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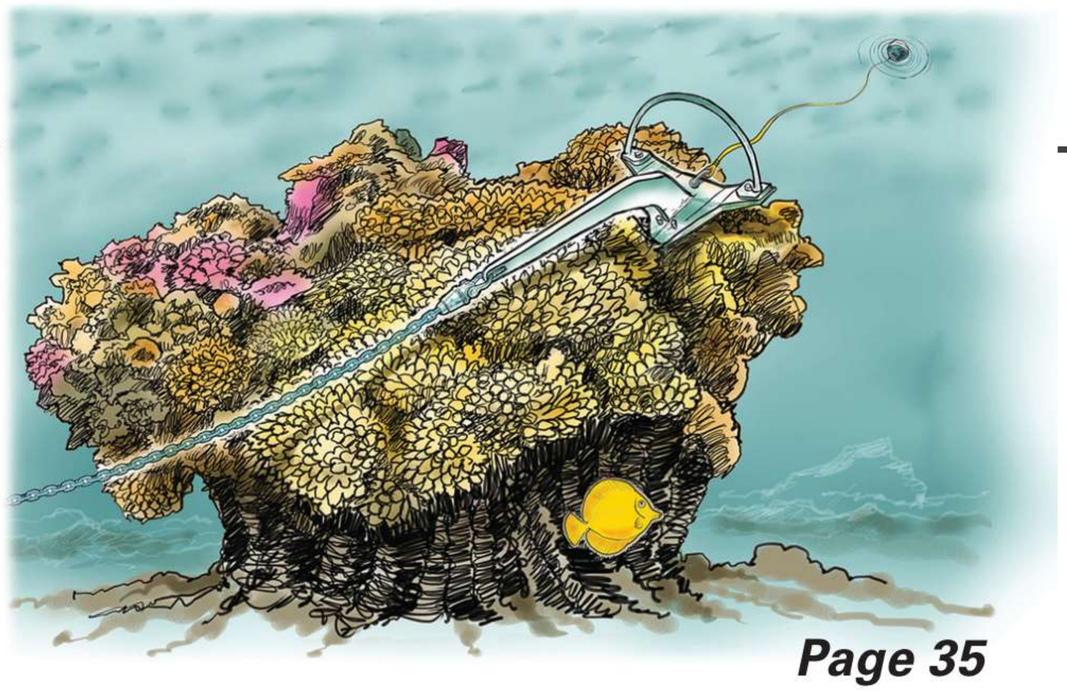

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Cover: Capt. Noah Barnes, who grew up in the Maine Windjammer trade, today represents the second generation of his family to skipper the 1871 schooner STEPHEN TABER.
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Photograph by Alison Langley



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EDITOR'S PAGE

Steering a Ship with a Big Wooden Wheel

As production of this issue was coming to completion, the satirical media outlet *The Onion* re-posted one of their 2024 headlines to a major social-media platform. It reads: "Nation Demands More Jobs Where You Steer Ship With Big Wooden Wheel." It was accompanied by a salty-looking, clean-shaven gent wearing a striped shirt and holding a spoked wooden wheel in his hands. I thought that was funny, and a fun coincidence, so I texted it to Noah Barnes, captain of the schooner STEPHEN TABER. His rise to a luminous career in a wooden vessel is recounted by Sarah Devlin beginning on page 22.

Noah, as Sarah describes, grew up sailing in his parents' windjammer, the STEPHEN TABER, out of Midcoast Maine. As a young man, he made a brief tack to New York City to dabble in a communications career in technology, before returning home to assume the family business.



ALISON LANGLEY

Capt. Noah Barnes, at the big iron wheel of the schooner STEPHEN TABER

The Barnes's schooner, the TABER, was and is part of The Maine Windjammer Association, a tight collective of independent owner-operators of traditional sailing vessels—nearly all schooners—who collaborate on marketing efforts and maintain high standards for the fleet. Each one of these owner-operators makes their living steering a ship with a big wheel made of wood or cast steel or iron.

The Onion headline, of course, grew out of humorous intent—a mix of exaggeration and irony and mild ridicule. Who, after all, makes a living steering a ship with a big wooden wheel? What an unlikely and obsolete career choice, the headline suggests, with little or no demand. The article begins, "Insisting more people should get to wear an old oilskin hat and smoke a pipe at work, the American populace on Tuesday demanded more jobs in which a person gets to steer a ship with a big wooden wheel."

In mid-September, as I write this, the Maine windjammers have just gathered at WoodenBoat for their annual Sail-In. The event is a grand and brief roundup of the fleet, punctuated by clam chowder, music, and the meeting of friends. Eager and appreciative passengers are ferried ashore in diesel-powered yawlboats driven by wool-and-oilskin-clad mates who, while generally not smoking pipes these days, could plausibly do so.

And aboard each of the windjammers is a captain, who often is an owner, who has made a very deliberate decision to invest deeply in a career in the rarefied world of traditional sail, and to share it with guests who seek tangible intelligence in a world where logic and investigation are increasingly outsourced to algorithms.

I still think *The Onion*'s headline is funny. But I must say: I find those big wooden wheels and the people who handle them more relevant than ever.



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	14k	18k
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B - Flemish Coil with Diamond Pendant *(matching earrings available)*	$3250.	$4300.
C - Compass Rose with working compass Pendant	$4900.	$6500.
D - Whale Tail Pendant	$2450.	$3450.
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LETTERS

A Matter of Battery Balance

Dear *WoodenBoat*,

I've just read the excellent article on repowering classic boats with electric motors by Ben Parson (WB No. 312). The breadth of coverage, the level of abstraction, and the depth of information are all outstanding. But Ben writes that gaining a 48-volt capability by connecting 12V batteries in series "can have balancing problems." No. The balancing problem arises in *parallel* battery configurations, where one underperforming battery can hold its neighbors below full charge.

The word "battery" itself provides a clue to how we arrange several low-voltage cells to increase voltage. The individual cell voltage is dictated by its chemistry. Increasing the size of the cell increases its charge capacity (energy in amp-hours) but not its voltage. Physically larger batteries of the same rated voltage have larger cells.

A *battery* is any interconnected set of cells, but particularly one connected in series, in order to obtain a higher voltage. We now talk about *battery banks*, but in the olden days those were just called batteries, because cells only existed individually. Now the cells are commonly packaged together in a common enclosure, and we call the resulting package a *battery* no matter how many cells it holds.

In other words, when we build a 48V *battery bank* out of four 12V batteries connected in series—or equally, 24 nominally 2V cells—we're doing exactly what the manufacturer of a 48V battery is doing. Only the packaging is different, unless the battery has the type of internal Battery Management System (BMS) that monitors individual cell voltages, and that same type of BMS is available for external management of a battery bank.

The advantage of individual cells or small batteries is that the system is more modular, so that a single failing element can be changed out rather than forcing a replacement of the entire package. The elements are also considerably lighter and smaller than a single package of the same total capacity, so that they might be lifted out by human strength alone, or by a handy billy shackled to the boom.

Dan Razzell
Sloop BARBARIAN

WoodenBoat replies:

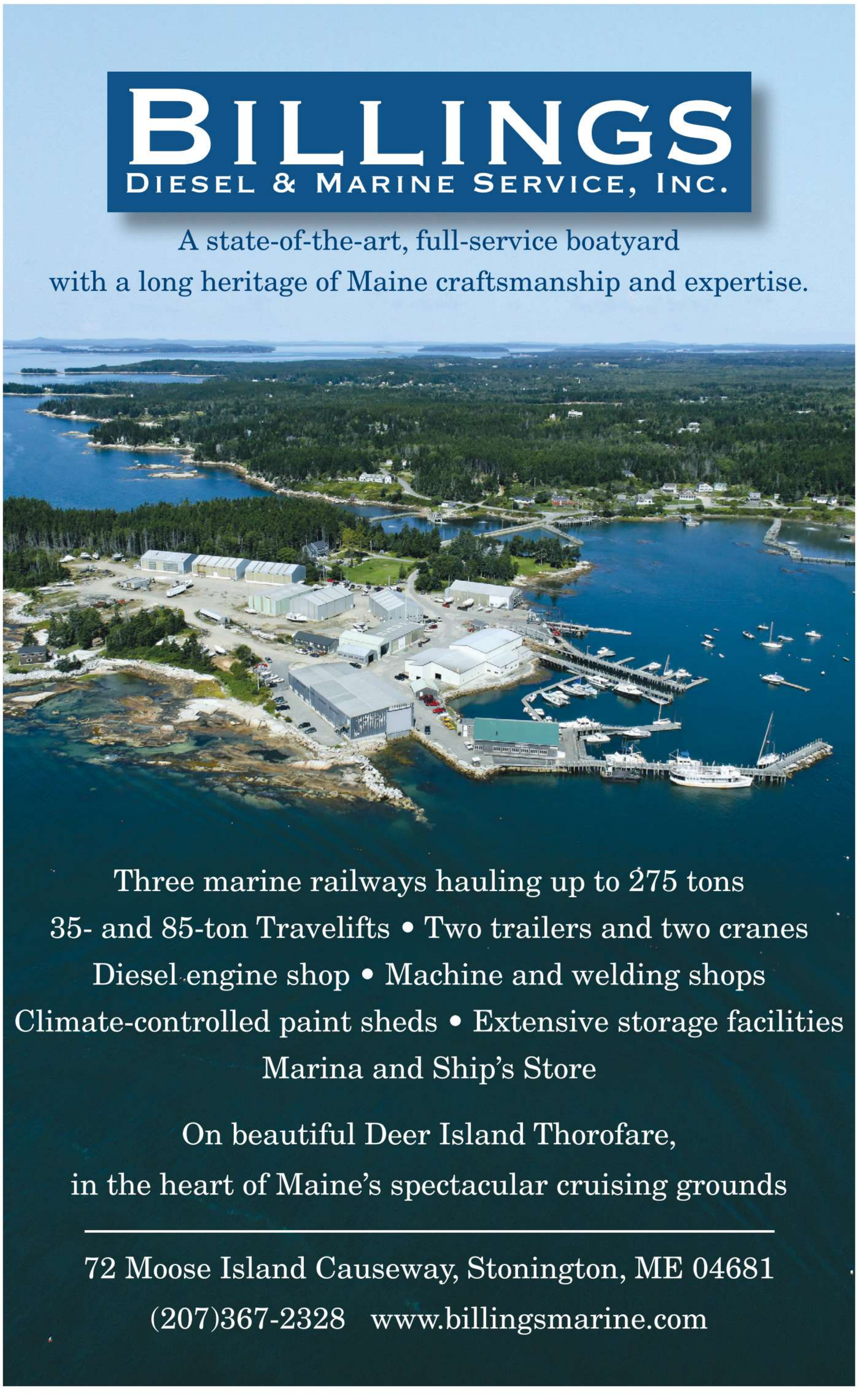
While we agree with Dan Razzell that batteries wired in parallel can experience balancing problems, we respectfully disagree with his assertion that this is not true of batteries wired in series. The limits of the printed page prevented author Ben Parson from delving comprehensively into this topic (and others), but in brief: When batteries are wired in series to increase voltage, current must pass through every battery in the series. If the batteries have differing capacities, the one with the least capacity dictates the amp-hour capacity of the entire series. Batteries in series should thus have identical capacities. In fact, manufacturers suggest that all batteries in a series be replaced at once, and not piecemeal.

Gaff Rig Performance

Dear Matt,

I have just completed reading the article about RÆDWALD, the gaff-rigged dinghy in WB No. 311. It prompted me to write to you, with a few examples, about the performance potential of gaff rig.

The configuration of the steel gaff schooners that I drew in the 1980s and '90s is pretty traditional, but the one that



I use on my modern gaffer designs uses a different shape with a high-peaked gaff. That produces a very efficient mainsail shape with much-improved leech control and pointing ability, also enabling the sailmaker to produce beautiful foil shapes in the sails. One owner even added full battens in an experiment that appears to have worked well.

In one particular race in a 19′ gaff-rigged Cape Cutter of my design, we were 20 minutes late for the start due to a conflicting obligation. The race committee held the line open for us, but the fleet was well down the first leg when we crossed it in about 3–4 knots of breeze. We rounded that first mark well up into the top quarter of the fleet. On the next leg, we sailed under main and genoa through the lee of a 30 Square Meter (a Scandinavian racer with very low wetted surface) that was reaching under spinnaker. In a heading and slightly freshening breeze we caught the 30′-long lead boat in a crossing situation as they approached the second mark. We led them around that mark and then through to the finish, taking line honors.

Another example is a Didi 29 Retro that I sailed out of Oriental, North Carolina. The owner told me of sailing for 5 miles pacing a J28 at equal speed and heading to windward. Eventually the skipper of the other boat shouted across at him "What the hell kind of gaffer is that?" I sailed that boat in 4–5 knots of breeze and could get her to beat at about wind speed and reach under main, jib, and asymmetrical at close to double the wind speed.

A modern gaffer can have surprising performance. A big benefit is that an owner who can build one in wood can build his own rig as well, producing very nice and relatively lightweight spars using bird's mouth details, knocking a bundle of money off the cost of his amateur-build project.

Dudley Dix
Dudley Dix Yacht Design
Virginia Beach, Virginia

Esperanza's Launch

Hi Matt,
I enjoyed "Esperenza's Launch" by Stan Grayson in WB No. 312.

The article brought Sanibel Island, Florida, its waters, boats, fishing, and the people who made their lives along that coast vividly to life. I especially enjoyed how the story of Esperenza Woodring became a doorway into a much larger history of the traditions of fishing and boatbuilding, the local fishing guides, and the intimate knowledge of the water that was passed from one generation to the next.

There is something special about stories such as this: they preserve not just the history of a boat or a person, but an entire way of life that can so easily disappear. The article made me feel that I was getting to know the people and places behind that history rather than simply reading about them.

I also loved the sense of place throughout the piece. Sanibel's relationship with the water is so central to its identity, and the article captures that beautifully. It reminded me why wooden boats are so much more than objects of craftsmanship; they carry stories, memories, skills, and connections to particular waters and communities.

Jeff Decker
Sanibel Island, Florida





TOM JACKSON

***Above*—A 1907 Fay & Bowen launch, relaunched by Hylan & Brown Boatbuilders in late August with a new electric drive, will take livery clients to their chosen boats.**

A boat livery with wooden classics

by Tom Jackson

Think of every cliché that has to do with nothing under the sun being new, that what goes around comes around, that history repeats itself or at least rhymes. An old idea given a new twist in Brooksville, Maine, shows that these sayings can underlie the enduring appeal of a very good idea.

At **Buck's Harbor Marina** in the heart of town, something called the **Maine Classic Boat Collective** (www.maineclassicboats.com) is running a boat livery of a type that was commonplace a century ago but rare today; not only that, but the organization is including vintage wooden yachts not just as part of the operation but at the core of it.

Tom Hollyday, who started working at the marina in 2025, was named its general manager early this year. The marina had been through significant changes in the few years before a new owner took it over, and it was he who brought Hollyday aboard. Hollyday started his waterfront career as a tall-ship sailor and wound up in Camden, Maine, running a charter operation for the owner of the Luke Powell–built HESPER, a 44′ plank-on-frame gaff-cutter built in England in 2004. But when that cutter changed hands, her chartering days ended, which is how Hollyday ended up bouncing around a bit and finally landing at Buck's Harbor Marina.

Among his duties was handling the day rentals of fast fiberglass outboard-powered boats, among them the Key West brand, rejuvenating a tradition at the marina that dated back decades. "I've always been about schooners and gaff-rigged boats, so to rent out boats like Key Wests was a-whole-nother world," Hollyday said. He said the marina's new owner, Andrew MacArthur, who prefers to keep a low public profile, has a **keen eye for vintage wooden boats**. Soon, the marina's fleet expanded to include wooden-hulled N.G. Herreshoff–designed classics: CRICKET, a 12½ built in 1975, and MANDALA, a 27′6″ S-boat built in 1927. More yachts under 30′ LOA by other designers joined, too: TRI, a 28′7″plank-on-frame Alden Triangle from 1925, and GHOST, a cold-molded Sparkman & Stephens–designed Dark Harbor 20 built by Taylor Allen and John England at Rockport (Maine) Marine in 1997. Some are still awaiting restoration, among them TRISKELION (ex-PALMETTO), a 1927 Herreshoff Stuart knockabout headed for restoration at Hylan & Brown Boatbuilders in Brooklin, Maine, at the end of 2026. Hollyday even jumped on the bandwagon himself, buying—for a mere $10—the 1888 Edward Burgess–designed cutter ELF (see WB No. 209), which also lies at Hylan & Brown awaiting a much-longer-term restoration.

Outside the cove that is home to Buck's Harbor Marina lies the stretch of water where the eponymous Eggemoggin Reach Regatta classic-yacht race has sailed annually since 1985, sponsored by Brooklin Boat Yard and Rockport Marine, accentuating the area's reputation as a center of classic yachting. "We're all kind of classic-boat fans," Hollyday said. For the marina, "We found five or six deals that we thought were good, where the boats were in good condition; they were safe, the rigging was intact. And it was important



COURTESY OF BUCK'S HARBOR MARINA

GHOST, a cold-molded Dark Harbor 20 built in 1997 (left), and MANDALA, an N.G. Herreshoff–designed S-boat built in 1927, are two of the classic boats that Buck's Harbor Marina in Brooksville, Maine, has in its livery.

that they were knockabouts, too, because, again, it's the day-boat concept," as with the runabouts. MacArthur "kept sending me links, and then we would decide whether we needed to have a surveyor come out, whether we thought it would be a good renter, safe for the public. Really, his only goal is community access, and whether it's the kids that are working here or whatever, it's always community based." GHOST and MANDALA both sailed in the regatta this year with local crews. The marina also holds community day sails once a week.

At the time I visited the marina on a fine August day, three local youths were doing seasonal work on a fiberglass-hulled Herreshoff Petrel, IBIS, at Brooksville's much-beloved Condon's Garage building, a setting for *One Morning in Maine* by the children's book author Robert McCloskey. As Hollyday put it, "No one's on their phone, right?" And the summer job gets them on the water regularly. "The kids are learning how to move boats," he said, "they're learning a lot about seamanship skills, 'cause that's really my primary strength."

In the end, it's all about getting people on the water. The livery clients are usually summer people or vacationers staying for a week or two. Some are veteran sailors of the coast. "The people that inquire about those boats have all been really knowledgeable, or they've owned one. They're like, 'Hey, I owned one of these for 20 years, but I don't own it now for obvious reasons—I just don't want to take care of it anymore.'" It's classic-boat use without the hassles of bottom paint, moorings, haulouts, and storage bills. For others, it's a chance to take wooden-boat stewardship for a trial run. "Not many people have these boats, like S-classes, Dark Harbors, and for the people that do have them, they're not publicly available," Hollyday said. "If no one ever gets to go on these boats, if no one gets to grow up working at a marina that has them, why would anyone want to buy them in 20 or 30 years when they're ready to make their first boat purchase?"

Most recently, the marina added a "new" harbor launch to its flotilla—a 1907 Fay & Bowen torpedo-sterned 22-footer that was substantially rebuilt and repowered at Hylan & Brown with an electric pod drive. Launched in late August, she'll provide silent delivery of people, including livery customers, to moored boats. "I got a text message," with a photo attached, Hollyday said, "and Andrew was like, 'What do you think about this?' Cool! And he was like, 'Oh, good—I just bought it.'" It turned out to be more of a project than anticipated (see Currents, WB No. 309), but it will be a handsome addition to the Buck's Harbor milieu.

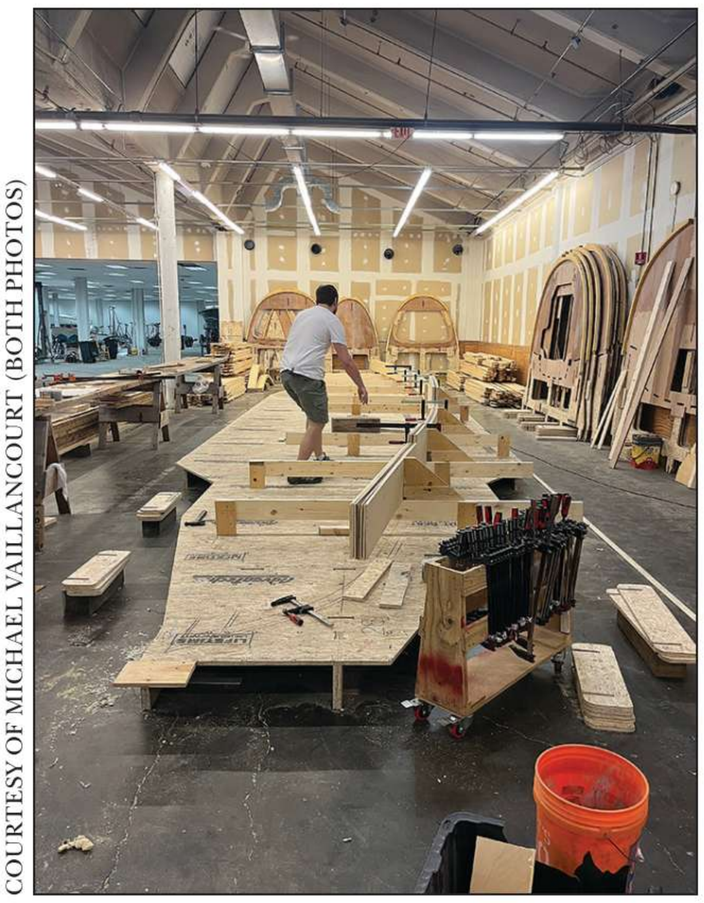
Of course, some modern museums carry on the livery-boat tradition with wooden boats—most famously The Center for Wooden Boats in Seattle, Washington, which marked 50 years of operation this year, and Mystic Seaport Museum's small-craft center. But it is somehow rejuvenating to see the edges rasped off the reputation of private marinas as necessarily exclusive places and classic wooden yachts as untouchable. It's worth celebrating.

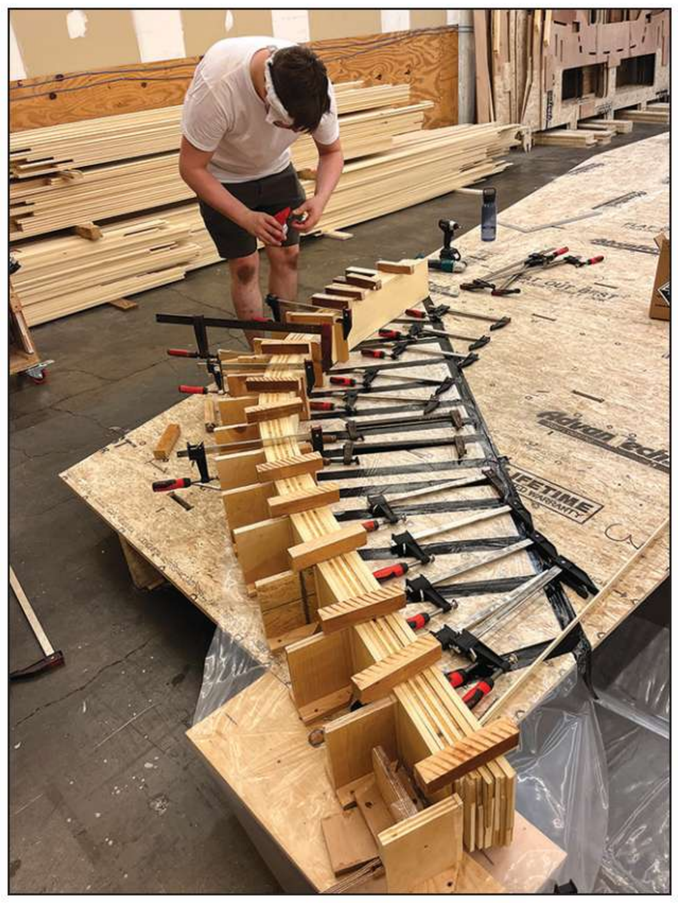
Tom Jackson is WoodenBoat*'s senior editor.*



TOM JACKSON

Summer employees Metta Lindsay, left, and Teddy Oleyer, right, painted a livery boat (this one fiberglass-hulled) at the Condon's Garage building.







COURTESY OF MICHAEL VAILLANCOURT (BOTH PHOTOS)

JIM TAYLOR

From the starting point of an unfinished L. Francis Herreshoff plan for a 55′ double-ended cruiser, Michael "Quin" Vaillancourt is working with the crew at Fred J. Dion Yacht Yard in Salem, Massachusetts, to bring the designer's vision to fruition. The yacht designer Jim Taylor of Marblehead, Massachusetts, reinterpreted Herreshoff's plans for a Spirit of Tradition makeover, suitable for CNC-cut molds, laminated frames, and cold-molded planking.

Around the yards

■ At **Fred J. Dion Yacht Yard** in **Salem, Massachusetts**, a **new yacht** inspired by a design from **L. Francis Herreshoff** is in the early stages of construction. "This is a tribute to L. Francis Herreshoff," the owner, Michael "Quin" Vaillancourt, writes from Marblehead, Massachusetts. "The yacht is **based on an idea** that L. Francis published in 1973 in *Sensible Cruising Designs* for a '**restricted-sail-area cruiser**,' a **55′ LOA double-ender**, but he never fully developed the plans for construction.

"Over the years, I have dreamed of building a sailboat with a long waterline and easily driven hull, and I have always enjoyed L. Francis's construction drawing for this boat, which has never been built before. About eight years ago, my dream started to come together: I purchased the plans from Mystic Seaport Museum and began tracing outlines and drawing layouts to envision what it could be, in a Spirit of Tradition style. Eventually, I **took the plans and idea** to the **naval architect Jim Taylor** here in Marblehead, who liked the idea. We talked about LFH's experiments and innovations, for example with molded-wood hulls, fin keels, and spade rudders; we can only guess what he would have done with this boat if he had had the epoxy glues, CAD design, and CNC machining techniques we have available today."

In looking at the plans, Taylor noticed some anomalies. "No boats were built to this design," he wrote, "and apparently it was not even fully developed as a concept; the sail plan shows a beam of 11′6″, while the lines plan shows a foot less. Whether or not the design was finished, the profile is drop-dead gorgeous, and the stem profile, sheerline (rotated a bit for more freeboard aft), and canoe-stern profile are all preserved in Quin's version. The new boat has a maximum beam of 12′ and a modern underbody, with a fin keel and spade rudder. With cold-molded wood construction, the designed displacement is 24,765 lbs, or about 4,000 lbs less than the 28,800 lbs that Herreshoff estimated for his plank-on-frame construction."

For Vaillancourt, building the yacht at Dion's was a logical progression. "I was doing a project for **Dion's Yacht Yard** last winter and had discussions with Rob Gorman [the yard's general manager] and Richard Schroder [a shipwright with 45 years of experience] regarding my intentions for the project," he wrote. "I had **started my boatbuilding career with them 30 years ago**, after graduating from the design and building programs at The Landing School of Boatbuilding and Design in Arundel, Maine, where I built my first boat—LFH's famous Rozinante. I have always had great respect for Dion's and their facility, and I was really astonished and very grateful with how they embraced the project and continue to do so.

"I **started work June 1**. Gardner Pickering of **Hewes & Company** in Blue Hill, Maine, designed the **construction mold** in CAD and fabricated it on the company's **CNC-cutting equipment** for fast setup. As of this writing [in August], all the station molds have been fabricated, along with deckbeams, cabin beams, floor timbers, and the forward and after stems. The backbone is next. Keiver-Willard Lumber Corp. in Newburyport [Massachusetts] has delivered the mill package for the **hull planking**, which will consist of **four layers of Alaska yellow cedar**, longitudinal tongue-and-groove planking on the innermost and outermost layers, with the two inner layers set on opposing diagonals."

Fred J. Dion Yacht Yard, Inc., 23 Glendale St., Salem, MA 01970; 978–744–0844; www.fjdion.com. Jim Taylor Yacht Designs, 8 Wyman Rd., Marblehead, MA 01945; www.tayloryachtdesigns.com.

■ In WB No. 303, we published a report from **Sweden** about **Anders Annell**'s construction of a **double-ended Koster 6** in his boatshop in Henån on the island of Orust. The plans, which date to 1943, came from the Ohlson Yachts archives (www.ohlsonyachts.com). Recently, Christina Stenberg of Göteborg, Sweden, and Ohlson enthusiast Lutz von Meyerinck of Hamburg, Germany, wrote to say that members of the Swedish Coastal Boat Association paid a visit to the workshop not long ago and found the double-ender is **not the only project** Annell has under way.

"Anders is building the Koster 6 for his own use, but he has spent his entire life building boats. He started at age 11, and

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ANNA HULL (ALL)



***Left*—Anders Annell on the island of Henån on Sweden's west coast has completed the hull of his Ohlson Yachts–designed Koster 6 for his own use. *Above*—Annell's shop has been busy with other projects, including a mahogany-planked composite powerboat (left), a replica of a sailing fishing boat (center), and a light sail-and-oars boat (right).**

his first was an iceboat. Anders's mentor was Hans Eriksson, a boatbuilder on Ingmarsö Island in the outer Stockholm Archipelago, whom he met in the 1990s. Erikssons Båtbyggeri AB is still operating on Ingmarsö to this day. Over the following decades, Anders built close to 50 boats and ran a shop on the island of Värmdö. Then love intervened: he moved his workshop to Henån, which is on Sweden's west coast about 50 miles north of Gothenburg near Orust and Tjörn, a historic center of boatbuilding.

"Anders **works exclusively in wood**—new builds, repairs, and restorations, no job too small or too unusual. During the winter of 2025–26, his Koster 6 was one of **four new boats** under construction.

"One of the other boats was an **elegant 28′ carvel-planked** mahogany **motorboat** being built with his partner and good friend, Jonathan Fröberg. Anders envisioned a proper workboat with classic lines, capable of 20–25 knots even offshore, driven by a 170-hp diesel. The design is a collaboration with Pelle Östlund, a boatbuilder with a background in industrial design. The hull's clipper bow, flared forward sections, and tumblehome stern were shaped with input from the Swedish Ship Testing Institute. The result is intended to be the first of a standard design scalable in size and layout; the first is fitted out as a day cruiser with two berths.

"Nearby was a **sleek 5m** [16′6″] **sail-and-oars gig**, built to be easy to row.

"And finally, something different altogether: **a replica of a single-masted fishing boat** from Kungsviken, weighing around two tons and built with another friend, Jonas Alfredsson. Anders said that such collaborations are 'a constant source of joy, inspiration, and good work together.' Sweden has very few boatyards left working with wood, Anders said. 'Many people speak about Sweden's **floating cultural heritage**,' says. 'But cultural heritage is also the knowledge of how boats are built. If we are to preserve it, new boats need to be ordered and **built so that the skills can be kept alive**.' And how does he find his clients? 'I don't know,' he said. 'People just show up here at the workshop. It can be a bit difficult to reach me by phone.'"

Annell Båtbyggeri AB, Industrivägen 30, 473 31 Henån, Sweden; www.annellbatbyggeri.se.

■ **David Stimson**, the boatbuilder and designer whose two comparative designs for diminutive schooners were published in WB No. 312, has **a menagerie of boats**—predominantly catboats and sharpies—lined up for work at his boatyard. The yard is adjacent to his home in **Warren**, **Maine**, where he moved in 2022 from Boothbay, in a bow shed of the type for which he markets designs (see www.bow-roof-shed.com).

His **largest project** at the moment is **EVENTIDE**, **a 27′ catboat** with a long history in Massachusetts. She was designed and built by George Shiverick in 1933 in Kingston, which is north of Plymouth. She is arguably best known as a Cape Cod boat, having taken charter sailing passengers out of Hyannis for more than 35 years. She was donated to the nonprofit **Community Racing Inc.** (www.lbay.org), which also has an historic boathouse on Lewis Bay in **Yarmouth**, just east of Hyannis, and envisions youth sailing programs for EVENTIDE.

"She came to us with an ugly doghouse, and we have photographs of a different doghouse that came all the way out to the edge of the cabin," Stimson said. "We don't know if she had a doghouse at all, originally, so we're leaving it off." The cabin had been lengthened, and the cockpit shortened, at some point, so for the boat's new purpose the original configuration, as near as can be discovered, will be restored. The cabin and coamings, which are believed to be original, are suspended in Stimson's bow-roof shed above the hull, awaiting restoration.

"A lot of the difficult work has been done," Stimson said. The work is **progressing in stages**, as funding comes available and the work fits in Stimson's schedule. So far, he has **entirely reframed** the hull with steam-bent white oak, after determining that **much of the keel and planking could be saved**. "It turned out that there was just superficial damage from the iron drifts that held it all together," he said. "I was able to drive the old drift out, and just drill around to make a core of about an inch or so, then plugged it with white oak and G-Flex," a toughened epoxy that works well with oak. He was then able to reassemble the pieces and fasten them using bronze pocket bolts. A few places needed graving pieces, and the stem had to be replaced.

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TOM JACKSON

At David Stimson's bow-framed boatbuilding shed in Warren, Maine, the 27′ George Shiverick–designed catboat EVENTIDE (at center) is being rebuilt; her cabin and coamings are suspended above, along with other boats, awaiting restoration. The 15′ Whitehall (foreground) was planked and framed at The Boat School, in Eastport, Maine, years ago but not completed; she was stored for years and finally brought to Stimson for completion.

Scan the QR code or click here for a WoodenBoat All Access video showing the construction and plans source for a bow-roof shed.

He has been able to save much of the planking above the first broadstrakes. In the butts, deterioration caused by fastening sickness was managed by using the "hide-a-butt" method pioneered by MP&G in Mystic, Connecticut, in which the ends are shaped to long scarfs to remove the fastening-deteriorated wood and then a new section of plank is epoxied into place, eliminating butt blocks. As a result, not much planking will need to be replaced; however, the boat will require new sheerstrakes and a new section of sheer clamp as well.

The four-cylinder Perkins diesel, which is not original but came with the boat, has been rebuilt, and the original bedlogs survived. The floor timbers have been refurbished: "It takes a lot longer to refurbish a floor timber than it does to make a new one, but we're trying to **keep as much original** fabric of the boat as possible," Stimson said. In the next round of work, he expects to address the transom to determine whether it can be saved. Another looming decision is how to rebuild the deck, which was edge-fastened with ferrous nails.

In the shed, a 15′ Whitehall that is believed to have been the last boat built on a mold at The Boat School in Eastport, Maine, but was never finished, is having its sheerstrakes installed and interior fitout completed. Outside, Stimson's own Fenwick Williams catboat, CALYNDA, built in 1932, awaits some minor repairs and a "major cosmetic makeover."

Stimson also works regularly on two schooners: SARA JANE, a Murray Petersen–designed Coaster III, and MARTHA SEABURY (see WB No. 243), built in 2012 by Dawson Moreland & Associates in Lunenburg, Nova Scotia. Both are owned and operated by Sailing Ships Maine (www.sailingshipsmaine.org) for youth sail training programs, and both came to the organization by donation. Stimson most recently completed a refit and deck recaulking on MARTHA SEABURY.

He and his son Nathaniel share a design office in Rockland, which borders Warren.

David Stimson, stimsonmarine@icloud.com.

Offcuts

■ "Beneath the plane trees of **Toulouse, France**, the Canal du Midi current moves slowly through old stone locks, past towpaths and barges moored in the shade," writes Daniel Caparrós Torres, a regular correspondent from northeastern Spain. "Water has shaped the city for centuries, but the Mediterranean lies more than 100km (62 miles) to the east. It is **not an obvious place to build a Viking ship**. Yet here the story of the **longship ORKAN** began, not with plans to cross the Atlantic—which developed later—but among five engineering students who wondered whether they could build and sail a 6m (20′) Viking-style boat together.

"Starting in 2011, they taught themselves how to shape timbers and lapstrake planks, solving unfamiliar problems through trial and error, and then put their ideas to the test on the water. That first boat attracted more participants and led to a much more ambitious undertaking. The group next built the 12m (40′) FYR, which they sailed as far as the Viking



COURTESY OF BÁTAR

ORKAN, a plywood-epoxy interpretation of 92′-long Viking Age craft, was built in Toulouse, France, the third boat of the type built by the Bátar association. A transatlantic voyage to New York is planned for the spring 2027.



