

**SPECIAL DOWNEAST ISSUE!**

# PassageMaker<sup>®</sup>

—The Trawler & Ocean Motorboat Magazine—

**GRAND BANKS  
EASTBAY**

**55 SX**



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STORY BY JOHN WOOLDRIDGE  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JONATHAN COOPER

# Stately



# Swift

GRAND BANKS' ELEGANT 55 EASTBAY SX  
OFFERS LUXURY, STYLING, AND  
SPEED WHEN YOU WANT IT



Misty fjords. Fog-blanketed sounds and channels. Azure waters overlooked by towering, fir-covered mountains sloping rapidly to the water's edge. Breathtaking sunsets lingering well into the evening hours.

Taken singly or together, these were all good reasons to head north and explore the coastal waters of British Columbia and Alaska. But for one group of owners on a three-week, 800-nautical-mile cruise, it was also a chance to celebrate the 50th anniversary of their favorite boating brand at a once-in-a-lifetime event.

When 16 Grand Banks yachts departed Poets Cove in the Canadian Gulf Islands on the 2006 Grand Tour, the fleet included models old and new, ranging from a 72 Aleutian to classic wood trawlers—and one Downeast-styled 54 Eastbay SX. Owned by Bill Buckingham, a



The newest semi-custom layout for the Eastbay 55's saloon adds more seating, with a barrel chair and ottoman starboard and a pair of Stidd bench seats forward. Owners wanted larger windows for outstanding 360-degree views—and they got it.

well-known Seattle businessman, this was the only boat in the fleet without a flybridge. But she was also the sole Grand Banks on the cruise that, with her twin 853hp Caterpillar C15 ACERT diesels, had the ability to offer either miserly consumption—5.8gph at 9.0 knots—or a wide range of faster cruising speeds—up to 25.4 knots while burning 33gph—to make quick work of longer distances when tight schedules, changing weather, or the vagaries of the cruising life required time management.

For Bill Buckingham and his wife, Connie, that flexibility was key to their cruising lifestyle. There were days on the Grand Tour when they cruised in concert with the fleet, enjoying the amazing scenery. But they also liked to throttle up and arrive at the designated anchorage well ahead of time, using the downtime to fish for salmon, set out shrimp or crab traps, and

pass along information about local conditions to those coming behind them.

When the professionals at Grand Banks decided to redesign the Eastbay 54SX, a good-looking enclosed saloon model and the largest in the Eastbay line, they began by eliciting input from owners and dealers to help guide the process. First and foremost, they decided to retain the excellent performance and seaworthiness of the original C. Raymond Hunt & Associates hull design, a proven foundation for the new 55 Eastbay SX. It followed that they also would maintain the high production standards, luxurious living spaces, and meticulously crafted interiors that define every Grand Banks Yachts design, whether Heritage, Eastbay, or Aleutian.

"First of all, we extended the deckhouse by three feet, making the saloon a brighter, more airy interior with



larger windows and an optional opening sunroof," said David Hensel, Grand Banks' director of brand and marketing. "It was another key decision based on our discussions with owners who used their boats extensively and who indicated that, more and more, their focus was up in the saloon, the main living area."

A careless extension of the deckhouse might have destroyed the classic style lines of the yacht, which, from its gently raked stem and modestly springy sheer to its gradually curved transom, looks very well balanced, indeed. On the contrary, the added living space is proportional to the overall design lines, barely suggesting the utility and comfort it creates. Grand Banks' designers are known to be meticulous about interior details, but their scrupulousness with outside details—judging from the care taken to paint the bronze through-hulls in the boot stripe with the same Awlgrip, making them virtually disappear—is equally impressive.

### SAFETY ON DECK

Access and safe movement in the cockpit were considered next. The A-slatted teak swim platform, which extends the full width of the transom, makes boarding the 55 Eastbay SX from a floating dock easy, and cockpit entry is through a substantial transom door supplied with a heavy-duty stainless steel latching mechanism that will never come open accidentally. The handlaid, teak-planked cockpit sole on the tour boat was skillfully installed and caulked, with hatch covers that lined up precisely fore and aft. The cockpit is somewhat larger than the one found on the 54SX and features an aft-facing

bench seat with a section that raises up with a modest pull, cleverly concealing engine room access under one of its cushions.

