

An N55 that's tailor-made

Exterior



[Daytime Profile](#)



[Daytime Transom](#)



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[Nighttime Fwd Quarter](#)



[Guests admire "Rhapsody" at her christening party](#)

Interior



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Interiors shot by Neil Rabinowitz

By Jeff Merrill

Mark and Michelle Doppe have completed the perfect Nordhavn 55 for themselves and by doing so have probably created the world's smallest mega yacht. Not trying to coin an oxymoronic phrase, I just can't find an easy way to express what an incredible boat the new *Rhapsody* is.

Let me back up a bit, because a little history might help to explain an interesting pattern that has developed here. A few years ago a stock Nordhavn 40 mark II arrived in Dana Point. Within hours of its arrival the first people who walked aboard [bought her](#), and yes, it was Mark and Michelle.

The 40II was purchased with the plan from the start to use the original *Rhapsody* as a way to literally test the waters of the cruising lifestyle and this 40 became the Doppes' proving platform to try out electronics, entertainment, fuel and oil systems, etc. and to essentially become immersed in the joys of extended liveaboard trips (that included their German Shepherd dogs!).

Satisfied that this was a great way to spend time together on the water, Mark asked me to sell their 40 (which was loaded with gear and sold with everything aboard to a dockmate admirer without ever being listed on the market) and we evaluated which larger sized Nordhavn would be the next best logical step.

After a careful evaluation of big Nordhavns - including the 68 and 76 - it became clear that what Mark and Michelle really wanted was a very custom build, something that we really couldn't accommodate reasonably without considerable collaboration and cooperation with our extremely busy and back ordered yards. It was a bit daunting...and frustrating – they knew exactly what they wanted and we didn't think we could deliver without significantly impacting the production cycle...then Mark had an idea.

He asked me about buying the next unsold Nordhavn 55 – just finish it as is, stock as possible and he'd receive it in Seattle and then turn it over as an extensive custom retrofit project under the guidance of Larry Schildwachter and his talented team at Emerald Harbor Marine on Elliott Bay in Seattle. (Mark and Larry worked on quite a few projects on the 40II so a strong working relationship built on trust and experience was already in place.)

After several months of work, the final result was launched in June. Mark and Michelle threw an incredible christening party and my wife Pam and I flew up to Seattle for the day to join in the festivities.

Wow, STUNNING! I can think of an assortment of appropriate adjectives to try to describe the Nordhavn 55 *Rhapsody*, but I'm going to take the easy way out and rely on some pictures to do the talking. Sylvia Bolton of Sylvia Bolton Design worked with the Doppes and Emerald Harbor delivered a 55 that truly raises the bar...and points out that you *can* build a custom Nordhavn, if you have a vision and patience. The concept of buying a stock boat, then ripping it apart to start over (not a notion to be entered into lightly) is an enormous undertaking – time frame and budget were stretched, but the underlying Nordhavn DNA design, systems and solid construction backbone allowed for an incomparable combination with the final result an unrivaled 55 - exactly what Mark and Michelle envisioned.

There are too many upgrades to list, but my favorites include a built in piano in the saloon (Mark is an accomplished pianist) and a converted office up in the pilothouse captain's cabin...and, how could I not mention the beautiful blue hull paint job? It is simply gorgeous!

Reading about *Rhapsody* can only give you a hint of what the Doppes have accomplished...seeing for yourself is the only way you can truly appreciate her.

Continuing the spirit of their magnanimous christening party the Doppes have graciously allowed us to show off *Rhapsody* at the [Lake Union Boats Afloat show](#) in Seattle, September 10 – 14, 2008. If you would like to make arrangements to view her please let me know. Our Seattle staff including Don Kohlmann, Barbara Lippert and Wilma Bracken will be at the show to escort you.

I would be remiss if I didn't thank, acknowledge and credit my old friend Neil Rabinowitz for his beautiful interior photos. If you can't make the show I'm sure you can get a wonderful impression of *Rhapsody* by viewing his work herein.

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