

# The Legacy of Kadey-Krogen Yachts

**It's About Heart And Soul, And Homage To A Mentor**

by Bill Parlatore

photos courtesy of Kadey-Krogen Yachts



*Jim in his design office.*



*Young Krogens in Key Biscayne*

It's boat show time again, and we gladly wait in lines to see all the new boats. It seems more so than ever before, trawlers and cruising motorboats command center stage. One of these boat builders is Kadey-Krogen Yachts. The familiar shape and style of the popular cruisers-known for comfortable cruising and quiet, relaxed living aboard-have attracted a cult-like following.

With Kadey-Krogen's recent 25th anniversary, it seems appropriate to look at the history of a company that has brought capable trawlers to those interested in cruising under power. It is a story of the devotion and honor of two men whose lives were as big as they come. It is the story of Jim Krogen and Art Kadey, and the two sons who took the company far beyond the horizon ever imagined by its founders.

## Roots In Great Lakes

James S. Krogen is the well-known designer of the Krogen family, born in 1928. Young Krogen grew up in Manistee, Michigan, on the shores of Lake Michigan. The son of a dentist, Jim always wanted to spend his time designing boats, a pursuit no doubt influenced by his mother's boat-building brother.

Krogen graduated with a degree in naval architecture and marine engineering from the University of Michigan in 1952, where he met and married his sweetheart, Jean VanderArk. Responding to his country's call, the couple moved to Seattle, where Jim served as a lieutenant in the Navy during the Korean War and until 1956. During that time, their first child, daughter Kim, was born. With full-time Navy duties as engineering officer, Jim still had time to design and build a gaff-rigged catboat, and the young Seattle family began a lifelong love of boating and cruising.

After the Navy, Jim moved the family to Florida in response to a job offer, and while the position never materialized, the Krogens fell in love with Key Biscayne. Over the next few years, Jimmy and Kurt joined the growing family (in 1958 and 1960), and the Krogen family enjoyed Florida life and its boating opportunities. In the 1960s Jim opened his own design office, where he focused on yacht design while continuing heavy involvement with commercial architecture that remained a steady contract source. His commercial projects included dry docks, tankers, fishing boats, landing craft, ferries and charter boats.

There were always boats in the family, and the boys especially loved a 30-foot sailboat named *Mischief*, and a double-

ender, *Siva Siva*, on which the family explored southern Florida, the Keys and the Bahamas. Boats were such an integral part of the family's life that Kurt's earliest memory (at 4 years old) is of his 6-year-old brother walking around with a dog-eared copy of *Yachting*. Jimmy drew boats all the time, and the two boys routinely begged their father to draw them yet another new design.

In the '60s, Jim designed a robust wooden motorsailer, known as the Krogen 42. American Marine of Hong Kong built a handful of these cruising sailboats in teak. The design, like all those coming from James S. Krogen and Company, stressed rugged simplicity and conservative style. It was his trademark.

Young Kurt followed right in line with the family passion for boating. When he was 10 years old, he was the U.S. Optimist champion.

Jimmy was as avid a boater as his younger brother. In fact, in the childhood years of the '60s, sister Kim interviewed her family for a school report. When she asked Jimmy what he wanted to be when he grew up, his response was, "I want to be a bald-headed naval architect like my dad."

In his teens, Jimmy crewed on large charter boats, making several transAtlantic crossings that gave him valuable experience. He even served aboard *Pinocchio*, the Art Kadey-built 60-foot schooner that later was renamed *Cyrano* and immortalized by William F. Buckley in the book *Airborne*.



**Art Kadey**



**230-foot, Krogen-designed tanker Centam, built for Esso Inter-America by the Barbour Boat Co. of New Bern, N.C. (left). One of Jim Krogen's larger commercial projects.**



**At heart a sailor his entire life, Jim Krogen loved to cruise his Krogen 38 cutter, which he designed for shallow Florida waters.**

### **A Bull In The China Closet**

By all accounts, Art Kadey was a person larger than life who had a big impact on the Krogen family. Art seemed like a character from a movie script about a man who lived life to the max.

Art was born in Michigan in 1925, and while not much is known of his early years, he left school at 17 to become a U. S. Army Air Force pilot during World War II. Damage to his hearing precluded a later career in the aviation industry, so he got

started building small motorboats, first in Marine City, Michigan, where he started Holiday Boats.

Art's many adventures, which included boating in all its forms, a successful car-racing career at Sebring and an appearance in TV ads for Camel cigarettes, spanned several decades, eventually luring him to Florida. It was here that he met his wife Maria, and together they developed a charter business in the Bahamas and Caribbean.

