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US EDITION

# BOAT

International

**TECH,  
TOYS AND  
TENDERS**  
THE 2026  
ROUND-UP

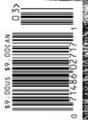
**WHAT  
MAKES A  
VILLA IN  
ST BARTHS  
A SURE  
BET?**

## STYLE ICON

**THE ADMIRAL 72, GIORGIO ARMANI'S**

**PARTING GIFT TO YACHTING**

Showboats



BEYOND CABO: THE LURE OF THE BAJA PENINSULA

# Owners' Club

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Matthew Sawyer,  
principal and CEO of  
Art Weiss Industrial  
Properties in  
California, gives  
back to marine  
conservation  
charities and youth  
organizations

**“Philanthropy helped  
answer the question:  
why do you do all this?”**

Owner Matthew Sawyer on how he found a way to merge  
a lifelong love of the ocean with his philanthropic efforts

**THIS MONTH:** a classic dream come true on Sea Tabby / setting off to sail around the world / the switch from sail to motor

EDITED BY Caroline White





ON BOARD WITH

## Matthew Sawyer

Cecile Gauert meets an owner who has merged his love for the ocean with philanthropy

**LIVES:** SAN DIEGO WITH HIS FAMILY AND THREE DOGS  
**FAVORITE CRUISING:** THE EXUMAS  
**FIRST BOAT:** 10-FOOT INFLATABLE MADE BY LONESTAR  
**CHARTERS:** CHALLENGER 350  
**FAVORITE PLACE TO PLAY GOLF:** PEBBLE BEACH  
**GREW UP:** SEAL BEACH, NORTH OF SAN DIEGO  
**PLAYS:** POKER

The sun slips behind the horizon and the yachts docked along the face dock at Fort Lauderdale's Pier Sixty-Six marina begin to glow. On the top deck of the recently refitted Palmer Johnson *Norma Jean*, a 2009 150-foot Nuvolari-Lenard yacht built in Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin, and a popular yacht on the charter market, two boys and two girls wearing matching T-shirts have gathered around the Jacuzzi. They flash their best smiles, which say, "we're on top of the world" and pause for a moment in front of a camera before turning back into being kids around bubbling water, which is changing colors for added fun.

One deck below in the yacht's sky lounge, the yacht's owner, Matthew Sawyer, chats with friends and greets newcomers with a friendly smile. There is a constant flow



Matthew Sawyer and Yacht Rendezvous co-founder Rita Case with children from the Boys & Girls Clubs of Broward County at the 2025 event at Pier Sixty-Six

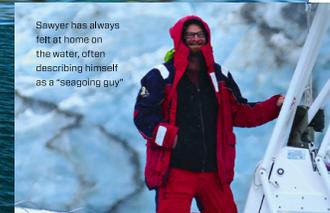


between the salon and the aft deck. More kids, wearing their Boys & Girls Clubs of Broward County (BGCBC) white T-shirts, walk among guests dressed for the white party under the watchful eye of chaperones and occasionally graze on finger foods. The youngsters from various clubs around Broward County seem perfectly at ease among the friendly crowd.

"I am glad they got on there and had some fun," Sawyer says as we catch up a few weeks later, before his workday starts in San Diego, California, and I mention the kids enjoying themselves. "That's what this is for."

The clubs, which offer after-school programs, guidance, camaraderie and sports, have much to gain from this gathering of superyachts and owners. The funds raised help the organization offer these programs at a minimal charge, making the activities accessible to all who qualify. At 60 years and counting, the Yacht Rendezvous, the local clubs' headlining event, is among the longest-running and most successful yacht charities. The 2025 weekend event alone raised over \$2 million for the local clubs.

PHOTOGRAPH: COURTESY OF OWNER; DOWNTOWN PHOTO



Sawyer has always felt at home on the water, often describing himself as a "seagoing guy"

know, we should be looking at other things, too. And those other things would be helping our communities and helping the kids of the communities."

He'd been to Fort Lauderdale many times. He had heard about the Yacht Rendezvous, which takes place each year right after the Fort Lauderdale International Boat Show,

and reached out to the organizers to learn more. He visited some of the clubs, spoke with the organizers and went to his first Rendezvous at Fisher Island in Miami (before the event moved to Fort Lauderdale last year). "I really like what they stand for," he says. His interest has expanded to local clubs in California, too.

"I do like those youth-focused organizations because there's so much untapped potential in these youngsters, you know, and if you don't intervene early on in their life, you miss out. I mean, a lot of them are fantastic, and they can grow to contribute themselves later in life."

In just a few years, he has joined a number of organizations that support marine conservation and young people, including via the family's Asher Foundation. Among them are Oceana, the International Seakeepers Society, the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, Junior Achievement, First Tee, UC San Diego, Monterey Peninsula Foundation, Birch Aquarium and several more.

The event appealed to Sawyer, the 42-year-old principal and CEO of Southern California commercial real estate company Art Weiss Industrial Properties. The name derives from Sawyer's grandfather, Arthur Weiss, who left the used-car business to establish the company in the 1950s. The event merges two of his interests: yachting and philanthropy.

