the length of the boat. The main cabin bulkheads are pushed to the hull sides, to create more internal space, and just aft of the pilothouse doors are stairs that lead up to the flybridge.

Helmsman designers decided to move the open flybridge aft a bit, to maintain the boat's low profile and reduce its windage. They also extended the flybridge deck aft, to cover the cockpit better

for the classic look and feel without the tired arms.

Out on San Diego Bay, the 38E's modified full-displacement hull, with a sharp but soft entry and a full keel, was rock solid on test day, as one would expect with a displacement hull. As the owners of two previous full-displacement trawlers, both from a builder that specializes in longer distance cruising, John and Maria were certain they wanted another displacement



The standard layout of the salon and galley area is as depicted in this photo. Our test boat was a near mirror image of this, with the salon to starboard and the galley to port. The refrigerator/freezer gets a little smaller in the mirror layout, but other than that, nothing is lost.

than it was on the boat's predecessor. A Bimini can be erected, but even with it engaged, the bridge is still open, for a breezy, one-with-nature experience. The centerline helm has a covered central dash with a Furuno MFD. To the port side is the thruster control, and opposite that is the engine throttle. The captain's chair has a twin to starboard, and a settee sits to port. Aft of that is a radar mast, and all the way aft is a dinghy deck. Instead of a traditional dinghy, John and Maria bought a custom Gig Harbor dinghy. It's a wood-en-looking fiberglass rowing boat, but they added a 2.5 hp outboard to the transom,

boat, but they realized they weren't going to be crossing any oceans, preferring instead to partake in coastal cruising, maybe even tackling the East Coast's Intracoastal Waterway someday. With that in mind, their extensive research led them to Helmsman, where they found and modified the 38E Pilothouse to their liking.

With the Cummins QSB 6.7L 380 hp diesel pushing the boat, we reached a top speed of 10 knots on test day, as we watched the activity on the bay through three new, larger windshield panes. The engine, in the middle of the horsepower range for the boat (250 to 480), was turning

➔ SPECIFICATIONS

> **LOA** 40 ft., 10 in. > **BEAM** 13 ft., 9 in.
> **DRAFT** 3 ft., 6 in. > **DISPLACEMENT**
32,000 lbs. > **FUEL** 400 gal. > **WATER** 145
gal. > **POWER (TESTED)** Cummins QSB 6.7L
380 hp diesel > **PRICE (BASE)** \$409,000

STANDARD EQUIPMENT

Cummins QSB 6.7L 250 hp diesel, bow thruster, Lewmar windlass, Webasto heating system, granite countertops, generator prewiring, hot water heater, Masterflush heads, hydraulic steering, teak-and-holly decks and much more.

OPTIONAL EQUIPMENT

Engines up to 480 hp from Cummins, Yanmar, Luggier and Isuzu, stern thruster, washer/dryer, ice-maker, inverter and/or generator, alternate climate control and many more.

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at 2420 rpm and burning 11 gph at that speed, putting its range at about 327 miles. Slowed down to 1550 rpm, about 7.5 knots, which John called the boat's "all-day speed," the Cummins was burning just 3 gph, for a range of 900 miles. That will get a captain and crew up and down a whole lot of coastline. To really go far, slowing down to 5.8 knots yields a 1,280-mile range, and 4.6 knots stretches that number to about 2,000 miles.

One theme John kept returning to during our time on the boat was simplicity. As experienced boat owners, he and Maria knew what they needed and didn't need in their new boat, and anything that complicated, in their eyes, the experience didn't make the cut. They didn't want a second engine to maintain, they didn't want stabilizers, they didn't want a generator (the battery bank is larger to offset the lack of genset) and they didn't want a semi-displacement hull. With the help of the folks at Helmsman, they kept the 38E PH simple without sacrificing comfort, seaworthiness, safety or functionality. Boat owners and buyers can understand that logic. 🍷