

BOATING
Test

This cruiser's no slow boat to China



When Wahye Lin approached designer Greg Elliott for a new cruising yacht he had only three requirements — length 15.24m (50ft), draft 1.83m (6ft) and costwise, economic to build. The resulting craft launched on May 18 of this year caused quite a stir.

A navigation station with luxuries new to Wayne.





Plenty of scope for the voyaging cook.



Reaching at speed up the harbour.

Why? Because Atmosphere does not, on first appearances, conform to what many people expect of a cruising yacht. She looks very different.

Wahye Lin hails from Hong Kong and has been world cruising since 1978. He started off modestly in a small 11m steel sloop called Silvero. This he replaced some five years later in France with the larger Joubert-Nivelt Metaphor, a 12.2m (40ft) centreboarder built in aluminium. (*Boating*, February, 1987).

After sailing across the Atlantic Ocean into the Pacific via Panama, he eventually ended up in New Zealand 18 months ago.

Auckland's vigorous sailing atmosphere, plus a chance meeting with Warwick Buckley of the Wooden Boatshop in Parnell, convinced him it was time for yet another change — preferably to something faster, more comfortable and therefore bigger. Three yachts in 10 years is not bad going. With all that experience under his belt Wahye should have a good idea of what he wants by now.

Warwick introduced him to Greg Elliott. He liked Elliott's practical yet imaginative approach to design and so gave him the go ahead. Atmosphere is the result.

To Elliott it is only logical to base such a design upon the fundamental requirements of cruising. He has incorporated into this his latest thinking as to what makes a boat sail efficiently with feedback from his racing experience. Atmosphere, therefore, has an



Main cabin although not completely finished, is obviously very light and spacious, ideal for entertaining.

easily driven hull. The idea being that it will require only a moderate sail area to allow the yacht to be easily handled by a small crew. Add to this plenty of deck space and good internal volume and you have the basics of a good cruising boat.

There is nothing new in the concept of seeking to produce a relatively light, easily driven hull. Akarana, built 100 years ago, was designed on the same principle. The difference lies in the interpretation with the result that Atmosphere has a thoroughly modern

look about her — even avant-garde when it comes to cruising yachts.

This boat was derived in part from another of Elliott's designs, Transformer, a 12m cruiser-racer, although in this new version the keel is a relatively long fin. Drawing only 1.83m (6ft), Atmosphere will have access to most anchorages.

Once again Wahye has opted for aluminium, a material which combines lightness with strength and is growing in popularity for the construction of large offshore cruising yachts. Many are surprised to see Atmosphere's topsides unpainted. But if you want to be sure of a fair hull with no filler, then brief your builder of your intentions just as Wahye did McMullen and Wing. You can always paint at a later date if so required — unless you are in

had been built by a Chinese owner who had run out of money and so could not afford to paint it.

Joking apart, that particular remark could easily have had some truth in it because, although this yacht is very obviously for export, Wahye has had great difficulty in obtaining any exemption from GST payments and so has had to spend considerably more than he originally estimated.

Despite the bare hull, Atmosphere's decks have been painted. Polyurethane powder has been sprinkled on top and then painted over to form a non-slip surface. This is cheap and effective although it does seem to pick up dirt rather easily.

The deck plan aims at providing plenty of clear working space. This makes for safety at sea and is marvelous for lounging whilst at anchor. The streamlined cabin top offers very little wind resistance and merges into the foredeck.

Aft there is no conventional cockpit. Instead, there is a steering station separated by a high bridge deck from another sunken area (you could hardly call it a cockpit) which provides access into the main cabin. This arrangement should make it difficult for water to enter below decks.

Many visiting yachts seem to have the cockpit crammed with everything but the kitchen sink, the guardrails festooned with a multitude of equipment. But this is well nigh impossible with the setup on Atmosphere. Elliott's design has purposely seen to that.

The outside steering wheel is another practical feature because not only does it give fingertip control but makes it much easier for the helmsman to see for'ard, either to port or starboard.

the business of cost cutting and then you will have saved yourself the price of an expensive paint system plus labour, now and in the future.

One of the advantages of aluminium is that it does not require painting. Given time, a layer of oxidation will form over the hull, producing a uniform silver-grey colour. You can't get cheaper maintenance than that. The French have been following this practice for years and likewise Wahye does not believe in work for the sake of it.

This has led to a certain amount of comment. A few weeks ago when one of the sightseeing cats was passing through Westhaven, the guide pointed out Wahye's yacht, remarking that it

Stowage space has not been forgotten either. There is plenty of room aft, large enough, in fact, to climb into. This provides easy access to the steering cables, rudder stock and the Robertson AP 200 Sail autopilot. The design of the stern makes it rather difficult to install a windvane self-steering gear but makes it very simple to get aboard whether at anchor or stern-to to a quay. You cannot have everything.

As to be expected of a yacht with a modern hull shape, Elliott has gone for a modern rig to match, with sails by Lidgard and the mast and spars by Matrix. The concept overall has been "what works for racing can be applied



Steering station aft. The large wheel provides finger-tip control and excellent visibility for the helmsman to port and starboard.