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Ship Museum in Roskilde, Denmark. From the growing circle of supporters around these projects emerged **an association**, **Bátar**, with a more permanent structure—and greater ambitions. Over the years, Bátar has drawn **hundreds of volunteers** to build progressively larger boats. About 250 people contributed to the **construction of ORKAN** at Toulouse's historic Cales de Radoub. She is 28m (92′) long and carries a single square sail of about 180m^2 (1,935 sq ft). ORKAN is not intended as an archaeological replica; her lapstrake hull and square rig draw on early medieval examples, but she is **built with plywood-epoxy techniques**, has an auxiliary engine, and is equipped with modern navigation equipment.

"After reaching the Mediterranean via the Canal du Midi in late 2025, ORKAN remained in Sète, France, for several months while crews learned her ways. In August 2026, after a brief detour east to Marseille, she turned west, sailed along the coast, and passed through the Strait of Gibraltar into the Atlantic Ocean. From there, ORKAN headed north along the Iberian Peninsula. In the final days of August, on a gray, rainy morning, ORKAN entered the Ría de Betanzos, Spain, accompanied by boats from Os Patexeiros, a local traditional sailing association. A small crowd watched the ship arrive at the quay in Sada. The Galician port provided an important staging point, with a change of crew before the voyage continued along Spain's northern coast. When ORKAN left the Golfo Ártabro, the weather had changed. On a sunny afternoon, under a brisk local northeasterly known as the *nordés*, it sailed past Ferrol, rounded Cabo Prior, and turned east along Spain's northern coast; from there she sailed north to Brittany, France.

"The voyage was also a rehearsal for a much greater challenge: If all goes to plan, Bátar will sail ORKAN from **Brittany to New York** in spring 2027, following a northern route via Scotland, the Faroe Islands, Iceland, Greenland, and Canada, including a stop at the French islands of Saint Pierre and Miquelon off the Newfoundland coast. The association estimates that the 8,500km (5,280-mile) expedition will take between 30 and 45 days and involve about 30 sailors divided into three watches. Funding, intensive training, and further testing are still required."

■ In **southern Chile**, an initiative is under way to use **boatbuilding** and education **to preserve the maritime traditions** of the **Chiloé Archipelago**, according to Katerine Araya, an architect, and Tomás Jorquera, a sociologist, who write from the country:

"We formed a working team with the historian Nelson Bahamonde and three experienced boatbuilders, José Ojeda, Jorge Bahamonde, and Daniel Barría, to establish a **school of traditional Chiloé boatbuilding practices** in the historic town of **San Juan**, on **Chiloé Island**, in a region where islanders relied on wooden boats powered by sails and oars as late as the 1970s. In **2023**, **15 apprentices** from various municipalities **built** the 5m (16′5″) **SANJUANINA** at a **75-year-old boatyard**. Their project leader was the boatbuilder Daniel Barría, 60. They worked every Friday afternoon and all day on Saturdays, with practical lessons; additional theoretical lectures, open to all the community, focused on the cultural value of traditional boatbuilding as a part of Chile's intangible cultural heritage. The construction was documented in collaborative writings and a 50-minute documentary.





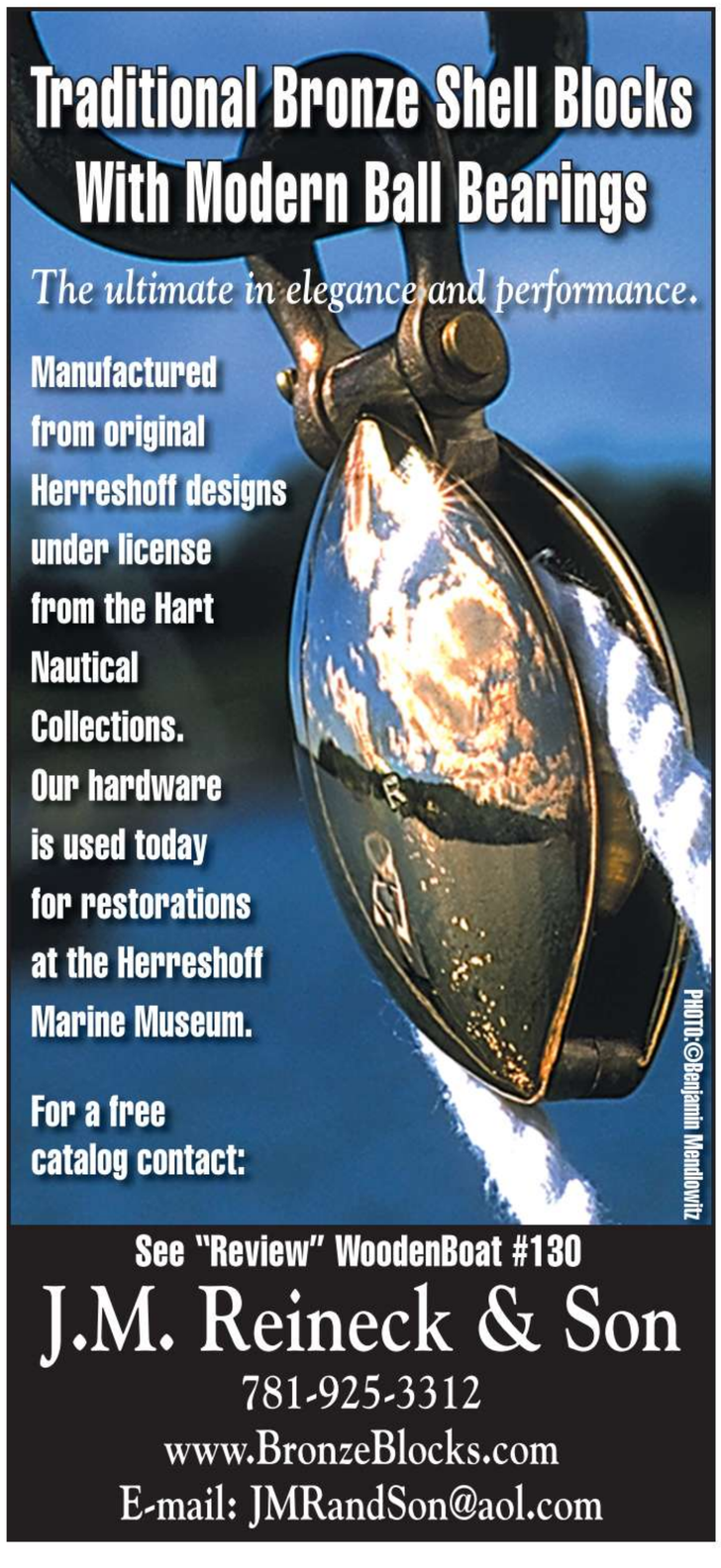




COURTESY OF TOMÁS JORQUERA

***Above left*—In the Chiloé Archipelago in southern Chile, a new program brought apprentices together with veteran builders to construct a type of boat native to the area, where sail and oars predominated as late as the 1970s. *Above right*—A sailing school is envisioned to preserve traditional skills.**

"An **envisioned heritage sailing school**, financed by *Fundación Mar Adentro*, would use the new boat to help **conserve** such **traditional skills** as boatbuilding, sailmaking, and rigging in conjunction with the island's Dalcahue Museum. In the future, we hope that the school celebrates the cultural importance of the island's maritime traditions and preserves such details as the traditional *chilote* rigging, including the dimensions and types of sails, the cutting methods for handmade fabrication, the stitching of eyelets and reefpoints, the height and installation of the mast, the position of shrouds









COURTESY OF BATAVIALAND MUSEUM

***Left*—The replica East Indiaman BATAVIA, launched in 1995, will be hauled ashore in late 2026 in Lelystad, The Netherlands, to prevent deterioration and simplify maintenance. *Inset*—Batavialand Museum, expected to reopen in 2028, is being reimagined around the ship, which was built with authentic 17th-century tools and techniques.**

and the mast partner, the length of the boom, the rigging of halyards and sheets, and more. There is always much to experiment with and to learn.

"Part of our goal is also to connect with other people or institutions interested in heritage navigation and traditional boatbuilding from other parts of the world; after all, the sea and wood connect us all."

For more information, contact Tomás Jorquer at tjorquerap7@gmail.com or Katerine Araya at araya.katerine@gmail.com; see also www.restaurotaller.cl/proyectos/educacion-patrimonial (in Spanish).

■ The **1995 replica** Dutch East India Company ship **BATAVIA**, 650 tons and 186′ LOA, this year **ends her days as a floating exhibit**. Her owner, Batavialand Museum in Lelystad, The Netherlands, the town where she was built, announced its intention to tow her to an Amsterdam dry-dock to be maneuvered onto a custom steel support structure. Once secured, the ship and its structure together were expected to be **floated by barge back to Lelystad** in October, to be **brought ashore permanently** as a part of a reconceived museum exhibit expected to reopen in late 2028.

The replica was built under the direction of **Willem Vos**, who is now 93, in a decade-long project, as told in WB No. 108 in 1992 (and in a retrospective in WB Nos. 173 and 175 in 2003). The project, partly an individual's vision, partly a way to keep shipbuilding going, partly a tourism draw, partly a vocational training program for the unemployed, was lauded for its **faithfulness to original materials and construction methods**, which arguably restricted her usefulness as a sailing replica. The construction *was* the exhibit. She was based on Vos's research into 17th-century shipbuilding, including recovered shipwrecks, among them the original BATAVIA of 1628, which archaeologists found and excavated in the 1970s off Western Australia, including evidence of the brutal mutiny after the shipwreck.

In 2025, the replica marked her launching's 30th anniversary. She has remained in Lelystad with the exception of a trip to Sydney, Australia, in 1999 via a heavy-lift ship to be exhibited at the Australian National Maritime Museum. During that period, she **put to sea briefly a couple of times**. She remained in Sydney during the 2000 Olympic Games and returned to Holland via lift ship in 2001. Ashore, the hope is, she will be less prone to the deterioration she has suffered and will be easier to maintain. **Reimagined museum buildings** are also part of the plan.

Vos's construction of an even larger ship replica, of the 17th-century warship ZEVEN PROVINCIEN, was started in Lelystad in 1995 but halted, restarted, then halted again in 2014 for lack of money. A much smaller ship, a replica of a 16th-century Dutch **fishing smack**, is currently **under construction** at the museum shipyard and carries on the tradition of using authentic methods and materials, this time replicating an archaeological find. The museum also houses the **National Maritime Depot**, a repository for undersea archaeological finds in The Netherlands.

For more information (in English), see www.batavialand.nl/en.

Across the bar

■ **John Rousmaniere**, 82, August 8, 2026, Manhattan, New York. An author who specialized in yachting subjects, Mr. Rousmaniere is best remembered for his 1980 book *Fastnet Force 10* (W.W. Norton, 1980), about the 1979 Fastnet Race in which 15 sailors died at sea. He was a crewman aboard a 48′

competitor, TOSCANA, in the ill-fated race, and the experience of facing heavy seas driven by sustained winds of more than 50 knots with gusts to 80 gave his account the immediacy of an eyewitness. Of the 303 yachts that participated, only 86 finished, 24 were abandoned, and five sank. For Rousmaniere, the experience galvanized a lifelong commitment to improving safety protocols and equipment for ocean sailors. In addition to *Fastnet Force 10*, among his 40 published books were several focusing on safety, including *The Annapolis Book of Seamanship* (Simon & Schuster, 1983) and *After the Storm: True Stories of Disaster and Recovery at Sea* (International Marine/McGraw Hill 2002). He also became a regular contributor to sailing and yacht-racing safety seminars. (Humbled before the wrath of nature, he also decided to return to college to earn a master of divinity degree in 1988 from Union Theological Seminary in New York City.)

A native of Nashville, Tennessee, he moved at age 11 with his family to Oyster Bay, New York, where he first learned to sail aboard a 13′6″ Sparkman & Stephens–designed Blue Jay. It was an introduction to a lifetime of sailing and an initiation into the appreciation of well-designed sailing craft. Those pursuits were linked with his keen interests in history and writing. After graduating from St. Paul's School in Concord, New Hampshire, and Columbia University with a bachelor's degree in 1967 and a master's degree in 1968, he was drafted into military service during the Vietnam War. He was enrolled as an infantry officer but remained stateside to serve at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York, as a history professor until his discharge in 1972. He went on to serve as a magazine editor with *Yachting* and *Natural History* before embarking on a freelance career in 1978.

His writing on yachting topics was wide-ranging, but it almost always focused on sail and often intersected with the world of classic wooden yachts. For example, he wrote *The Golden Pastime: A New History of Yachting* (W.W. Norton, 1986); *The Low Black Schooner: Yacht America, 1851–1945* (Mystic Seaport Museum, 1986); *Sleek: Classic Images from the Rosenfeld Collection* (Mystic Seaport Museum, 2003); *A Berth to Bermuda: 100 Years of the World's Classic Ocean Race* (Mystic Seaport Museum/Cruising Club of America, 2006); and *The New York Yacht Club: A History, 1844–2008* (Seapoint Books, 2009).

He wrote a number of articles and book reviews for *WoodenBoat*, including an interview with the photographer Stanley Rosenfeld (No. 90); a salute to the restored Phil Rhodes–designed KIRAWAN and her return to the Newport Bermuda Race in 2000 for the first time since her win in 1936 (No. 158); "The Yacht AMERICA at 150" (No. 163); and a retrospective interview with designer Olin Stephens (No. 179).

He was inducted into the Bermuda Race Roll of Honour in 2024, was awarded the Cruising Club of America's Richard S. Nye Trophy in 2009, U.S. Sailing's Timothea Larr Award for sailing education in 2013, Mystic Seaport Museum's W.P. Stephens Award for maritime history in 2014, and the Commodore Henry A. Anderson Jr. Award from the New York Yacht Club in 2014 for volunteerism.

"Whether you are a she-sailor or a he-sailor," he wrote at the end of his preface to the *Annapolis Book of Seamanship*, "may your days and nights afloat be as happy and interesting as mine have been, and may you never make the mistake of believing that you know all there is about sailing. Nobody knows it all. Nobody *can* know it all, but here (I hope) you will learn at least a little."



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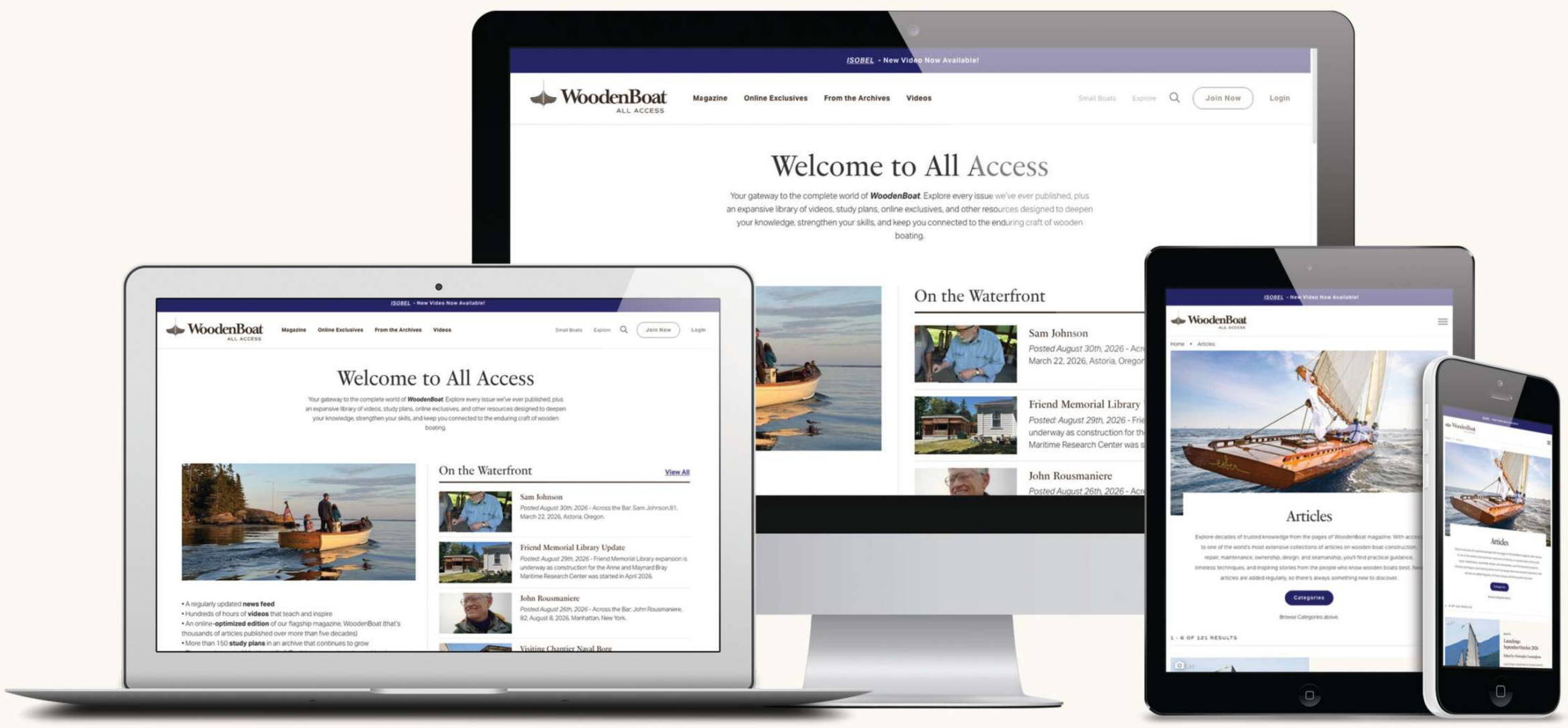

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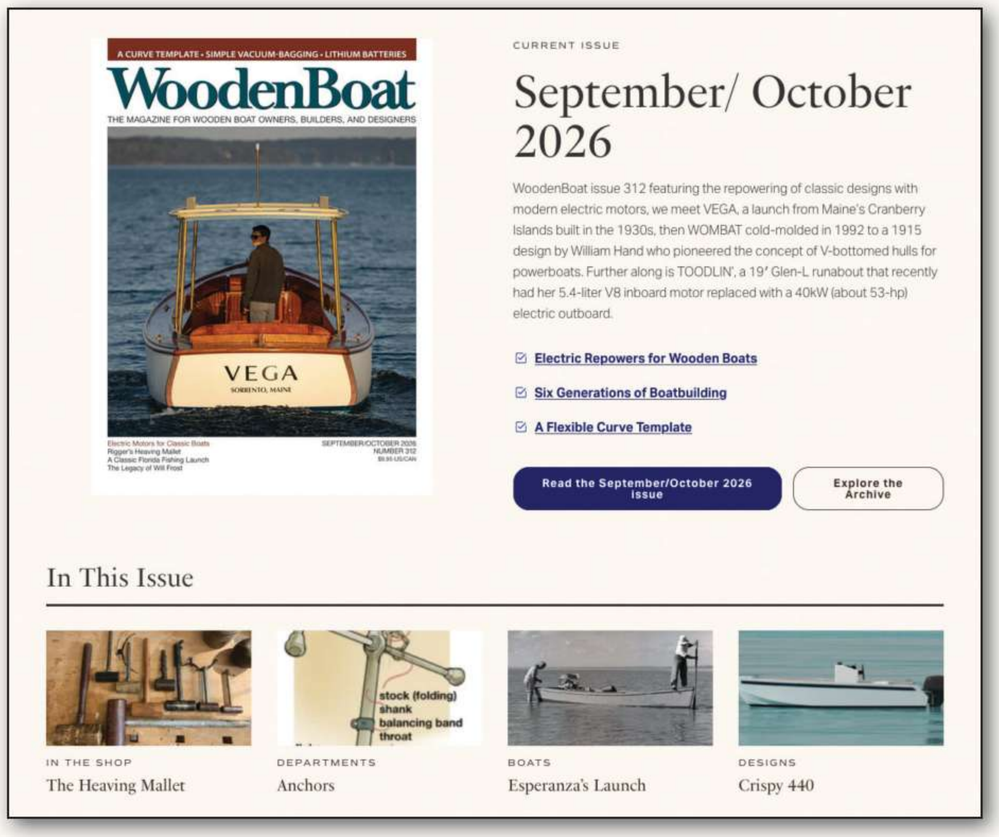
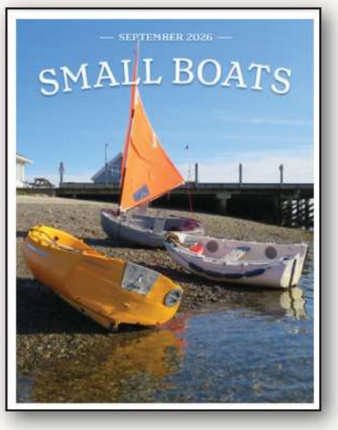
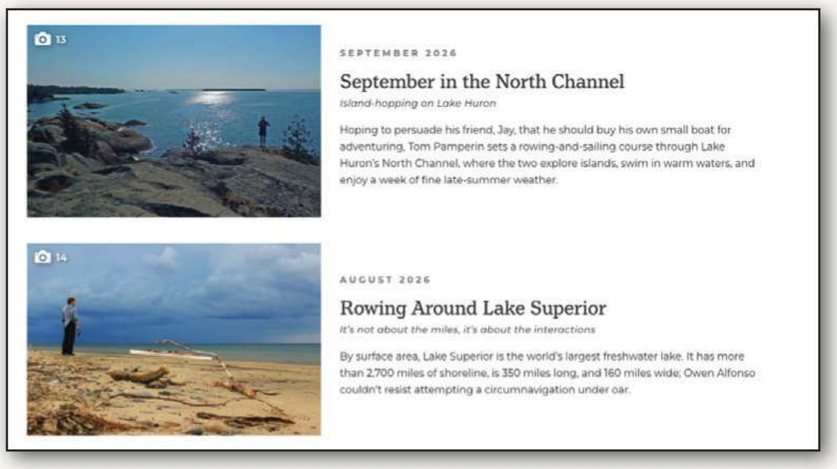
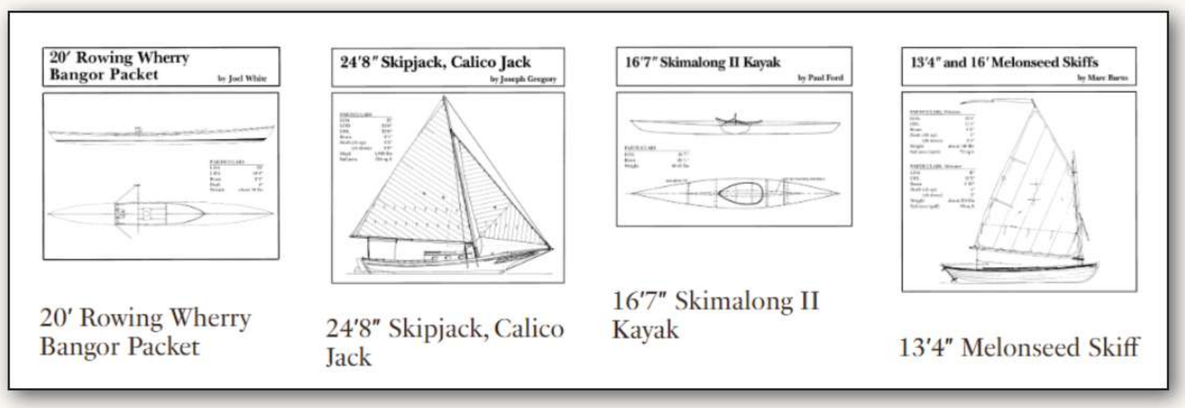


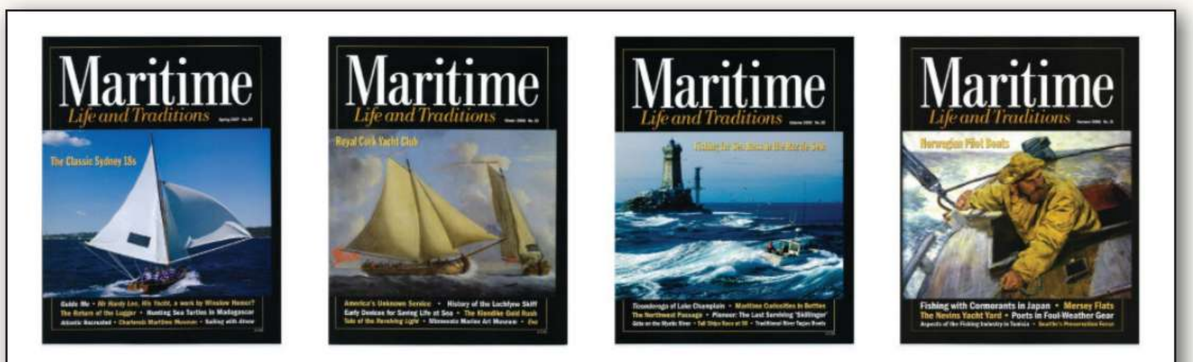












Noah Barnes

Running a windjammer is a family legacy

by Sarah Devlin



ALISON LANGLEY (BOTH)

By the time Ken and Ellen Barnes were ready to retire in the early 2000s, their son, Noah, was living in New York City and working for a public-relations firm that represents tech companies. "I'd been running away from my fate," Noah told me last summer on a Saturday break between trips in his 68′ LOD schooner, STEPHEN TABER.

Noah was raised, along with three sisters, in the orbit of the TABER. Launched in 1871, the schooner was built to haul cargo such as wood and bricks up and down the Eastern Seaboard. As the oldest documented sailing vessel in continuous service in the United States (save for a handful of seasons dedicated to restoration) the TABER is a saucy vessel named for a New York–based lawyer who may or may not have been saucy himself. She has been worked and reworked over the years, and settled into the full-time role of passenger vessel in the early 1940s.

In 1979, the TABER landed in the capable hands of the Barnes family. Ken and Ellen had been living in North Carolina in the late 1970s when they booked a cruise on the schooner LEWIS R. FRENCH. They fell in love with the idea of living on the coast and running a charter business. The Maine Windjammer Association—a collective of independent owner-operators of passenger vessels who cooperate on marketing efforts and standards—had been formed just two years earlier. Unlike many who have such whimsical ideas, the Barneses followed through with it. And, very much unlike those who follow through on such a plan, they were extremely successful.

Every summer, the Barneses brought their daughters and son aboard to work as crew. Noah, the youngest, thus spent his formative years on sailboats, but fled to the city as a young adult to pursue a different path. "I really did grab an oar and walk inland," he said, citing the proverbial seafarer who exits the trade by slinging an oar over his shoulder and walking away from the coast until asked what he's carrying. But the call of the sea wouldn't fade.

In New York City, Noah returned to the water, working weekends and evenings on tourist vessels with names such as CHELSEA SCREAMER and THE BEAST—high-speed thrill-ride boats that run 360s in the water like an amusement-park ride. He was also relief captain for the schooner ADIRONDACK, an 80′ cold-molded pilot schooner that continues to run day trips and private charters out of the Chelsea Piers.

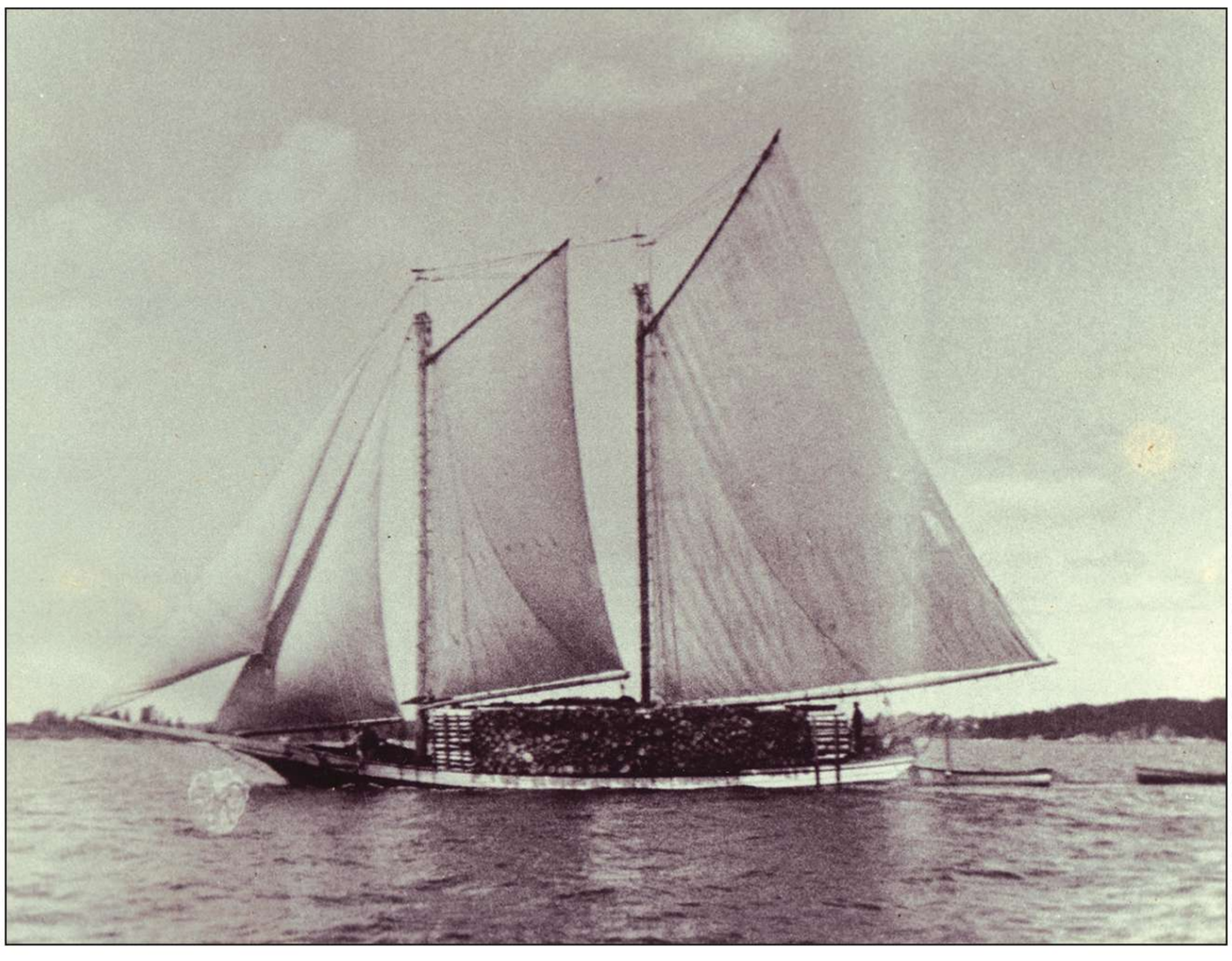
At Christmastime 2003, Noah decided to bring the "love of his life," Jane Barrett, to his hometown of Camden, Maine, to meet his parents. Jane is a Long Island, New York, native who was successfully working as a public-relations consultant in the wine industry. "This is a girl I'm crazy about," he said. "And we roll into Camden in this snowstorm. The flakes coming down—they were this big [he closes his forefinger and thumb to show about the size of a quarter] falling under the Camden streetlights. We had to slow down as people were cross-country skiing from Reny's department store to downtown."

He continued with a chuckle: "It was so *It's a Wonderful Life*. We pulled in pretty late with like 6″ of fresh snow on the ground. The plows weren't going, and it was just that beautiful snow with that acoustic quality in no wind. It just wasn't fair," he recalls of the effect this would have on a monumental decision that was to follow.

On New Year's Day, after Noah and Jane had spent nearly a week in Camden "being its most Camdenest," his parents pulled him into their office to make him an offer he couldn't refuse: Commit to buying the TABER within the next 45 days or they would offer it to another local interested buyer.

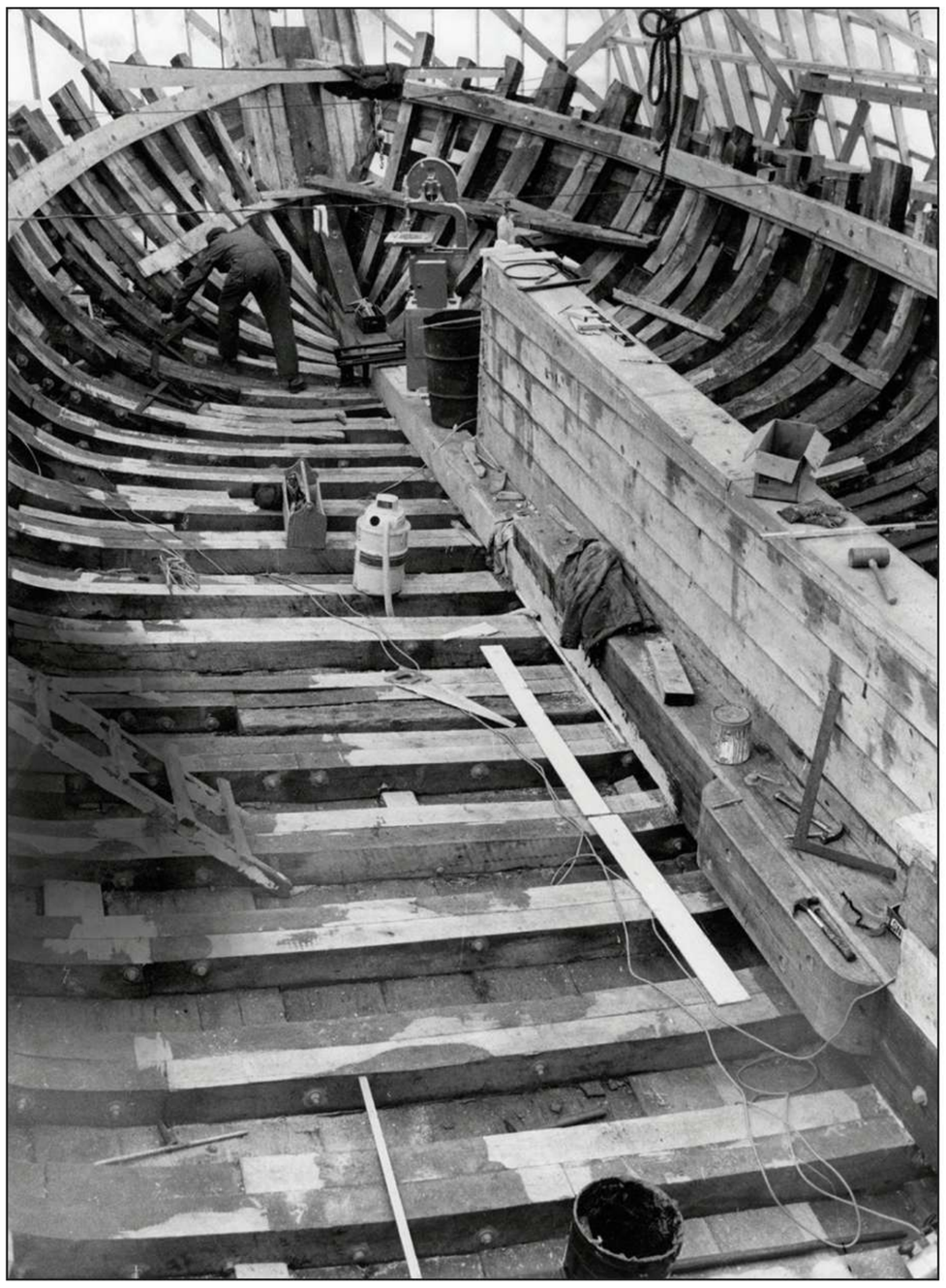
Noah claims it took three days to decide. He realized quickly that he wanted to come back. So, as Jane stayed in New York, he packed up and spent the next summer as mate to learn the schooner business, or more important, the guest-service business, from his parents.

"The TABER is built for hosting a dinner party," Noah said. "It's built for gathering people together under the awning and playing music for them." His parents both had theater and vaudeville backgrounds. While his father played music, his mother, a true raconteur, would regale their guests with tales of the TABER's past and present.



COURTESY OF SCHOONER STEPHEN TABER

***Opposite*—Although Noah Barnes (inset) grew up in his family's Maine windjammer business sailing the schooner STEPHEN TABER, as a young adult he pursued a different career path in New York City. Twenty-three years ago, however, he returned to Maine and to the TABER, whose business has continued to flourish under his command. *Right*—The Stephen Taber was built to haul wood and bricks along the East Coast, and did so until the 1940s.**





COURTESY OF SCHOONER STEPHEN TABER (BOTH)

***Left and above*—When Ken Barnes first saw the STEPHEN TABER in 1979, she was 108 years old and tired. Ken was nonetheless smitten, and he and his wife, Ellen, soon acquired the vessel and embarked on a thorough rebuilding that spanned two off-seasons of their burgeoning charter business.**

"My dad [who died in 2024] could play guitar for 72 hours and not repeat a song. He could play the bagpipes, the concertina, the mandolin, and the double bass," he said. "And they both could tell a story. That's the way they taught me to host—to entertain and feed the senses. And to be an empathetic host. Everything that builds on the aesthetic of having a dinner party on a cool old schooner." When it was time to run that business himself a year later, Noah called Jane.