In 1962 they built Pinocchio, a Ben Sawyer-designed schooner with an 18-foot-long bowsprit (hence the name), which they also ran in charter. But after eight years, they were ready for a change, so the couple sold the boat to Buckley, and Art became involved with a small freighter service between the Bahamas and Caribbean.

But good times did not last long after, as Maria was soon fighting for her life against cancer. She lost the battle, dying in her early 40s and leaving Art with medical bills far beyond his means. It was a tough time for the bighearted man.

Now widowed, Art got into yacht brokerage, opening his own office in the early 1970s in Coconut Grove. It was here that his path crossed with Jim Krogen's. At first they knew each other professionally.

"He had great respect for my dad's design work," said Kurt, and the relationship between the two men later developed in a social level. Coconut Grove in those days was a tight-knit little marine community. The local bar was a gathering hole for the nearby marine guys, and a perfect backdrop for Jim and Art to become friends.

It was in the mid-1970s that Art showed Jim Krogen some drawings for a new boat he wanted Jim to design. "Art understood the advantages to a full-displacement boat," Kurt remembered of Art's early meetings with his father. "I know he wanted to live aboard and cruise on a trawler. That was his dream."

And Art knew Jim was the man to help make it happen. Art had been to Taiwan and knew of one possible builder for the project, Trans Pacific Marine. Those crude drawings eventually became the now-classic Krogen 42, and Trans Pacific built the first five boats. By all accounts, Art was the man behind the Krogen 42, following up on his hunch that a full-displacement trawler yacht had a place in the market. It also was precisely what he wanted for himself. "The 42 was Art's baby," Kurt told me.

And the man showed a genuine intensity when it came to building boats. He once told Kurt, "Your dad is the best architect in the world. But he doesn't know anything about propellers. He doesn't know s--- about propellers," Kurt laughed at an inside joke that existed between Art and the Krogens. "I'll never forget," Kurt recalled, "whenever we came into the port, he used to look at propeller sizes and calculate pitch and diameter, and tell me, 'No way this bucket could do more than 20 knots with the wind behind it!'" He was really into propellers. It was the one side of engineering he really loved," Kurt continued. "My dad's dream was more about sailing, which is why the Krogen 38 was developed right after the Krogen 42, because my dad wanted a cutter rig and shoal draft to sail Key Biscayne Bay."

"Kadey was really the full-displacement guy, to cruise and live aboard that trawler. My dad wanted to sail to Tahiti."



*A lifeboat conversion undertaken for Burl Ives in the 1960s.*



*50-foot Eden II was featured in Beebe's original Voyaging Under Power.*



*The Manatee remains one of Krogen's most clever cruisers. It still is quite popular.*



*26-foot lobster boat inspired the Manatee. Jim Krogen maximized volume for liveaboard space, then Jimmy softened the curves and named it the Manatee.*

### **A Partnership Is Born**

So it was decided that Art would be the liaison in Taiwan, and it was a perfect match of personality and style. He was well liked there, as he appreciated the culture and the people.

"Art had a real love for Taiwan," Kurt recalled. "He loved the people, the language, the food, all of it. He had a real appreciation for Taiwan." Kadey was in Taiwan when Nixon recognized China, and Art made the local newspapers by translating a song from Chinese to



*Custom Krogen Buster, 52 feet LOA with 210hp diesel.*

English and singing it at the piano at the Imperial Bar. The newspaper stories called him a true and loyal friend of Taiwan. At a time when most Americans were on the China bandwagon, Kadey remained focused on Taiwanese assets.

The pair started Kadey-Krogen Yachts in 1976 to market the first boats, built in Taiwan using primitive molds and integral plywood fuel tanks. "They were pretty rough," Kurt recalled, "but what do you expect for \$68,000?"

Marketing the boats remained low-key at first, with small black-and-white ads in the boating magazines. "There was no understanding of the boat at the time," Kurt said. "In Taiwan or the U.S. in those years, only knowledgeable yachtsmen could appreciate and understand the Krogen. Before PassageMaker magazine, people just didn't comprehend this kind of boat. It was not until PassageMaker and the Nordhavn that people began to grasp what this type of boat was all about."

It's almost hard to believe, given the respect of the product line today, that it started on such a shoestring.

After the first five boats, Krogen and Kadey moved construction to Chien Hwa Boat Builders on the Tam-Sui River in Taipei. By February 1981, they had built 20 Krogen 42s and three Krogen 38 sailboats. Momentum was starting to gather for the small company.

But the Krogen 42 never really took off; it slowly attracted growing attention in the marketplace. "There was never a mad rush for the boat," Kurt said. "It wasn't until the mid-'80s that there was sufficient demand to build two or three a month."