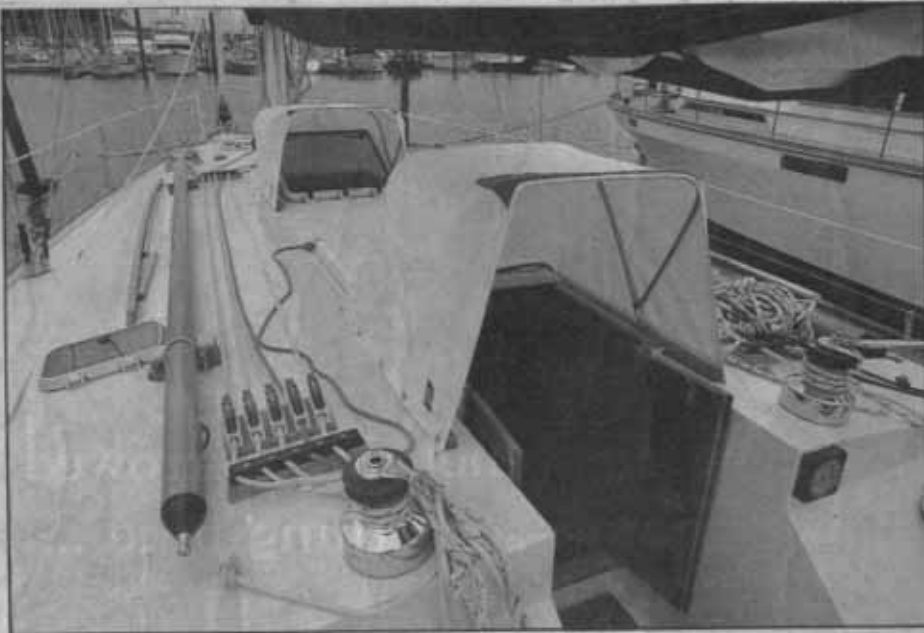
is of a spacious, light and airy interior — in contrast with more conventionally-fitted out yachts which are often dark and cavernous. The Wooden Boatshop, responsible for fitting out, has managed to achieve a very pleasant, relaxed atmosphere aboard, perfect for someone as sociable as Wahye — and a reflection of the yacht's name.

As the majority of cruising liveaboards spend more time in port than at sea, a comfortable living area is particularly desirable. Add to this the privacy of your own cabin completely separate from the rest of the accommodation and you have a very convenient arrangement. Atmosphere boasts three double cabins, one for'ard and the other two aft with one each side of the cockpit.

A navigation station has been fitted into one of these quarterberth cabins. This main saloon is huge for a boat of this size — perfect for entertaining. However there is a conspicuous absence of handholds. The beam of 4.27m (14ft) is a fair distance to be thrown with nothing to hang onto. However, the interior was still unfinished at the time of inspection, so perhaps this omission has now been remedied.

The galley, to port of the main hatch, is compact and well thought-out for operating at sea. Likewise, the toilet and shower compartment is conveniently situated opposite to starboard, in a far more sensible position with less motion and easy access than up for'ard.

The entire layout is simple and, more to the point, very inexpensive to construct partly because of the extensive use of painted plywood, occa-



A neat cockpit arrangement which keeps all close at hand for the cruising sailor.

sionally relieved by cedar trim. It is especially suited to Wahye's needs who enjoys sailing with friends and entertaining in port.

The yacht is powered by a Ford 50hp diesel motor mounted underneath the cockpit. Wahye has installed a small Furuno radar. He has previously never been one to use electronics extensively and is content to limit himself to a small satnav and a Danavigate 3200 combined boatspeed, distance, windspeed and depth set of instruments. For him, a compact disc player for listening to his favourite

music is far more important than any radio.

Already during sea trials in the Hauraki Gulf, Atmosphere has been performing well up to expectations. Wahye finds this 50-footer so much easier to handle than his previous two boats. She is light and responsive on the helm and tacks just like a dinghy. Best of all she is fast, very fast. A trip that used to take the best part of two days now takes only one. Fast passages are immensely satisfying and greatly extend one's cruising limits within a given period of time. Moreover, a larger boat makes for a gentler and

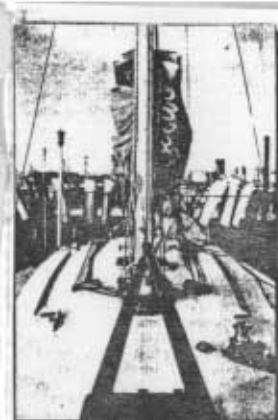
therefore more comfortable motion, so Atmosphere is far less fatiguing than either Metaphor or Silvero. Wahye is delighted.

From the designer's point of view, this yacht is optimised for running and reaching in 20 knots of wind, bearing in mind that she is to be used for extensive cruising in the Pacific. She is specifically designed to reach a high average speed of around 8 knots. Present indications are that, calms excepted, she can do just that. She tracks well and appears to have no serious vices.

As to her seaworthiness, only time will tell. Despite her light, racy appearance she is very strongly constructed in aluminium alloy. Her rig, although unconventional, is small for a boat of her size.