For those who must move around and tend to lines, or deploy and retrieve the anchor, safety on deck is vital. Teak treads lead up to the side decks on both sides, as well as into the cabin on the starboard side. The wide, walkable side decks, the hard top, and the cabin top are finished in Awlgrip nonskid to help knock down glare and improve footing when conditions are damp. Sturdy, welded stainless steel handrails make climbing from cockpit to side decks much safer, and there is a welded secondary rail beneath the main rail to help keep crew on deck. Opening handrail sections on both sides are provided for boarding from a fixed-height dock.

In a nod to the traditions and times when Grand Banks yachts were constructed of teak, high-gloss teak toerails and teak light boards behind the navigation lights sparkle in the sun. For securing the boat properly at the dock or in a slip, stout stainless chocks and oversized cleats strengthened with large backing plates are carefully located on deck. There are stainless steel pop-up cleats aft dedicated to fender deployment, so docklines are not covered up on mooring cleats, making them easier to adjust, snub, and release.

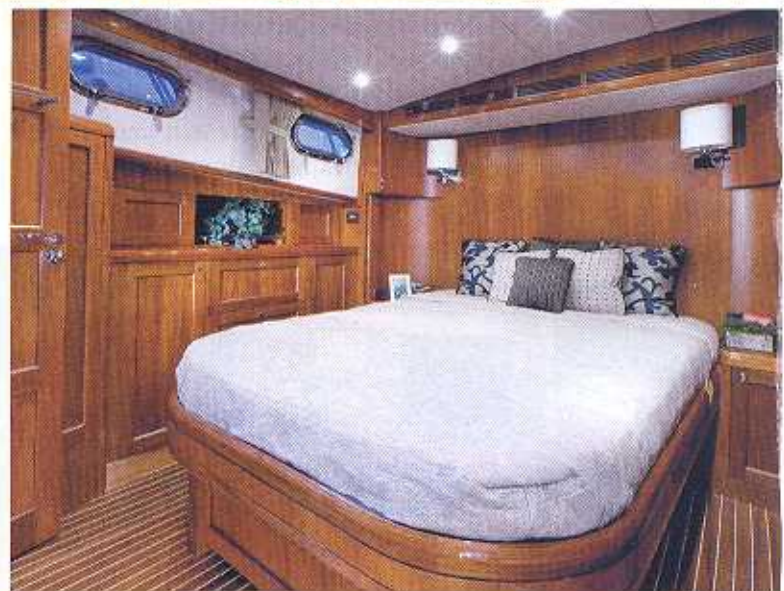
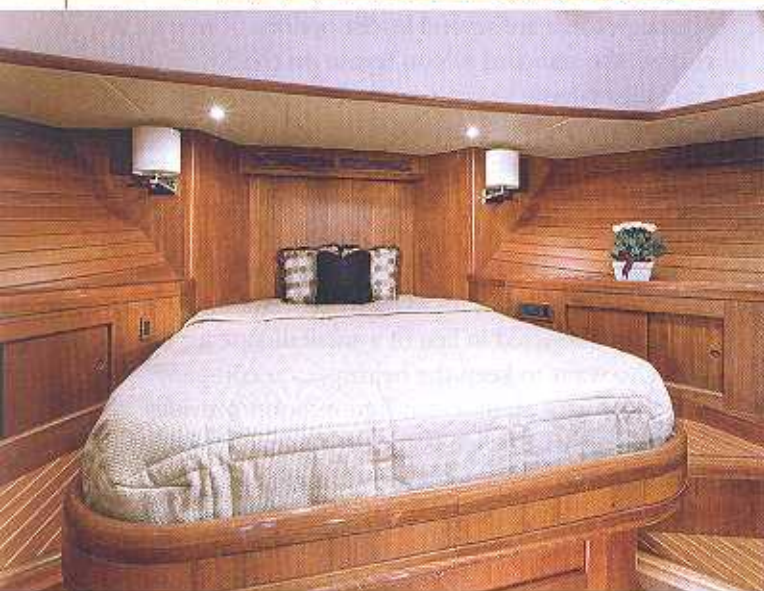
Although there are several layout options from which to choose, the standard saloon layout on the 55 Eastbay SX includes a large seating area aft to port, facing a long, beautiful teak entertainment center to starboard that houses a stereo system and TV on a lift, as well as drawer storage and a refrigerator. A high-low folding table of quartersawn teak, lovingly matched in grain and color, serves as a cocktail or dinner table for this comfortable sofa. Twin Stidd bench seats forward can be selected in lieu of a small dinette for those who want to keep the helmsperson company under way. A slide-out liquor locker provides storage for 10 wine bottles, hidden in the built-in cabinetry between the two lounges on the port side. You can opt for a barrel chair and ottoman in place of the starboard entertainment center if you prefer more seating aft.