"We talked all the time and I was like, 'This is f***ing hard,'" he said. "I'm trying to run the boat, hire the crew, and take reservations answering the phone, and trying to keep the books straight. Can you come up and do this with me? And she said yes."

Jane continues to work full-time taking reservations, selling merchandise, supporting provision runs, greeting passengers, and bookkeeping, plus she purchases all the wine.

Noah Barnes makes an impression. He *lives* his life. Many have witnessed his charming sailing bravado and pure joy during the annual Great Schooner Race, and more than a few have seen his blasé attitude while simply setting an anchor. "You can come flying in between two other schooners and just put her where you want her," he said of anchoring the TABER. Noah and his crew raise the centerboard, scandalize the foresail, throw the wheel over, and the TABER burns all energy and skids sideways. "We can drop the hook while we're doing that hockey stop, and it will decelerate the boat. You can parallel park that way," he said.

"It's a lovely feature of a centerboard schooner. It feels like when you're skiing and your buddy is sitting down on the snow and you just cover them with snow, right? I giggle every time I do it." (Disclosure: This writer has been acquainted with Noah Barnes for many years and can confirm that he will take every opportunity to cover a fellow skier in snow.)

Jed Kriegel, who met Noah while he was working aboard ADIRONDACK in New York, relates a story about his first encounter with him. "I was working as the mate doing day sails out of Chelsea Piers," Kriegel said. "And this guy rolls up on rollerblades in tiny shorts and he's like, 'Hey, is that a schooner?'"

When Kriegel said it was, Noah said, "Can I go for a ride?"

"So, I snuck him on the boat," Kriegel, a musician and luthier now based in Belfast, Maine, laughed. "It turns out he's Noah Barnes."

From there, Noah forged one of many long friendships. That's how he became relief captain for ADIRONDACK with Kriegel as his first mate. They were in their 20s at the time. "We'd play music," Kriegel remembers. As he tells it, Kriegel would be playing his stand-up bass on the foredeck with Noah at the helm. When it was time to tack, Kriegel would hand the bass over to a crew member or guest, and then, after the tack, he'd pick back up with the music. "We'd be cruising up Battery Park with the boom over the sidewalk," Kriegel said. "We had the best time around the Hudson River."

While Noah fondly remembers the seeming recklessness of those days, he was always a captain first. "I would have the radio in one hand and the wheel in the other and be just constantly communicating" with the local commercial traffic.

Currently, the TABER and her stablemate schooner LADONA (to which we shall return) reap the benefits of return passengers and referrals from happy guests. Why is that?



COURTESY OF SCHOONER STEPHEN TABER

Ellen Barnes, shown at the helm in about 1980, shared Ken's love of sailing. They also shared a background in theater, which enhanced their windjamming enterprise.

Passengers who book a trip aboard the TABER typically look for an outdoorsy vacation or "glamping" experience. They "don't mind shared discomfort," as Noah put it, and "can wrap their head around the concept of a shared head." But also, "they like good food, and enjoy a glass of wine. And they like cool old boats or new experiences."

As anyone paying attention to sales will tell you, repeat customers and word-of-mouth drive business. Noah's parents sold him a nearly turnkey business built on intense loyalty to Ken and Ellen. But that was 25 years ago, and the business continues to thrive with a return rate of over 50 percent.

"We were 80 percent of capacity those first two seasons," Jane said on the back porch of their house, holding a bag of vegetables she planned to bring down to the docks. Energetic and bright, with enviable discerning taste, Jane supplies flowers and herbs from her garden to both the TABER and LADONA; she also delivers locally grown produce to LADONA's chef, Anna Miller. "I buy the cheese," Noah shouted from the house.

"And then, we were over 90 percent," Jane continued. "We just had a couple who came back who had sailed with us in 2004. And I'm like, 'Wow, that was our first season. And you're back.' We really didn't know what we were doing" back then.

For both schooners, the return rate was 52 percent last year. "That's amazing," Jane said. "I mean, if you're selling widgets and 50 percent of your people are coming back to buy more of your widget, you're doing great. That's not a realistic goal in business school.

"For a lot of people," she said, a windjammer cruise is "a trip of a lifetime. So for them to come back...." She paused to check on some cilantro next to her deck that was not doing so well. "And in an age where people don't repeat experiences very often."

Noah has a big personality. Like his mother, he loves to tell a story, gesturing with his arms and clapping his hands. He wants to share his favorite things, like food, and wine, and cheese, and music. History, family, tradition, and friends are important to him. To make this schooner business work, he had to blend his musical background with his love for his friends and his passion for sailing.

With that in mind, and maintaining traditions his parents established, Noah and Jane offer themed trips that feel more like three- to five-day dinner parties. Also, Noah does not refer to his passengers as customers; he naturally calls them guests. It's not an affectation: he views his paying passengers the way he'd view guests and friends in his house.

During the safety portion of his orientation, he'll say things such as, "Do the thing that we say. If it sounds like we're a little strident, it means maybe you didn't hear us the first time. It doesn't mean we don't like you anymore." When a guest brings food aboard, he says "You guys brought food? That's adorable. You don't know what's about to happen to you." And, finally, when he talks about the canvas the crew rigs up on deck for guest showers in the morning: Water from barrels feeds via gravity into the heat-exchange coil of the TABER's wood stove. When it's hot enough, the water courses through a little deck fitting and into a shower hose. Noah lets his guests know there's room for two or three in the shower *cabana*. "It's your vacation. I'm not here to judge," he tells them. And so he makes instant friends.

Noah has a tendency to ask his friends, and people he finds interesting, to come aboard for his themed trips. One such trip included one of his best friends, Chicky Stoltz, whom he has known since first grade. Noah and Chicky played in high-school rock bands together and were in chorus and an acapella group.

Around 2009, Noah reached out to Chicky, who lives in Vermont, to ask whether he'd be interested in spending a week on the schooner making some music with two other friends, Tom Whitehead and Kriegel. Thus, the Charlie Nobles (named for the galley stovepipe) were born with one standup bass, two guitars, and percussion, plus Noah on harmonica, washboard, maracas, or whatever's handy to grab as he navigates Penobscot Bay.

"We did it to help him out," Chicky said. The Charlie Nobles now join the cruises once or twice a year. "We get together, we play music, we hang out. It's a great week." As of 2026, one third of the TABER cruises are music trips with visiting artists.

Kate Shaffer, co-owner of the Maine-based company Ragged Coast Chocolates, also joins the TABER for the "Wine, Dine, and Chocolate" trip, having met Noah and Jane in the early 2000s when the TABER was anchored in the Isle Au Haut Thoroughfare, near where Ragged Coast was founded. Noah hailed Kate on the radio and invited her crew aboard for a wine dinner. "I don't know about you," Shaffer said. "But when I'm invited to dinner on a 150-year-old schooner, the only answer is yes! We brought chocolates to share with the guests and the crew. After that, our chocolates became a regular feature on the TABER's themed wine and chocolate cruise."





COURTESY OF SCHOONER STEPHEN TABER (BOTH)

***Left*—Young Noah gets a feel for the tiller under Ken's tutelage. *Above*—By age 12, Noah had a deft hand at the TABER's wheel.**

In keeping with the "dinner party" approach, one week each summer is called "Captain's Choice," formerly known as "Captain's Favorite" due to a printer overhearing Noah tell Jane it's his favorite week because it's his birthday. Guests repeat this trip annually because it's a chance to do whatever the captain wants. And, on his birthday, the crew tosses him overboard. Every year. Without fail.

Finally, Noah specifically mentions one of his other favorite weeks, the Music and Windjammer Gam, when the windjammers raft up in a semicircle and passengers can walk from boat to boat. Noah compares it to an amphitheater as many of the schooners are playing music, sharing crew and musicians to sing and play, asking their guests to join in. He takes great pride in watching his guests explore the entire Maine Windjammer Association fleet.

These themed trips notwithstanding, Noah said, "If you read accounts from the '50s, we go to the same places and we do the same things." He continued, "You know, the food is better, largely. And there's running water in the cabins and the mattresses and the sheets and the towels are probably way nicer. But it's still the same. It's amazing."

About a decade into owning the STEPHEN TABER and creating themed trips to continue building business, everything seemed to be settling into a nice pace. And then….

In 2013, the 1922 schooner NATHANIEL BOWDITCH went to auction and received no bids. This 82′ gaff-rigged schooner, originally named LADONA, was built at Hodgdon Brothers in East Boothbay, Maine. She had been recommissioned as a passenger schooner in 1971. A star of the Maine Windjammers was now sitting idle next to the STEPHEN TABER.

"I had a crush on the BOWDITCH, right?" Noah said. Gib Philbrick, her former owner and captain, "had loomed large. An old school captain." The BOWDITCH, Noah said, was "just f***ing sexy."

But it was such a gamble. He had witnessed his parents branching out by converting the 83′ wooden sardine carrier PAULINE into a dinner cruiser in the late 1980s. It was a challenge then. Did he and Jane have the right stuff to make this happen?

Over the course of about a year, he watched the BOWDITCH caretaker and former TABER crew member Kirk Rouge walk down to the dock to make sure the bilge pumps were still pumping. "Somebody should do something," he'd think. "She's going to get broken up for her lead."

Finally, the sale price got to a point that Noah and Jane found enticing. That's when he called J.R. Braugh about joining an effort to save, refit, and repurpose the schooner. Braugh is now the financial partner and working captain aboard the vessel, which is once again called LADONA.

"He was a yacht captain at the time, and we were in a band together." Noah said. "He was the captain of MERCANTILE. I saw him take care of the boats. I saw him sail well. He was the most competent captain. He was the dude."

Like all wooden-boat enthusiasts, it was their love for the project that carried them through as it became increasingly expensive, with more and more planks pulled from the hull. In other words, they found themselves pondering a Ship-of-Theseus-like thought experiment: If you replace 90 percent of a schooner, is it still the same schooner?

According to Noah, Braugh was responsible for many of the key design features that have made LADONA successful. These days, Braugh runs more of a luxury trip aboard LADONA than what is offered in the TABER. They take on fewer guests; there are tiled showers below; the quarters are a bit bigger; and meals are plated dinners rather than a buffet.

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ALISON LANGLEY

The TABER's auxiliary power is provided by a yawlboat, shown here in davits. When launched and lashed astern, the yawlboat maneuvers the schooner in and out of tight spaces. Anchoring, however, is often accomplished under sail.

The skill behind those dinners is Anna Miller, who has been the chef aboard LADONA since the relaunching 11 years ago. Anna had originally worked on the TABER for about five years and is now in her 24th summer of sailing on schooners after watching them sail past when she worked at a restaurant on Little Deer Isle. Anna is charming and gregarious, with an easy laugh. She looks the part of the schooner chef, carrying boxes of vegetables down the dock and stopping to say hello to the crew members on other schooners tied up for the weekend turnaround.

One luxury that Anna mentioned is that LADONA's kerosene stove, as opposed to the woodstove aboard the TABER, allows her to elevate the meals slightly and offer those plated meals, which are unique to the schooner experience.

"I remember one day [on the TABER in the galley] I heard, 'Hey, we need you on deck to do the yawl boat.'" This was one of those all-hands-on-deck situations.

"I'm literally in the middle of making a crème anglaise," Anna shouted up to Noah. "You choose."

"Carry on," Noah exclaimed as he looked around for someone else to handle the yawl boat, BABE.

Despite early misgivings, LADONA is now a highly successful business with as high a return rate as the TABER.

Noah Barnes talks of the "old duffers" he would meet on the docks when he was a kid as though he is still the young guy on the scene, sheepishly admitting that he may now be the old duffer. The legacy of the Maine Windjammer fleet and the schooners is clearly important to him, as proven by his desire to save LADONA. But he grew up prowling around these schooners and on the docks, much like his own son, Oscar, did. Those schooner captains loomed large for him.

"I feel like I'm a link to the guys who remember working at the same time as John Foss, Doug Lee, Jim Sharp, Orville Young, Budsy Hawkins, Ted Schmidt, and the Allens who ran the RIGGIN." In one sentence, Noah manages to name-drop a legendary *Who's Who* of Maine Windjammer history. Respectively, he is mentioning John Foss, who saved and rebuilt both the schooners LEWIS R. FRENCH and AMERICAN EAGLE; Doug Lee, who rebuilt and saved the RICHARD ROBBINS and ISAAC H. EVANS, designed and built HERITAGE), and founded and ran North End Shipyard, the facility the entire industry depends on; Jim Sharp, still a waterfront legend who was instrumental in helping to launch the Maine Windjammer tourism trade over the years as captain and owner of various vessels, including the STEPHEN TABER; former TABER and ROSEWAY owner Orville Young, whose wife, Andrea, worked in



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ALISON LANGLEY

At the heart of the TABER's galley is a wood-fired cook stove.

the galley; Havilah "Budsy" Hawkins, another former TABER owner and also the designer of the MARY DAY, the 125′ schooner built specifically for the Windjammer passenger trade and named after his wife; and Ted Schmidt, who was captain of the MATTIE until 1988 and who died in 2024. Finally, Noah brings Dave and Sue Allen into the chat. The Allens restored the J&E RIGGIN, a former oyster schooner, into a passenger vessel in the early 1970s. "These people," Noah said, "were truly larger than life influences in my early life."

Noah has lived his life as both a waterfront historian and a fiercely loyal friend and family member. Maintaining connections with people and history, with traditions and legacy, are paramount, as he and Jane consider ways to modernize the schooner travel experience.

"It's a good fit," Kriegel said. "He enjoys hosting and he's very good at it. It doesn't look like a put-on at all, and he talks about the food or the cheese, and you're like, 'Whoa, look at this guy.' He loves this. It gives him energy. You have to pay attention before you notice, like, 'Oh my goodness, this guy is sailing this boat.' He's not taking passengers from port to port. He's whipping around and having a good time. You know, it'll be a real breezy day, and he's trying to get to an anchorage that's in the lee, and so you're beating maybe 20 tacks with this big boat through narrow water with rocks everywhere, and dinner's getting made, and there's all this stuff





The TABER's water supply for passengers and crew is carried on deck in four barrels that originally did duty as distillery casks.



ALISON LANGLEY

to do," he said. "And then he'll drop the anchor, get the awning up, and the next thing you know, he's like, 'Who wants to go for a sailboat ride in this cute little boat?' like, for fun. He's not out of energy. He's like, 'Let's have more.'"

That "cute little boat" is PLAIN JANE, a 14′ Cape Rosier wherry built by Tim Clark and Noah. Tim is a boatbuilder based in Lincolnville, Maine, and doing business as T.R. Clark; he is a former TABER crew member.

Kate Shaffer added to this: "Sailing with Noah is fun! His connection with the boat (having grown up on it) is pretty special, and he manages to share the TABER in the most generous ways."

Noah credited his father's influence: "Watching how my dad handled guests, and [his way of] entertaining and hosting was probably the single thing that influenced what I thought was the right and proper way to do things."

These days, "I have the most competent set of colleagues I could ever imagine," Noah said. "Everybody who runs a Windjammer for more than a season or two is fully vested and fully inured in that culture of Yankee 'do it yourself,' sourcing the stuff and building it. And that is part of the legacy that I feel I'm part of.







ALISON LANGLEY

FRED LEBLANC

***Left*—Jane and Noah Barnes and their son, Oscar, take a moment aboard the TABER. Oscar has recently been sailing as a mate. *Opposite*—In 2013, the Barneses and a partner, J.R. Braugh, purchased the schooner NATHANIEL BOWDITCH. With the direction of lead shipwright Mike Rogers, they restored her and returned her to her original name, LADONA, to create a high-end windjamming experience. She is seen here with her stablemate, the STEPHEN TABER, off the Rockland, Maine, breakwater.**

I see this as a precious and potentially fragile thing," Noah said. "I would like to vouchsafe that tradition of doing it and being proud of...just being able to support yourself and your family and have a home and keep the vessel and pass it on in better shape than you got it."

Sarah Devlin's nearly 30-year career in the marine industry included positions with Professional BoatBuilder *magazine, the International BoatBuilders' Exhibition and Conference (IBEX), and most recently the American Boat & Yacht Council (ABYC). Her articles have appeared in numerous magazines, including* WoodenBoat.

For information on the STEPHEN TABER, visit www.stephentaber.com; for information on LADONA visit www.schoonerladona.com. To learn more about the Maine Windjammer Association, visit www.mainewindjammerfleet.com.

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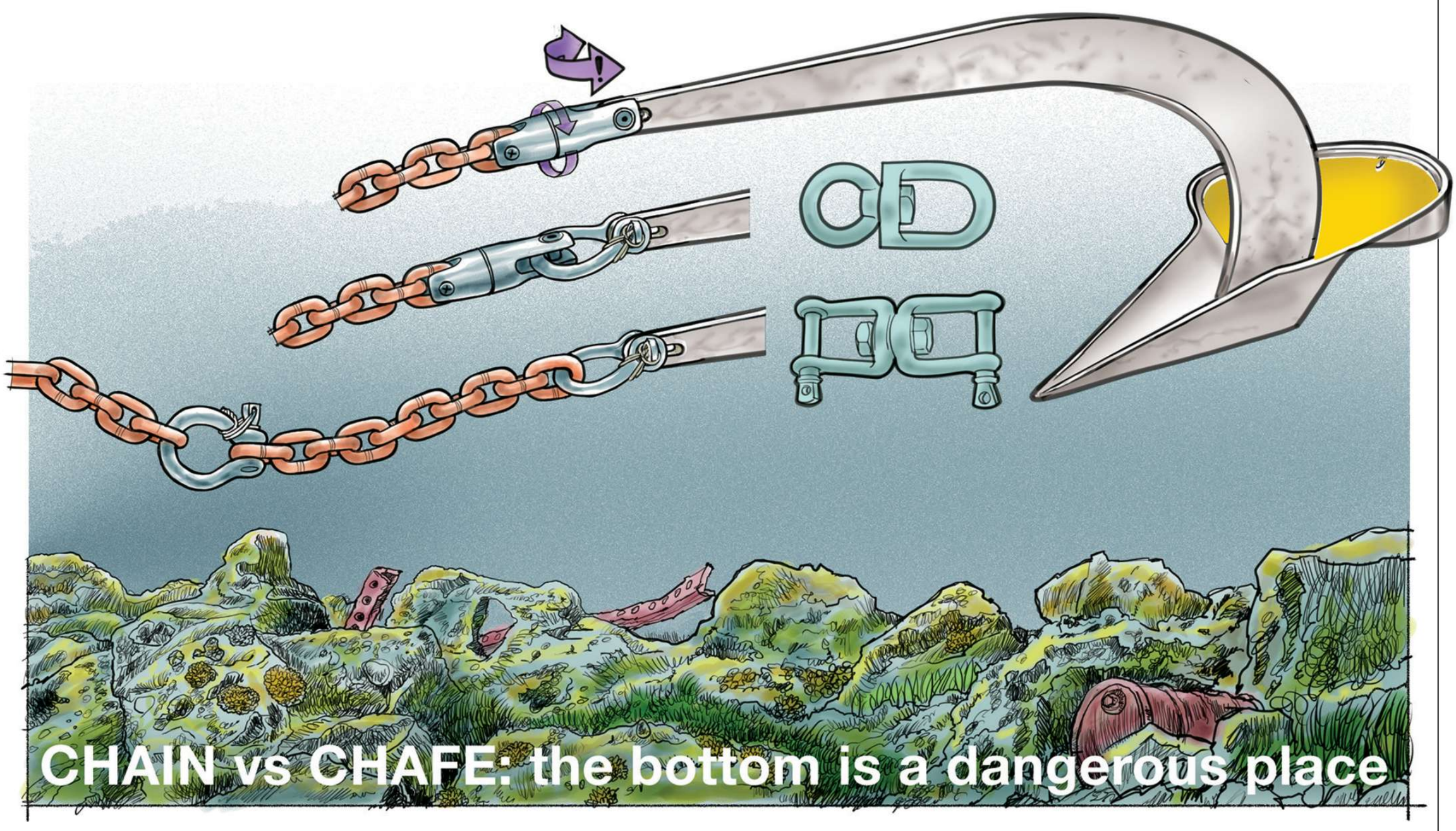
Anchoring

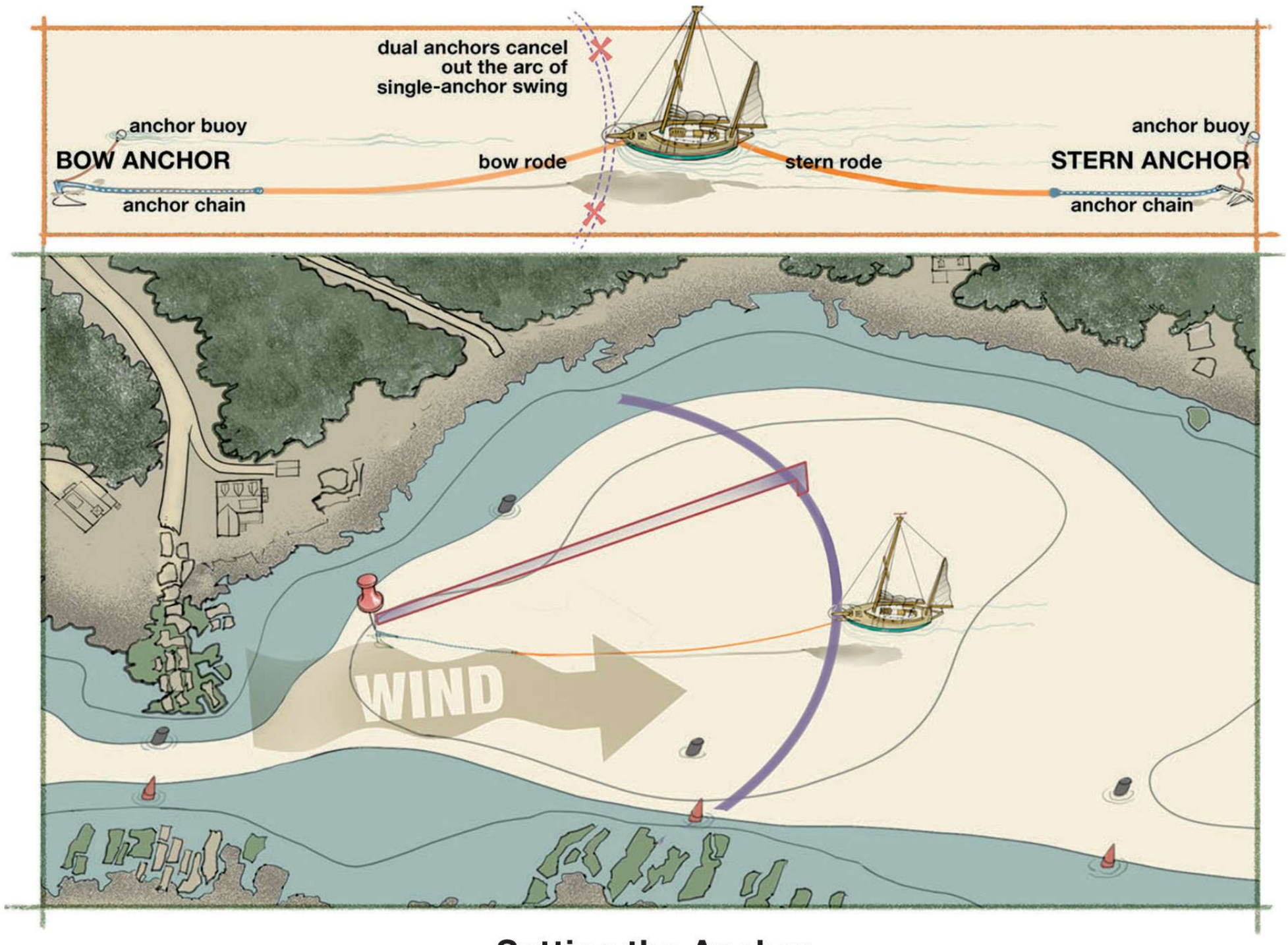


Day's end is precious time for a sailor. You've made your odyssey and found your temporary Ithaka. While landfolk might not be aware of wave fatigue, you are: through a day of courting the wind, you've been balancing every moment, flexing muscles to maintain your connection to the boat. What you want from your anchorage, your anchor, and its ground tackle is security, time for ease, yarns, and no surprises. It's within your reach as you slow your progress to exploratory maneuvering, then fix a spot and initiate your anchoring sequence.

A goodly time before you've arrived at the harbor, you'll have your anchor *a'cockbill*, which is the old shellback's way of saying it's unlashed and ready to drop. You'll have checked the anchor chain's shackle and its wire mousing (which secures the shackle pin against turning). The anchor chain will be checked for *hockles* and—if chain is only part of your rode—laid out in preparation for an easy drop. You'll have made yourself aware of the anchor rode's unsnarled readiness to follow anchor and chain to the bottom.

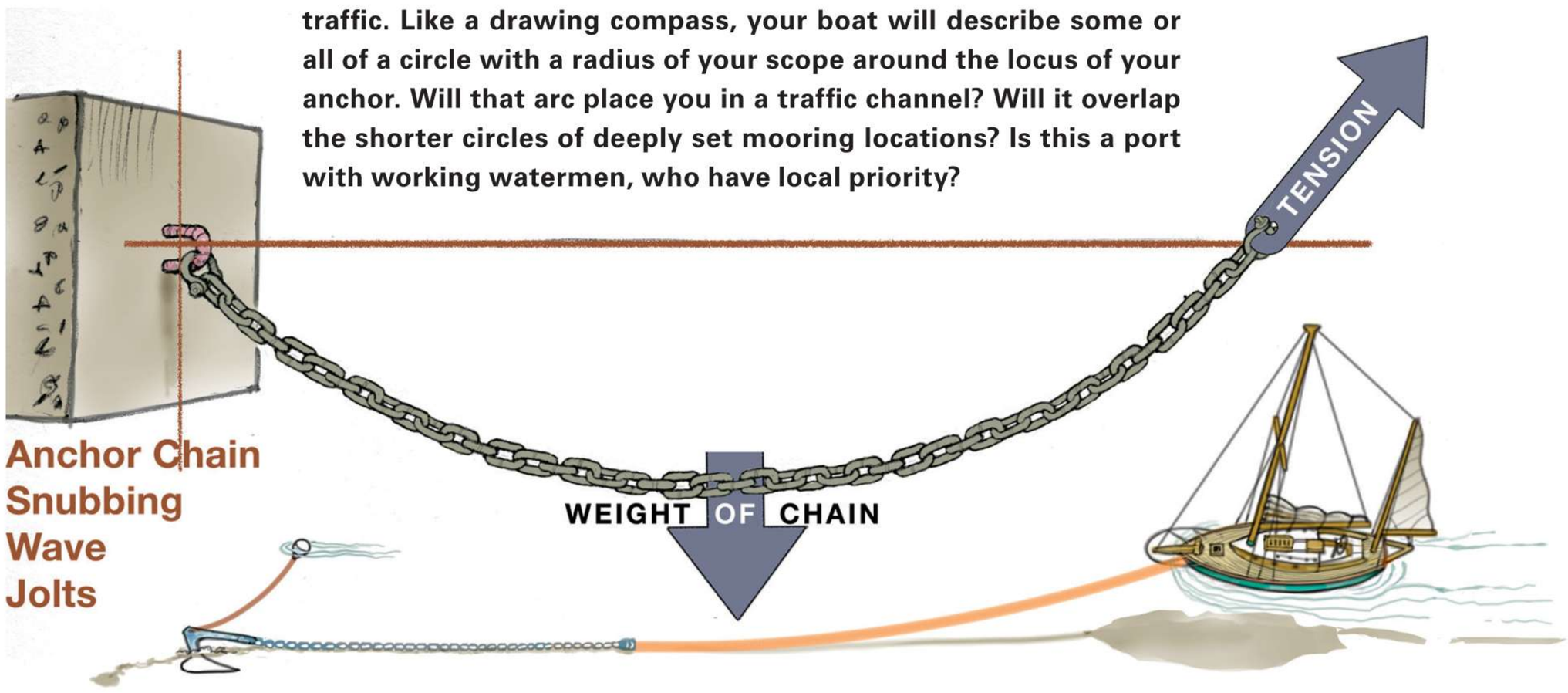
What's the tide—ebbing, flooding? What's the phase of the moon and expected tidefall up or down? Tide current? What's the bottom like? Are you dealing with sand, weed, shell, *cobble* (chair-sized stones), silt, gravel? Charts have abbreviations noting the bottom type. Neighboring boats may have local knowledge. Know all you can about what you can't see. You probably carry more than one anchor; which is more suited to the seafloor beneath you? (For a discussion of anchor types, see our Skills 101 article on the topic in the previous issue.)

Weather is another variable. A line squall can pipe up to 60 knots briefly. What does the forecast tell you? Will weather from some exposed compass vector bring a chop into the anchorage?



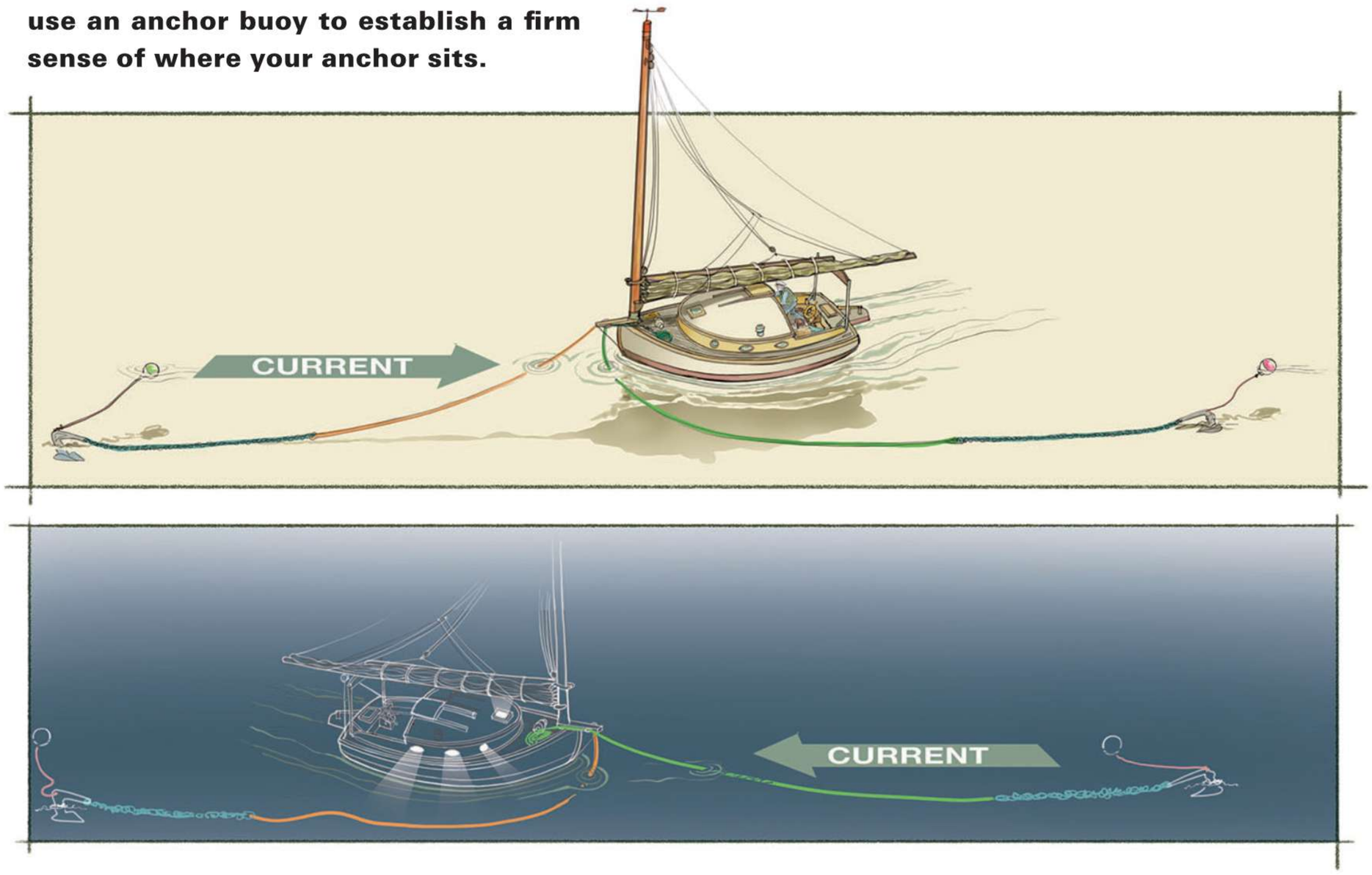
Setting the Anchor

As you choose your spot, consider: What's the depth below your waterline, and what's the recommended *scope* (depth-to-rode ratio) for the overnight depth on your particular anchor? It ranges from 3:1 to 10:1, depending on anchor type, wind, tidal range, and traffic. Like a drawing compass, your boat will describe some or all of a circle with a radius of your scope around the locus of your anchor. Will that arc place you in a traffic channel? Will it overlap the shorter circles of deeply set mooring locations? Is this a port with working watermen, who have local priority?

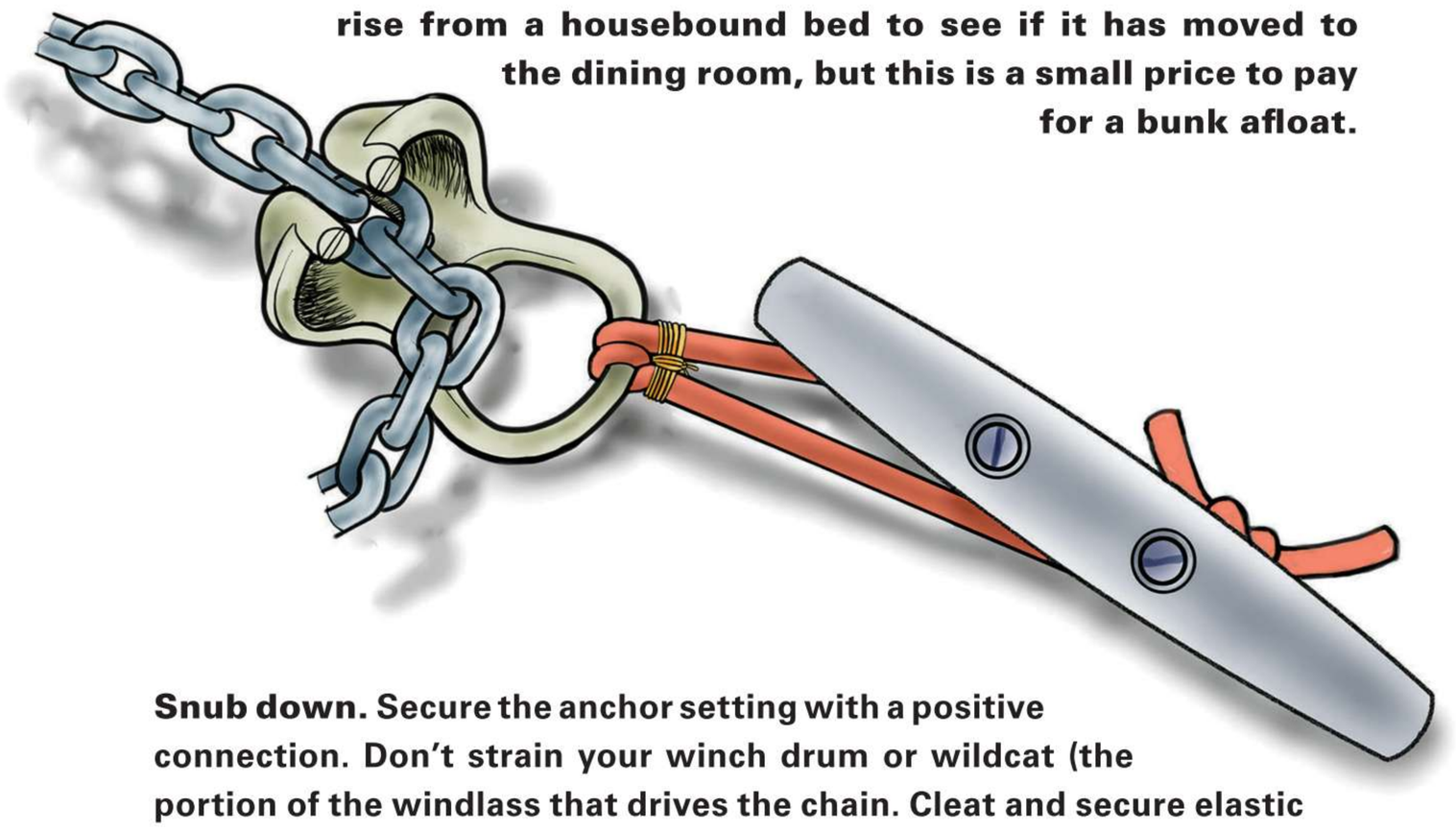


How does a hefty length of anchor chain soften shocks on the anchor line? It's natural shape, when hanging, is a so-called catenary curve. A horizontal pull on the cain digs the anchor deeper into the bottom. With a vertical pull, the weight of the chain acts as a cushion, softening the jerk of the boat caused by wind and wave action.

