

BUILDING A DREAM



Just launched at the Seward south ramp.

The Ashbreez Boatworks St. Elias 28XL Monohull

Photos courtesy of Ashbreez Boatworks

This past August in the quiet of a calm morning, just before the sun rose over the eastern mountains of Resurrection Bay, Ashbreez Boatworks launched the latest rendition of their St. Elias monohull series, the 28XL.

The St. Elias 28XL was born as a result of a Florida client's request for a vessel that would serve both as a cruiser and a fishing platform. That could range from fishing the flats of Florida or the Gulf of Mexico to achieving a long-held dream of cruising the Great Loop (going up the Intercoastal waterway of the East Coast of the U.S., up the Hudson River, through the Erie Canal, the Great Lakes to Lake Michigan, down the Illinois and Mississippi rivers and back to Florida), or scooting over to the Bahamas after trailering it to the Florida Keys. The St. Elias 28XL is versatile enough to accomplish all of these.

The idea was conceived in January 2019, when client David Hull expressed interest in the St. Elias 28 that Ashbreez had built on speculation. After talking over a period of two months, discussing his ideas with Joel Morse, Co-Founder and Marine Artisan at Ashbreez Boatworks, David decided to commission a new build. With so many unique requests, it would have been costly to retrofit the existing spec 28 to meet his needs. David and his wife visited the Ashbreez shop in early March and by mid-March, committed to a new commission.

In 2015, Ashbreez entered a collaboration with Armstrong Marine USA (Port Angeles,



The helm.

The dinette is stylish and multifunctional.

The Sylvia Rene sports an expansive fishing deck.



Stern view.

WA) with whom they contract for bare hulls to Armstrong's design. Armstrong is willing to make hull modifications that Ashbreez desires, working with Armstrong's naval architects to achieve them. For this build, Ashbreez asked Armstrong to make the boat a full 28 feet of usable space and add a transom offshore extension bracket. This

was a first for Armstrong, but they did not hesitate to make the design changes. Hence, the St. Elias 28XL.

The bare hull was begun in mid-April. Over the course of the build, Joel traveled to the Armstrong facility three times, checking in on the build, working through modifications, and when the bare hull was

complete, assisted in the readying of it for travel on Totem Ocean Trailer Express (TOTE) to the Ashbreez shop in Anchorage, where it arrived in mid-June.

Upon its arrival, 340 hours of work went into making it the dream vessel that David desired, with all his unique requests incorporated into the build. As Chad Morse, Owner and Co-Founder of Ashbreez states, "That is the beauty of a custom boat. Unlike production boats, in a custom boat, you get to choose what you want in your boat—the colors, the interior and deck layout, the accessories. You don't have to accept what someone else decided was the ideal boat; you are creating your own ideal boat." He adds, "Of course, every boat is a compromise. You are limited by the constraints of the design, but within those constraints, you get to have a lot of choices."

Over the next eight weeks, the sole focus of the Ashbreez shop was the 28XL—the *M/V Sylvia Rene*. A bare hull is just that—a bare hull. There are no windows, interior sole, seats, equipment...nothing. At this point, it is shiny aluminum in the shape of a boat. While the bare hull was being built in Port Angeles, orders were underway for everything that was needed to complete the boat: sheet goods, interior paint, plumbing, electronics, motors, teak, hoses, electrical wiring and panels, fixtures, lights...the list is long with the majority sourced from

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West Marine Pro in Anchorage and Fisheries Supply in Seattle.

Upon its June arrival in Anchorage, those 300-plus hours of work commenced. Additional aluminum fabrication in this build included the seat boxes, galley, davit, trolling motor mount, tie downs, dive ladder, exterior fishing rod holders, hammock hooks, storage units, electrical cabinet, etc. Joel worked alongside the crew at Greatland Welding & Machine in Palmer to accomplish these tasks over the course of a week. Joel arrived with his drawings in hand, fabricated the parts and Greatland welded them.

Next on the list was the etching, priming, and painting of the interior and all the newly fabricated items that would go into that interior. And from there, it was practically nonstop from insulating the cabin and v-berth, to paneling and trimming it, to installing the electrical system, the plumbing, the electronics, making countertops and tables, to name just a few of the tasks. It is difficult to compress 300+ hours into a paragraph! It truly takes an accomplished marine artisan like Joel to accomplish the myriad of details necessary to build such a custom boat. This is not an assembly line process and the resulting product is unique.

One of the more unique design incorporations was a Rhodan 120-pound-thrust electric trolling motor, mounted on the port bow and powered by a 36-volt lithium battery. It has a wireless remote control and built-in GPS. David wanted it because of the areas he fishes. Amazingly, during the week-long sea trials, David and Joel found that it could easily hold position over hot fishing spots while fishing for rockfish in Resurrection Bay. And in a pinch, it can even be used as a bow thruster! (Read George Krumm's feature article, *The Game Changer*, in the May 2016 *Fish Alaska* issue for more information on using wirelessly controlled, bow-mounted electric trolling motors for west coast applications.)

The *Sylvia Rene* is powered by a Suzuki DF350A duoprop outboard sourced through Seward Heavy Industrial in Seward, AK. Additionally, there is a Suzuki DF6A 6 HP kicker motor stern mounted on an adjustable motor bracket; being portable, it can be used on the boat's dinghy as well.