Other interesting options for the saloon include relocating the galley from the accommodations level to the aft port or starboard corners and moving the large sofa and table forward. If you want to minimize trips down and up stairs to reach the galley or accommodations and don't need the extra seating, this option makes good sense.

Contemporary styling trends, consistent with the look established by Grand Banks Yachts in its new models



The well-designed helm has plenty of room for a full suite of Raymarine electronics and a chart flat just to port.



Top: The contemporary galley has twin under-counter refrigerators, black granite countertops, and loads of storage lockers. Above left: Guests will appreciate the island berth, teak cabinetry, and hanging lockers in the forward stateroom. Above right: The master stateroom features a queen island berth surrounded by handcrafted teak cabinetry.

dating back the last five or six years, include large bonded, tempered safety glass windows all around for outstanding visibility, plus a pair of curved aft-corner windows that add transparency in a traditional problem spot. As we have come to expect from Grand Banks

craftsmen, the use of carefully matched teak in bulkheads, built-in furniture, and cabinetry continues to achieve high standards for fit, finish, and beauty. Smooth and inviting to the touch, the satin finish most owners select is achieved with six coats of varnish inside (and



## GRAND BANKS 55 EASTBAY SX

LOA	59' 10"
LWL	50' 10"
BEAM	16' 4"
DRAFT	4' 4"
DISPLACEMENT	63,300 lb. (half load)
BRIDGE CLEARANCE	16' 2" (mast up) 12' 7" (mast down)
FUEL	1,000 U.S. gal.
WATER	180 U.S. gal.
HOLDING TANK	68 U.S. gal.
GENERATOR	21kW Onan e-QD
ENGINES	Twin 873hp Caterpillar C18 diesels (standard)
MAXIMUM SPEED	30.24 knots (standard power)
CRUISE SPEED	9-12 knots
RANGE AT CRUISE SPEED	1,396nm at 9 knots (with 10% reserve)
NAVAL ARCHITECT	C. Raymond Hunt & Associates
EXTERIOR/INTERIOR STYLING	Grand Banks Yachts
BUILDER	Grand Banks Yachts
BASE PRICE	On request

For more information:  
Grand Banks Yachts  
[grandbanks.com](http://grandbanks.com)



Looking forward in the brightly lit engine room, it is the clean, well-engineered systems that impress.

seven coats outside); although Grand Banks offers an option of high-gloss finish, as well.

The Stidd seat at the helm of the new 55SX is highly adjustable and comfortable, and the tilting, teak-rimmed steering wheel makes it easy to stand or sit comfortably for long periods while under way. Laid out with two large Raymarine E-120 multifunction displays in mind, the helm console is sized with room left over for the autopilot and a VHF radio or two close at hand. Several other nice touches are worthy of note: There is a rudder angle indicator mounted ahead of the wheel for easy orientation before using the throttles, the control for the Sleipner SidePower bow thruster is easy to reach just ahead of the digital engine controls, and a chart flat is found just to port of the wheel—a practical feature that Grand Banks owners will simply not do without. Additionally, there is a sturdy door just to starboard of the helm. "Many of our customers still want to singlehand, so we gave them quick access to the side deck with an outward-opening and latching door," Hensel said.