Drop anchor and let the wind back your boat to its resting position. If your boat has an engine, back down on the anchor, gently at first and then at half throttle to oblige the anchor's shape to dig deep. You can use an anchor buoy to establish a firm sense of where your anchor sits.



Anchors can drag and shifting winds and current can change the boat's position. If you have a GPS anchor drag function, set an alarm to alert you. Without a GPS warning, set your wakeup alarm and re-examine your position in the graveyard watch. You don't rise from a housebound bed to see if it has moved to the dining room, but this is a small price to pay for a bunk afloat.

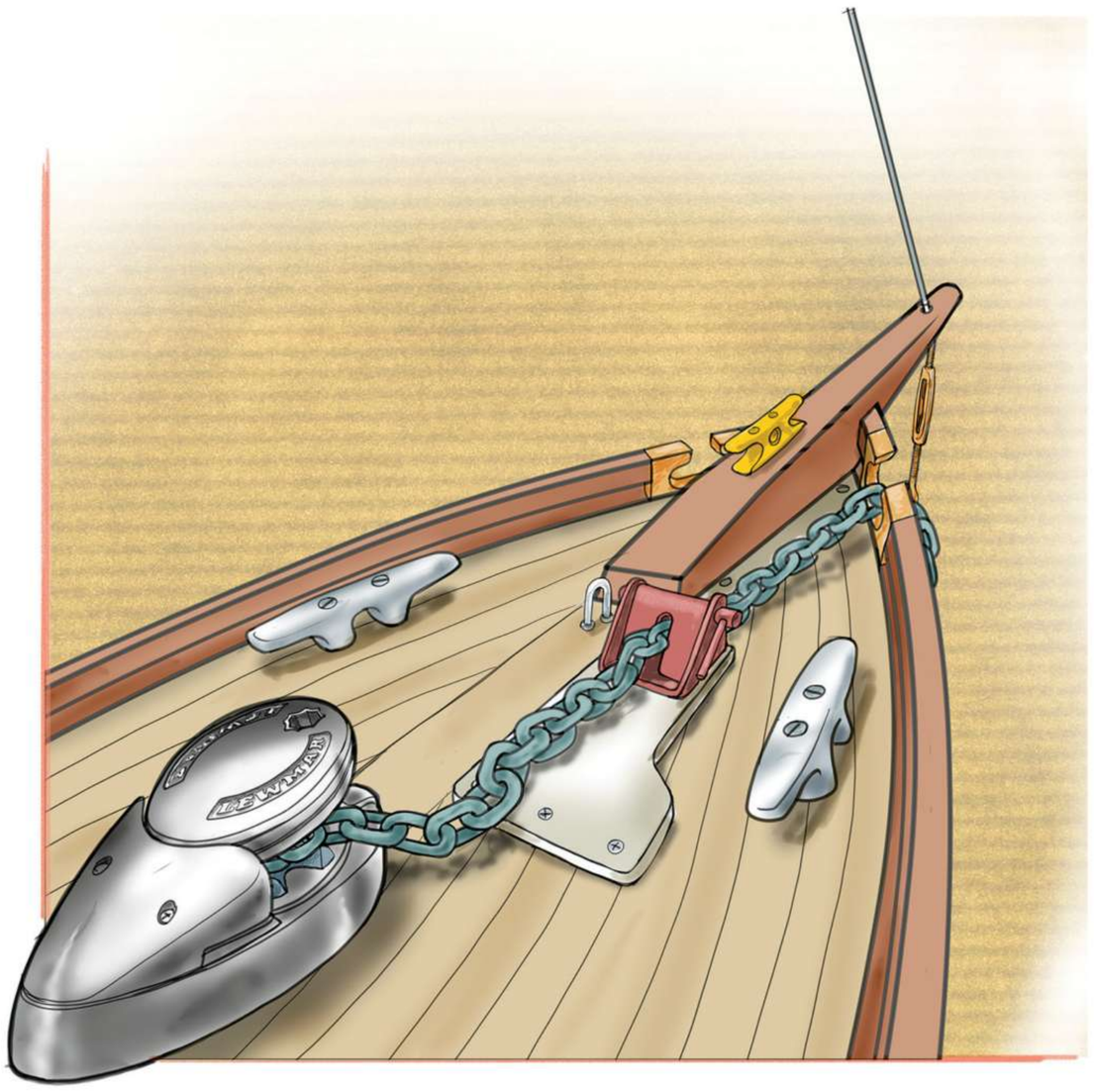


Snub down. Secure the anchor setting with a positive connection. Don't strain your winch drum or wildcat (the portion of the windlass that drives the chain. Cleat and secure elastic *nylon* (not low-stretch synthetic) rode to a trustworthy deck cleat or holdfast. For all-chain rode (lucky you) secure the chain rode with a well-mounted pawl stopper, or with a snubber—a length of line—shackled to the anchor and made fast to a heavy-duty deck cleat.

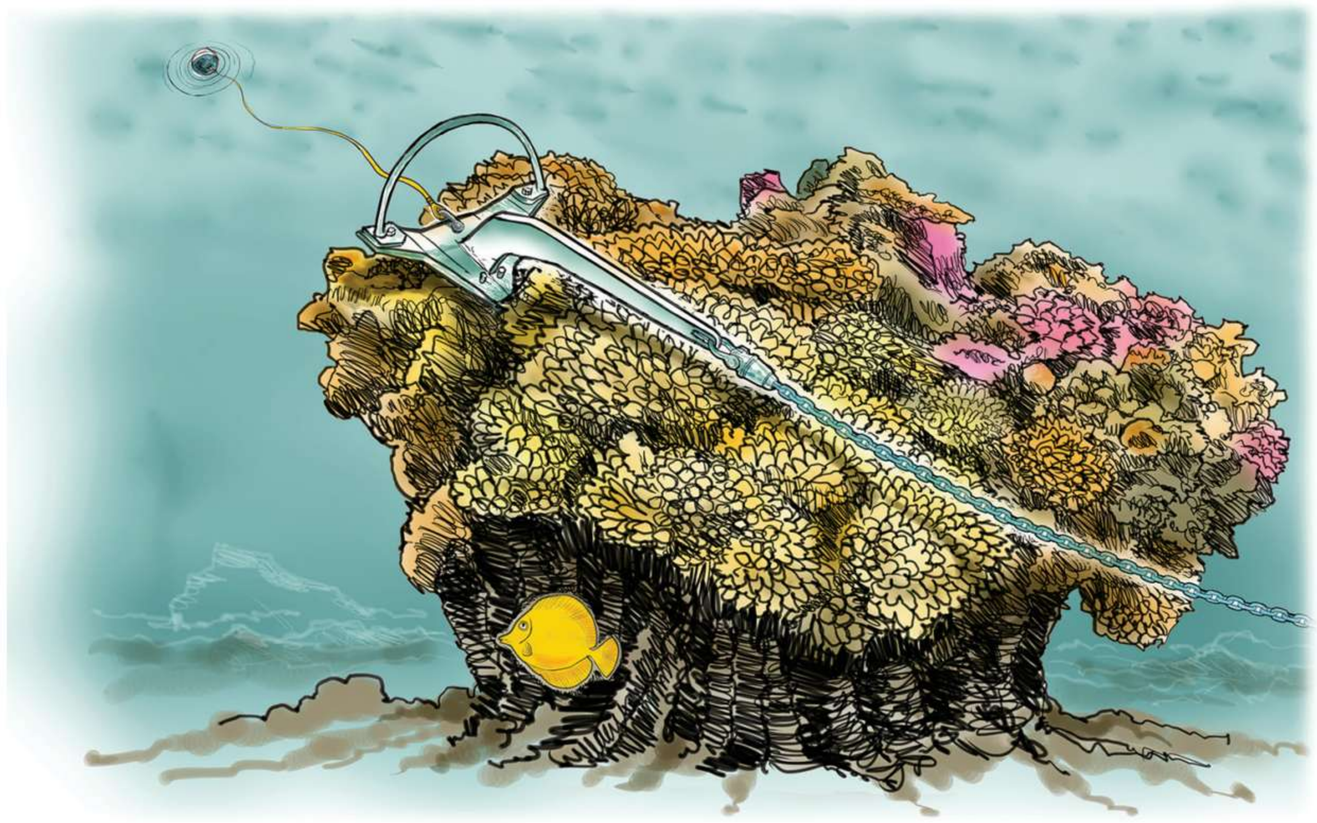
Anchor Aweigh

Weighing anchor when sailing solo is nearly always possible but nearly always chancy. If you've settled on simple, unambiguous hand signals, getting under way with a mate should be uneventful...depending. Depending on your scope, your chain-and-nylon rode or all-chain rode, and windspeed. Wind resistance may be critical; must you weigh anchor with sail set, or can you motor out of a confined space before making sail?

Let the winch do its job—without using the engine to move up on the anchor, if possible. If a bit of engine assistance is necessary, be mindful of the rode's location; an obvious disaster would be overtaking a bight of your rode and wrapping it around the propeller. The anchor's break-out will be obvious in the pitch of the winch's motor or in the ease of hand-hauling. If you have a mate at the bow, agree on a hand signal that indicates the boat is no longer attached to the bottom. "Up and down" is the old sailor's term for an anchor directly under the bow, and another good time for a specific hand signal. Don't hurry this moment; gentle thrust with the engine may be useful to stay in place and bow-to-the-wind.



Copious mud on the anchor demonstrates its dig-in efficiency but offends a clean deck. It's tempting to keep the anchor immersed just below the surface and allow the boat's headway to sluice the mess away, but a frisky steel anchor can do serious damage to a hull. When the anchor again hangs a'cockbill below the bow or the bow pulpit, it's available to bucket and brush or a saltwater hose-down before stowing.



You're not done until the ground tackle is stowed and stable. Stow a nylon rode methodically. And keep in mind that weighing anchor and leaving harbor is a vulnerable time, so you may need the anchor quickly. Flake your nylon rode on deck, and then move it to its locker; or send it down a hawsepipe. An all-chain rode has the advantage (and disadvantage) of weight, and will pull itself obediently into the chain locker.

Jan Adkins is a regular contributor to WoodenBoat. *Visit his blog, Dockwolloping (www.dockwalloping.boats), for more insightful illustrated discussion of all sorts of maritime matters.*

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NIC COMPTON

The Art and Craft of John McShea

Salcombe launches for a new era

by Nic Compton

There's no doubt about it: Bradley and Tracey Worsfold are living the dream. After selling their highly successful online-instruction business in 2021, they disposed of their home in fashionable Marlow on the River Thames in Buckinghamshire, England, and moved to no-less-fashionable Salcombe in Devon—or, to be precise, East Portlemouth, across the Kingsbridge Estuary from Salcombe. Their new house overlooks one of the finest beaches in the area, with spectacular vistas of Salcombe and the estuary. But lately there has been something distracting the couple from the undoubtedly scenic views.

"Every morning I wake up, and I come out here with a cup of coffee, and make sure she's still there, that someone hasn't stolen her—and of course she is still there," Bradley says. "Sometimes when the tide goes right out and she settles down, she drops over this way and shows off her lovely brightwork. I can walk down there and find five or six people just looking at her, taking photos. She's very beautiful, and she makes me very happy."

Bradley is talking about the couple's latest acquisition: HAYDEN, a 19′6″ gentleman's launch, which they keep on a mooring in front of their house, all the better to admire her first thing in the morning, all through the day, and last thing at night. HAYDEN is in many ways a quintessential lapstrake-planked ("clinker-built" in English parlance) launch of the type that has been ploughing these waters for the past hundred years, first as workboats, then increasingly for leisure. Before the advent of the now-ubiquitous inflatable boats, there would have been dozens of these launches pottering up and down the estuary. Now just a handful are left.

***Above*—John McShea, at the helm, built the launch HAYDEN, a bespoke wooden launch inspired by historic local types of Salcombe, Devon, England. His client Bradley Worsfold, seated amidships, and his wife, Tracey, commissioned the boat.**

The Warsfolds had owned a traditional launch when they lived on the River Thames but were encouraged to buy a RIB for the Salcombe Estuary. They soon concluded that John McShea's launches were more their style.



NIC COMPTON

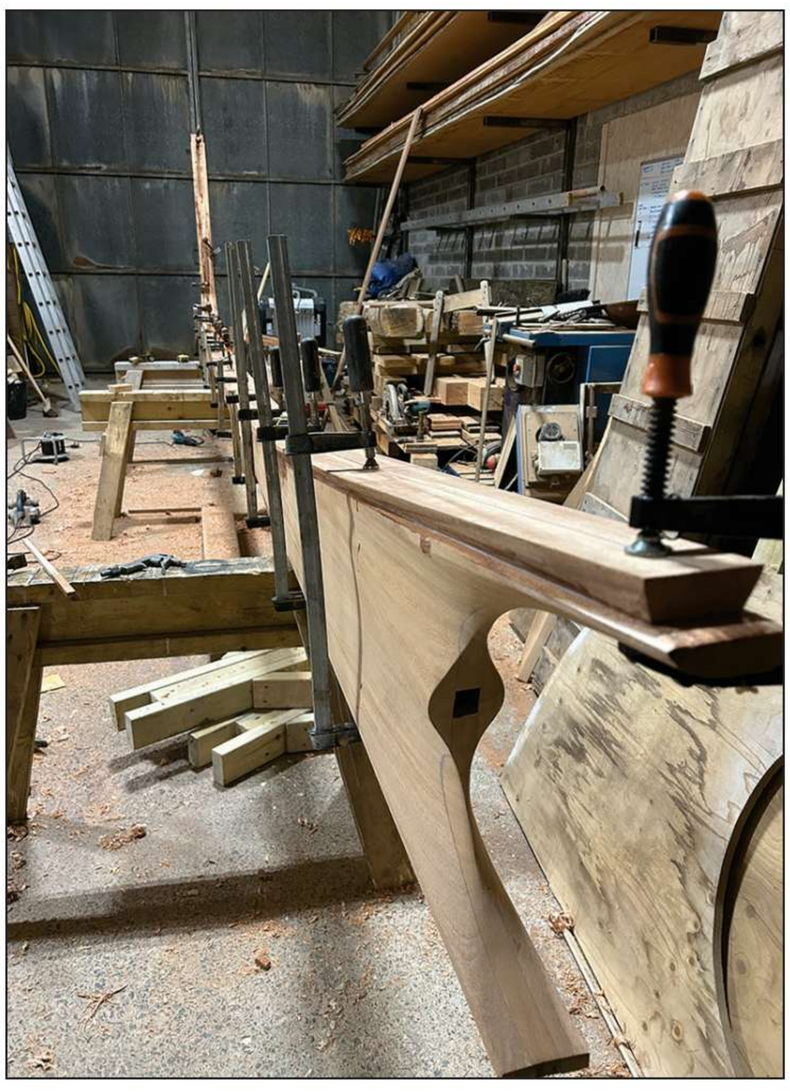
But there's something about HAYDEN that suggests she's a bit different from the rest, and the clue is in the hull color. She's pink. Admittedly, it is a very tasteful pale pink, but it's still pink, which is not a color traditionally associated with boats. She's also beamier than most of her counterparts, she has a lot of bespoke stainless-steel fittings, and that engine-compartment cover is suspiciously light in weight. The closer you look, the more you realize things aren't quite what they seem.

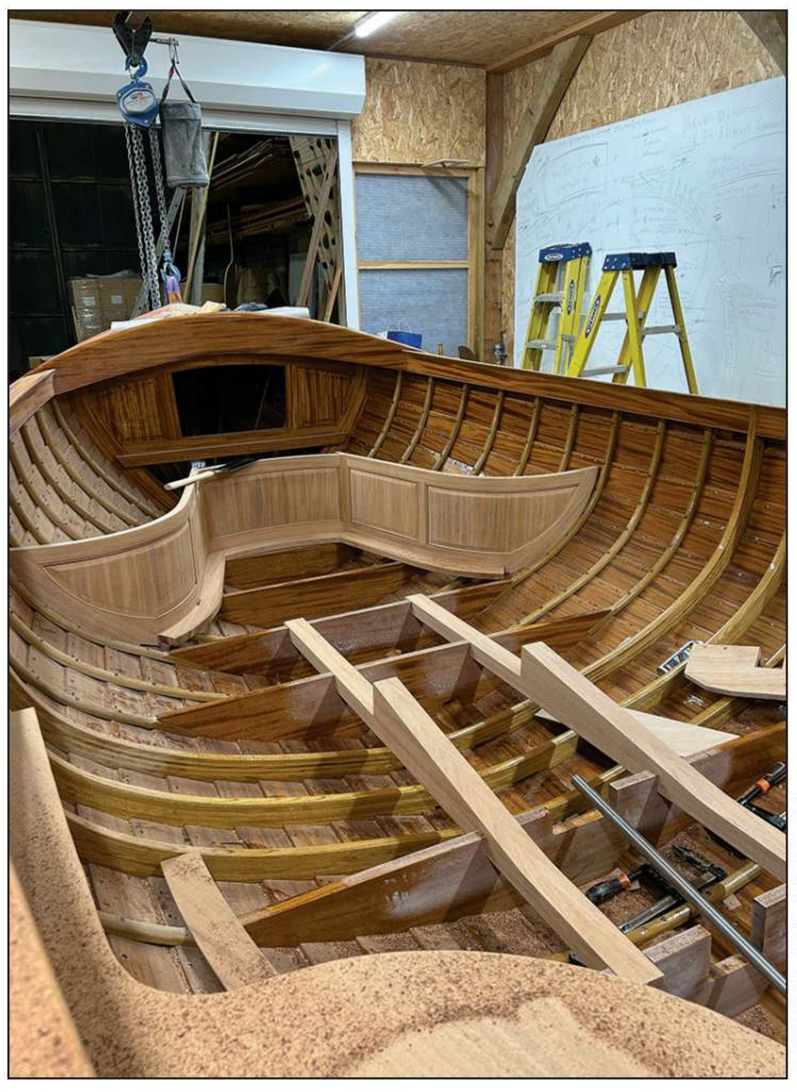
HAYDEN was built by the local boatbuilder John McShea, who has strong views about the concept of authenticity. Asked if he had any scruples about painting the boat such an apparently untraditional color, he replies, "I'm not actually that fond of the word tradition, because it holds people back. I build boats in the same way that people have built boats here forever, but I don't like to be held back by what people believe things should be. I like to cherry-pick what works. I'll take from tradition what works, but I won't stick to tradition for the sake of it. I think that particular pink is a beautiful color, and I think she sits on the water beautifully. The contrast with the blue and greens of the sea is really nice."

John's boatbuilding career started, not insignificantly, on a beach in Thailand. Practicing meditation and yoga and reading a lot of Herman Hesse convinced him that he needed to find a more creative path for his life. The distinctive longtail boats he had observed carrying tourists and cargo between the islands, with their dramatic stems and hand-crafted hulls, convinced him that building wooden boats would be the way forward. Back in England, he enrolled in a two-year course at the Boatbuilding Academy in Lyme Regis, followed by a year working for the boatbuilder Peter Freebody on the River Thames.

In 2000, John moved to Devon to be with his wife-to-be, Naomi, herself an accomplished artist and sculptor. After a few years working as a journeyman shipwright, mostly based in Dartmouth, he set up shop in a corner of a big, new shed erected in East Portlemouth by Tristan Stone of Salcombe Yawl fame (see WB No. 256). And it was here that he made his first attempt at building a boat from scratch, an 18′ motor launch designed by Paul Gartside. John lofted the boat, built the backbone, transom, and molds, and then waited for a buyer to come along to fund the project's conclusion. No one came. He ended up selling the whole setup, including plans, on eBay for £1, or $1.42 at the exchange rate at the time.

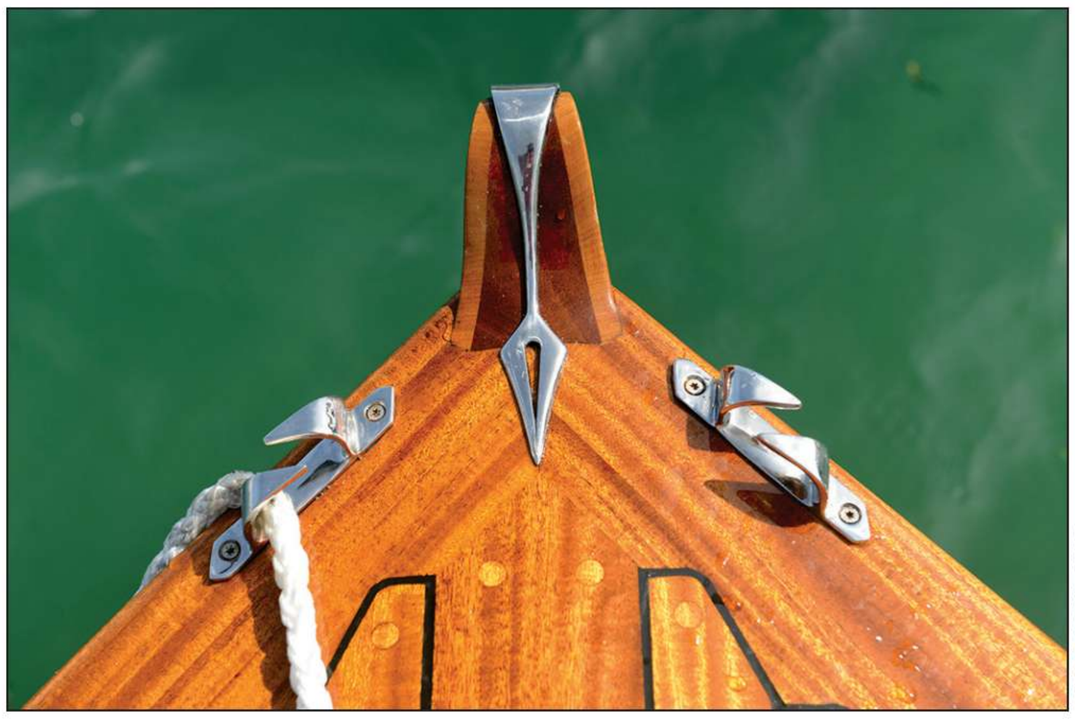
Meanwhile, he had his hands full restoring a Salcombe launch built in the 1930s by Coves Boatyard, in its day one of the top yards in the area. Inevitably, the restoration turned into a complete reconstruction, and as John took the boat





JOHN McSHEA (BOTH)

***Right*—John McShea built HAYDEN at his workshop in East Portlemouth. Here, the hog piece is epoxy-glued to the sculpted keel and deadwood assembly. *Far right*—With the engine bedlogs and forward paneling in place, the elegant interior takes shape.**



NIC COMPTON

All of John's boats have a 3" × ½" stainless-steel keel shoe. Where the protective band comes aboard over the stemhead, it is finished off with his trademark spear shape.

apart and rebuilt it piece by piece, he gained invaluable insights into the ways this kind of boat was built.

Four years later (and 11 years after his Thailand epiphany), he finally got a chance to build a boat from the keel up when Tristan commissioned him to build an 18′ launch designed by the renowned dinghy designer Ian Howlett. By comparison with the Coves boat he had just rebuilt, the new design was relatively broad, with a beam of 8′, and had a flatter bilge, producing a fast, stable hull. By the time TEMPEST was launched in 2011, John had an intimate knowledge of both traditional and modern versions of the type.

A second commission proved elusive. Eventually, he decided to throw caution to the wind and start building a new boat anyway. Not only that, but this time he would build a boat of his own design, applying the lessons he had learned from his previous projects.

"I laid the plywood down on the workshop floor and drew the boat I wanted, full-sized," he remembers. "I really wanted to get a nice wineglass shape. There used to be much more of that in launches than has been seen recently, but it's been lost because it's easier to build boats without it. I also gave it less of a hard turn of the bilge, because that's where many old boats break, and increased the number of planks from 11 to 13 per side to control the shape of the sheer better."

Once again, he bought the wood, built the centerline assembly, molds, and transom, and waited for a customer to turn up. After nearly a year, he finally got the call he was waiting for, and he was able to start building the first boat of his own design. Inevitably, there were compromises to be made—for a start, his new client didn't want the hull planked in the sweet chestnut he'd bought for the purpose but instead chose the more conventional (and arguably stronger) African mahogany. More generally, the new owner was a demanding taskmaster, which forced John to up his game and build to the best of his abilities—something that caused a degree of stress at the time but for which he was ultimately grateful.

The result was TENACITY, an eye-catching boat. She had the spacious interior and wave-cutting bow of a highly functional hull, but at the same time her immaculate clinker planking and high-gloss varnished interior paneling made her a showcase of fine craftsmanship. If ever an aspiring boatbuilder needed a calling card, this was it. John's achievement didn't go unnoticed: the boat duly received a commendation in the New Powered Vessels category in the 2022 Classic Boat Awards.

John's high standard of finish was a long way from the type's origins. Wooden workboats used to be built cheaply, John says: "Materials were cheap, labor was cheap, they were built very fast, but they were not built to last. The market's not there for that now, so you have to create your own market. The boats we build now are better made, leak less, and last longer. They take more time, but they are something different. People are buying something made for them, something really special, something that will outlast them."

In short, people want a work of art—something they can enjoy looking at as much as using, and sometimes more. It's surely no coincidence that another of John's interests is sculpture. When not building boats, he carves abstract shapes, often in collaboration with Naomi, out of wood and stone that sell for hundreds of pounds.

Having finally built a boat of his own design that demonstrated his distinctive approach to boatbuilding, a slow but steady trickle of orders started to come in from discerning (not to mention wealthy) clients. Each one presented special challenges to ensure that no two boats were exactly the same.

***Below left*—Salcombe launches were traditionally fitted out with either tongue-and-groove staving or, as seen here on HAYDEN, raised panels. *Below right*—Three beefed-up frames make up for the lack of an amidships thwart and double as supports for a side bench.**





NIC COMPTON (BOTH)

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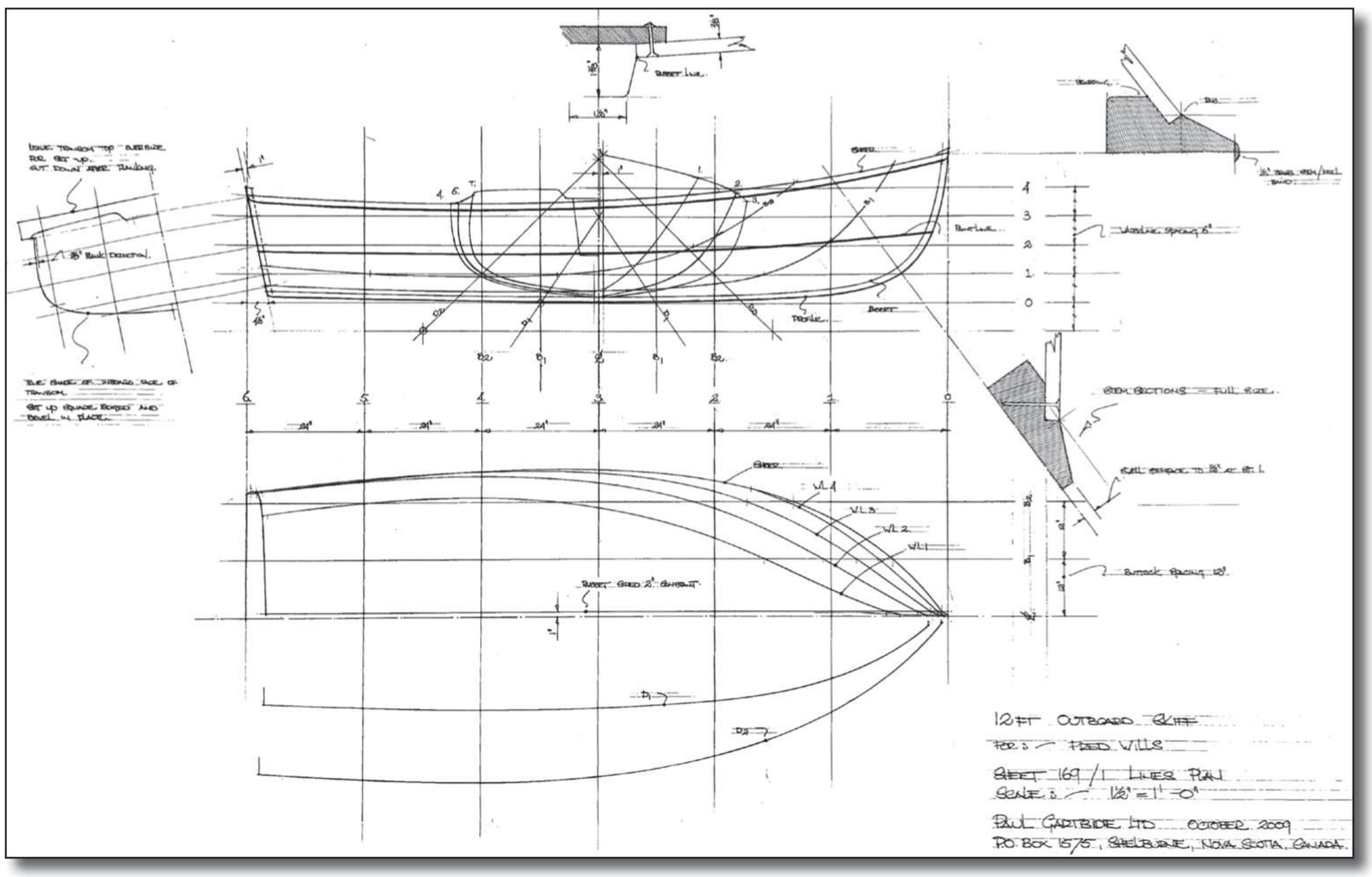




AVIVA—14′ Gardner Lapstrake Peapod. Built in the Spring 2026 class.



ADRIAN LILBURN

The first boat of John's own design was the 29'6" TENACITY, built in 2020 and seen here powering up the Kingsbridge Estuary in Devon. John has used her molds for all his subsequent designs, tweaking them slightly to reduce beam and sheer and produce a slightly fuller bow.

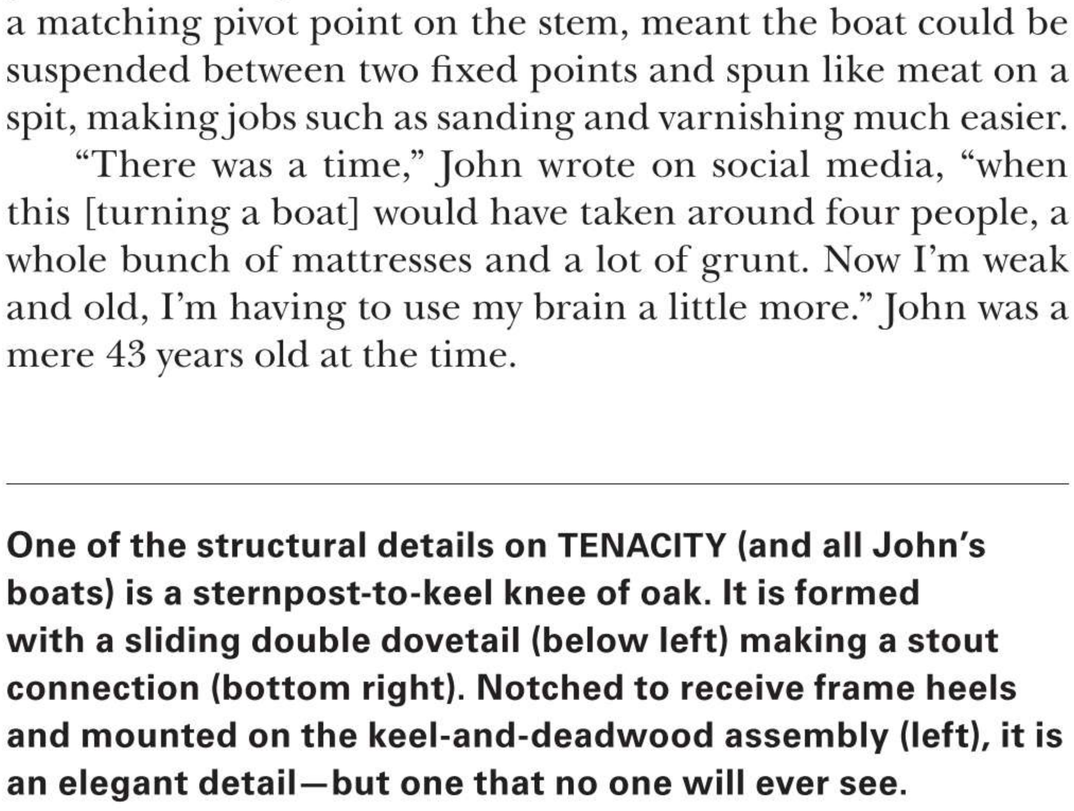
TENACITY was followed by WHISPER, another 19'6" launch built using the same molds as John's first design but with slightly less beam—7'6" instead of 8'2"—and a less-dramatic sheer requested by her owner. Unexpectedly, the reduction in beam wasn't due to any performance issues but simply because the extra beam made her awkward to manage on land, especially when moving her around a crowded boatyard.

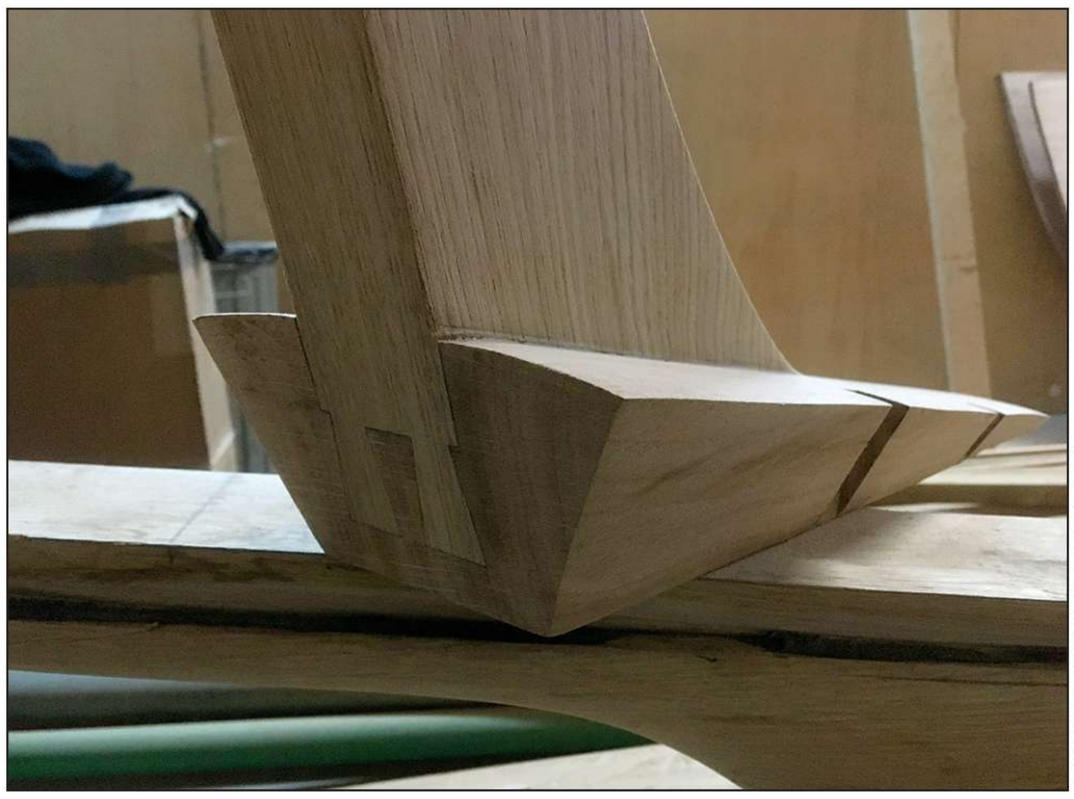
The other significant change was that the new owner wanted wheel steering rather than a tiller, which necessitated fitting a rudder tube right where the sternpost knee would normally be located. John's solution was to fashion a stainless-steel knee that incorporated the rudder tube and was enclosed in oak for a more traditional appearance. At the after end of the assembly, he built in a pivot point, which would ultimately protrude through a hole in the transom and, combined with a matching pivot point on the stem, meant the boat could be suspended between two fixed points and spun like meat on a spit, making jobs such as sanding and varnishing much easier.