Elliott points out that cruising boats aim to avoid bad weather by sailing with the seasons. They can afford to wait for favourable weather conditions. Bashing to windward is not on. Any off-shore yacht should be able to cope with extreme conditions if the need arises but no one in their right mind deliberately seeks them out. The advantage of a fast yacht is that she can keep up with a favourable weather system instead of being left behind and overtaken by something nasty like her slower sisters. In these circumstances a fast boat is a safe boat and passage racing tends to confirm this view.

Atmosphere has been built in just under a year and was barely three weeks behind schedule on her launching date, May 18. The aluminium hull was lofted and carefully welded up by McMullen and Wing at their Mount Wellington yard and then delivered



Clear uncluttered decks. Mainsail controls lead aft to the cockpit. The twin poles are for downwind sailing especially in the trade winds.

to cruising". After all no one wins a race with a broken mast.

One of the horrors of every long distance sailor is to lose his stick. Nevertheless, the prospect of carrying a bendy, tapered mast, minus backstays takes most cruising yachties some getting used to. Backstays are useful for all manner of things quite apart from holding up the mast. The question is, is that sufficient reason to retain them, if structurally they are not necessary?

Elliott has aimed at producing a rig that is powerful enough to move the boat quickly and efficiently and yet is easy to handle when sailing short-handed. In other words, the minimum amount of sail for the maximum effect. Wahye himself is slightly built and does not want the problem of trying to winch in huge overlapping genoas. For these reasons Elliott has opted for a fractional, three-quarter rig with small headsails and a relatively big main. With this arrangement, there is no need to have backstays let alone running backstays as, unlike a masthead rig, it does not put enormous compression loads on the mast. Instead there are two sets of spreaders, raked well aft to help distribute the stresses. There is at least one problem with this arrangement, namely the possibility of chafe on the sail which will need reinforcing.

As befits a cruising boat, the emphasis is on strong rigging. A discontinuous pattern has been developed to avoid too many rigging screws cluttering up the side decks. It is a general rule that major rigging failure will invariably bring the mast down, irrespective of the amount of secondary staying. The mast itself is tapered to cut down on weight aloft and so stiffen the boat.

Even by cruising standards it is a conservative rig for a 50-footer, carrying a correspondingly small sail area of just 750 sq ft (70 sq m). This, combined with a Furlex furling system, makes for very easy handling by one person. As with everything else on this yacht, the keynote is efficiency combined with simplicity and economy.

This theme is continued below decks. Here the immediate impression

mid December, 1987, to The Wooden Boatshop in Parnell for fitting out. Wahye Lin wanted to be involved at this stage of the construction and had arranged with Buckley to help out whenever practicable. It took just over four months to complete the work before returning the yacht briefly to Mount Wellington for fitting the keel and launching. Warwick Buckley was responsible for overseeing the entire project.

As soon as the paper work and a few minor last minute jobs have been completed, Wahye plans to sail away back to "the islands" and the cruising life. His chances of meeting up with a similar yacht in any of the Pacific anchorages is highly unlikely. Atmosphere is bound to arouse comment amongst the more traditional boat owners, especially those brought up on a diet of Colin Archers and 19th century pilot cutters. It will certainly take some mental adjustment for them to come to terms with this latest style of ocean cruising yacht. But, in reality, is Atmosphere so removed from the conventional voyager? The basic requirements that governed her design are the basic requirements of any good cruising yacht. After all what do most ocean sailors look for? Surely most of them would like the following:

- A boat that is fast, manoeuvrable and easily handled by a small crew.
- Strong and seaworthy.
- Comfortable accommodation, with plenty of space for stowage.

- Shallow draft for easy access to anchorages.

- Value for money.

- Easy, low cost maintenance.

Judged on these terms, Atmosphere rates rather well, for not only does she sail well and handle easily, she has comfortable accommodation and was surprisingly cheap to build for a yacht of her size. As for maintenance, that has been cut to a minimum — witness her bare topsides.

All boats are a compromise one way or another but hats off to Greg Elliott for taking a fresh look at the ocean cruising yacht and producing a fast, functional craft in the modern idiom. It will be very interesting to see how well this new yacht works out in the long term.

We found Atmosphere very exciting, very stimulating. She made the voyagers of our test team, rethink many of their own ideas. Cruising sailors are notoriously conventional and resistant to change, when it comes to boat design. However it is only a matter of time before other boats, designed on similar lines to Atmosphere, become a part of the cruising scene. We have just one reservation — will cruising sailors sail without backstays?

Meantime, Wahye Lin plans to sail his new boat through the Pacific back home to Hong Kong. One thing is certain, it will not be on "a slow boat to China".

The Vitals

LOA	15.3m (50ft)
LWL	14m (46ft)
Beam	4.4m (14ft)
Draft	1.8m (6ft)
Displacement	9000 kgs (19,840lbs)
Sails	Lidgard
Mast and Spars	Matrix
Builders (aluminium work)	McMullen and Wing
(fitting out)	Wooden Boatshop
Engine	Ford 50hp
Instruments	Danavigate 3200