Grand Banks designers also positioned the helm closer to the windshield than was the case on the

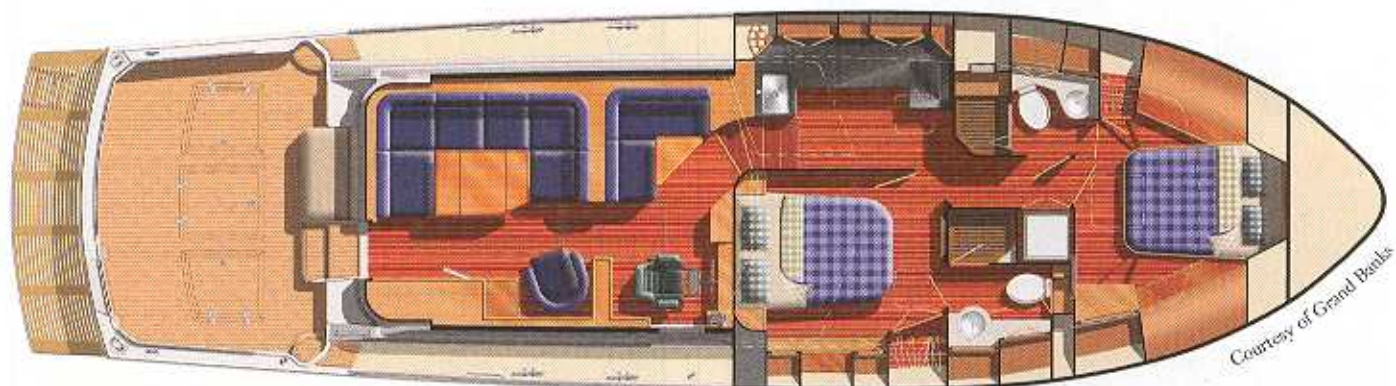
54SX, improving visibility and allowing easier communication with those on the foredeck. Visibility forward is kept perfectly clear with three large Exalto windshield washer/wipers controlled by a touch pad within easy reach of the wheel. Located on the face of a panel just to port of and below the wheel, the electrical panel includes six keyed remote battery switches, so you won't need to enter the engine room to turn the battery banks on or off. A day hatch in the gorgeous teak-and-holly cabin sole, on the centerline between the helm and passenger seats, makes it easy to drop down and check fluids without entering the engine room from the cockpit. Overhead, the optional power-actuated Trent Marine sunroof slides open and shut smoothly and quietly and includes hideaway OceanAir screens to block out unwanted light when the sun is directly overhead.



## INTELLIGENT IMPROVEMENTS AND ROOM TO SPARE

On the accommodations level of the previous 54SX, the galley was U-shaped and set to port, across from a dinette that could become an office/stateroom, with the master in the bow. The new 55SX layout stretches out the galley along the port side, places the master stateroom to port, and retains a large guest stateroom. The galley, well lit from windows overhead, now seems much more spacious. And there is also an option to move the master stateroom into the bow.

The galley boasts some notable design ideas that make



cruising distances more appealing. For example, the microwave is installed aft above the optional black granite countertop, with the door opening forward: a sensible placement for use under way. Lots of clever storage ideas appear in spaces that otherwise might have been wasted. Just below the microwave, the deep, stainless steel sink is large enough to hold soaking pots. Twin under-counter, drawer-style Vitrifrigo refrigerators are within easy reach of the working counter space. Storage is everywhere—beneath the steps, under the sole, beneath the refrigerators, and over the counters—more than enough for living aboard and eating well during long cruises. In addition to the forward windshields above, twin opening portholes bring in more light and the option of fresh air when desired.