"There was a time," John wrote on social media, "when this [turning a boat] would have taken around four people, a whole bunch of mattresses and a lot of grunt. Now I'm weak and old, I'm having to use my brain a little more." John was a mere 43 years old at the time.









JOHN McSHEA (ALL THREE)

One of the structural details on TENACITY (and all John's boats) is a sternpost-to-keel knee of oak. It is formed with a sliding double dovetail (below left) making a stout connection (bottom right). Notched to receive frame heels and mounted on the keel-and-deadwood assembly (left), it is an elegant detail—but one that no one will ever see.



JOHN McSHEA (BOTH)



***Left*—John gave TENACITY more of a wineglass sectional shape than recent Salcombe launches and added two extra planks per side to facilitate the curve. *Above*—Opposing wedges will be driven into the recess of this scarf, joining the sawn frames on TENACITY, to tighten and lock the joint.**

I visited John at the start of the WHISPER project, and it was immediately clear to me that this was a boatbuilder who thought deeply about his craft and how best to execute every task. There was that complicated stainless-steel knee—which, like most of the fittings on all his boats, he had made himself—but there were other things, too, such as the fancy laser light show. Rather than simply measuring off the position of the fastenings on the planks, John set up a line of laser lights on a copper bar located over the boat and used the perfectly spaced red lines shining on the keel and ribbands as a foolproof set of reference points for every plank-to-plank fastening in the hull.

The interior joinery of the new boat was all made in tongue-and-groove, in theory to reduce costs, though in retrospect John's not sure it really saved very much at all. The middle thwart was dispensed with completely to make way for the engine box, and instead of the three steamed frames on each side he used laminated ones to compensate for any loss of lateral rigidity.

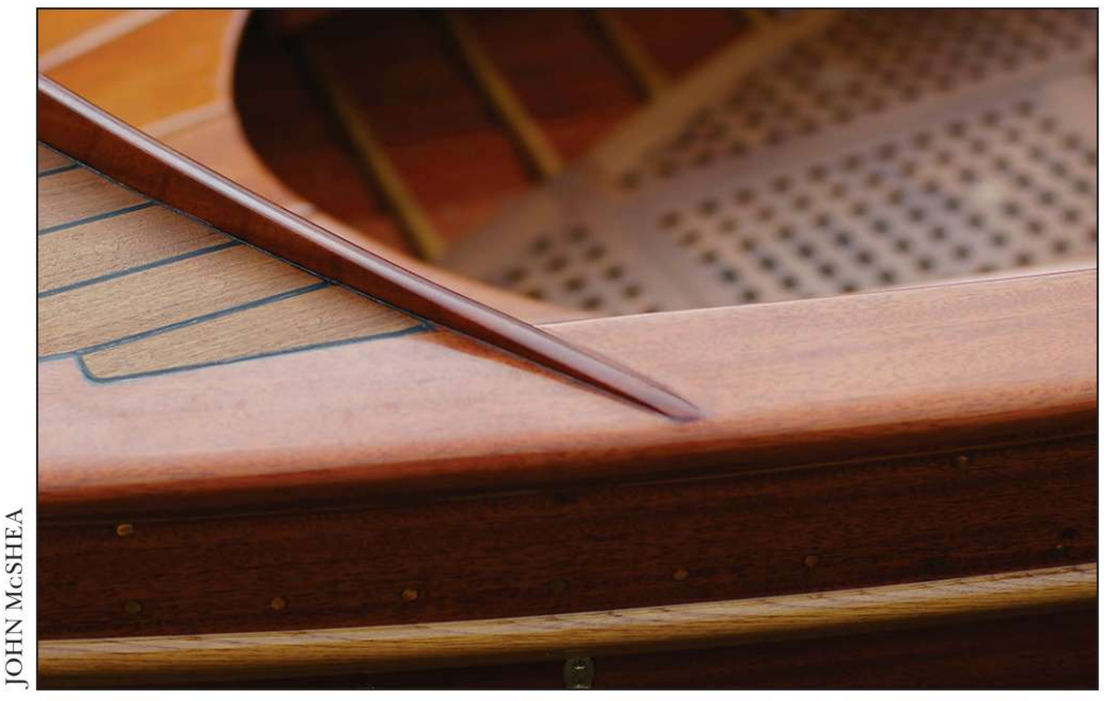
The broad top of the box itself is made from an exquisite piece of rippled chestnut that John stumbled across in a lumberyard in North Devon. Most builders would have simply butted solid planks together or perhaps laminated a veneer on plywood; instead, John used modern foam construction, completely sealed in wood, to create a lid that looks completely traditional but weighs half as much as using those other methods and is much less likely to split. It's a perfect example of his combination of traditional aesthetics and modern building techniques and materials when it suits him.

WHISPER was followed by BIBBIDDI (named after the owner's dog, which was in turn named after a song in the Disney movie *Cinderella*). She, too, was built to the same design as WHISPER but with the bow slightly fuller for more buoyancy forward. As before, John made the changes by altering his original TENACITY molds and, guided by the use of ribbands, fairing the shape by eye.

BIBBIDDI was fitted with a 16-hp Vetus M2.18 diesel engine, as are all of John's boats except WHISPER, whose owner insisted on a 20-hp equivalent. The boats are all fitted with 13 × 10 propellers, and from BIBBIDDI onward John has used Ercem GV shaft seals, with the Cutless bearing water-cooled by a feed from the engine exhaust system.

With the basic design settled, it was then more a question of refinement and detailing. The interior paneling was back, beautifully curved to echo the line of the coamings. Even the gratings took up the theme with curved lateral

***Below left*—The coamings on TENACITY aren't cut off at the ends but taper to a point across the covering boards. *Below right*—TENACITY's centerline timbers and framing are of British oak and her transom and planking are of African mahogany.**



JOHN McSHEA



NIC COMPTON



JAMES FULLER

WHISPER was the second boat built to John's design, incorporating slightly less sheer, a bigger engine, wheel steering, and a continuous rope fender.

strips, something that takes very careful planning. Then there's the custom-made swimming ladder; when not in use, it slides under the afterdeck, which is also fitted with a drawer designed to hold bottles of champagne and another for equipment such as the boat's clip-on navigation lights and a key for the deck-plate gas cap.

But the detail that really caught my eye was the asymmetrical locker doors aft. Made from that same rippled chestnut as the engine-box lid, they were laminated and curved to the same shape as the cockpit coamings. Rather than fitting metal latches, as most boatbuilders would, John made the larger door with just enough bend so that it flexes into a groove in the frame, which holds it in place without any need for mechanical fittings. It's almost like magic, or like something you might find on a high-end piece of furniture rather than a functioning boat.

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NIC COMPTON (BOTH)

***Right*—John uses plywood only for molds and temporary pieces, viewing solid wood as superior for boat work. *Far right*—John created an ingenious structure for WHISPER, incorporating the stern knee and rudder tube.**

By this time, John had developed a modus operandi, or what he calls a "set of parameters." For starters, although custom laminations have a place in his boats, he'll have no plywood in any of them, apart from temporary jigs and templates. "I don't like plywood as a material," he says. "I don't think it's a particularly good material. In my experience, it doesn't last. When I was working on Rivas at Freebody's, the two things that always had to be replaced were the bottoms, which were made of plywood, and the decks, which were made of plywood. Because ultimately plywood is made up of these very thin bits of wood stuck together with thin bits of glue."

John also suggests that the use of plywood invites "a different mentality of craftsmanship," whereby the skill level to produce a box out of plywood is far less than it would be to produce something using traditional joinery, such as panels or tongue-and-groove.

He also has a limited tolerance for epoxy. While he's happy to use it for laminating wood and for constructing individual parts, he won't use it in the hull structure, preferring to see the boat as a collection of individual elements joined together and therefore easily replaced, instead of the more modern concept of a monocoque structure bonded together with epoxy and fillets.

"That doesn't mean that I think that all boats with epoxy resin are bad," he says. "I do use plenty of epoxy, but I use it in a particular way. I don't use it on the lands [the joint between the planks in clinker construction]. I build the boats completely dry, which is the way they've always been done in Salcombe. The planks are glued at each end, at the stem and at the transom, but not in the middle. And that encourages

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NIC COMPTON

John takes the helm of BIBBIDDI off Salcombe. The boat's blue topsides match the color of the owner's Land Rover.

good boatbuilding practice, because you can't rely on this gap-filling glue, which tends to happen in modern-day boatbuilding. It's easier to cut corners if something else is going to do the work for you, and epoxy can do that to an extent—or at least people think it can." Gluing the lands together with epoxy, John believes, means the wood isn't allowed to move, which can lead to cracks and, ultimately, leaks.

John's latest commission came about as he was getting BIBBIDDI ready to transport to the Southampton Boat Show. Bradley happened to be walking past the boat and fell in love at first sight. He would have bought her then and there, but inconveniently she already had an owner and so Bradley and Tracey—the couple who commissioned HAYDEN for their East Portlemouth home—had to wait. But that worked out just fine, since they still had major work to do on their new house at that time and had to return to their home in Marlow while all that was going on. And, besides, it meant they were able to customize the boat to their own requirements.

This time, the hull shape was identical to BIBBIDDI—you could call it the McShea 20, if you were a clever marketing person, which John isn't—though Bradley did have one rather unusual request: "I wanted a toilet," he says. "I'm known to enjoy a glass of wine on the boat. On the Thames, you can always jump off onto the bank. But here, if I'm in the middle of doing a bit of fishing or something, and Tracey and the kids are on board, I don't want to have to 'go' over the side.…"

HAYDEN was fitted with a locker lid forward to conceal a wooden toilet seat and a handsome marine bucket. The louvered paneling behind, which on previous boats was full-length, was made half-length to accommodate the new feature. Other changes included fitting USB device-charging ports, a horn, and a stainless-steel swimming ladder with wooden treads for added comfort. This time, the engine-box

***Above left*—Pivot points that John builds into all of his boats allow him to easily and conveniently spin them during construction. *Above right*—For brightwork, John applies 14 coats of Epifanes varnish, inside and out. "It's a question of sustainability," he says. "It's not right in this day and age to produce things in a throwaway nature."**





NIC COMPTON (BOTH)



NIC COMPTON

BIBBIDDI, like all of John's boats, is designed to be seaworthy and easily driven. All the boats have 16-hp Vetus M2.18 diesel engines except WHISPER, which has a 20-hp version.

lid was made from ovangkol wood that had caught the eye of John's daughter, Penny. John made the panel wide enough for the top by bookmatching two pieces, as you might for a guitar, which the species is often used for—except the only sound this piece of ovangkol will shape is the noise of the engine.

For John, it was all part and parcel of building non-production, bespoke wooden boats, which of course doesn't come cheap—the final bill for HAYDEN was £125,000 (about $168,500).

"I've got the molds that I set up each time, and I've got a few laminating jigs that I use to make the stem and the pattern for the transom," he says. "But apart from that, I don't keep the measurements for any of the boats. I might look at photos of what I've done before and guess the scantlings, but it's not exact. I used to joke with the owner of TENACITY that I made it up as I went along, because it wound him up a little bit. And he would laugh and smile, but it's actually true. I like to keep it like that, because otherwise I'm just recreating something that's happened before. And that freedom allows evolution of sorts. I try not to be anchored; I always try and evolve."

As for the color, the idea was to re-create the soft pink of Bradley and Tracey's newly refurbished house overlooking the beach at East Portlemouth. But what looked right painted on a house with emulsion didn't necessarily translate to being painted on a small boat with marine gloss, and it took three attempts to get the color just right. And John's right: although it may not be 100 percent traditional, it does contrast perfectly with the many shades of blue, green, and turquoise in the sea around it.

Meanwhile, John has completed his master's degree in fine art. For his thesis, he made a series of wooden hoops, using various woods that he steamed and then riveted, just as he steams and rivets the frames on his boats. The hoops were then set up in strategic spots around the neighboring countryside as sculptures in their own right; they also frame certain views, including Island Street in Salcombe, where most of the town's boatyards in the heyday of wooden boatbuilding were located.

It's the old art-versus-craft debate, which is becoming increasingly relevant in this age of artificial intelligence, and John happily dances between the two. "What's nice with an owner like Bradley is, he appreciates the joinery that 99.9 percent of people will never notice," he says. "For example, the way the dovetails are cut. You can tell they're cut by hand because of the size of the pins. There's no way a machine could physically cut that; only a handsaw could do it. I do those things on purpose just to show that it's been made by hand. In a changing world, where AI is increasingly removing what humans do, it's my place as a craftsman to hold the space. To say, 'Well, we're actually doing something that can't be re-created by a bunch of machines.'"

Nic Compton, a contributing editor for WoodenBoat, *lives in Devon, England.*

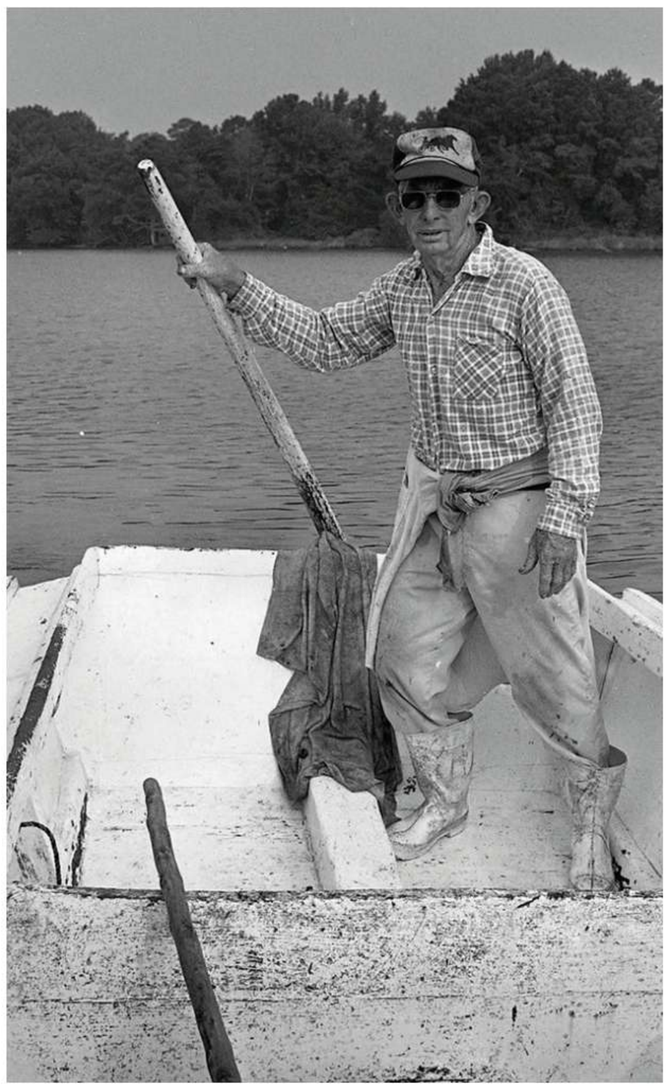


NIC COMPTON

HAYDEN's owners chose a pale pink color for her topsides to match their newly refurbished house on the Kingsbridge Estuary waterfront.



GLOUCESTER-MATHEWS GAZETTE-JOURNAL, GLOUCESTER, VIRGINIA



DELTAVILLE MARITIME MUSEUM/LARRY CHOWNING

The Curious Case of Chesapeake Sculling

With neither oarlock nor transom notch



CHESAPEAKE BAY MARITIME MUSEUM

by Albert C. Pollard Jr.

I have the good fortune of being from the same tiny town on the Chesapeake Bay shore where my dad grew up and my grandfather farmed and planted oysters. When I was growing up, that meant hearing lots of stories from "back in the day," and one that stuck out was how my dad learned to scull in the manner of local watermen.

As a boy in the early 1950s, my dad could walk out his back door and see the bustling world of the Rappahannock River on Virginia's western shore. The river's bottom was sandy and the tides mild. Almost every creek had a dozen oyster-shucking houses and rafts of shedding floats. The family's dock was not far from my grandfather's oyster lease, a bottomland so productive that it later paid for Dad's college education. And so, with no supervision, as a towheaded boy he got on a small, leaky skiff and learned to scull by mimicking local watermen.

He used a flat paddle, maybe 10′ or 11′ long, resting it on a short post coming off the transom. He wagged

***Above, left*—From the early 1960s through the 1970s, fishermen showed off their sculling skills at the Gwynnes Island Festival in Mathews County, Virginia. Note the use of burlap sacks to provide friction and help improve purchase on the sculling post. *Above, top right*—Mathews pound-netter Wilson Rowe, shown in 1988, sculls his trap skiff with just a post and flat paddle. *Above, bottom right*—A log canoe being sculled off a post at the Kinsale Virginia Cannery sometime in the early 20th century. Even after Chesapeake Bay watermen moved to square-sterned vessels, they added a post to enable the method of sculling they knew best.**



COURTESY OF THE MATHEWS HISTORIAL SOCIETY

Because propellers and nets don't mix, sculling off a post survived longest in Chesapeake Bay's pound-net fishery. This undated postcard photo shows five men working a pound net in Mathews, Virginia. The single, flat paddle is not in use but is visible, as is the small sculling post at the transom.

the paddle back and forth against the post trying to balance it and to discover the right pressure to keep purchase. For several days, he practiced, being blown onto shore or into the shucking house across the creek. Eventually, he could keep the paddle on the post and maneuver into the wind. He'd mastered the pressure of the sweep as the paddle pivoted on the post without an oarlock, tholepin, or transom notch.

Although larger boats had long been motorized, the watermen of the early 1950s continued to use sculling. Their deadrise boats were likely powered by old car engines, and the Johnson Seahorse outboard wasn't yet invented. The log canoe was still in memory.

Watermen would scull out to work the crab-shedding floats where molting crabs would be prepared for the city markets. They'd scull back home after dip-netting for soft-shell crabs in the shallow, clear water. Deep-water docks weren't yet common, so they'd scull a flat-bottomed skiff out to their deadrises moored to pilings in deep water. Sculling provided a quick setup, allowed the waterman to face forward, and didn't have cumbersome oars protruding off the gunwales.

But, as it turns out, this particular method of Chesapeake Bay sculling was so ubiquitous that it nearly slipped from history. Over the years, I'd asked a few old-timers about "sculling off a post." To a person, they confirmed that "back in the day" just about everyone sculled that way.

And so, in January 2025, I resolved to teach myself the technique. Frigid temperatures kept me off the water, so I started with research. I perused my library of Chesapeake Bay boatbuilding and maritime history. Nothing. The maritime historian Howard I. Chapelle's books were silent on sculling off a post. The databases at the Mariners' Museum in Newport News, Virginia, and the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum in St. Michael's, Maryland, documented everything from lighthouses to oyster tongs but had nothing on sculling off a post.

In the evenings, I went down Internet rabbit holes, frustrated that the search term "sculling" is also reserved for the sliding-seat sport of collegiate and Olympic fame. Yes, all these resources had information on stern sculling, but not the particular method of sculling with the paddle resting on a post.

After one particular night of fruitless research, I had to make a random shopping run. I arrived early and bumped into two acquaintances who were "mall walkers." One of these gentlemen was a retired tugboat captain in his 70s and the other, a young 90, was our retired county treasurer.

And there, between the Duracell display and Valentine's Day candy, I asked them about sculling off a post. "I certainly do remember that," the captain confirmed. The treasurer agreed. Their faces lit up as they told stories of how ably a waterman could work his way out of a creek in any breeze or weather.

That morning I realized that this fading niche of maritime history needed to be documented. Soon, I also realized that just as small boats evolved for the use of local materials and for use on local waterways, so too did sculling. As a "wooden boat person" I have long loved that wooden boats are unique to regions, the way, say, that a Connecticut River shadboat deviates slightly from a New York Whitehall. But I had never reflected on varying techniques for sculling. Why, for example, would sculling a Chinese yuloh differ from sculling a Japanese ro? Similarly, why did Chesapeake Bay sculling evolve without the use of a thole pin, an oarlock, or a transom notch?

Throughout my research I was continually hobbled by the vernacular. The method was so widely known that no one referred to it as "sculling off a stern post"; instead, it was simply "sculling." An excellent example of this is a 1908 article in a local paper, *The Virginia Citizen*. Nestled amid ads for buggy harnesses and railway caulkers was this blurb: "As one looks at the tongers going to the rocks in the early morning, he cannot but notice the change in a large number from the sail and paddle to the gasoline engine. The gasoline propelled canoe carries its workers to the rocks in about 15 minutes, who are fresh for work and nearly a bushel of oysters gathered when comes up his neighbor all tired, sculling and rowing."

The sharpie was quickly being adopted, but at the turn of the 20th century, log canoes—double-ended craft made of three to five logs sistered together and then hollowed out—were everywhere around the bay's waterways. A 30′ log canoe would not be unusual. And, like the canoes they were first modeled after, early Chesapeake Bay sharpies and crabbing skiffs were also double-ended.

I started testing a theory that since double-ended boats don't have a transom, there was no place to affix





KENT EANES (ALL THIS PAGE)

A sculling paddle is made as a flat tapered plank, with a simple handle (above left) carved into the inboard end. Standing (above right) came naturally for sculling the Chesapeake's flat-bottomed, square-sterned skiffs.

an oarlock or transom notch. Likely, several hundred years ago, a becalmed sailing canoe had some spare lumber aboard. Someone picked up a plank and realized that it could be wagged across the sternpost. The rest, I reasoned, is an obscure part of maritime history.

Building on my theory is that locally the term used is "sculling paddle." Elsewhere in the world, the instrument is called a "sculling oar"—the distinction being that a paddle has a flat shaft. That flat shaft allows it to pivot on a sternpost without slipping.

As it became clearer to me that this method was lightly, if at all, documented, I began searching out watermen who could share their histories and stories. I learned that sculling paddles were typically 6′ to 8′ long but might be as long as 12′. One fishboat captain I interviewed showed me a "creek paddle" that was a mere 5′ long. Another gentleman of about 70 showed great pride in the giant paddle that his grandfather used, measuring 13′6″ long and 5″ wide at the blade.

One great resource I met was Kerry Hall, a former pound-netter from Mathews, Virginia—a county with two lighthouses and zero stoplights. By the early 1990s, sculling had faded from other uses but was still used in the pound-net fishery. Obviously, propellers and nets don't mix well, so the pound-netters would tow unmotorized "trap skiffs" behind a larger boat. They'd secure the main boat near the weir, disembark to the smaller craft, and then scull to the nets.

Kerry tells a great story of a local charity event in about 2015, when he raced his wooden pound-netting skiff against a rowboat. It was an "out-and-back" race around a buoy. "I was ahead of him on the first straightaway, but he could turn his dinghy around faster with those oars, so he made up a lot of time around the buoy. I gained on him on the back stretch but couldn't quite beat him to the finish."

Kerry shared a detail that demonstrated another important use for sculling: When he was a young crabber, his dad made him carry a sculling paddle in addition to his (somewhat unreliable) outboard engine. That way, if the motor broke down, he could scull off the bow post. "And there was many a day that motor quit and I would point the stern forward and scull off the bow post. It wasn't as good as sculling off a sternpost, but it got you back home."

To me, this clever use of a bow post—or as some might call it, a stem—is a clue that boatbuilders of yesteryear viewed their square-sterned craft as a mere adaptation of the double-ended skiffs they knew before. While I couldn't find information at large maritime history institutions, I did find it hidden away in small local museums. For instance, when I called the Mathews Historical Society, Becky Barnhart, the curator, answered the phone. It turns out that her dad was a waterman who taught her to scull off a post. The society's collection includes photos of scullers as well as an old sculling paddle. In an adjacent county, the Deltaville Waterman's Museum also has a sculling paddle, photographs, and staff knowledge.

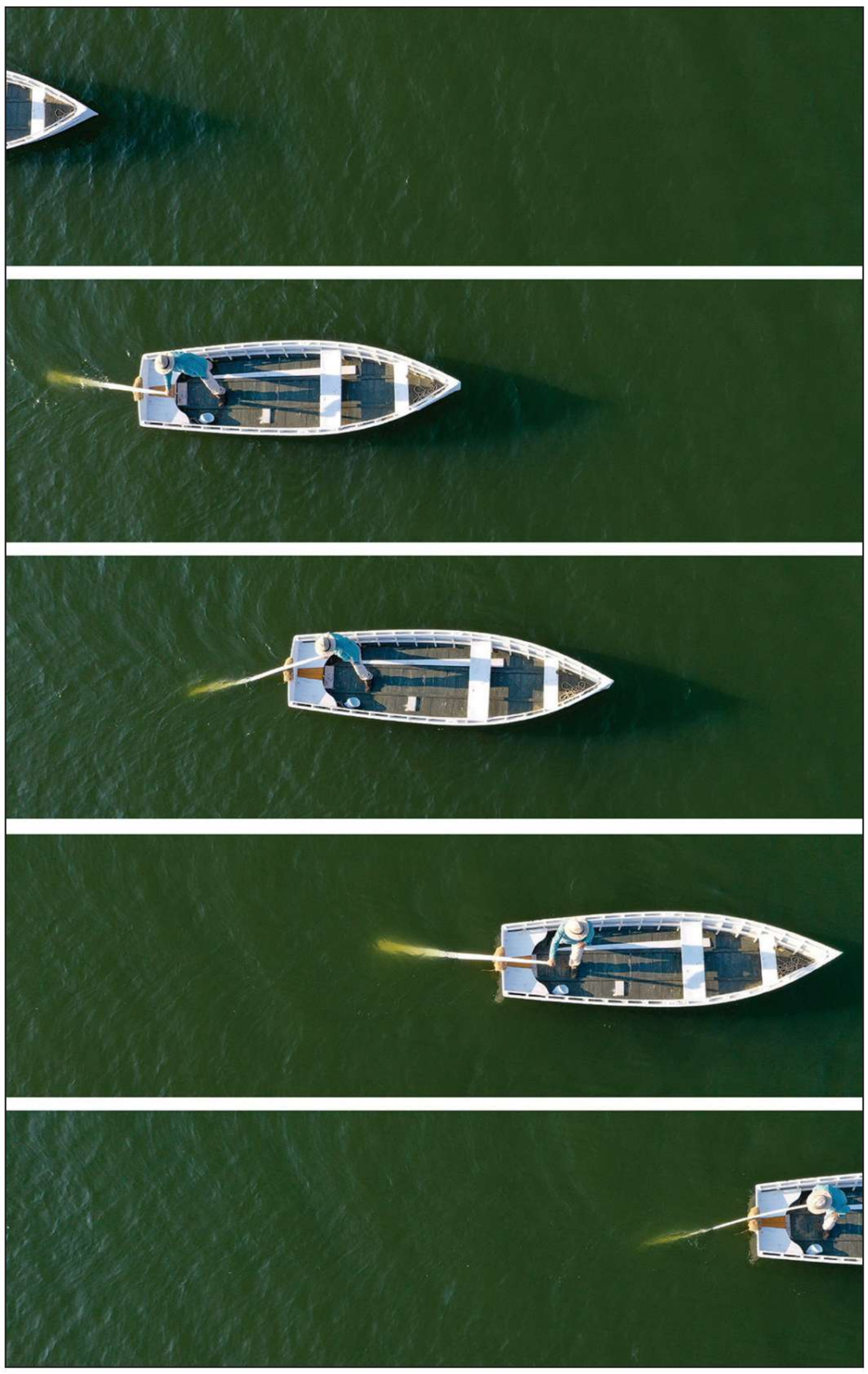
When searching through Chesapeake Bay books, the only place I could find a reference to sculling off a post was in "Harvesting the Chesapeake," a sort of "Firefox" for bay craft. The author, Larry Chowning, has a wonderful chapter titled "Making a White Oak Sculling Paddle." The article mentions the sculling post in passing and, curiously, doesn't address the method of sculling.

Larry, who is celebrated for documenting all things Chesapeake Bay, lives across the Rappahannock from me. So, one day I crossed the river and asked why he documented the paddlemaker but not the sculling style. He replied it was because it had never occurred to him that the method was unique or undocumented!





A sharpened post fastened to the transom (far left) provided an effective fulcrum for sculling. Some paddles had a groove cut in their undersides (left), but many did not. Regardless, the pressure of the paddle itself kept the paddle in place, though a wet burlap bag often helped smooth the motion.



KENT EANES

I was starting to feel a little less crazy. Larry's chapter included this anecdote:

> "I remember when everyone around here sculled here and there," he [Woodland Rowe] said. Many of the old boys would put a burlap bag, wet it, and put it on the sternpost to help keep the paddle steady as they sculled…. When I was a small boy, I remember the men around Guinea would sail their log canoes to Norfolk to pick up supplies that we couldn't buy around home, and many a time they'd come home by sculling the whole way."

And although they didn't have any cataloged resources, the staffs at the larger museums were very helpful. In particular, the head curator at the Mariners' Museum pointed to a second source—*Chesapeake Bay Log Canoes and Bugeyes* written by M.V. Brewington in 1937—that further bolstered my theory: "In a calm," Brewington wrote, "the canoeman seldom waited for a breeze if he really wanted to go anywhere. Instead he got out a peculiar paddle and proceeded to scull his craft to her destination. Both the instrument and its means of use are said to be purely local. The paddle was made of a plank 8 or 10 feet long by 7 inches wide, ¾ thick at one end tapering to 1½ thick at the other. The wood was customarily red oak. With spoke shave, plane, and knife the plank was worked into a long triangular shape, the base being the thin end of the plank. To scull, the canoeman stood in the stern of his craft, facing aft with the flat of the loom against the top of the stern post and the blade about two or three feet in the water. No row lock, thole pin, or notch was ever used."

According to my research, that's all that has ever been published on sculling in the ways of Chesapeake Bay.

I even reached across the Atlantic to see if the method is used elsewhere. Frenchman Gildas Roundat has dedicated much of his life to preserving the art and practice of "godille" (sculling) and has even written a book entitled *L'art de la Godille* (Canotier, Yerville, France, 2015). It documents sculling from around the world, together with various methods and the science behind them. In reply to an email inquiry asking if he had ever seen sculling such as is practiced in the Chesapeake, Roundat replied, "I'm so surprised to see how the oar is 'fixed' to the stern.… I have never seen that before.… It sounds good to write a paper before sculling practice disappear [sic]. A good idea you had!"

I am glad to have been affirmed from afar that recording this tiny bit of our history is a good idea—even if it means tracking down people in a big-box store to learn about the old ways.

Albert C. Pollard Jr. lives in Lancaster County, Virginia, and represented that region in the state legislature. He invites anyone with stories, photos, and insights about sculling methods from the Chesapeake Bay region to contact him at pollard.albert@gmail.com

Additional Resources

• For a how-to article focused on learning this method of sculling, see the August edition of *WoodenBoat*'s sister publication, *Small Boats* magazine, at www.smallboats-monthly.com/article/chesapeake-sculling. (*Small Boats* magazine is included in a membership to WoodenBoat All Access (access.woodenboat.com). And for a *WoodenBoat* video, see https://access.woodenboat.com/videos/ches-sculling/.

Scan the QR code or click here for a video describing the Chesapeake sculling method.

• For an article on sculling techniques and some regional variations, see "How to Scull a Boat," by Sam Manning, in WB No. 100 (available to subscribers in the digital archive). Manning mentions having heard about sculling off a post, but he wasn't able to document it.

• *L'art de la Godille* (The Art of Sculling, Canotier, Yerville, France, 2015), by Gildas Roudaut, is a wonderful compilation of the history, theory, and practice of sculling. It is available (in French only) from independent booksellers and online vendors.

The author learned to scull to revive the Chesapeake style. The figure-eight motion side-to-side is much like other versions of sculling for propulsion, as the author demonstrates; however, the use of a post and the plank shape of the paddle itself appear to be unique to Chesapeake Bay.

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ALISON LANGLEY

Particulars

LOA	45′4″
LWL	32′
Beam	10′7″
Draft	6′6″
Displacement	23,500 lbs
Sail area	990 sq ft
Designer	Sparkman & Stephens (1935)
Builder	Henry B. Nevins

Scan the QR code or click here for a WoodenBoat All Access video profiling the New York 32 class.

A Fleet for the Ages

The enduring appeal of the New York 32

by Randall Peffer

"We had a race where almost nothing went wrong… but there was plenty of opportunity," Ben Sperry said. He is the skipper and owner, with his wife, Michelle, of GENTIAN, sail No. 18 of the New York 32 class. He was remembering how GENTIAN, at age 88, won her class and placed third overall in her division in the 2024 Newport Bermuda Race. That particular race had some of the event's most challenging weather in more than 50 years.

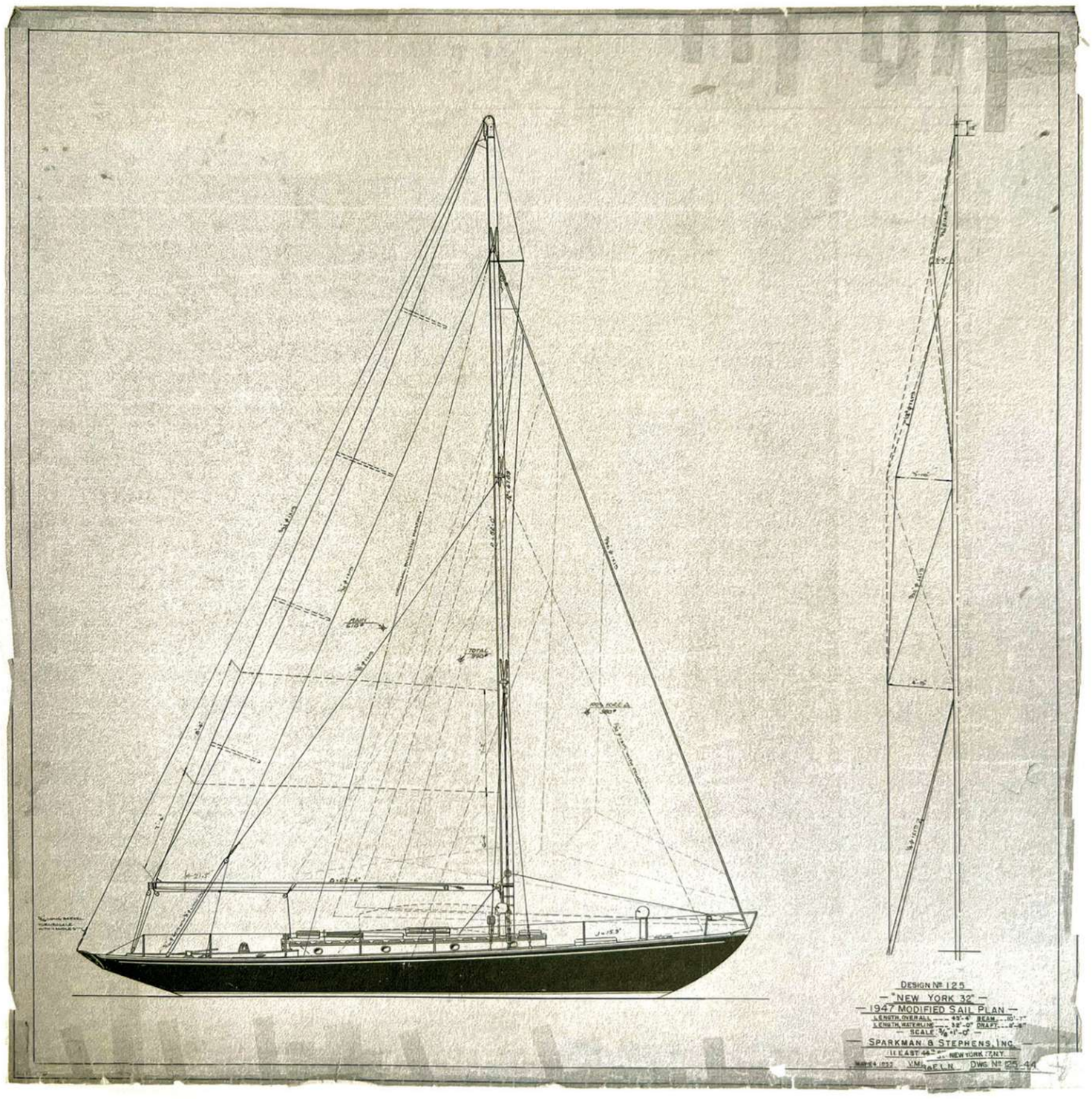
GENTIAN's victory stole some of the glory from the carbon-fiber, high-performance yachting crowd, but the New York 32's accomplishments should have been no surprise. She is a thoroughbred.