"Then the mid-'80s happened. A severe exchange rate, the luxury tax and the stock market crash conspired to kill off many boatbuilders. It really put a damper on things, but we continued to build boats."

## **A Loss In So Many Ways**

But in February 1981, this economic roller coaster was still in the future. Things looked bright for the friends who'd started with a drawing of a simple cruising trawler. The company was on the verge of its first profit, and life was looking good for Kadey-Krogen Yachts.

Then the world turned upside down, a nosedive from the clouds that affected everyone, especially two young men who by now had part-time jobs working for their father and their mentoring friend.



***The Krogen 42 in sea trials off Taiwan. It was something quite new for the American market.***

Art Kadey was leaving the Coral Reef Yacht Club after dinner one evening, when in the parking lot he came upon a couple being robbed. He went over and told the hooligans to get lost. One of the thugs pulled out a gun and shot Kadey in the heart. He died instantly, the bull in the china closet coming to the aid of others as he'd done all his life.

It was a monumental, mind-numbing event for Kurt. "I'd been commissioning boats that morning on the Miami River," Kurt remembered, "when I learned from my dad that Art had been shot."

"I asked my dad, 'What are we going to do?' And he said, 'Go to work. ' "

For Kurt and Jimmy, the death signified a fork in the road that forever changed their lives. Both were in school, working on boats between classes. Art Kadey was a strong mentoring influence to them, giving advice and life direction, and doing much to steer the men toward college and careers in the marine industry. Art Kadey was the family's dear friend. Jim Krogen was a man who did not force his will on his children, or push them to follow in his footsteps, but Art absolutely did his best to steer the boys in a positive and marine-oriented direction.

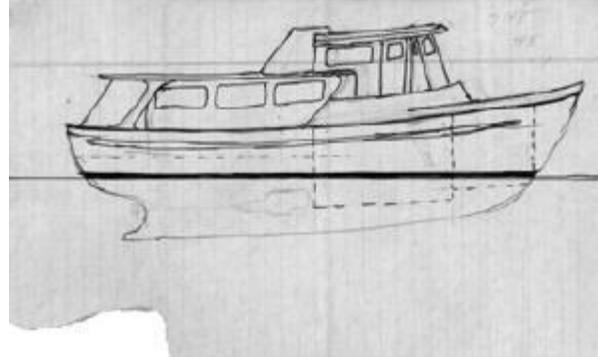
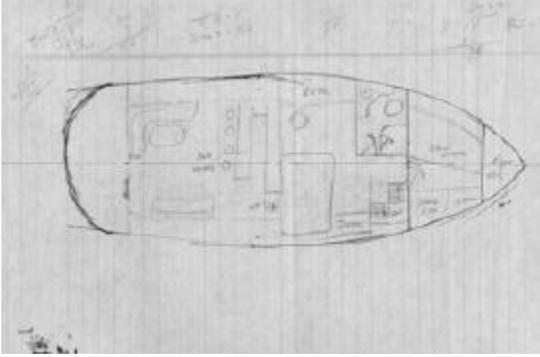
Kurt volunteered to replace Art Kadey as the Taiwan connection, pledging to help do whatever it took to make it succeed. He literally put the rest of his life on hold; his dream of becoming a land-based architect would just have to wait. Despite getting great grades and wanting a profession outside the marine industry, he knew it would have to wait.

"My dad had a real love for Biscayne Bay, sailing his Krogen 38 cutter, and his design firm," Kurt explained. "He had his world. He was not ready to go to Taiwan, or even attempt to do what Art had done for the company. So Jimmy and I volunteered."

Seemingly overnight, Kurt moved to Taiwan, where he spent most of the next seven years. He learned the language and culture, as well as boat building. Kurt was instrumental in refining the Krogen product.

By family consensus, Jimmy stayed in school to become a naval architect, although both sons worked together in Taiwan for a time in the early '80s, where they influenced each other's projects. Kurt oversaw the production of the Krogen 42 and Manatee, while Jimmy looked after the 38-foot Krogen sailboat. (Jimmy actually came up with the Manatee name, doing much of the design work to round off the edges of this father's initial design, which is based on a working lobster boat hull.)

In subsequent years, the company expanded its line of models beyond the venerable Krogen 42, adding the 36-foot Manatee, the 48-foot Whaleback, the Krogen 48, the Krogen 39, Krogen 58, Krogen 49 Express, and for a time, a high-speed cruiser known as the Silhouette 42 SeaDeck. All told, some 400 boats have been built under the Kadey-Krogen moniker.