"Following the lead of the 54SX, there was also a fair amount of living space devoted to the accommodations on the lower level forward that we wanted to preserve in the new 55SX," Hensel said as we toured the lower deck. First up: a spacious starboard owners' stateroom with abundant floor space, allowing easy access to both sides of the large fore-and-aft berth. Looking like a beloved piece of furniture from home, the built-in bureau with drawers along the hull side is a gorgeous piece crafted from teak with loads of storage. With Corian sinks and countertops, a separate shower stall, and a SeaLand

VacuFlush head, the en-suite head compartment offers the privacy and luxury Grand Banks owners have come to expect in a comfortable, livable master stateroom.

On the boat I toured, the hallway leading to the guest stateroom housed a locker with a Splendide combo washer-dryer below and a Vitrifrigo freezer above. The headroom here, about 6 feet 8 inches, was the lowest I found in the accommodations area. The forward stateroom was furnished with a large island berth with upholstered headboard, and equipped with an innerspring mattress much like the one in the master cabin. Teak storage cabinets flanked the berth, with two

cedar-lined hanging lockers nearby. There was a private access door to the portside head compartment, plus another door leading to the hallway for ease of use by daytime guests.

## A GB POWERHOUSE

Even though it did not offer standing headroom, the engine room of the 55 Eastbay SX I tested was easily navigated, brightly lit, and dominated by two 873hp diesels handed to make service points easily accessible along the walkway between them. Descending the ladder from the aft cockpit entrance, I found three Cruisair chilled-water air conditioning units located immediately to the port side of the dogged engine room door, with two large, fiberglass water-lift mufflers in the aft corners on either side. Moving forward on the port side outboard, a Charles Industries ISO-Boost isolation transformer sits within easy reach, next to the tub for a Glendinning Cablemaster and an inverter. Big Delta "T" ventilation systems were installed on both sides to keep the engine room cool and dry.

House batteries and starter batteries are found in heavy-duty boxes port and starboard, outboard of each engine, and they make a good perch for anyone working on the opposite side of the motors. Twin sets of duplex Racor water-separating fuel filters are situated on the



Stainless steel grabrails are well placed in the large, deep aft deck to help ensure safe movement to the saloon and side decks.

forward bulkhead. On the centerline beneath a removable teak grate, I found large engine cooling water intakes and Groco strainers within easy reach for regular cleaning. Intakes and strainers for the 21kW Onan genset and air conditioner cooling pumps are on the centerline aft, as is the Reverso oil changing system.

The engine beds are massive, with steel encapsulated on the upper face that was drilled and tapped to accept hefty engine mounts. For optimal noise attenuation, Grand Banks engineers specified the large, vibration-suppressing mounts, as well as a substantial number of sound-deadening panels overhead, on the bulkhead, and generally throughout the engine room.

The Grand Banks 55 Eastbay SX is a distance cruiser's dream under way. I first experienced the motion of this hull in its previous configuration, on the 54SX, in an offshore blow. I predict the 55SX will provide a platform that is just as comfortable in conditions that are similarly unkind. The Ray Hunt-designed hull banks gradually into turns and is capable of tight turns at speed—not more than four lengths—the kind of quick avoidance that will be appreciated when agile maneuvering is necessary. Not one of the

modifications to the deck or interior has changed the way this yacht handles.

Now that the twin 853hp Caterpillar C15 ACERT diesel inboards that were standard on the 54SX are no longer available, standard propulsion is provided by a pair of derated 873hp C18 diesels. For those who want more power, 1,000hp Cat C18s are available as an option. Fuel consumption for the new standard Cats is virtually identical to that of the 853hp Cats in the lower ranges: 5.8gph at 9 knots, with an approximate cruising range of 1,396 nautical miles, and 10.99gph at 11.9 knots, with an approximate range of 982 nautical miles. (Both ranges factor in a 10 percent reserve of fuel.)

Grand Banks popularized Downeast-style yachts with the introduction of its Eastbay 38 Express in 1993, another well-respected Raymond Hunt & Associates design. GB has long seen the need for efficiency and speed in cruising boats. The new 55 Eastbay SX is an outstanding addition to a line of yachts that has steadily improved on this duality while continuing the themes of luxury accommodations and unwavering craftsmanship. 