In 1935, the New York Yacht Club (NYYC) solicited candidates to replace the beloved and venerable Herreshoff New York 30s, which had been the club's one-design racer of choice since 1905. With a new design, the NYYC hoped to give a boost to the sport of Corinthian yacht racing as well as to the club's membership roster during the Great Depression by commissioning a modern marconi-rigged cruiser-racer. The selection committee, headed by the legendary yachtsman Robert Bavier, was searching for a yacht with speed and grace. His committee wanted a boat that was equally well suited for racing around the buoys, carrying a family on the annual yacht club cruise, and thriving in serious ocean competition.

Vying against a *Who's Who?* of American yacht designers (including John G. Alden, Bill Luders, Ford & Payne, W.J. Roué, and Belknap & Paine), 27-year-old Olin Stephens II won the competition with Sparkman & Stephens design No. 125. It would become known as the New York 32—the number, in the convention of the day, indicating the length of the waterline. The new boat followed the path that Stephens had pioneered with his successful ocean-racing yawls DORADE of 1929 and STORMY WEATHER of 1934. But with an overall length of 45′4″, the "32" was about 10′ shorter than STORMY

***Above*—The Sparkman & Stephens–designed New York 32 class was launched in a single batch in 1936 by Henry B. Nevins, Inc. The boats are much sought after today and still provide good competition and cruising. From left are SIREN, FALCON, and VITESSE.**

The New York 32, S&S design No. 125, is named for its waterline length of 32′; it carries a sail area of 990 sq ft.



FROM *LINES*, BY OLIN STEPHENS

WEATHER and carried a fractional sloop rig, making the boat manageable for a professional crew of two, a group of Corinthian racers, or a family. The hull design was slender, with easy sections, making it swift but stable when beating across the Gulf Stream to Bermuda or racing on Long Island Sound. "The 32s were—and are—good all-around boats: simple, seakindly, sensibly rigged, and conveniently arranged," Maynard Bray wrote in his 1986 article "The New York 32s" (see WB No. 73).

During fall 1935, 20 enthusiastic NYYC members agreed to pay $11,000 (approximately equivalent to $250,000 in 2026) apiece for the new yachts. The Henry B. Nevins yard at City Island, New York, where Olin Stephens had started his design career as a draftsman, completed all 20 yachts during winter and spring 1936. So began a transition in American yachting from extreme racing machines to bluewater cruiser-racers.

Good Fortune

As Sperry tells it, the way that he ended up owning GENTIAN and racing her to Bermuda was more kismet than deliberation.

"I got involved with New York 32s back in the early 2000s, sailing with Peter Cassidy [the highly regarded yacht restorer at Buzzards Bay Yacht Services who owns NY 32 No. 20, SIREN]. It was a fun time with many young men and women in the crew."

"Peter rescued and restored a boat [SIREN] that had been condemned," said *WoodenBoat* editor Matt Murphy, who sailed two Newport Bermuda Races in SIREN, and another in ISLA (No. 10). "A scene coalesced around that boat in the late 1990s—a bunch of sailors in their 20s and 30s racing a pedigreed classic."

Sperry, now 47, recalled that "we took SIREN to several Newport Bermuda Races and East Coast classic yacht events such as the Opera House Cup [at Nantucket] and the Eggemoggin Reach Regatta [in Maine]." Amid these adventures Sperry met and married his wife, Michelle, an ocean racer in her own right, and one classic 32 led to another. The Sperrys found themselves sailing occasionally with SIREN's sisters, FALCON and ISLA, too. Eventually, Ben became a delivery skipper on GENTIAN after classic-boat enthusiast Richard Armstrong (current owner of the converted Maine sardine carrier WILLIAM H. UNDERWOOD) had sent GENTIAN to Cassidy's shop to complete an interior restoration.

"At one point, Rich asked Michelle and me if we would like to buy GENTIAN," Sperry said.

"We discussed it," Michelle recalled, "but in the end we had to say it was not possible." They had a young family by then—two daughters and a son—and were trying to grow their sailmaking business, Sperry Sails. They didn't have spare cash to buy an 80-year-old classic yacht.

"Well," said Armstrong, "what if I give her to you?'"

It was an offer the Sperrys couldn't refuse.

"We were shocked for days," Michelle said. "We couldn't believe Rich was serious and so generous. I think he saw what we were on that boat. We would be good custodians of GENTIAN. We would raise our family on her." That was in 2015.

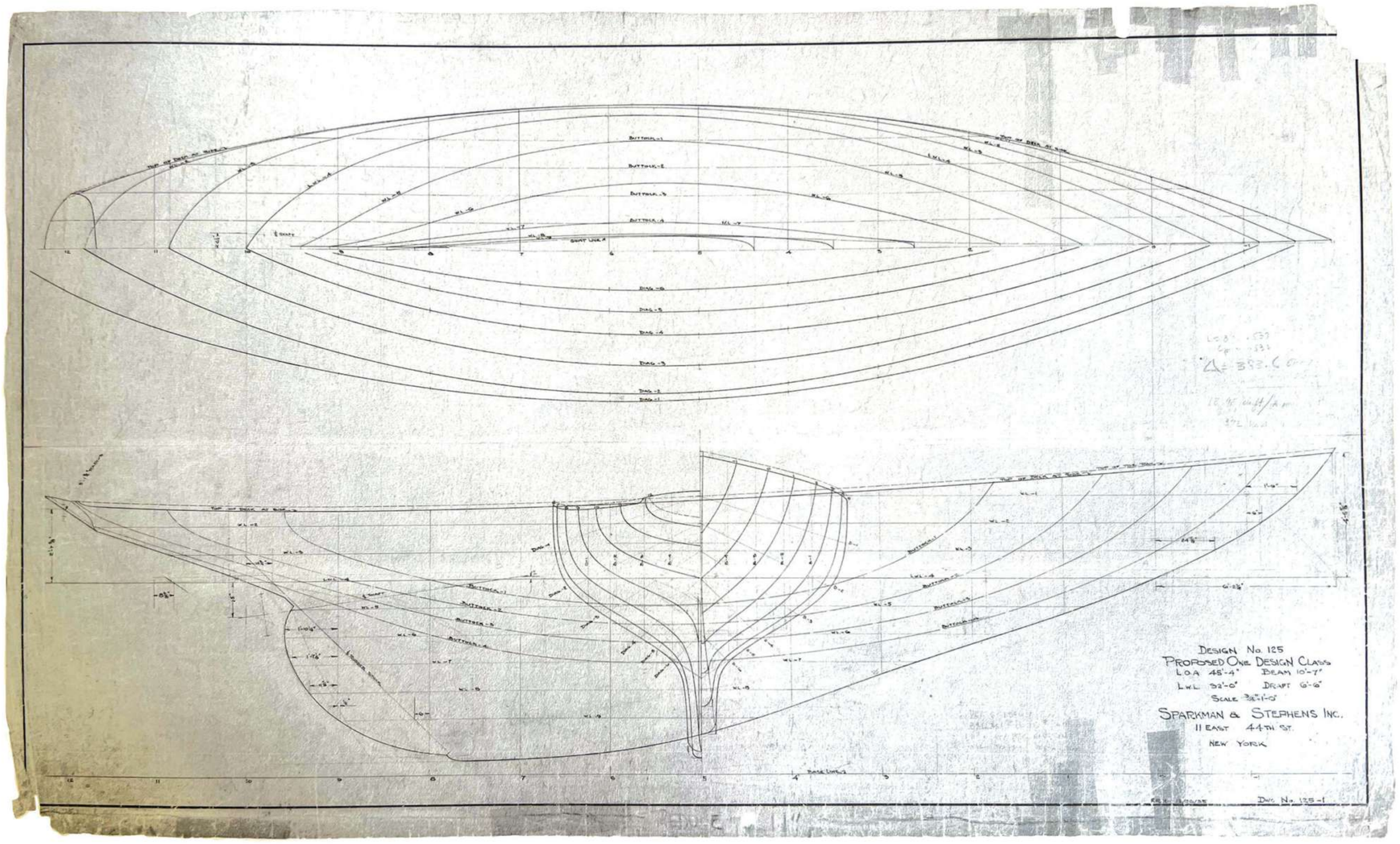
"I definitely had no intentions to race GENTIAN to Bermuda until one night at the New Bedford Yacht Club," Sperry said. "My friend Dan Rittenhouse fed me two martinis and talked me into the race. I was committed. I couldn't back out."

It took another eight years after making that resolution, but after a thorough survey and tune-up (that included scarfing a new top onto the mast) at Gannon & Benjamin Marine Railway on Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, and a new suit of racing sails that Sperry built in his loft, he signed up GENTIAN for the 2024 Newport Bermuda Race, the 53rd running of the event sponsored by the Cruising Club of America.

"Considering that she was 88 years old at the time, prepping her for the race seemed surprisingly ordinary beyond refreshing the electronics," Sperry said. There was one material upgrade. Sperry decided that he should build a proper ice chest. His family had been making-do with a portable cooler for years.

As for crew? The skipper enlisted six seasoned GENTIAN sailors as well as Brian Gault, a Bermuda Race veteran, as navigator. Sperry rounded out his team with himself and his 16-year-old son, Noah.

"I didn't know if I wanted to do it at first," Noah told a reporter from *The Martha's Vineyard Times* after the race, "but then I thought about it."



FROM *LINES*, BY OLIN STEPHENS

The 32's hull is a scaled-down version of the legendary STORMY WEATHER, which is turn was an evolution of the breakthrough Olin Stephens–designed DORADE.

"He's a tough kid, a good sailor, but we had no idea it would be such a rough ride for him," his dad said.

Gault recalled that, going into the race on Friday, June 21, 2024, GENTIAN's crew "liked the setup of the weather pattern and deep meander in the Gulf Stream running almost parallel to the rhumb line…." The crew "tried to stick to a simple game plan: sail close to the rhumb line, push the boat (but not too hard), and 'keep it casual.'"



PETER CASSIDY

At first, GENTIAN faced light air leaving Newport. "We were sailing with our biggest headsail [a 155 percent genoa] and a full main, trying to muster all the speed we could get out of GENTIAN," her skipper remembers. "Around midnight we passed BLACK WATCH [the classic 68′ yawl also designed by S&S and built by Nevins], which had started an hour and a half before us, and we started to feel like GENTIAN just might have a chance to do something special." Young Noah had his first trick at the helm. He felt like he was flying.

As the wind increased to over 10 knots from the southwest, the crew kept GENTIAN hard on the building breeze, betting that sailing west of the rhumb line would put them in a better position to cross the Gulf Stream.

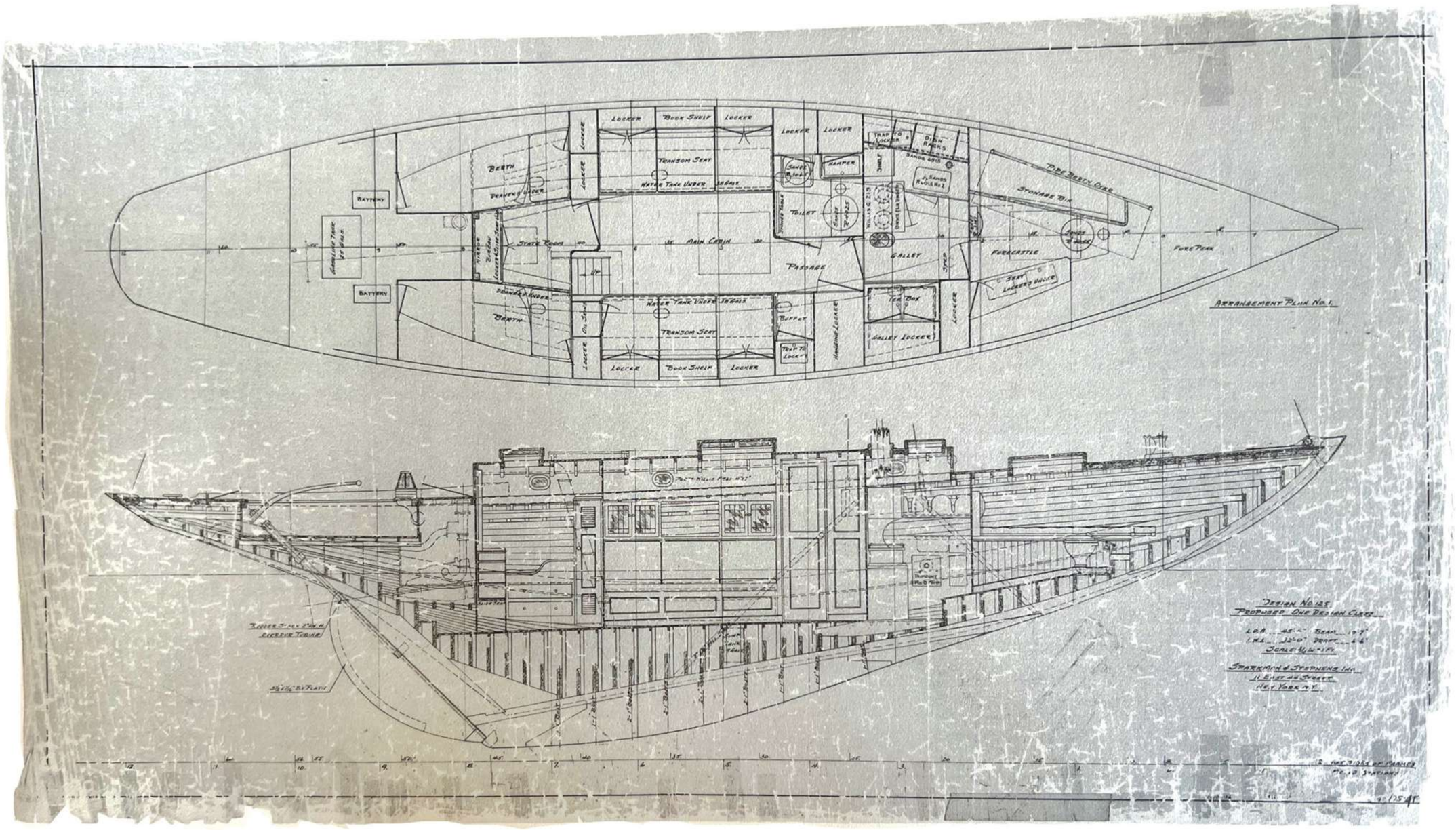
It was a gamble, for sure," Sperry said. "We could see a lot of the fleet on AIS keeping a bit to the east."

Meanwhile, the fleet suffered its first of 15 casualties. PROTEUS, a carbon-fiber JV72, lost her mast and limped back to Rhode Island.

Rugged for the Ages

Risks on the way to Bermuda were far from foreign to NY 32 crews. Thirteen of the 20 yachts have sailed more than 40 Newport Bermuda Races. According to class historian Debbie Rogers, "Five have completed three or more races to Bermuda. One, No. 3, raced three times with a sloop rig and six times with a yawl rig; No. 13 and No. 17 each raced seven times as sloops."

Peter Cassidy rebuilt SIREN from near-derelict condition when he was in his 20s. The project required intense focus—with nights spent aboard the stripped-out hull.



FROM *LINES*, BY OLIN STEPHENS

ALISON LANGLEY

The 32s were designed with a forecastle with crew berths. Next aft were the galley and head, then the main saloon. The standard arrangement has a ladder to the companionway hatch that sits on the top of the deckhouse, though some of the boats were built with the companionway opening into the cockpit.

In his design No. 125, Stephens essentially created something like a scaled-down version of STORMY WEATHER. The NY 32 measures 45′4″ LOA, 32′ LWL, 10′7″ abeam, 6′6″ draft, and 23,500 lbs displacement with a sail area of 990 sq ft. Stephens's drawings called for steam-bent white-oak frames (1⅝″ on 8″ centers) and 1¼″ Philippine mahogany planking fastened with silicon-bronze screws. The decks were canvas-covered, strip-planked white cedar. They are topped with a low-profile cabin trunk.

The most famous boat of the fleet is No. 17, MUSTANG (formerly REVONOC), which was owned and extensively modified by Stephens's brother, Rod, for more than 23 years. About two-thirds of the original fleet is still sailing. In 2010, a cold-molded NY 32, No. 21 MASQUERADE, which is sanctioned by S&S, was completed and launched in the Netherlands (see WB No. 296).

As originally conceived, the 32s had a forecastle with berths that could accommodate professional crew. Moving aft, you came to the galley and the head, then the main saloon with two settees and a ladder to the companionway hatch on the top of the deckhouse, then an enclosed aft cabin with two berths. Some of the boats, such as FALCON, were built with the companionway opening into the cockpit, and with no aft cabin.

For several decades, SIREN has been a top competitor on the New England classic yacht circuit—and has raced in two Newport-Bermuda Races. (See page 66 for a tour of SIREN.)





ALISON LANGLEY

Ben Sperry (at the helm) sailed GENTIAN in the 2024 Newport Bermuda Race, finishing first in class. Note the companionway hatch on the cabintop.

Riding a Dragon

Gault remembered the second night of the race after GENTIAN entered the Gulf Stream meander: "I stayed at the makeshift nav station on a dresser in the aft cabin, providing slight course changes through a porthole in the cockpit to keep us in our lane."

Sperry passed the night leading his watches as they tucked two reefs into the main and reduced headsails down incrementally to the No. 4. With the wind against the stream, the seas were haystacks. More than once that night Sperry recalled a time when he was washed off the foredeck of SIREN in another Newport Bermuda Race and was dragged back aboard by Matt Murphy.

"We saw 20–25 knots of breeze with max speed over ground of 15.5 knots (10–11 knots boat speed)," Gault said. "One crew member described the 150-nautical mile Stream passage as riding a dragon."

A Storied Class

Debbie Rogers has compiled the NY 32 class history on the website www.newyork32.org. Here are some of her highlights:

- Eight of the boats have raced in either the Port Huron (Bayview) or Chicago Mackinac Races or both. Four have done some of the Southern Ocean Racing Conference races.

- Three—Nos. 1, 7, and 13—have sailed in the Pacific Ocean. Two of these have passed through the Panama Canal: No. 1 from west to east and No. 7 both directions from Texas to the Galapagos Islands and back.

- Two—Nos. 12 and 13—have sailed across the Atlantic Ocean, with No. 13 also sailing back to Chesapeake Bay. In major long-distance races, two (Nos. 17 and 13) won their class [before No. 18 GENTIAN] in the Newport Bermuda Race a decade apart. Another (No. 1) won the Newport Annapolis Race (which switched directions for 1957) in two succeeding events. One (GENTIAN) won her class in the Chicago Mackinac Race (1947). Another (No. 2) has been overall and class winner in three Port Huron Mackinac Races, 1943, '45, and '59. Three others (No. 5 in 1944, No. 6 in 1962, and No. 15 in 1971) have won their class and were overall winner in one Port Huron Mackinac Race. No. 4 won the 1960 Nassau Cup Ocean Race…and, with a different owner, won the first Trans-Superior Race in 1969.

- Three have been affiliated with colleges under donation programs—two (Nos. 3 and 19) went to the United Stated Merchant Marine Academy in Kings Point, New York, and later made it to Italy and raced each other there; No. 19, then named SIRIUS, was lost without a trace in 2016 while being delivered from Cannes to Mallorca. One (No. 7) was at the University of Southern California.

- Three have survived fires (Nos. 6, 16, and 18), although one (No. 8) did not during the mid-1940s.

- Two have appeared on the covers of major magazines: No. 1 for *Sports Illustrated* on September 6, 1954, and No. 5 for *Sailing* in August 1977.

- One, No. 5, has appeared in a 1991 made-for-television movie about Jacqueline Kennedy, *A Woman Named Jackie*, and at least two have appeared in perfume advertisements.

- As part of the NYYC's 175th anniversary celebration, July 15–20, 2019, the 32s were assigned their own class start. The last time the sisters raced as a NYYC class was during the 1948 Annual Cruise. That year there were six (Nos. 3, 9, 12, 13, 15, and 17) counted as members and three of them (Nos. 3, 15, and 17) raced each other.

—RP

The 32s were conceived to provide spirited inshore competition, family cruising, and serious bluewater racing. It holds true to these virtues today.



MYSTIC SEAPORT MUSEUM/ROSENFELD COLLECTION

Overcoming challenges was nothing new for GENTIAN. She has had a storied life. She and No. 2, APACHE (currently under restoration at Peter Cassidy's shop), are the only 32s to have kept their original names for all of their 90 years, and GENTIAN is the 32 to have had the most owners—at least 16 of them. Nevins built her for George Nichols, who had been commodore of the NYYC from 1925 to 1927, and was on the committee that selected the Stephens design to replace the New York 30s. Nichols named GENTIAN after the hardy alpine flower with violet, trumpet-like blossoms and roots believed to have healing powers.

Like many of her class, the yacht moved to the Great Lakes during World War II; long-distance racing was still possible there, unlike on the enemy-submarine-prone saltwater coasts of the United States. GENTIAN remained on the Great Lakes for the next six decades racing, family cruising, and recovering from a sinking as well as more than one instance of neglect. In 1997, she was trucked east to Newport, Rhode Island, where a new owner was hoping to restore her. But she languished on the hard until Bruce and Debbie Rogers bought her in 2002 and sent her to Paul Rollins's boatshop in York, Maine, for restoration. In 2004, GENTIAN narrowly escaped going up in flames when a fire consumed a workshop adjacent to the Rogers driveway in Castine, Maine, where she was stored.

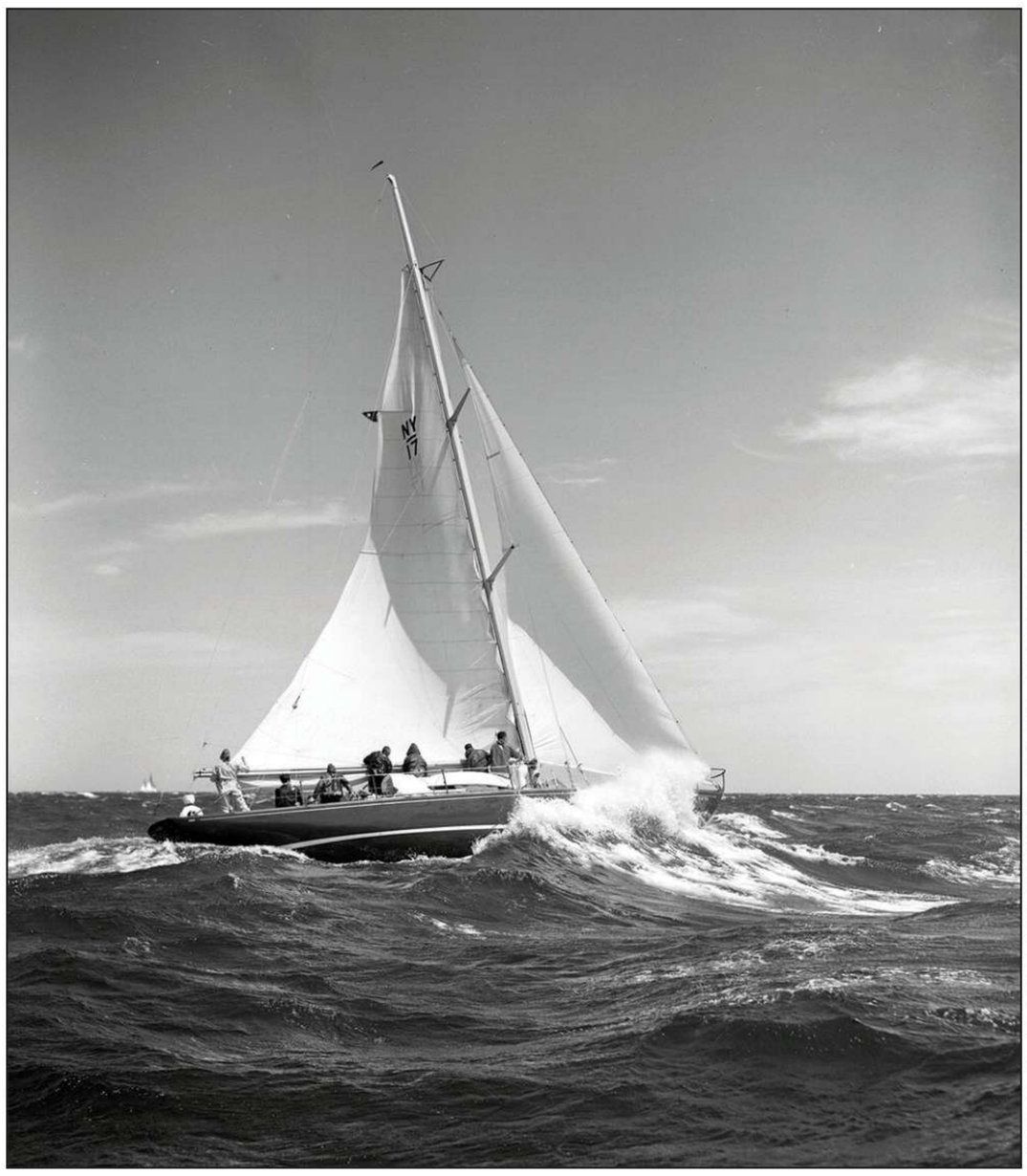
Debbie Rogers wrote on the class website, "Her aft port side sustained most of the fire damage. The family did the work with one son [Ben] making the planks and guiding the project for the rest to help. They replaced four planks plus the sheer, toerail, and a small section of the cabinhouse side, as well as taking out the interior ceiling in the port aft area to reach the butt blocks. They had modified the interior design from the original to move the head forward and the galley area aft to the companionway port side, and it was still a work in progress. GENTIAN was launched in July that year and raced against her sisters and others in August."

The Rogers family loved their NY 32, but in 2010 they decided to sell her because they no longer could sail and race her regularly. By the fall of 2011, Richard Armstrong owned GENTIAN, and he moved her to the south coast of Massachusetts, near her sister SIREN. Here, SIREN's owner, Cassidy, completed the interior with period-appropriate aesthetics at his Buzzards Bay Yacht Services.

The Tempest

Thirteen years later, GENTIAN was the Sperry family's heirloom…and she was tangling with a frisky dragon. As she crossed deeper into the Gulf Stream, the southwest winds increased into the 20s. Waves crashed over the bow from every direction as GENTIAN rode 3–5 knots of favorable Gulf Stream current. Noah was seasick but was still standing his trick at the helm. It was exhausting, steering a slalom course between the haystacks. Off watch, he curled up amid the sail bags on the sole of the saloon and tried to sleep through the whir of the bilge pump cycling on and off.

He will never forget that night in the Gulf Stream. "Halfway through you're like, 'I just want to get off this boat and get dry.'"



MYSTIC SEAPORT MUSEUM/ROSENFELD COLLECTION

MUSTANG (sail No. 17) was owned for many years by Rod Stephens, brother of designer Olin Stephens. She sailed in several Newport Bermuda Races.



The GENTIAN crew dries out on arrival in Bermuda. Ben Sperry is third from left; his son, Noah, is third from right.

BEN SPERRY

'The hull wasn't leaking," his father said, "but waves were washing the deck, and we couldn't stop the water dribbling in through the companionway hatch."

The constant heeling on starboard tack had prevented a pool of icewater in the new icebox from draining properly. The water overwhelmed pre-made, oven-ready meals, turning chicken parmesan and shepherd's pie to mush.

The crew was now on a diet of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches…when they could keep it down. Noah couldn't, and his father was worried. Sperry was also concerned that the bilge alarm had counted over 200 cycles in four hours. For the crew, this passage was becoming an ordeal. But for GENTIAN, it was the moment she had been born for. She was on her way to logging 225 miles in 24 hours.

At 3:00 a.m. on Day 3 of the race, the crew of ALLIANCE, a J/121, reported taking on water and decided to abandon ship. An hour later, the crew of CEILIDH rescued them while BANTER stood by for support.

Charging for Bermuda

As Gault remembers it, "We exited the Stream just east of rhumb at 1200 Sunday in a washing-machine sea state and 15–20+ knots of breeze, encouraged that our boat, rig, and crew were still holding strong. Although the routing and a few boats [spotted] on AIS suggested cracking off and sailing southeast in search of a cold eddy, we made the call to stay hard on the breeze and try to work our way back toward the rhumb line to setup for the breeze to shift right on Monday, as the updated weather models were indicating."

With the Gulf Stream behind them, GENTIAN's crew got a second wind and the off-watch gang prepared a meal of hot ramen noodles.

"Brian said that we were in a good place to do something," Sperry said. "It was time to go for it. We hauled up the No. 1 and charged for Bermuda with a single reef in the main. Noah finally started to feel better."

ISLA (No. 10) was rebuilt by Peter Cassidy and his crew at Buzzards Bay Yacht Services for Henry and Jean May. The boat is active in classic yacht racing and has recently competed in the Bermuda Race.



ALISON LANGLEY

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FALCON (No. 6) is owned by Bob Scott and hails from Castine, Maine. She won first place in her division and class in the 2011 Marblehead to Halifax Race, and sails almost daily.



ALISON LANGLEY

Gualt recalled, "Once the breeze settled in from 220° TWD on Monday evening, we eased sheets and dialed in the tiller to sail fast and loose through bright blue crashing seas and steady 15–20 knots of southwest breeze in an overnight drag race to Kitchen Shoals [off Bermuda]…. It felt like GENTIAN was a horse galloping down the track."

Up ahead, Roy Disney's carbon-fiber PYEWACKET 70 was the first to cross the finish line.

A Singular Magic

Sperry steered a lot that last night. But at one point, GENTIAN's skipper had to take a break, and he fell into "a sleep so deep I didn't know where I was when I woke up." This was not a time to reflect, but there have been many quieter nights aboard GENTIAN on her annual cruises to Maine when Sperry and his family had savored the quieter side of life afloat in a NY 32.

An important element of those family cruising adventures had been the friends made in Maine with other NY 32 owners such as Bob and Pam Scott. The Scotts, of Castine, have owned, raced, and cruised FALCON (No. 6) since 1985. At age 82, Bob Scott is the longest-term owner of a 32 and considered by many to be the godfather of the fleet. A retired purveyor of parts for classic aircraft, he sails FALCON almost daily, often recruiting crew at the spur of the moment.

"FALCON is more than a boat," he says. "She has made us so fortunate. She has introduced us to truly wonderful people."

"I decided to buy a 32 because Maynard Bray's 1986 article in *WoodenBoat* about New York 32s inspired me," Scott said, "and after moving to Maine with FALCON, Pam and I became friends and shipmates with Maynard."

Other luminaries of the yachting world such as Mitchell Gibbons-Neff, the longtime president of S&S, have also become friends of the Scotts through FALCON. Scott first met Rod Stephens after he made a phone call to the company with questions about FALCON's mast and rigging, and Rod called him back to help. One thing led to another, and Olin Stephens became a summer visitor and sailing companion aboard FALCON.

"Olin sailed with us for 10 years. He was in his 90s, and he usually took the helm. The last time Olin sailed FALCON, he was 100 years old. Maynard Bray, Matt Murphy, and Tom Jackson [*WoodenBoat*'s senior editor] were aboard, too."

"Olin liked the Eggemoggin Reach Regatta [hosted at *WoodenBoat*'s campus]. It reminded him of how regattas used to be," Murphy said. "He'd observe constantly. The race course was like a chessboard for him; he kept track of every boat."

Mission Accomplished

Rounding Mills Breaker Buoy on Tuesday morning, the crew tacked GENTIAN for the first time since leaving Rhode Island Sound. She crossed the finish line off St. David's Lighthouse at 0844:26, and hailed Bermuda Radio to confirm her entry into Bermudian waters. Then the crew doused their sails and passed around a bottle of Gentiane liqueur (made from gentian root) while motoring into Hamilton Harbor. GENTIAN finished No. 1 of 10 boats in Class 1 of the St. David's Lighthouse Division and No. 3 in the division overall (behind two other classic yachts, CARINA and HOUND). She had an elapsed time of 3 days, 17 hours, 14 minutes, 26 seconds, and a corrected time finish of 4:16:25:54.

Meanwhile, the boats behind them on the course were having a brutal ride. Later on Tuesday, DESNA rescued the crew of GUNGA DIN, who abandoned her as she flooded 80 miles off Bermuda. Fifteen of the 162 boats that began the race in Newport never finished their passages…but all crew members made it safely to shore.

"I can't describe it. You can't unpack the pain and the joy," Sperry said, reflecting on GENTIAN's victory, "but a year later, Noah and I were double-handing GENTIAN home from Maine," to the south coast of Massachusetts. "I could see the imprint of the Bermuda Race in his confidence and how he handled himself at sea."

"I don't think I want to do that race again for a while, but definitely someday," Noah said.

When that moment comes, GENTIAN will be ready for Noah and his sisters, Grace and Mary Alice. The NY 32s, like their creator Olin Stephens and their godfather Bob Scott, seem forever primed for adventure.

Randy Peffer's current book, Yarmouth Castle Burning, *with co-author Capt. Eric Takakjian, received Honorable Mention for the best North American Maritime History book of 2025 and won the C. Bradford Mitchell Award from Steamship Historical Society of America.*

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Aboard: SIREN

A New York 32–class sloop

Text and photographs by Tyler Fields

SIREN was the seventh of the 20 New York 32–class sloops built by the Nevins yard of City Island, New York, during the winter of 1935–36; she carries sail No. 20. Designed by Olin Stephens, these 45-footers (see page 56) were commissioned by the New York Yacht Club (NYYC) as replacements for the storied New York 30s built by the Herreshoff Manufacturing Co. in 1905. Originally christened FOLLY, she was delivered to Junius Spencer Morgan III—grandson of the American banker J.P. Morgan—an avid racer and previous commodore of both the NYYC and Seawanhaka Yacht Club. All 20 boats built to this design were purchased by members of the NYYC and quickly proved successful in spirited competition on the waters of Long Island Sound.

By the 1960s, FOLLY had changed hands numerous times before being purchased by Franklin D. Roosevelt Jr., son of the former president, a U.S. congressman himself, and recently appointed to the office of under secretary of commerce by fellow sailor John F. Kennedy. Renamed HALF MOON, she spent her time sailing on the Chesapeake Bay and in New England with the Roosevelt family. During the winter of 1976, Roosevelt commissioned Martha's Vineyard Shipyard to convert her marconi sloop rig—an aluminum replacement already—into a yawl. The island boatyard had previously installed a new diesel auxiliary, replacing an earlier gasoline engine, and partially reframed her midsection; actually, Martha's Vineyard Shipyard reframed the hull twice in rapid succession after the frames of the first replacement set were damaged while the yacht was on charter as an AMERICA's Cup spectator.

SIREN's current owners, Peter and Kate Cassidy, purchased her in 1998 after the boat had sat ashore, unused, for a number of years. Her structure was failing, but the Cassidys were enthusiastic. During that first winter, the couple hired Maine boatbuilder Paul Rollins to jump-start their restoration by reframing much of her length, fitting a new sternpost and horn timber, and addressing some planking concerns. Overall, Rollins ensured the boat was sound enough to launch the following summer. At the same time, the Cassidys replaced the cabintop, reinstalled the diesel, and fit a basic interior before sailing away in 1999.

Over their nearly 30 years of ownership, Peter and Kate have continued the tradition of excellent care for SIREN. In 2005, referring to the drawings of Rod Stephens's own New York 32, MUSTANG, Peter replaced the 1970s yawl arrangement with a new single 64′ mast of Sitka spruce. Cassidy went on to repeat this process for the New York 32 ISLA in 2008 (see WB No. 214). The Cassidy family has raced and cruised SIREN thousands of miles, collecting an impressive number of regatta wins, trophies, and a few Panerai watches along the way. SIREN can be found throughout the season anchored in waters from Maine to Bermuda.