While the main motor had only gone through its first 15 hours during sea trials, initial results indicate a top speed of 43.6 mph at near full throttle and an average of 2 miles per gallon (mpg) in speed ranges of 22-33 mph. For the entire 15-hour period, from wide-open throttle to idling, it averaged 2.3 mpg.

If you are going to use this boat to accomplish adventures such as those outlined earlier, you need creature comforts. This interior has them! The cabin is light and airy, white and light gray in color, with oiled teak

trim and comfortable upholstery, custom made by Kevin's Upholstery in Chugiak, AK. There is a Formica-topped dinette that will convert to a double berth. The forward dinette bench seat converts to a co-helm seat through a unique design that Joel fabricated. There is storage beneath both seat boxes. The Formica-topped and teak-trimmed galley cabinet features a sink, drop-in Dickinson 2-burner propane stove, an Isotherm 5.5 cubic-foot refrigerator, and underneath storage in the form of a 3-drawer cabinet and a large open storage cabinet. Additionally, there's no need to worry about being warm; an Espar D2 heater is routed to the cabin. If you are traveling the Great Loop (or perhaps the Inside Passage or touring Prince William Sound), it will be handy!

The hub of any boat is the helm station. The captain will be comfortable in the shock-mitigating Shockwave S5 suspension base paired with Shockwave's Corbin 2 helm seat. Electronics consist of a Garmin GPS Map 8612 multifunction display, Garmin 18 HD 4 kW radar, and a Garmin VHF 100 radio.

Forward, the cuddy cabin is finished with an insulated overhead trimmed in teak, hull liner on the sides, an overhead hatch with a day/night solar vent, reading lamp, and open storage both port and starboard. There are also hammock hooks for hanging a hammock. The v-berth cushions match those in the main cabin.

The head/wet locker is accessed from the aft deck. Inside, there is a composting head and a shower with hot and cold running water. On deck, there is a recess-mounted, hot and cold outdoor shower. Truly a self-contained vessel!

For all the fish this boat will be catching in Florida and points beyond, there are two outlets for freshwater washdown, as well as an outlet for saltwater washdown. There are two fish holds with pumps for evacuation, as well as a large hull access hatch. Rocket launchers for fishing rods are port and starboard on the cabin roof, attached to handrails, keeping the aft cabin roof clear so the dinghy can easily be hoisted aboard with the pulley system that was rigged for that purpose.

The exterior white, gray, and black color accents on *Sylvia Rene* are vinyl. The hull is clear-coated, which is refreshed every three years by simply wiping down the hull with the chosen product. In this case, Nyalic was applied at Armstrong prior to shipping the bare hull to Alaska.

David, his son-in-law, Brian, and grandson, Joe, made their way north from Florida in mid-August for week-long sea trials and orientation to the 28XL. How could you commission a boat build in Alaska and not at least get to use it on beautiful Resurrection Bay? What better way to do that than live aboard in a transient slip in Seward Harbor and make daily excursions into the Bay and surrounding areas, all the while testing

everything on board before *Sylvia Rene* was shipped south in mid-Fall? What orientation trip would be complete without an initiation process to truly christen it as a fishing boat? How about 60 pounds of silver and rockfish fillets? Unfortunately, the wind and seas were running too high to head outside the Bay for halibut; charters even canceled halibut trips.

"Ashbreez was excited to work with David in fulfilling this portion of his dream," Chad said. "This is our third bare hull in our 4-year collaboration with Armstrong, and it is a relationship that just makes sense. Why would we reinvent the proverbial wheel, when Armstrong USA has been building strong, reliable, proven hulls for over 30 years? They are willing to work with us, making design adaptations that we request, and provide the foundation for the Ashbreez series of hulls. Charlie Crane, Perry Knudson, and their crew have been a pleasure to work with."

Ashbreez's first build was a 2016, 32-foot by 11-foot catamaran in their Resurrection catamaran series. The second was a monohull 28-foot in their St. Elias series, built on speculation. That boat was sold to a family of four in March 2019 and they have been using it extensively throughout southcentral Alaska waters. They reported to Ashbreez that they had 270 hours on it by mid-August. Both of those build processes are highlighted on the Ashbreez website.

"We are a versatile company," Chad says. "Our bread and butter is major boat repair, fiberglass repair, topside repainting/refinishing, systems installations and electrical work, outboard re-powers, inboard-to-outboard conversions, and general repairs and maintenance. Building new custom boats is icing on the cake and we will continue to look forward to growth in that arena."

Boat owner David Hull had this to say, "Joel and Chad are wonderful people to deal with. Joel is a magician and knows exactly how to put things together. He built everything with very tight tolerances. He is a superb boat builder. The boat handles like a dream. I am really looking forward to traveling the Loop and completing the 6000 mile journey in the boat starting in May."

Meanwhile, the *Sylvia Rene* is making its way south to its home in Florida after having successful Resurrection Bay sea trials. Some additional features were added before she was loaded on TOTE for the return trip to Tacoma, where she went on the road to her new home. Her adventures are just beginning!

If you would like to see examples of many of Ashbreez Boatworks capabilities, check out their website (ashbreezboatworks.com) or Facebook page. I'm sure they would be more than happy to discuss your boat building dreams, as well.



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