***Art Kadey's original sketches. This boat became the Krogen 42.***

### **Super Good And Getting Better**

It is the quality of materials and construction detail of Kadey-Krogen that continue to improve even to this day, as the company finds better products to use in boatbuilding and related construction. Go aboard a new Krogen and you'll see a huge difference from early models. The Krogen 39, for example, has a passing resemblance to the classic 42, but it is a much better boat in every respect.

The list of standard features on the current models reads like an expensive options list from other manufacturers: welded aluminum doors, Kelvar-reinforced hulls, U.S.- made gelcoat, one-piece molds for all major fiberglass components, Corian counters, lead-lined foam insulation, aluminum fuel tanks, Northern Lights gensets, CruiseAir air conditioners...the list goes on and on.

When Jim Krogen died unexpectedly in December 1994 at the age of 66, it was yet another family shock, although by this time both brothers were solidly involved in critical operation of the company. As a result, Kurt became president of Kadey-Krogen Yachts and Jimmy took over the Krogen design office.

Today, Kadey-Krogen Yachts has an impressive product line that spans 25 years. Its move in 1999 to a new facility in Stuart, Florida, marks the introduction of a full-service brokerage office and expanded staff and sales network. The company hopes the Stuart base will become a magnet for Krogen owners, as it's well positioned geographically to serve boats headed north or south.

There were other key players at Kadey-Krogen Yachts during the growing years, including M.F. "Buzz" Labee, who was a financial partner in the yacht business. Jim Billings, who sold many of the boats during the 1980s, also contributed much to the company's tenure and growth. More recently, there's Miguel Rios, a close family friend and boat builder who remains a strong influence on the construction side of the business.

Kurt Krogen has a vision for the future and plans to continue improving the full-displacement cruisers. Toward that end, he sold the Krogen Express business last year to give it its own team and support, as it is a different boat with a different philosophy from the displacement trawler yachts. A new Krogen 52 Express will splash next year through Krogen Express Yachts.



***Art Kadey's love of Taiwan and its culture made him popular among its people. He saw great promise in a land under constant threat from China.***



*The Krogen 48' Whaleback, which many believe is the ultimate liveaboard.*



*The Krogen 54' passagemaker was ahead of its time and now is somewhat rare.*



*The large Krogen 58' is the best finished yacht to date, and showcases what the yard is capable of.*



*The Krogen Express 49 proved that a faster cruising boat did not need enormous horsepower and huge wakes. A new version will be introduced next year.*

## **Words Of Encouragement**

I asked Jimmy and Kurt what Jim Krogen and Art Kadey would think of their efforts if they were alive today.

"Art would be shocked at the quality we have achieved," Kurt said. "We've brought it so much farther than when he left us." Then Kurt laughed. "But he'd still comment that our propellers need some attention."

Jimmy, of his father: "He would be proud of us and what we've done. I'm sure of that."

They say the road to salvation is like a razor's edge. For Jimmy and Kurt Krogen, the loss of their mentor, and later their father, forced them to dig inside and find destiny among heartache. It is an inspiring story that goes way beyond the simple task of building boats.

If you go aboard a new Kadey-Krogen trawler at the boat shows, really look at the details. Art Kadey's inspiration and Jim Krogen's design philosophy are apparent everywhere, with strong added influence by both Jimmy and Kurt. Today's boats reflect a healthy blending of modern materials, quality hardware and systems, with conservative design and seaworthy simplicity. There's a good reason for that brand loyalty.

For Jimmy and Kurt Krogen, Kadey-Krogen Yachts proves their accomplishment-even with the impact of circumstance. Jimmy did indeed become a naval architect like his dad, although he won't be bald anytime soon. And while Kurt didn't become the architect or photographer he told his sister Kim he wanted to be in that childhood interview, he's brought the company beyond what his father and mentor might have imagined.

The company will soon unveil its new dreamboat, the long-awaited replacement for the Krogen 42. A new boat for the keel up, the Krogen 44 encompasses everything learned from all the boats so far, and with a fresh set of design parameters. For those who want the Kadey-Krogen philosophy in contemporary form, the Krogen 44 will rule.

Kurt dreams of spending more time cruising and living aboard one of his boats. He hopes to one day live the life that first inspired Art Kadey to dream up the concept for the classic trawler.

Perhaps we'll share an anchorage one day. It's the dream of us all.



*Jimmy Krogen with his wife Angelia and their daughter Joanna at launch of the Krogen 58', Billy the Eagle.*



*The popular Krogen 48 has it all. It quietly cruises the world.*



*The Krogen 39' is a wonderful boat for one couple, for living aboard or extended cruising.*



*The speedy Silhouette 42 SeaDeck was a departure for the displacement Kadey-Krogen company, although its features showed creativity and promise.*

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| [Back](#) |