A superb pedigree



A highly respected operation, the Nevins yard built many of the young Olin Stephens's designs, including the schooner BRILLIANT and the ocean racer STORMY WEATHER. The close relationship between S&S and Nevins proved very beneficial to the overall success of the New York 32 class. SIREN's builder's plate was a gift to Cassidy from Ed Kane, owner of the S&S yawl BOLERO.

Chronometer and Barometer

The New York 32 was launched into a time when the use of a sextant, paper charts, and chronometer was standard practice. Electronic forecasting and navigation have largely supplanted the need for these tools, but it's comforting to know that such analog redundancy hangs on the saloon bulkhead. SIREN's Chelsea instruments show the signs of many thousands of miles sailed offshore, but they remain as trustworthy as ever.



Cruising accommodations

The interiors of the New York 32s are functional and simple, but their concept was different from their one-design predecessors. Previous club fleets were not outfitted for comfortable cruising, but rather offered their crews, if they stayed aboard at all, bare-bones accommodations. Belowdeck, SIREN has a private stateroom aft, comfortable seating in the saloon, a full-width galley with stove and icebox, and additional bunks forward.





Original layout and details

Although Peter Cassidy rebuilt SIREN's interior a second time in the 2000s, the layout remains nearly as designed, and much of it is original to the boat. Some of the missing or damaged parts were relatively easily replaced; even locker doors with the Nevins angelfish cutouts were remade without much trouble, thanks to the help of Kevin Porter, a craftsman from Penobscot, Maine, who has sailed aboard SIREN for many years. But specific items such as matching bronze door turns or drawer pulls were virtually impossible to find. Facing this problem repeatedly while restoring several hulls of the New York 32 class, Cassidy patterned and now reproduces this hardware himself; it is available through his shop, Buzzards Bay Yacht Services (BBYS) in Mattapoisett, Massachusetts.

Well-lit saloon

The saloon is bright and welcoming, with a large butterfly hatch above. Long settees to port and starboard make comfortable bunks when needed and have plenty of storage in lockers above. Finishes below match the style of the 1930s with white-painted surfaces and varnished mahogany trim accented by the combination of original and reproduction hardware.

Private aft stateroom

Access belowdeck is through an offset companionway and ladder forward of the cockpit on the cabin top (see previous page). This placement helps provide space and standing headroom in the stateroom aft. A pair of snug bunks stretch under the cockpit to each side of the compartment, with more storage in custom lockers. A secondary butterfly hatch above and multiple opening ports provide plenty of ventilation for those lucky enough to earn the private bunks.





Ocean-worthy structure

While other one-designs focused on inshore racing, the New York 32s were built to handle offshore conditions and stresses much greater than those faced when racing around the buoys. Bronze deck knees are found throughout; a full cabin-width bronze casting just aft of the mast connects directly to the chainplates and onto additional boot straps leading to the maststep—which was replaced by a previous owner with a fortified step, made of stainless steel and larger than the original. Working with the original tie-rod supporting the deck, this assembly essentially creates a robust ring-frame providing peace-of-mind when the yacht bashes through heavy weather for days on end.



Overhead details

The replaced overhead is finished beautifully in a satin varnish. Not to detract from this by adding a modern light fixture, Peter fit SIREN with custom dome lights inspired by classic Perko offerings from the period; like other hardware, the reproductions are produced by Cassidy's shop. The 5″ bronze castings were made by Edson and paired with bright and efficient LED internals from IMTRA, with both white and red light settings. *WoodenBoat* founder Jon Wilson reviewed these reproductions in WB No. 232, noting that they solve the problem of having to choose between form and function when replacing aging equipment.

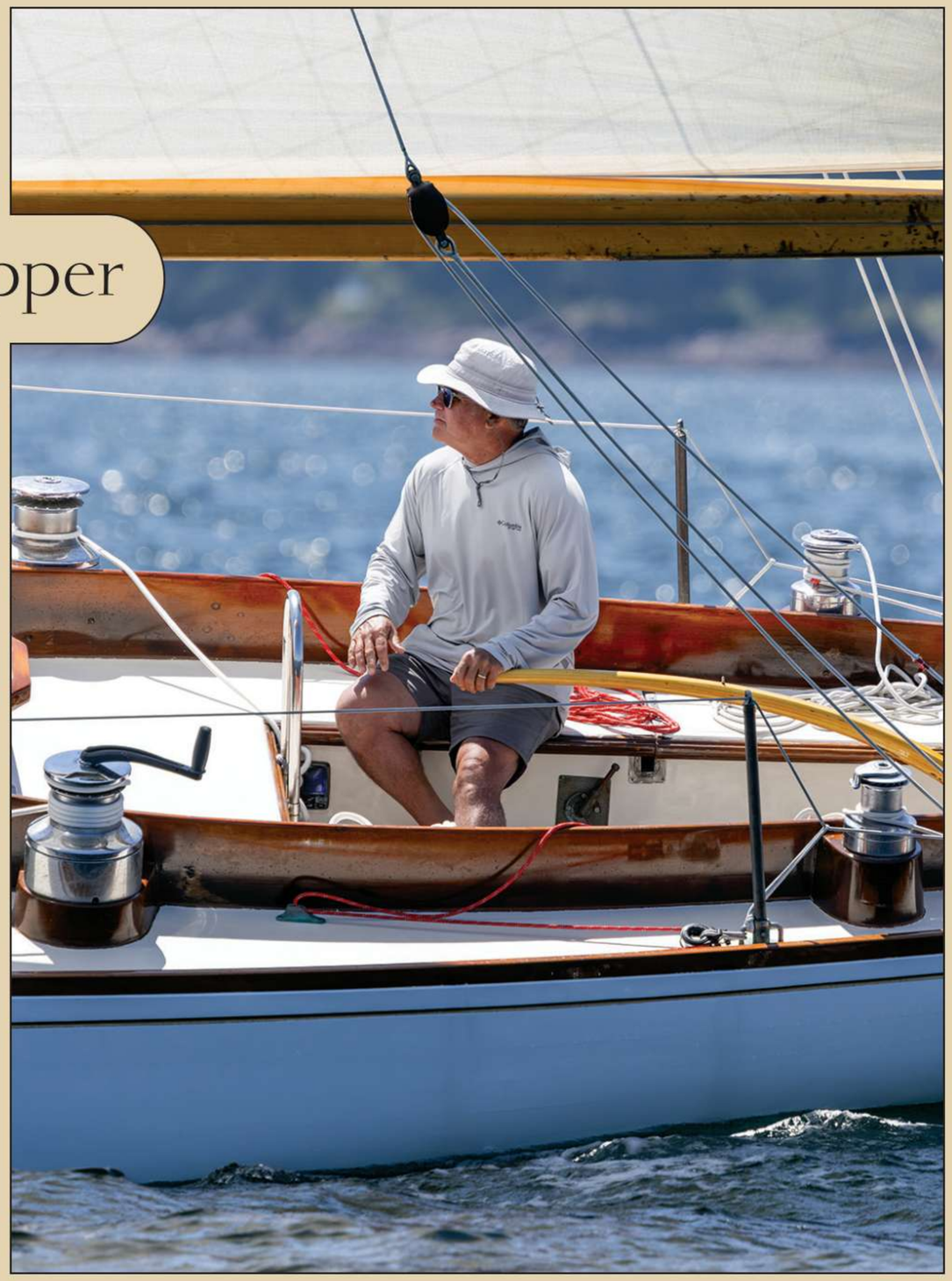


Comfort and speed

With the evolution of class racing and fleets venturing farther offshore, the practicality of the cruising portion of "racer-cruiser" became more important. The New York 32s excel in comfort nearly as well as speed. Instead of rudimentary pipe berths, cold sandwiches, and buckets, the 32s have privacy, areas to gather, functional galleys, and proper heads. As with many of her class today, SIREN spends her season pairing the events of the classic racing circuit with family cruises throughout New England.

Experienced skipper

Peter is an accomplished boatbuilder who owns BBYS in partnership with Ed Van Keuren. Their résumé is full of notable restorations, including the breakthrough Stephens-designed DORADE and the Eldredge-McInnis motoryacht BLACK NIGHT. Before opening the doors of BBYS, Cassidy completed a 2½-year circumnavigation, sailing east to west more than 34,000 miles aboard a 32′ Pearson Vanguard.



Tyler Fields grew up in Oregon, where his passion for photography and wooden workboats of the Pacific Northwest developed. Since graduating from Oregon State University and moving to the East Coast, he has been photographing classic yachts both in the shop and on the water. Tyler is a frequent contributor to WoodenBoat *and an instructor at WoodenBoat School.*



Building Fox

Part 1

An elegant double-paddle canoe, in plywood

Text and photographs by Bill Thomas

The first version of my Fox canoe was launched in spring 2007. Over 18 years, she's proven to be a versatile boat that's capable of multiday camping trips, yet well suited for short, spontaneous outings. She's not designed for big waves and the conditions where proper sea kayaks excel, but that might be one of her virtues: She is easy to use at a moment's notice, easy to enter and exit, easy to load gear into, and stable. She can carry a child or a pet in addition to the paddler. She's a decked double-paddle canoe, intended for simple and peaceful times on the water.

Fox intentionally has an old-school appearance. When I sat down and put pencil to vellum, my design inspirations were from some of the masters. Norman Skene's own Fox design, L. Francis Herreshoff's Double Paddle Canoe, and Harry Bryan's Fiddlehead are a few of my inspirations. My interpretation of a double-paddle canoe, though, is a bit longer, deeper, and fuller than the boats that inspired me, and she is built stitch-and-glue fashion of marine-grade okoume plywood and epoxy. Even so, the boat's appearance harks back to designs rooted in simpler times.

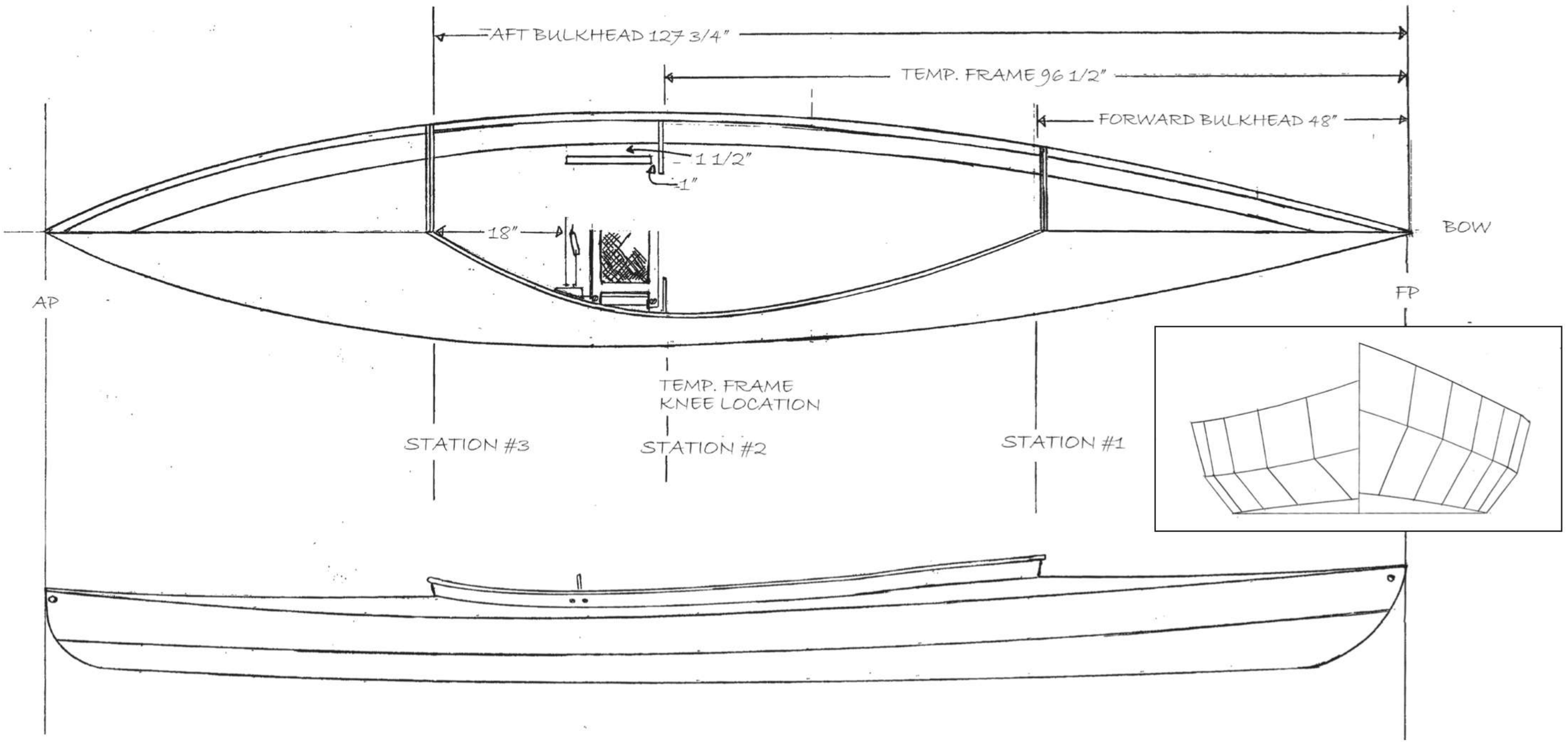
Boat design is the art of compromise; no small boat can do or be all things to all paddlers. My goal with Fox was to balance performance, aesthetics, and ease of construction while making sure a first-time builder would enjoy the project.

Each spring on the first paddle of the season, the boat's performance and good manners surprise me. The length of 14′7″ yields a good turn of speed, despite the hull's somewhat full ends. The entry, with the bow wave flowing along the sides, seems to lessen the drag. As the wake exits, the slightly hollow stern seems to offer a balance of maneuverability and tracking beyond what I'd hope for. Her flat bottom, full ends, and flared bilge panels add to her stability, and her coaming height and shape offer the paddler a dry ride.

The top goal for the design after performance, and the one that proved the most challenging to achieve, was her ease of construction. I wanted a boat that could be built by a first-time builder working from a set of plans rather than a precut kit. For me, working from plans is the purest form of boatbuilding. Computer-designed and CNC-cut panels offer some wonderful design options, and the plywood panels for all my boat kits are cut on a CNC machine, but with Fox I wanted to avoid hard-to-replicate panel shapes that required a precut hull kit to build the boat.

So, if you've got a few sheets of marine-grade plywood, sharp tools, and an organized shop with plenty of clamps, grab your copy of this article (which will be continued in the next issue) and a full set of plans, and let's get started.

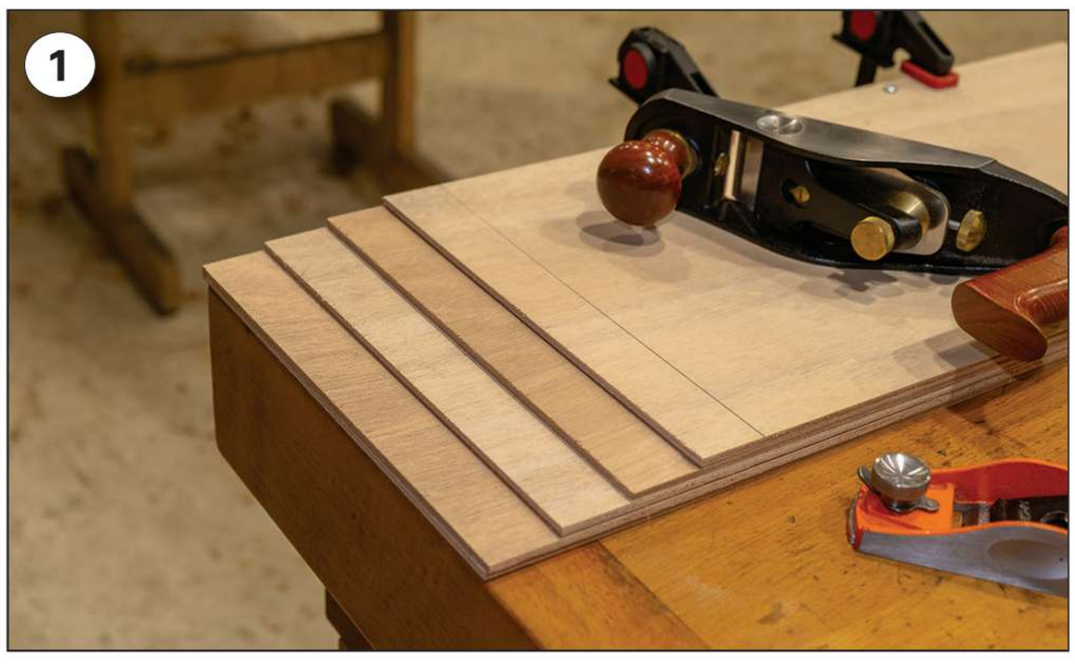
***Above*—Fox is an elegant double-paddle canoe that's capable of taking a paddler and gear on multiday camping expeditions but also well suited to short day trips.**



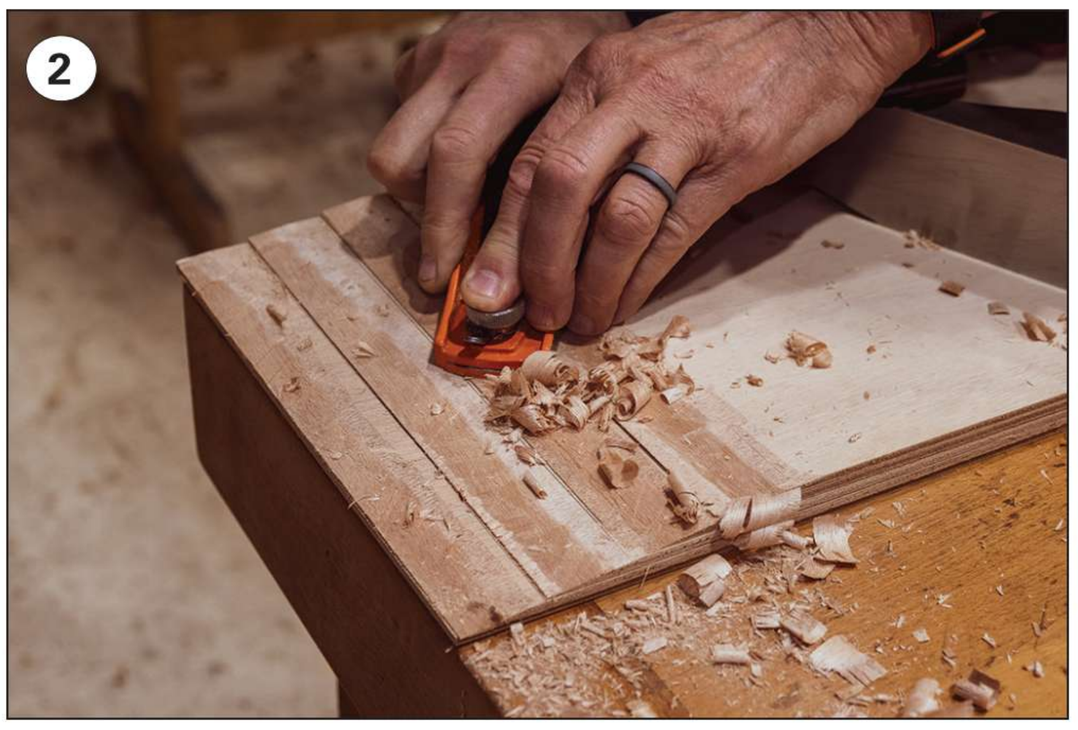
Scarfing Plywood

1. Building a 15′ boat from 8′ sheets of plywood requires creating longer stock for the planks. We do this with scarf joints, which are mating bevels planed onto the ends of the panels.

For plywood, an 8:1 bevel is best; for 4mm plywood that works out to a 1¼″-long bevel. For 6mm plywood, make the scarf 1⅞″ long. You'll need four 4mm planks that are 16′ long—two for the sheer panels and two for the bilge panels. The bottom is made from one 16′-long 6mm plank. Rip the plywood to the dimensions shown in the plans on page 2; a tablesaw makes the cuts quickly. Mark a line 1¼″ (or 1⅞″ for 6mm plywood) from each end of the plywood to be scarfed. Place a piece of scrap plywood under the bottom edge of the lower plank to support the feather edge you are about to create. Stack the planks so they stair-step back, with each edge lined up with the marked line on the plank below. Securely clamp or screw this stack to a bench.



2. Now it's time to create a smooth ramp from the stair steps. I prefer a low-angle block plane for this job. The glue lines of the plywood make it easy to gauge progress; keep the lines straight and parallel. Finish up with 100-grit sandpaper on a longboard. The goal is even, smooth joints with clean feathered edges. Once you separate the planks, use a sanding block to tune-up the joints. Bring the lead edge to a fine feathered finish and sand all the way back to your pencil marks.



3. Use epoxy resin to glue the scarfed joints. Whatever brand of epoxy you work with, carefully follow the manufacturer's instructions and stir the product thoroughly. In order for epoxy to cure, it needs the correct combination of resin and hardener, mixed together for a specific time *before* applying or adding thickeners. Whenever using epoxy, work neatly and safely, and



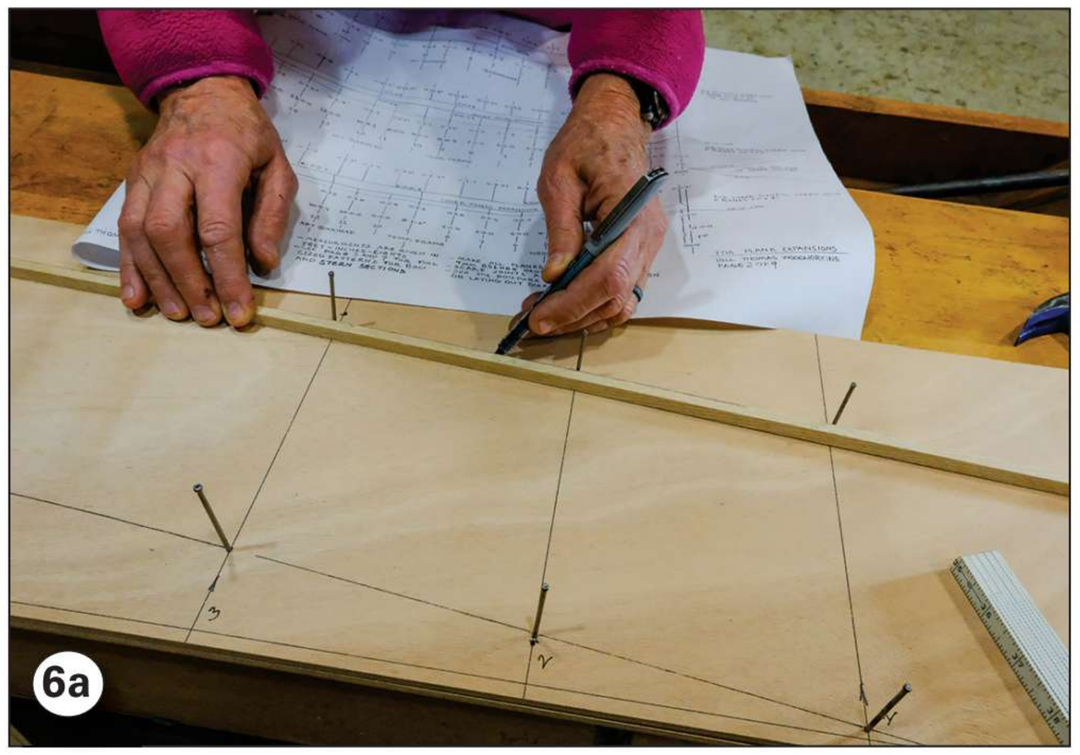
plan ahead to avoid wasting material. Before you mix any epoxy, do a dry run for the whole glue-up procedure. Make sure the long plank edges will be close to straight. Then mix your epoxy. First brush an even coat of unthickened epoxy on all the surfaces to be joined. Next, thicken some epoxy; I use a blend of two-thirds MAS Cell-o-Fill and one-third wood flour. Add filler and stir until the consistency resembles thin peanut butter. Brush a light coat on all the joints. It's important to coat the joints in this manner; the unthickened epoxy saturates the grain, and thickened epoxy fills any voids.


4

4. Line up your first plank on the bench so the joint looks fair. For efficiency, I stack up planks when gluing the scarfs. I seldom glue more than four planks in a stack since things might slip a bit with each successive layer. Make sure to place 4-mil plastic or Mylar film between each joint so you don't end up with one thick plank. The plastic keeps the planks from sticking together. Also, place plastic between the first plank and the workbench.


5

5. Verify that the planks are straight, and place a scrap of ¾″ plywood about 2″ wide on top of the joints as a glue block. It does not take a lot of force to hold these joints together while the glue dries—just firm pressure. You can use screws driven through the ¾″ stock into the bench or balance weights on top of the glue blocks. On the wide bottom panel, it is fine to drive a few screws through the glue block and into the bench. You'll have lots of opportunity to fill these holes later.


6a

Laying Out the Planks

6a–6b. With the stock for the planks glued to length, it's time for my favorite step: laying out the shapes of the side planks and bottom. The measurements for the expanded side and bottom panels are given on page 2 of the plans. The deck information is on page 9. Pages 3 and 4 show the full-sized templates needed for the bow and stern for the two side planks. Transfer this information to the scarfed planks; accuracy is crucial.

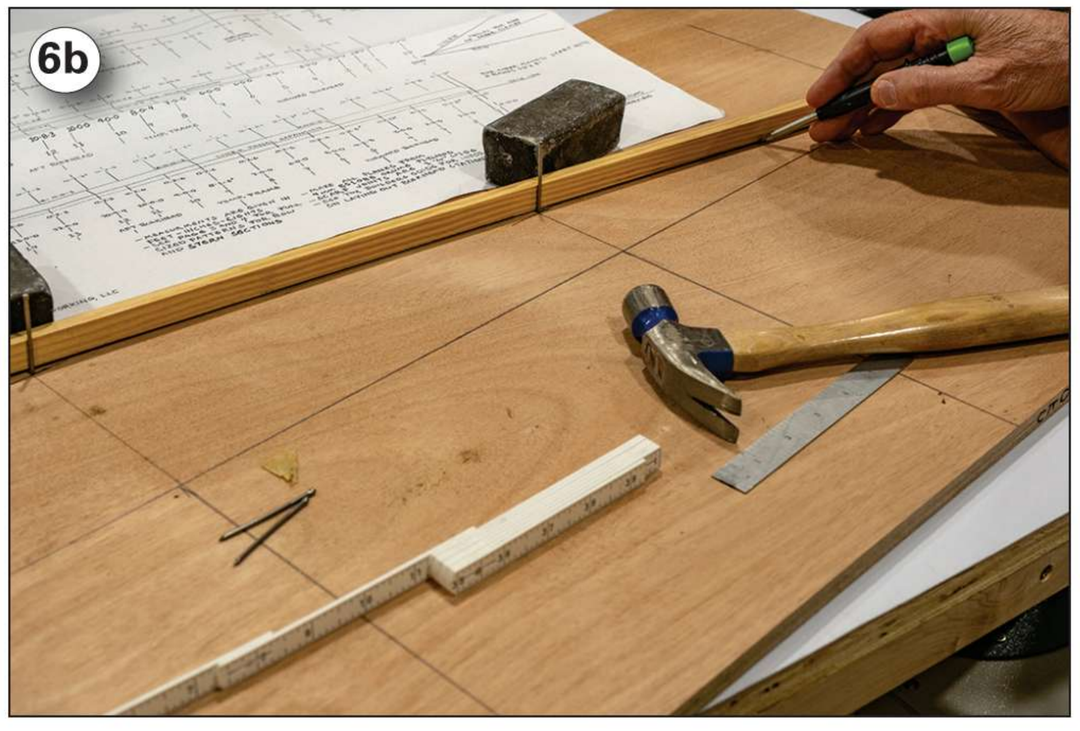
Prepare the planks by sanding off any excess epoxy at the scarf joints; resist the temptation to really grind away here. Do not sand through the veneer, because this might create an unfair bend in the plank when the boat is assembled.

Start with the bottom, which is cut from 6mm plywood. Strike a dead-straight line down the center of the panel. At the bow end (the right-hand end to align with the plans), draw a line square to the baseline. This will be the forward perpendicular (FP); you will take your station measurements from this line.

Move left to station No. 1, which is at 1-0-0. (These measurements are laid out in feet, inches, and eighths, so 1-0-0 is one foot, zero inches, and zero eighths.) At station No. 1, draw a line square to the centerline.

Move aft (left), and lay out each station, always measuring from the forward perpendicular. Clearly mark station Nos. 3, 7, and 10 with pencil lines. These are the locations of the bulkheads and knees; you'll need this information when you start to lace the hull together.

Once the stations are established, measure from the centerline to find the points that define the bottom's shape. The given measurements are half-breadths—

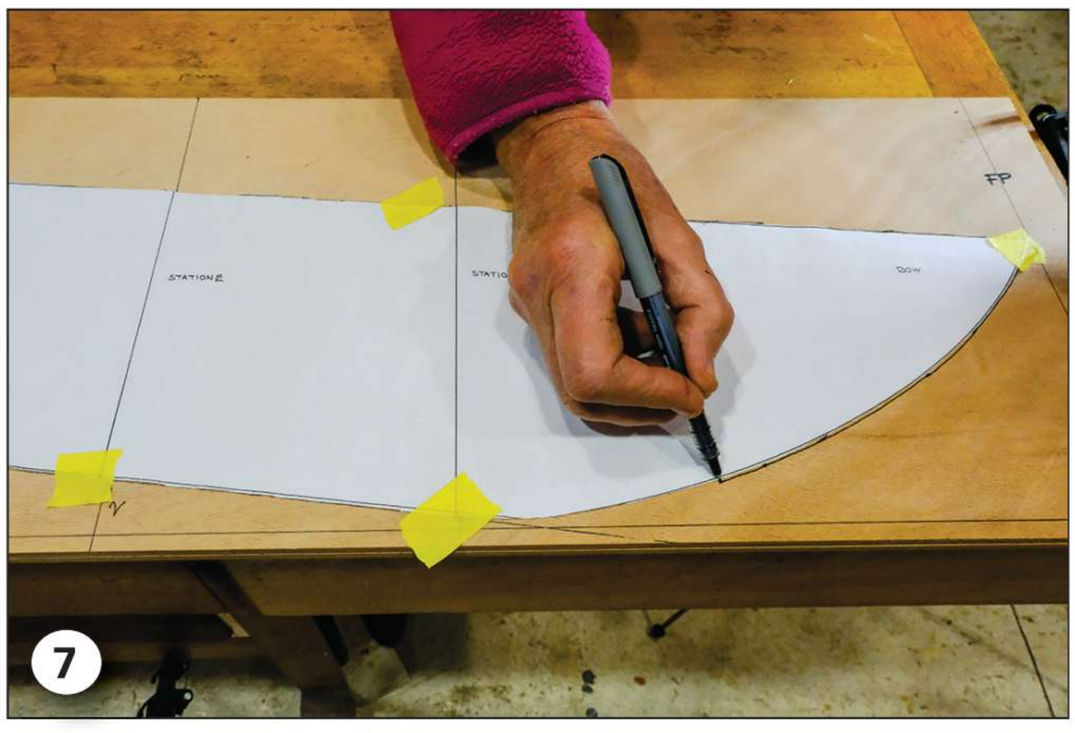

6b

that is, they describe one side of the panel. Lay out both sides to create the full bottom panel: for example, on the bottom panel at station No. 3 the edge point is 0–7–1 away from the centerline. Lay out all the points that will define the bottom's shape, then connect these points with a fair pencil line guided by a batten; I use a ⅜″-square piece or wood about 10′ long as a batten.

If you do not have drafting ducks, use nails driven in at the points to mark them, and hold the batten tightly against the nails. Draw your lines fair and true. Once you are happy with the layout of the bottom, use a good-quality jigsaw to cut to the line. A circular saw with the blade set for a shallow cut will also work well here. Cut up to the line, but leave it; then use a sharp block plane to work down fair to the line. Once the bottom is cut and planed to shape, clean up the edges with 100-grit sandpaper on a sanding block.

6c. Lay out and cut the bilge and sheer panels from 4mm plywood. Lay out both panels the same way you did the bottom: Strike a baseline along one edge of the plank and mark a forward perpendicular. Lay out stations following the information shown on the plans. Measure the offsets for the top and bottom edge of each plank. Mark these points along the station lines; they define the plank shapes.



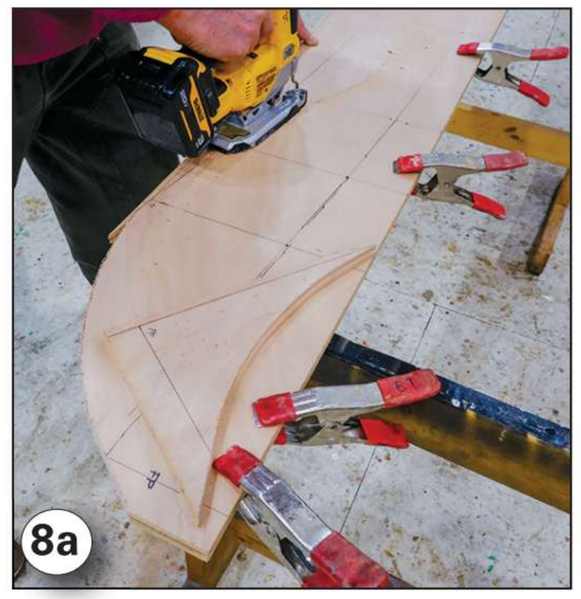


7. Pages 3 and 4 of the plans contain full-sized patterns for the ends of both side planks. Cut these out from the plans and use them to establish the planks' end profiles.

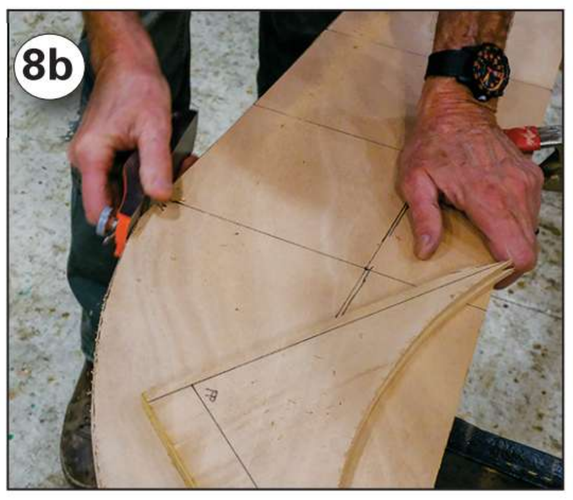
As you lay out the side panels, you'll notice that at station Nos. 5, 9, and 12 there are marks that are used to align the bulkheads when you are assembling the hull. Use the information on page 2 of the plans to mark these reference points with pencil lines. As with the bottom panel, these lines guide the work of stitching the boat together.

Cutting Out the Panels

8a. Once you have double-checked your layout, it's time to cut out the side planks. Stack up the blanks for both sets of planks and screw or clamp them together. Cut both plank pairs at the same time.

