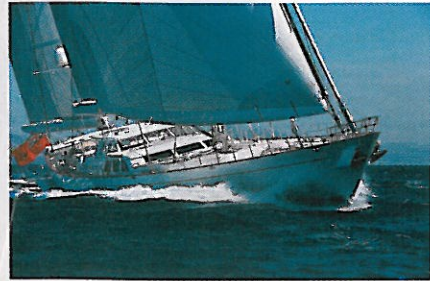




ON THE WATERFRONT
ALICE HUISMAN
WITH BILL JOY AND
A MODEL OF HIS
ETHEREAL (SEEN AT
FAR RIGHT), THE MOST
ENERGY-EFFICIENT
MEGAYACHT Afloat



Sails Force

The tech world's preeminent boat builder, Royal Huisman, is seeing steady demand for its impeccably crafted custom yachts. **BY DAVID A. KAPLAN**

THE PASTORAL DUTCH VILLAGE of Vollenhove might seem an odd place for two of the tech world's most celebrated launches. But just outside Amsterdam, the Royal Huisman Shipyard has done it again with two magnificent custom-built megayachts. There's the 190-foot ketch *Ethereal*—owned by Bill Joy, a co-founder of Sun Microsystems and now a Silicon Valley venture capitalist—which is the most eco-friendly, energy-efficient boat afloat. And the sleek 138-foot *Hanuman*, currently crossing the Atlantic, is a replica of the great J-class racer *Endeavour II* from the 1930s and the latest nautical plaything of Netscape co-founder Jim Clark.

Shipbuilding has traditionally been a man's world. But overseeing both boats is 48-year-old Alice Huisman, oldest daughter of the late Wolter Huisman, who ran the venerated 125-year-old family business before her. Alice was an apprentice even before she was a teenager—scrubbing boats (and scrubbing dishes when luminaries like Baron Edmond

de Rothschild came for dinner). She eventually attended business school in the Netherlands and was clearly being groomed. Yet when Wolter, in failing health, asked her in late 2003 to take over, she hesitated. The clients could be prima donnas, and the yard's technologies for yachts (which can cost up to \$100 million) were complicated. "I'm not my father," she says now, "and that was something I had to keep reminding the boys." But she signed on anyway.

She may not have her father's technical prowess, but, along with nearly 400 craftsman and engineers, she has maintained the impossibly high standards he was known for, from perfectly fitted joints to handmade winches. She's also become a true CEO, keeping a closer eye on the bottom line and marketing the business aggressively with beautiful coffee-table books about the boats, which she distributes to potential clients.

Alice is the company's "most entrepreneurial and market-focused person," says Bruce Katz, co-founder of the Rockport shoe company, whose 143-foot ketch *Juliet* is a yard classic. "It takes a special person to engineer complex ships that can go to sea safely, and deal with customers who at times want you to defy gravity in the designs."

Since she took over five years ago, revenues have increased to a record \$70 million. "Alice has succeeded in making it more of a commercial enterprise," says Joe Vittoria, a longtime U.S. yachtsman. Even with the recent loss of two long-range projects, including a 243-foot windjammer, Huisman expects to maintain about a 2% profit margin and to keep the workforce intact. In this economy, that's smooth sailing. ■