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# ShowBoats INTERNATIONAL

# MOVABLE FEAST



Restaurateurs use their Hargrave 78 as a mobile home while they pursue their semi-professional passion for fishing

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY NEIL RABINOWITZ



**T**he weather is an easy call in Southeast Alaska. There are nearly 40 names for precipitation. Misty Fjords National Monument, just south of Ketchikan, greeted the Hargrave 78 *Crab Pot* with a brooding mist. Hargraves generally are not considered expedition

yachts, but in the Griffith family's hands, *Crab Pot* was in an adventurous mood. They were on a mission, cruising on their new yacht through cloud-shrouded fjords along the edge of nearly 2.3 million acres of wilderness populated by wolf and grizzly, filled with thick forests of Sitka spruce, hemlock and cedar, and lined by vertical slopes painted with cascading waterfalls tumbling into tranquil emerald coves.

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Owners of many delectable and notorious seafood restaurants along the U.S. West Coast and beyond, the Griffiths have been gunkholing coastal haunts in the Northwest for seafood inspiration for nearly 40 years. Each year, they venture to new parts of the nearly 23,000 miles of shoreline between Seattle and Alaska. As a family, they catch and sample the best seafood they can find, researching new spots and challenging the elements to discover a fresh approach to seafood to add pizzazz to their menus.

Joan and Hal Griffith were both born in the Northwest and spent their youths kicking about in boats. Joan fished with her brothers. As a kid, Hal worked in Gig Harbor near the ferry landing running food concessions. He eventually graduated into restaurants, leasing a downtown Seattle pier from the city and establishing the nucleus of what was to become a landmark Northwest seafood eatery. But the roots of his success run back to his early fishing days.

"We took our honeymoon thirty years ago on a small sailboat and spent our days setting crab pots, fishing, digging clams and dangling a line overboard for salmon," says Hal Griffith. "Obviously it was something we both really loved, since we decided to make that the focal point of our honeymoon."

As the years went by, they explored the Northwest in small flotillas with friends in other boats, fishing wherever they went.

"We started out in sailboats, but we'd just be escaping Puget Sound when our friends would whistle past us, waving from powerboats," Griffith says. "They'd reach an anchorage and all the fish would

have been caught and the drinks and dinner done by the time we'd arrive in darkness, inching ahead by flashlight. That's when we realized the Northwest belonged to powerboat cruisers."

They bought a small cruiser and fished the Georgia Straits for six years before buying a Tolly 44, which burned in the great Seattle Yacht Club fire of 2001. Then they moved up to a Tolly 65 and fished the entire coast until commissioning the Hargrave in 2007.

For years, the Griffiths' fleet of fishing buddies cruised the coastal inlets, stretching the limits of their fishing grounds further each season, sharing the best of their catch and feasting on the highlights of one another's success.

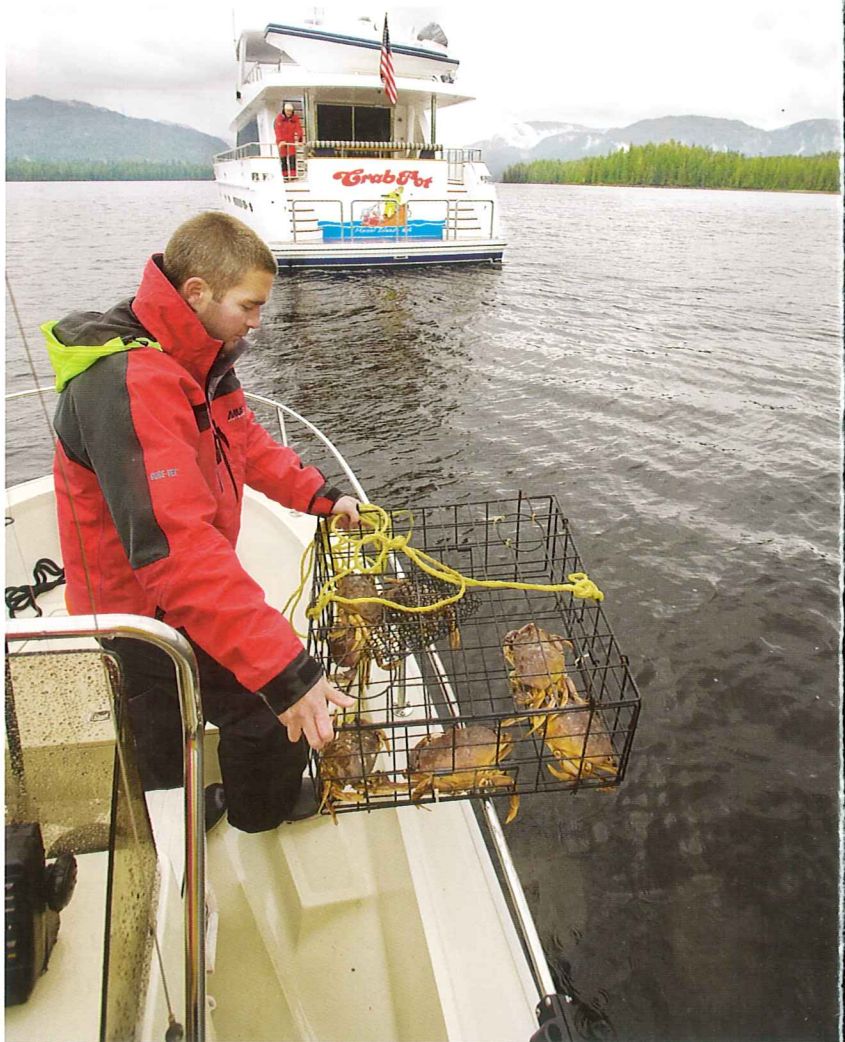
"We built our entire restaurant's image of Northwest cuisine around casual seafood feasting, much like we did aboard each other's yachts," explains Griffith. "Every season we'd learn a new spot or fishing technique and built our recipes and our menu concept with our friends' contributions. This year I ran into a crab boat while pulling our Hargrave into a remote anchorage, and his catch was distinctive. He'll probably join our supply line this season."

