

# SEAFINN AT HOME IN OUR SOUTHERN WONDERLAND

BY KEITH INGRAM



Fiordland is the largest national park in New Zealand and one of the largest in the world. It stretches from Martins Bay in the north to Waitutu Forest in the south and from the picturesque eastern lakes of Te Anau, Manapōuri, Monowai and Hauroko to the jewels of fourteen spectacular fiords reaching up to 40km inland, extending from Milford Sound in the north to Preservation Inlet in the south of the west coast.

The natural beauty of this isolated part of New Zealand is what first inspired Chris Lemin on his first visit in 1976 and would set the future course he would follow in life. Besides the often awe-inspiring beauty and constant changing of the scenery, the local fishing and hunting were a pretty positive attraction. First released in the early 1900s red deer from Britain, wapiti and moose from North America and possums from Australia were liberated all around Fiordland. Although no moose are thought to have survived, the wapiti bugle during the roar draws hunters from around the world each autumn, while red deer, wapiti or a hybrid of both and possums abound throughout the rain forest and bush and may be found right to the waters edge. Meanwhile, for the purest freshwater fisherman, trophy sized rainbow and brown trout abound in the local lakes and the fiords are noted for providing an abundant feed of rock lobster, tarakihi and blue cod among other species.

From 1976 on, Chris would lead the life of a bushy come fisherman. His life revolved around hunting to live captures, to

commercial diving for paua and fishing. Life was good for this southern man who hailed from Invercargill. He met Diane, his wife and business partner to be, in 1984 when working for a local helicopter company doing live capture and meat hunting. Diane was the boss! Well, she paid the wages so must have pulled some weight and wasn't a bad looker as well. Work in those early days was all over the place, one had to diversify to survive or die. It proved to be a challenge that both Chris and Diane would grasp as they built a life in this southern wonderland together. In 1997 the decision was made to focus seriously on chartering and do what they had learnt well over the years. The summer season would be focused on tourists, both international and some domestic, with live aboard scenic charters, diving and a bit of fishing and hunting tossed in.

Clearly there was a strong demand for eco-tourism as many folk wanted to visit, to look and enjoy the experience both above and below the water. Bottlenose dolphins, fur seals, Fiordland crested penguins and little blue penguins are all resident in the fiords. Beneath the surface a whole new world beckons with the black corals living within SCUBA diving distance. Very heavy rainfall in the region creates a permanent freshwater layer. This sits above the sea water and is stained by tannins washed out of the bush. In turn this cuts down the amount of light that can penetrate the surface and restricts almost all of the marine life to the top 40 metres of the fiords. This band of water is calm, clear, relatively warm and home to sponges, corals and fish of sub-



ABOVE: The large open saloon is people friendly

BELOW: A functional master's helm position



tropical, cool water, including many deep water varieties. The fiords support the world's biggest population of black coral trees, about seven million colonies, some of them up to 200 years old. They are also home to brachiopods, a primitive clam-like animal that have been bypassed by evolution, remaining unchanged over 300 million years. Diving these waters is an experience rarely forgotten.

During the winter months, the tourist season is virtually all about skiing the Southern Alps leaving the opportunity for the Kiwi folk to enjoy the fishing, diving and hunting on specialised action trips. Historically, Deep Cove Charters developed its business with vessels that could only cater for smaller parties and carried out a wide range of hunting and fishing trips with some scenic tourism tossed in. Chris says their new vessel *Seafinn*, is much larger and faster than previous vessels and can range further afield, from Milford to Preservation Inlet.

So lets take a look at her. Named after a valued southern hunting mate, Ray Finn, the decision to build *Seafinn* was made early in 2007. Chris and Diane started looking around New Zealand and Australia to see what was available, but nothing quite fitted the bill. All options would require a major refit and alterations with resulting compromises in space, comfort or performance. They started looking closer to home and liked what they saw in the recently launched *Zayla-Jay* (*Professional Skipper*, issue 60) a commercial cray boat working in Fiordland.

So it was a time to talk design with Tony Gough of Gough ▶



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