The latter has been a relatively new addition to his life, he says. His business formed an advisory board a couple of years ago, and one of the board members asked him about his goals, including philanthropic ones. He had not thought of them in a cohesive manner until then, but "I started thinking about it."

"I thought, well, if I was going to do anything, it would be something related to marine conservation because I've grown up on the water. I don't really fish, but I've taken from the sea, I burned fuel while navigating the sea. So I started digging into marine conservation. I met some amazing people who operate in the space. And I thought, well, you

**"I've taken from the sea. So I started digging into marine conservation... and helping the kids of the communities"**

The 150-foot Palmer Johnson *Norma Jean*, designed by Nuvolari Lenard, had a recent refit with updates by Patrick Knowles Design



While running a busy commercial real estate business, Sawyer, who describes himself on his public profile as a philanthropist, chairman, yachtsman and average golfer, has been

traveling to attend charity events, board meetings and functions. He was at the Oceana Sea Change Sea party last summer, which raised \$1.7 million to support efforts to curb plastics, restore fish populations and other initiatives; at Pebble Beach for youth development organization First Tee's annual meeting, to Monaco in the fall and to the Rendezvous.

Although a Californian through-and-through who always loves returning home and enjoys the West Coast's more relaxed vibe, he likes Monaco for its connection to all things oceans. In the next couple of years, he'd like to expand his horizons and take a boat to the Mediterranean. But not right now.

"I'm very busy, but it's a labor of love. I love all these things that we do, and I love where life has taken us. Stressful, yes, overwhelming, yes, enjoying it, yes. We have a great team of people who work with us. And I really have grown to love the philanthropic world. It really helped answers the question why. You know, why do you do all this?"

He may have embraced philanthropy relatively recently — although fully — but his love of the water came early. "I first went out on the ocean when I was three years old," he says. "I'm not much of a lake guy or a river guy; I'm definitely an ocean guy," he says. "I'm not a guy who has extra money and decided to buy a boat.



Sawyer at BGCBC's 2025 Yacht Rendezvous (top left) and with his mother at Pebble Beach (left). Above: *Norma Jean* is a successful charter yacht with a plethora of toys and a refreshed interior (below)



"I'm a seagoing guy. I have loved the ocean since I was a little kid."

One of the few photos he has posted on a recently created Instagram account is a picture of himself with his grandparents on a small boat. The caption reads in part, "no wonder my love for the ocean runs deep."

It was also his grandfather who showed him a path into the family's commercial real estate business. There was never a question of what he would do as an adult. He joined the company at 19.

"I knew I was going to join the family business before I knew what the family business was," he says. "And it was really because I wanted to spend time with my grandfather; I was very close to him." It turned out

quite well. "I enjoy the business. I enjoy the legacy that my grandfather left in the business. I wouldn't want to do anything else." He's been at it for more than 20 years, and each day is busy and looks quite different from the next.

You might think movie stars inspired Sawyer; he is, after all, a native Californian. However, his

PHOTOGRAPH: DOWNTOWN PHOTO; COURTESY OF OWNER

*Norma Jean* has become a vehicle for philanthropy. Sawyer also auctioned a five-day Caribbean charter for the BGCBC charity



Palmer Johnson, *Norma Jean*, is not named after a certain movie star, but bears the name of his late grandmother, Art's wife of more than 50 years.

For a general contractor and licensed broker, combining his interests made sense. *Norma Jean* has become a vehicle for philanthropy. In addition to hosting guests for the BGCBC's Yacht Hop last year, Sawyer gave a five-day Caribbean charter for the charity to auction (and he has done that a few times). The yacht charters for up to \$160,000 per week, plus expenses.

For the past three years, he has maintained the 2009 yacht through a rigorous program. He works closely with the yacht's captain, Richard McKee (he calls him Richie) and his broker, Michael Selter. "I see it as a floating work of art," he says and wants to keep it in tip-top shape. "I feel like if you're not maintaining a boat to your best ability, you're going to lose something. Something's not going to work and it's going to cost you more money down in the islands. Either way you're going to pay for it. So why not pay for it and enjoy it?"

He also understands the experience charter guests expect. With expenses, they'll spend around \$200,000 per week, so the experience must be impeccable.

"Back in 2005 when we had our first kind of bigger

boat, we chartered that, but I just didn't understand the needs of the client at that time," he says.

Twenty years ago, he had dipped his toes into large boats, with two around 100-foot vessels. "I knew how to run my own boats. I knew how to maintain them, take care of them and operate them, but I didn't know how to manage crew very well. And so that was kind of the reason I got out of crewed yachts for a time."

He dipped his toes back in with a 56-foot Sea Ray and loved it. He rejoined the yacht world first with a Viking 92, a Sunseeker he kept in California and now the Palmer Johnson *Norma Jean*. The yacht ticked the right boxes — the size, the draft (Bahamas friendly, as you'd say), American-built yet with European style. "I mean, it's perfect for what we wanted." He clicked with the captain too. "Richie and I are good friends."

And now he has been able to meld his love for the ocean, quality boats and his newfound purpose beyond business through philanthropy. ■

One of the few photos shared to Sawyer's Instagram (top right) showed Sawyer as a child on board a boat with his grandparents. Sawyer aboard his Viking 92 (above)