The Griffiths' Seattle seafood empire is stretching nationwide, a family business inspired by the motivational fishing excursions that have become a family heritage.

"For a while, no matter the weather, we would head out in a small 24-footer and fish from dawn to dusk and then hunker down among the pots and rods and reels and camp overnight on board," Griffith recalls. "We always had a dog, and if we wanted to get farther north and didn't have time, we'd leave the boat along the coast and hop onto Kenmore's [floatplane service] in Seattle and return to land by our boat and begin fishing again. Now we tow a Whaler on a bridle a thousand miles along the coast behind our Hargrave, and it's like coming home to comfort and luxury each night."

*Crab Pot* turned south from Ketchikan into Misty Fjords, running the 100-mile Behm Canal and anchoring in Punchbowl fjord, draped in mist and dripping greenery. With a lazarette teeming with an assortment of rods, reels, crab and shrimp traps, and bait of all varieties, Griffith and his two boys, Troy and Kyle (who run the Seattle restaurants), load the Whaler and run into open fishing grounds, setting traps, trolling and dodging breaching whales and swooping bald eagles. Once in a while they snag an undesirable rockfish, hold it aloft and whistle for the eagles, which sprint from the treetops, leading with their talons, and snatch the fish out of the air to retreat again to dine in the branches. »

**Previous page:** *Crab Pot* entering Misty Fjords National Monument. **Opposite, clockwise from top left:** owner Hal Griffith in his element, the galley, after a productive haul; *Crab Pot* runs out of Punchbowl; Troy Griffith hauls the trap from their Whaler; brown bear (grizzly) are on their own seafood quest.





Clockwise from top:  
The main salon;  
Eddystone Rock is a  
familiar volcanic  
landmark in the  
Behm Canal en route  
from Ketchikan  
to Misty Fjords;  
the Griffith family  
hamming it up  
on their swim step.



The Hargrave wasn't conceived for fishing. "I want ultimate maneuverability to nestle amongst rocks and follow tide lines," explains Hal Griffith, "so towing was always our plan. Besides, I fish with all the fixings—downriggers and a cat's cradle of lines and gear. I want to keep the big boat clean and uncluttered."

Despite being fitted with trolling valves for slow-speed running and fishing, *Crab Pot* was established solely as home base for their intrepid fishing exploits. The interior was conceived as an entirely open layout from the main salon doors to the wheelhouse forward. The amidships galley, where Hal and Joan are often wearing aprons and filleting, is the center of activity, with on-deck panoramic views and enough galley counter space to rival a commercial kitchen.

As are many Northwest-owned boats, *Crab Pot* is fitted for shorthanded operation with wing stations and an unobstructed view forward from the wheelhouse all the way astern

out the aft windows. An additional aft steering station assists with docking or challenging maneuvering, sometimes involving the towed boat.

As the weather turned harsh, *Crab Pot* moved deeper into the cul-de-sac of the Punchbowl, threading a narrow gauntlet of rock down Rudyerd Bay and entering an amphitheater ribboned with waterfalls, a cathedral of towering snow-capped mountains, sheer granite cliffs and solitude.

*Crab Pot* features twin helm stations above and below, with the flying bridge fitted with an optional clear enclosure. But even the coldest Alaskan summer could not faze the Griffiths, who chose even through driving rain to run the yacht from topside, keeping a watchful eye for logs and floating debris washed out by flooding rivers.

Powered by twin 1,760-hp Caterpillar C32s, the boat reaches a sprint over 23 knots. She cruises at 800 rpm at 11 knots, burning less than eight gallons per hour.



**Clockwise from top left: Floatplane service will deliver you to your yacht or to sightsee along the fjords from Ketchikan; *Crab Pot's* flybridge provides a viewing platform for bear, whales and otter; bald eagles in Alaska are as common as pigeons in the city; *Crab Pot's* Lower Helm Station.**

Running the boat is a passion for Griffith, who rarely surrenders the helm to family members. It replenishes his spirit and takes him away from a consuming business.

“We come back from these voyages where the four of us just relax, fish, focus on family time and remember what gave rise to this business to begin with,” says Kyle Griffith. “It has become the secret ingredient to our success in the seafood business.”

“Having fished ourselves, we take nothing about the product for granted,” says Troy Griffith. “Our guests sense this appreciation we have for the food we serve. Our boat is the perfect mothership for our fishing exploits. At times we have a handful of other yachts anchored nearby, and their owners arrive in tenders with armloads of fresh catch. Nothing beats the feasts we serve on board.”

At the end of the season, as Alaskan waters cool and boats turn south, the Griffiths, who are die-hard Washington

Huskies football fans, put away their fishing gear and bring their boat to each Saturday home game. The lake-side stadium sits in full view of the snow-capped Cascades overlooking Lake Washington, where 70,000 enthusiastic fans converge. The stadium marina rocks with football fans aboard a crazed fleet of supporters.

As *Crab Pot* ties dockside, the purple-clad pom-pom girls, cheerleaders and marching brass band converge on the boat and spill over the docks as the seafood platters circulate among the lucky patrons, and another *Crab Pot* testing ground comes to life. The Galloping Gourmet has nothing on *Crab Pot*, as this off-season cruising spectacle provides another venue for the best seafood on the planet. With a gridiron kick-off over their shoulders and a distant Alaska cruise a recent memory, the Griffiths surely will be joined by others in the upcoming season. Just don't count on the same menu. ☺



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