

FAMILY

First

A Newport builder and its brood takes the work hard, play hard philosophy to extremes

THEIRS ISN'T THE TYPICAL FAMILY. THE KIRBY AND PERKINS CLAN, WITH Jerry Kirby and Tom Perkins at the helm, are a tight-knit pack comprised of pilots, kitesurfers, rock climbers, skydivers and professional sailors, to say nothing of hockey players, scratch golfers and horseback riders. But it's sailing that's both an obsession and a way of life for many in the Newport family. The sporting world knows Jerry Kirby for his six America's Cup campaigns—including his 1992 win—and as a crewmember for the Volvo Ocean Race, a harrowing, around-the-world offshore sailing competition that makes "*The Deadliest Catch* look like the Holiday Inn," says Kirby.



THE FAMILY THAT PLAYS TOGETHER, STAYS TOGETHER.



Tom Perkins and Jerry Kirby
Photography by Roger Pelissier



Photography by Roger Pelissier



Photography by Warren Jagger

Jerry's son Rome also has saltwater in his veins. Rome made America's Cup history in 2013 as a trimmer on Oracle Team USA, the high-speed yacht that bested Emirates Team New Zealand in a record-setting comeback of 9-8. Jerry, who's nearly 60, and Rome, now 26, are widely considered to be the first father and son to win the America's Cup, a laurel that's as prestigious as it gets in a yachting town like Newport.

Perkins hasn't clinched the Auld Mug like his brother-in-law or nephew, but he's every bit a sailor, too. He and Jerry competed against one another in a Newport regatta as kids, and he's done his share of races.

While adventure may seem like the family business, it isn't. Building is. Jerry launched his Newport-based business in 1980 with just "one man and a pickup truck," and Perkins joined him in 1987. Now, Kirby Perkins Construction has over 150 employees and is revered for the old-world craftsmanship that pervades its structures. Together, the band of brothers have built more than a successful company; they've struck a balance that allows Perkins to captain the business while Jerry is manning maxi boats in locales like St. Tropez and the Maltese Islands.

When the family isn't making history, they preserve it. Yet another legacy that runs deep, Jerry's uncle and father were preservationists, and Kirby Perkins Construction has followed suit by restoring many of Rhode Island's most iconic structures. Aloha Landing, the boathouse of railroad magnate Arthur Curtiss James' three-masted schooner, and Rock Cliff Estate on world-famous Bellevue Avenue, are among them.

Aloha Landing





“IF YOU’RE GOING TO MAKE
A SUPERYACHT, MAKE IT A
SUPERYACHT.”

Jerry Kirby’s work as a professional sailor has impacted his company and his nuclear family. His wife, Kim, and sons—“have lived all over the world,” Kim explains, citing New Zealand, Australia and the Isle of Wight as places they’ve called home. As an interior designer and lover of textiles, her travels have been a “fabric lover’s dream,” not a sacrifice. In supporting her husband and keeping her family together, she could also scour silks in Singapore and weaves in Africa. Such experiences now inform her work as principal of Kim Kirby Interior Design—the firm behind the inspired interior of the Aloha boathouse and warm grandeur of Rock Cliff.

Jerry, too, brings what he’s gleaned back to the office, particularly with regard to risk.

“When you’re at sea and something breaks, you have to come up with solutions,” says Perkins. You can’t stop at the nearest iceberg for help, he and Jerry joke.

Such innovation has spawned some brave building choices at Kirby Perkins—like tunneling under a Newport mansion without cracking any plaster to create a jaw-dropping superyacht basement or restoring the parquet floors of the parlor in the same property by hand sanding them and treating it as you would a laminate on a boat.



Kim Kirby
Hot Rose Photography

“Most of the crazy ideas we’ve come up with,” says Kirby, “come from a fusion of being exposed to superyachts and the homes of the people we sail for.”

What’s been good for the family has been good for business. On the sailing circuit, resources flow as readily as the Veuve Clicquot; Jerry and Kim are privy to a world of superyachts and environments that are almost unfathomable for their luxury and lifestyle. These sights and experiences are tucked away like memories but resurface back in Newport, where they are channeled into homes and settings that are truly a cut above.

Text by Sandy Giardi

WHAT LIES BENEATH...



Photography by Warren Jagger