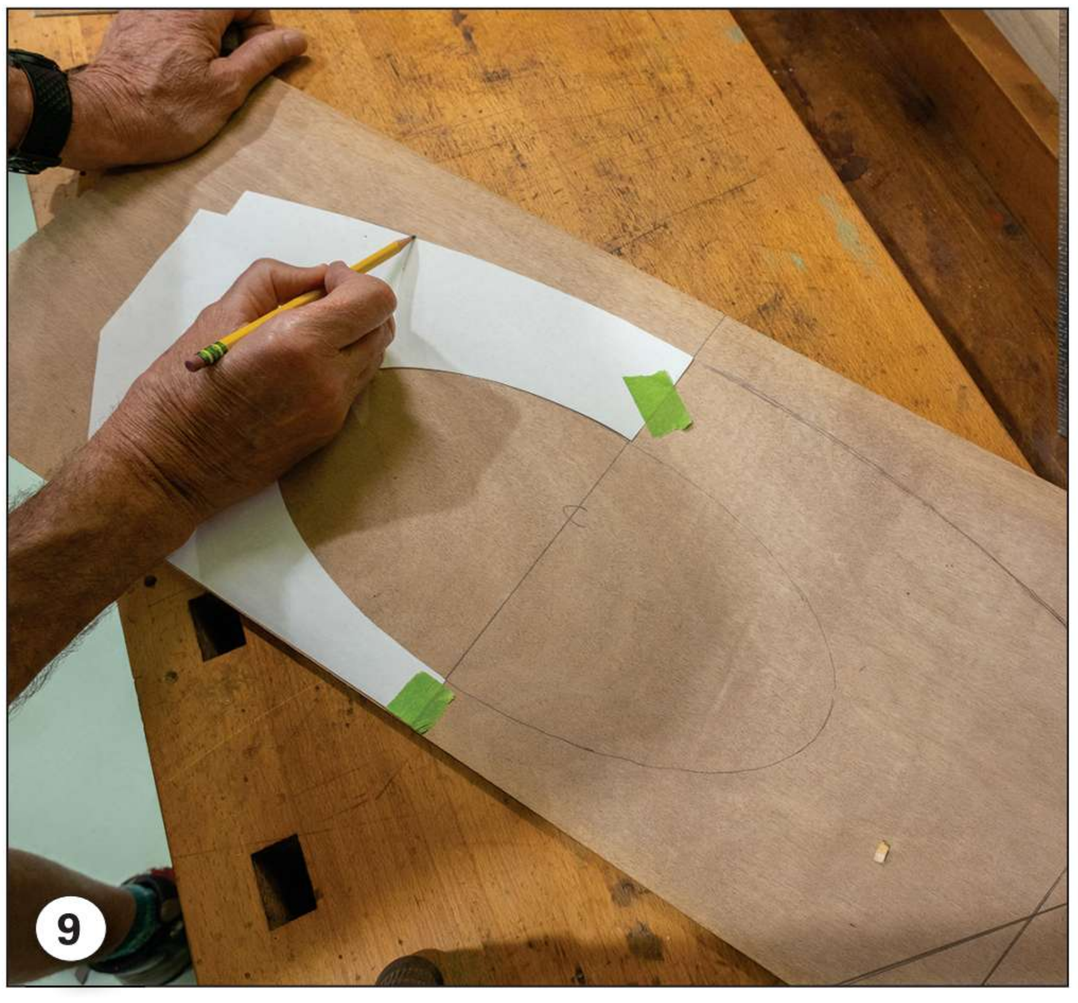


8b. Leave the line and use a block plane to fair to it. Clean up the edges with a soft sanding block. Now the bottom and the four side panels are ready for assembly.



Deck Parts and Bulkheads

The deck's parts are laid out in much the same way the bottom panels are laid out. Strike a centerline and lay out the stations and offsets that define the outer edge of the deck and the coaming opening. Use a batten to connect these points, mark the line, and use a jigsaw to make the cuts. There's no need to fair in the edges of the deck pieces, because the parts are cut oversized and will be trimmed to fit later on. The coaming parts should be cut precisely following the same processes you've used to lay out the other hull parts.

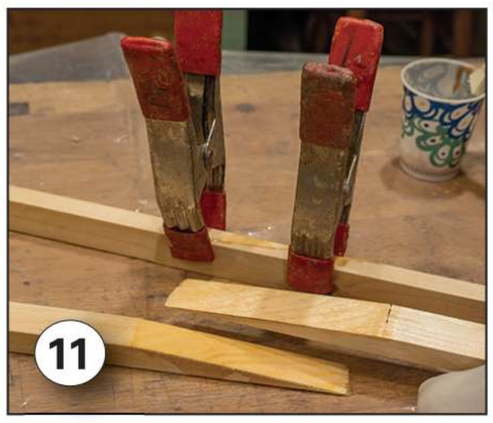


9. Next, lay out the two bulkheads and their assorted parts: hatches, hatch spacers, and hatch rims. You'll need these in place as you stitch the hull together. Full-sized drawings are on pages 4 and 5 of the plans. Cut these parts with a jigsaw or, if you have one, a bandsaw. Again, leave the line and plane and sand to the finished dimensions.



Sheer Clamps

10. For the sheer clamps, you'll need to create pieces almost 15′ long. The plans show the sheer clamps as ¾″ thick, but I've found that dressing the stock to ⅝″ allows for an easy bend in the sheer while maintaining ample strength. You'll need four pieces of wood, 1″ × ⅝″ × 8′, for your sheer clamps. Fir, cedar, or even white pine work well. A 4″-long bevel is adequate here since we are gluing the clamps to the inside of the sheer panel. Lay out the joint and make the cut with a handsaw, then clean up the cut with a block plane.



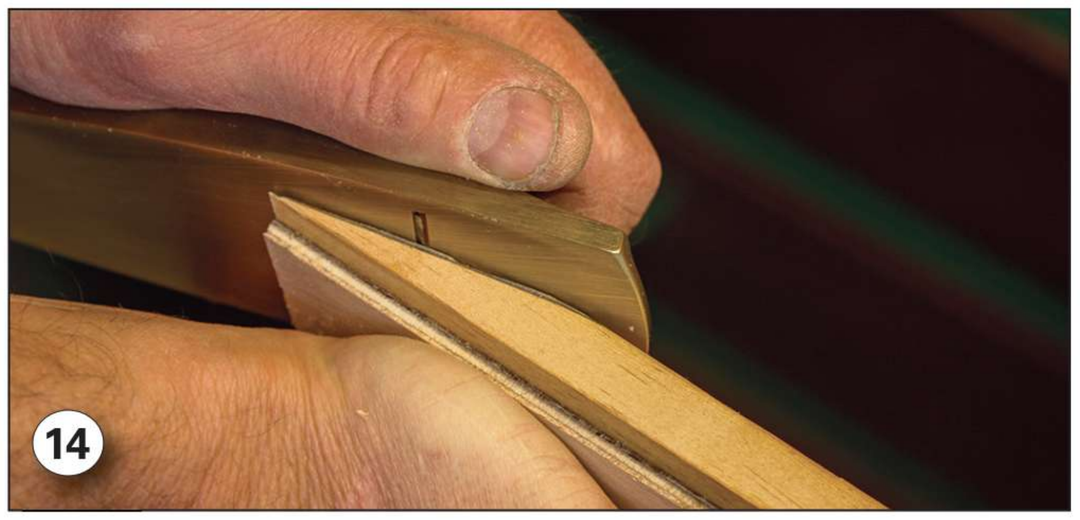
11. Glue the sheer clamps to length using unthickened epoxy brushed onto each mating surface. Two spring clamps per joint should be sufficient to hold them.

12. When the glue in the sheer clamps' scarfs is cured, lightly clean up the excess epoxy, taking care to hold the correct dimensions at the scarf joints. The sheer clamps will be positioned proud of the top inside of the sheer planks by ¼″; to determine this position, strike a line ¾″ from the top inside edge of each plank and stack the planks so the outside edges are aligned, with one inside edge facing up and one facing down. Clamp the pair of planks together. Coat both faying surfaces with clear, unthickened epoxy. Work neatly, with no excess epoxy, so that you don't glue the sides together. Place the sheer clamps in their respective positions and clamp them roughly in place, allowing them to overhang each end. Now, place a spring clamp every 3 or 4 inches, and as you do, line up the clamps with the pencil lines on the topside panels. If you decide to do this glue up in two operations, make sure to create a matched pair, and not two left or two right sides.





13. Once the glue sets, unclamp the parts, cut the overhang flush with the ends, and mark the bevels on each end of the sheer clamps to the angles shown on page 2 of the plans.



14. Make the cut with a handsaw and finish up with a block plane. These joints will probably need to be tuned up once the hull is stitched together.

Hatch Spacers, Rims, and Deckbeams

15. Now is a good time to glue the hatch spacers, rims, and deckbeams onto the bulkheads. The layout is shown on page 1 of the plans. Use unthickened epoxy and coat all the mating surfaces. Apply the spacers and hatch rims in one session, taking care to make sure the parts line up correctly. Once the glue sets, come back and epoxy on the 6mm deckbeams. Sand these parts before you start to assemble the boat. I also like to mark and drill the holes for the hatch buttons.





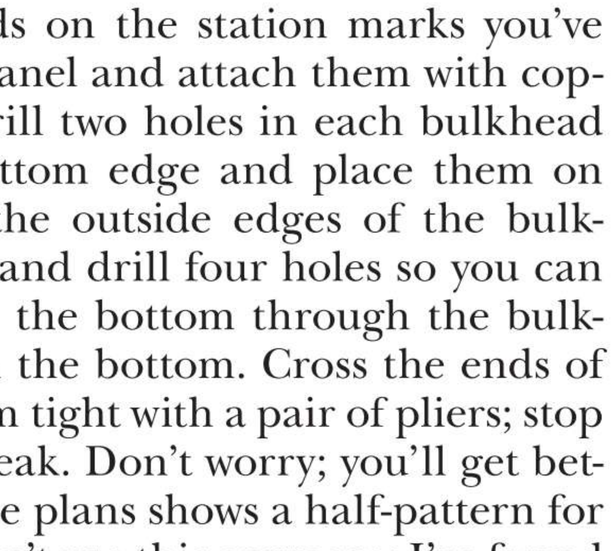
Assembling the Hull

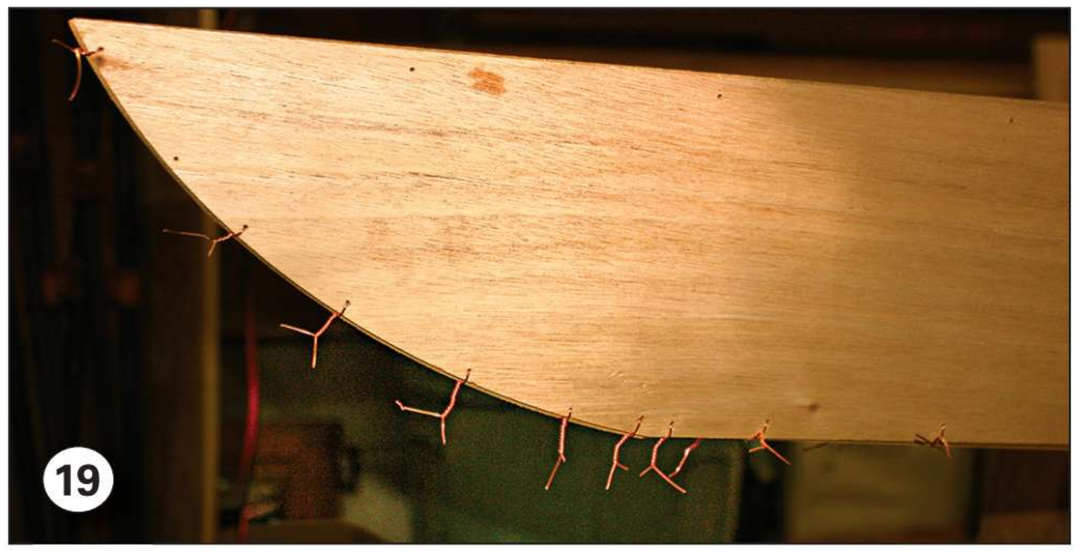
16. With the pieces ready, it's time to assemble the boat. Cut 18-gauge copper wire into roughly 250 3″ lengths; then set the bottom plank on a pair of sawhorses spaced about 10′ apart.



17. Place the bulkheads on the station marks you've drawn on the bottom panel and attach them with copper wire. To do this, drill two holes in each bulkhead about ¼″ above the bottom edge and place them on their marks. Line up the outside edges of the bulkheads with the bottom and drill four holes so you can pass a wire up through the bottom through the bulkhead and back through the bottom. Cross the ends of each wire and twist them tight with a pair of pliers; stop just before the wires break. Don't worry; you'll get better at this. (Page 8 of the plans shows a half-pattern for a temporary frame. I don't use this anymore; I've found through experience that it's not necessary.)

18. Next, clamp the bilge panels together as a matched set, then drill 1/16″ holes, 5″ apart and ¼″ in from the edge of the planks along the full perimeter; a shop-made jig like the one in the photo speeds things up. Make sure all the planks have the station marks on the inside. If you need to transfer these lines to the correct side of the plank, do that now.

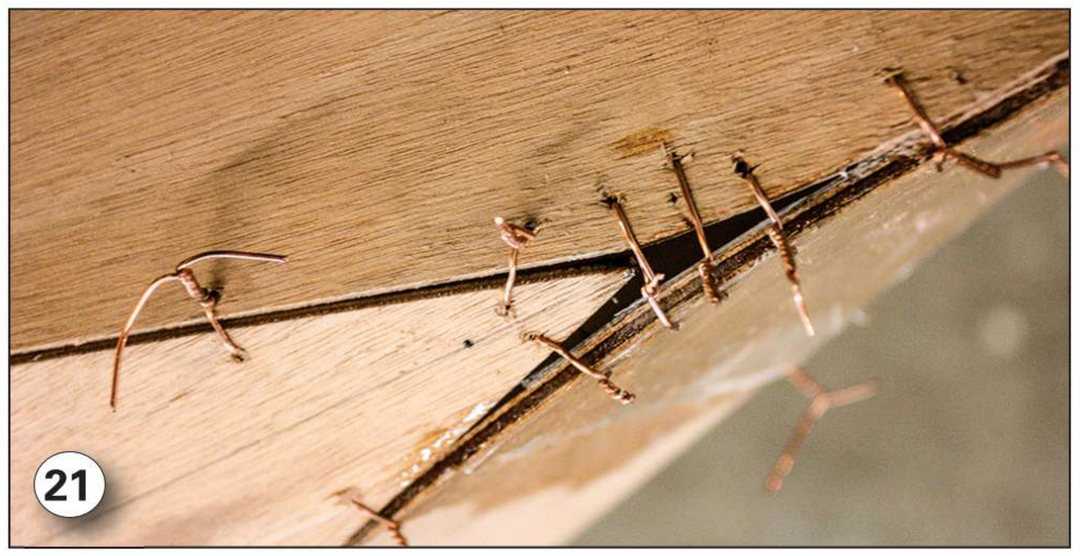




19. Wire the forward 10″ and the after 6″ of the bilge panels together.



20. Spread the partially wired-together bilge panels apart and place them over the bulkheads. Position the station marks so they line up with the center station mark on the bottom plank. Drill 1/16″ holes through the bottom plank to correspond with the holes along the bottom edge of the bilge panel. Wire the bilge panels to the bottom. Begin with the center section, and work first on one side of the boat, then the other. Snug up the wires on the outside of the hull; they don't have to be very tight right now, because you'll fine-tune the fit later. Work in short sections, about five or six wires at a time, and move back and forth between sides so the hull remains symmetrical. Make sure the inside edge of the 4mm bilge panel lines up with the inside top edge of the bottom panel. Keep the station marks aligned with the frames. When the center is wired together, use a few wires to attach the bulkheads to the bilge panels. Now wire up the forward section. Make sure the panels line up at the bow and stern; this assures a symmetrical boat.



21. Wire the after section. Again, work the sides evenly and line up the plywood ends. There will be a small gap where the bottom and sides come together. Get this as close as you can, but don't fight it. You'll come back and tune up this section later.



22. Wire the ends of the sheer panels together with one or two wires at their bottoms. Spread these panels apart and place them on the boat so the lines marking the center station line up with the bilge panel center station. Drill holes in the bottom of the sheer panel to match the holes in the top of the bilge panel. Starting in the center section, wire the planks onto the boat, moving from side to side as you progress. Once the center section is finished, wire the forward section together. Next wire the panels in the stern section in place.



23. The stern section where the bilge panels meet the bottom can be challenging. You're asking a lot of the plywood here, with all the shape in the bilge panels. I flip the boat upside-down and brace its after end on a stool so I can apply downward force; this takes pressure off the panels and closes up any gaps between the two hull panels and allows the end of the bilge panel to be pulled up a bit tighter where it meets the bottom. Wetting the bilge panels with water makes them more pliable. Do the best you can and settle for what you get. It'll be fine.

24. Remove the boat from the sawhorses and position them so they are 6′10″ apart, parallel, and level side to side. If you're working on a wooden floor, screw the sawhorses to the floor. Set the boat right-side-up on the horses so the bulkheads sit over them. Tighten the wires and check that the plywood panels' inside edges meet. You might need to use a block plane or saw to tune-up the fit of the sheer clamps so the plywood at the ends of the boat meet flush.



Fillets

25. To prepare the hull for fillets—the epoxy "welds" that hold the panels together—use a flathead screwdriver to bed the interior wires along the chine down against the plywood. The inside section of the wires along the chine will be covered by fillets of thickened epoxy, so these wires should be tucked in flush to the plywood. You are about to fix the hull's shape; there won't be another chance to get it right. To prepare for this, now is the time to ask:

- Do all the station marks line up?
- Are the sawhorses level and parallel?
- Does the bottom of the boat sit fully on the sawhorses without rocking?
- Are the wires tight and the panels lined up so the inside edges meet?
- Do the bow and stern look good? When you look at them dead-on, are they plumb?
- Do any broken wires need replacement, and are any corrections required?

Trust your eye… Now check it all once again.

26. To bond the bilge panels to the bottom, make ½″-radius fillets of thickened epoxy in the 'midships section of the boat; you'll cover these later with 6-oz 'glass cloth. Start on the cockpit. In this area you will need to work very neatly; fiberglass cloth won't lie well over uneven fillets. Use masking tape to define the fillet's size. Run the tape along the wire holes, creating about a





½″-wide path. The bow and the stern will receive larger fillets and 'glass tape later.

Mix 8 oz of epoxy, stir it, and then add filler. I like to use a mix of MAS Cell-o-Fill and wood flour to yield a strong bond; the wood flour darkens the fillet so it looks good in a varnished cockpit. Add filler a bit at a time until the mixture resembles thick peanut butter. Use a fillet tool; I like the West System mixing stick, with a radiused end, for this job. Apply the mixture between the masking tape along the seams where the bottom meets the bilge panel. Work neatly and use the rounded end of your tool to create a nice concave fillet. While the epoxy is still soft, clean up any excess and pull up the tape. Make sure the edges of the fillet are clean and flush with the plywood surface.



27. Next, tab the seam between the bilge and sheer panels in preparation for removing the wires and then fiberglassing the joint. Work a small amount of thickened epoxy into the gap where the bilge and sheer planks meet. Cover about a 3″ section between each wire on the outside of the hull. Be careful to keep epoxy off the wires, because it will be difficult to clean up later. Continue applying these tabs right up to the ends of the boat. While you are making the tabs, keep an eye on the chine fillet as it cures; clean it up if it starts to sag.

That's enough for this session. Let all the epoxy cure before working on the ends.

Fiberglass—and a Few Other Details

28. Now that the cockpit is 'glassed, it's time to fillet and tape the two end sections. Cut the 3″-wide fiberglass tape for the ends of the boat. Forward, you'll need two 36″ pieces, two 46″ pieces, and one 20″ piece. For the stern, you'll need two 40″ pieces, two 46″ pieces, and one 20″ piece.





29. Now clip and pull the wires where the two hull panels meet. Leave the wires at the chine. Also leave the wires in the stems and the cockpit. Double-check that the panels line up, inside edge to inside edge and at the chine. Push the wires down so they lie flush with the plywood. Stand in front of the bow and stern stems and look at the shape of the boat. If either stem moves off to one side or the other, push on the panels until the ends are plumb. If tightening the wires does not hold this shape, a 1″ No. 6 wood screw temporarily driven through the sheer clamps should hold the correct shape. Trust your eye here; if the boat looks right, it is right.

Work the forward section first, then move to the after section. You'll need to work each section while the epoxy is still soft; the 'glass tape is bedded into the wet fillet. Mix 8 oz of epoxy thickener for the fillets: two-thirds Cell-o-Fill and one-third wood flour.

Use your fillet tool to work epoxy up into the bow. Reach up and try to lay as much epoxy as you can right up under the sheer clamp. Pull out a nice bead of epoxy so that it fills this joint all the way to the tip of the bottom panel. Lay the 20″ piece of tape on top of the fillet. Wet this out with unthickened epoxy, using a disposable 2″ chip brush. Start in the center of the tape and work toward the edges, and you'll be able to smooth out any wrinkles and have it lie flush with the plywood.

Make a fillet along each chine and bed the 36″ 'glass tape into these joints with unthickened epoxy. Again, use a chip brush and work from the center of the tape to the ends. Because you've tabbed the section between the wires where the hull panels meet, now is the time to clip and remove the wires.

The bilge-sheer seam does not need a fillet. Use unthickened epoxy to wet out the wood around the seam and apply the 46″ 'glass tape inside the boat. Wet out the 'glass with more epoxy.

The process for the stern is the same: 20″ tape in the stem, 40″ at the chine, and 46″ at the bilge-sheer joint. Double-check that the stems are still plumb before the epoxy sets.

30. Both the outside of the hull and the inside of the center section will be sheathed in fiberglass cloth. This makes for a very strong hull and bonds the plywood panels together. I fiberglass the cockpit section before I tape the ends. To get a clean edge for the interior cloth,



30

strike a pencil line 2″ down from the underside of the sheer clamp; this is where the fiberglass will stop. Run masking tape above the pencil line.

Wait until the fillets have cured before starting to fiberglass. Clean up any pencil marks in the cockpit area. Lightly sand the inside of the boat to clean up any rough spots. Clip and remove the wires along the bilge and sheer panel joints. Clean up any rough edges around the holes. Vacuum out the boat interior. Cut an 83″ length of 6-oz 38″-wide fiberglass cloth. Lay the cloth inside the boat and use a wallpaper brush to smooth out the wrinkles. Brush from the center toward the ends. The 'glass rides up onto the bulkheads just a bit, but you'll want to work neatly at the ends so you don't have to clean up hard, rough fiberglass cloth later.



31

31. Start with mixing up clear epoxy. It's better to mix small batches, 8 or 10 oz at a time, than to risk having the epoxy kick off in the mixing cup or on the boat. Start to wet out the fiberglass cloth in the center of the boat. Use a chip brush with the bristles cut down to about ¾″ to spread out the unthickened epoxy. *Don't* use so much epoxy that you "float" the fiberglass; use just enough epoxy to adhere the cloth to the hull, making sure it lays down everywhere. Move from wet to dry and work any air bubbles out to the edges. Add more epoxy to places where the epoxy is too thin. Pay particular attention to the joints where planks meet; make sure the 'glass lies flat across the joints and adheres to the plywood. The 'glass's main job here is to form a solid union where the planks meet. At the ends, tuck the fiberglass into the joint at the bulkhead; don't run the 'glass up the bulkhead. Later, after you clean up this area, you'll lay down a nice fillet.



32

32. When the fiberglass is bonded to the hull, but before the epoxy fully cures (depending on the temperature, this could be anywhere from three hours to overnight), use a razor knife to cut along the edge of the masking tape. Pull up the excess cloth and tape, leaving a clean, smooth edge that can easily be feathered in when the epoxy is fully cured. Clean up the excess 'glass around the bulkheads.



33

33. The designed maximum beam of the boat is 30½″, measured from the outside edges of the plywood. Cut a stick to hold this dimension at the midsection of the boat.

Make the knees from 6mm plywood. There are full-sized patterns for them in the plans, but because of the variable nature of stitch-and-glue boatbuilding, you might have to customize, just a little, the edges that rest against the hull. Use a block plane or a sanding block to tune-up the shape. The knees go on the line that marks the location of the temporary frame. Use three wires per knee to hold them in place.

Mix epoxy thickened with Cell-o-Fill and wood flour for the bulkhead and knee fillets. Glue each side of the bulkheads to the sides and bottom with neat fillets. Start on the forward and after bulkheads, so that when you reach the inside cockpit fillets—the ones you see—you've developed your technique and can lay down masterful fillets. Fillet the knees in place using your newfound skills to create clean joints.

Once the fillets have cured, flip the boat over and trim the wires where the bottom and bilge panels meet. Cut the wires as flush as possible and use a file to knock down any rough ends. If you plan on varnishing the hull, be careful with the file and don't scratch the plywood. If you're painting, you'll cover and fair any scratches with epoxy. Use a soft sanding block with 80-grit paper to evenly round over the chines and ends of the boat. A power sander would be too aggressive for this work; take your time softening up the hard corners and sculpting a nice shape at the bow and stern.

Do not round-over the joint where the sheer and bilge panels meet; leave these lines crisp and fair. Use a sanding block loaded with 120-grit paper to clean up the entire hull in preparation for the fiberglass. The next step is to 'glass the outside of the hull, so what you create now is the final shape of the boat.



34. Cut a piece of 50″ wide, 6-oz fiberglass cloth to a length of 16′, lay the cloth over the boat, and use a wallpaper brush to smooth out any wrinkles. When brushing out the cloth, start amidships and work toward the ends.



35. As with the inside, use just enough epoxy to glue the fabric to the plywood; too much epoxy might cause the fiberglass to be suspended above the plywood instead of lying on it. A squeegee works well; a 3″ foam roller with a nap suitable for epoxy works better; and a cut-down chip brush is the most beginner-friendly tool. I use a combination of the roller and brush—the roller for the larger sections and the brush at the ends. Start in the middle and work toward an end. Always work from wet to dry. As you epoxy the bottom, also wet-out the sides so you are fully 'glassing one section of the boat at a time. If you are careful, you'll find you can pour a bead for epoxy along a 1′ to 2′ section of the chine and use your roller to move this epoxy down the sides of the boat.



36. Once you have worked your way down to the ends, you will need to cut a dart. There's no point in making this cut ahead of time, because the cloth will move and stretch as you work. Once the dart is cut, wrap the cloth around the stems so the fabric is doubled over the ends. Go back over your work and make sure the 'glass wraps around the chine and panel joints without any voids. The cloth's main job is to hold these plywood panels together. While the epoxy is still green (that is, not fully dried), trim the cloth at the sheer. (In the next issue, you'll reinforce both the bow and stern with another small layer of 6-oz cloth.)

With this step, you've finished with the major fiberglass work and your hull is done! In our next installment, we'll move onto woodworking.

Bill Thomas grew up paddling the rivers and coast of North and South Carolina. He is a self-employed woodworker, cabinetmaker, furniture builder, and boatbuilder who teaches at WoodenBoat School. He is also an avid sea kayaker and Registered Maine Guide.

Plans for Fox are available from The WoodenBoat Store (www.woodenboatstore.com). The package contains nine sheets, and includes full-sized patterns for the bulkheads, end profiles, and other major components. We strongly encourage that builders purchase these, for the sake of accuracy.



BOUNTY's Launch



NIC COMPTON

Staying alive

by Nic Compton

"When ships were made of wood, men were made of steel."

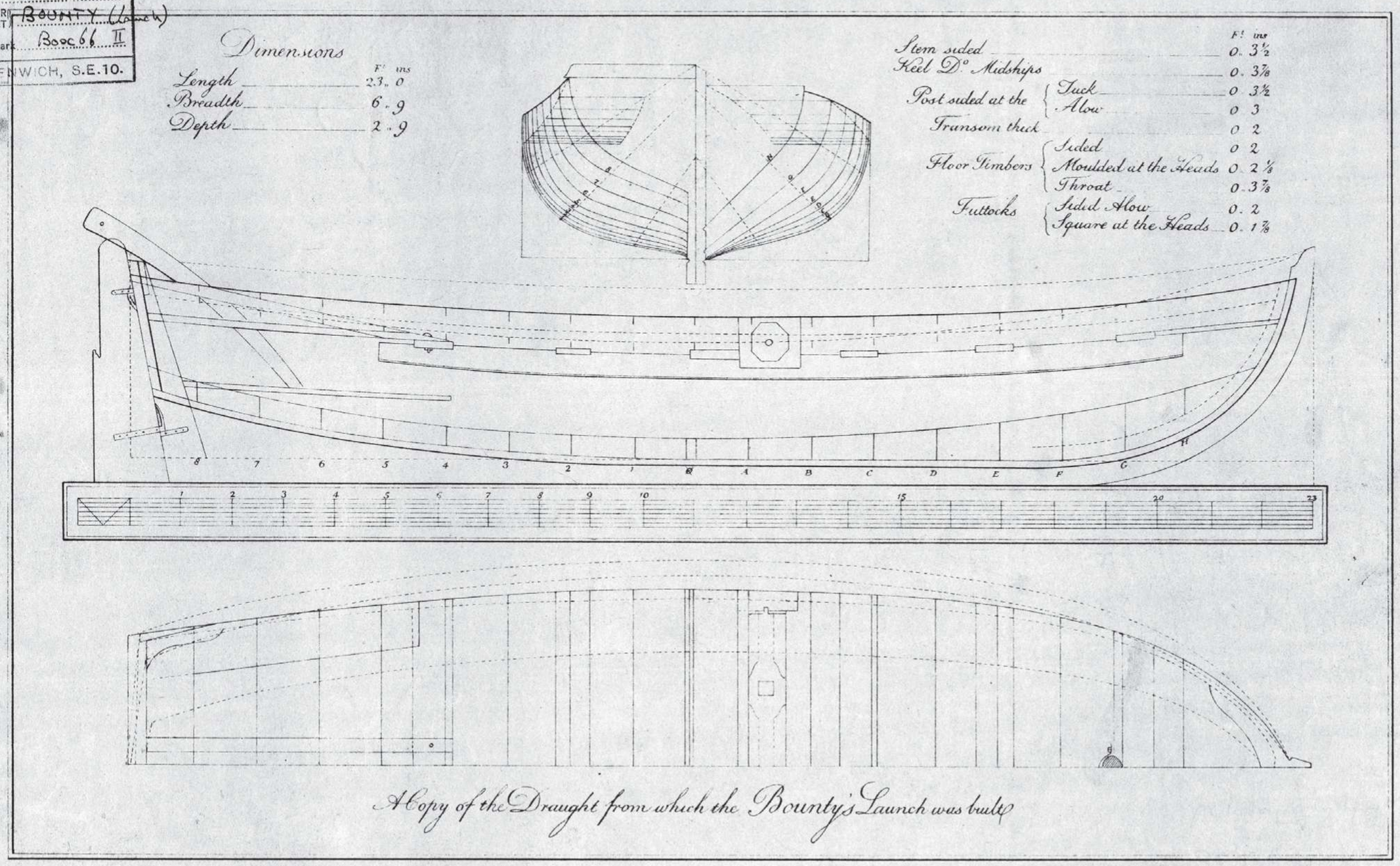
This was the catchline for the 2017 British Channel 4 television program *Mutiny*. The series followed a group of nine men as they embarked on a 4,000-mile voyage across the Pacific, following in the wake of Capt. William Bligh and his crew. The mutiny in the title refers, of course, to the famous events aboard BOUNTY in 1789, when the ship's mate, Fletcher Christian, led a mutiny against the (allegedly) authoritarian captain. Bligh and 18 men loyal to him were cast adrift mid-ocean on a 23′ open boat to face what seemed like certain death. Against all odds, the boat reached Timor, with all surviving except one crewman killed by natives on the island of Tofua. The 47-day ordeal is one of the most remarkable stories of survival at sea ever recorded.

The point of the television series was, in the words of Ant Middleton, the broadcast personality who served as the boat's skipper, to see if "the modern-day man can endure such hardships." The crew was dropped off at the same longitude and latitude as Bligh and his men, given the same rations of biscuits and cured meat known as biltong, and told to get on with it. Crucially, it was not intended as a re-enactment of Bligh's voyage, complete with period costumes and a flowery script. It was meant to be a genuine experience, a real test of endurance—albeit this crew always had the option to bail out onto the 128′ mothership that shadowed them throughout the voyage, something that was never a possibility for Bligh and his loyalists.

Sailing a small open boat across such a vast expanse of sea would have been challenging enough had the crew been a bunch of former military commandos, as

***Above*—It's hard to imagine that after the 1789 mutiny aboard BOUNTY, Capt. William Bligh and 18 men sailed 4,000 miles over 47 days aboard the ship's diminutive launch. A crew sailed a replica to retrace the voyage for a 2017 British television show, after which one of them, ocean-racing sailor Conrad Humphries (at the helm), acquired the boat.**

N. M. MUSEUM
Reg. No. 6343
SHIP OR SUBJECT BOUNTY (launch)
Press Mark Booc 66 II
GREENWICH, S.E.10.



NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM GREENWICH

BOUNTY's launch, documented by the British Admiralty, was a multipurpose, standard-issue 23-footer of a type built by the hundreds for the Royal Navy.

Middleton is, but this being reality television, the crew selected were all civilians of, shall we say, mixed ability. Sparks and conflict were baked into the project from the outset, and the crew duly suffered a mutiny, while one person had to be taken off the boat with a hand injury.

In truth, it was more *Big Brother* than *Survive the Savage Sea*, with two cameramen embedded in the crew while the mothership recorded events from a distance, complete with the obligatory (and spectacular) drone shots. They didn't have the overcrowding issue that Bligh's crew faced, yet the hardships they endured for 60 days were real enough. They struggled with violent storms, flat calms, constant rain, roasting sun, lack of food, physical injury, and zero privacy. By the end of the voyage, the participants had lost, on average, 25 percent of their body weight, suggesting they weren't entirely faking it.

The challenges of navigating such a fragile craft across such a dangerous stretch of water using only traditional navigation equipment—sextant, compass, and charts—shouldn't be underestimated either. Although Middleton provided most of the leadership and survival skills, the sailing and navigation knowhow came from his Number 2, round-the-world sailor Conrad Humphreys. This is the man who, during the 2004–05 Vendée Globe race, famously repaired the damaged rudder on his boat HELLOMOTO and managed to claw his way back from last place to seventh out of 13 finishers. He knows a thing or two about courage and tenacity.

And there were plenty of genuinely hairy moments during the Channel 4 series, particularly as the boat was approaching unlighted reefs and islands at night, when all they could hear was the roar of the surf and they didn't have a GPS to confirm that they were where they were supposed to be. Unlike the original crew, these men chose to put themselves in a position of danger, but that doesn't make the danger any less real.

Eventually, the captain and seven remaining crew made it to Timor with only a little help from the mothership, which provided some water at the very end when the men were starting to dehydrate alarmingly. It was the end of the journey and what for most of them would be a once-in-a-lifetime experience. What next?

"I sat on the beach in Timor at the end, looking out to sea, looking at this little boat, and I had this epiphany," Conrad said. "I thought, 'That boat has kept us all safe for 60 days. It's sailed across the Coral Sea in some pretty challenging sea states. Where else could it go? What else could it do?'" At Channel 4, producers "were talking about taking it back to the United Kingdom and putting it in their foyer, but I thought, 'No one's going to have a real purpose for this boat afterwards if I don't buy her.'"

COURTESY OF CHANNEL 4 (BOTH)





Although essentially staged for a reality-TV show, the privations the launch replica's crew suffered during the filming of *Mutiny* were real. Humphries (above) was officially the "sailing master" during the 60-day voyage. Television celebrity Ant Middleton (far left in the photo at right) was the boat's skipper, while the rest of the crew were mostly new to sailing.

Conrad was uniquely placed to give the boat a new life. Alongside competing in two Vendée Globes and many other crewed and singlehanded races, he had built up a successful career as a public speaker. Personable and intelligent, he could talk about the lessons learned during the Global Challenge and the Vendée Globe, about leadership and self-belief, about happiness and optimism. The BOUNTY launch was something completely different from anything he had experienced before but would be, he decided, "a good storytelling boat." The decision to buy her was, therefore, both emotional and pragmatic, and yet, over the past nine years, it has paid him back in spades.

Once Bligh and his crew reached Timor, they acquired a 34′ Dutch schooner and sailed her to Jakarta, then known to Europeans as Batavia, where they hitched a ride back to Europe. Their launch's ultimate fate is unknown.

The original BOUNTY launch no longer exists. We do, however, have a fairly accurate idea what she looked like. The story goes that Bligh didn't like the original boat that was on the BOUNTY and schemed for it to be dropped from great height when it was being craned off. He then commissioned a new launch more to his liking from a boatbuilder on the Isle of Wight, which became the boat he and his men sailed across the Pacific.

"She was a standard-issue launch," Conrad said. "The naval shipyards were prolific at building these little survey boats. They were purposefully designed for charting, going from ship to shore, and staying out in all weather. They were good people-carriers and good general-purpose boats. Which is why the launch is so seaworthy."

Not only were the boat dimensions standardized, but a set of lines for the 23′ launch drawn in 1780 (see page 83) still survives in the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, giving a remarkably precise reference for historians and boatbuilders.

Thames boatbuilder Mark Edwards was the man the London-based production company Windfall Films chose to build the replica. It was a discerning choice. Mark has a towering reputation for building exquisitely crafted river boats, including the Royal Barge GLORIANA, which led the River Thames boat parade during Queen Elizabeth II's Diamond Jubilee Pageant in 2012. His reputation was given the royal seal of approval in 2015, when the queen awarded him an MBE for his services to boatbuilding.

One of the main points of contention when it came to building the replica was whether to build it using carvel or lapstrake planking. It's a debate that's been raging for years.

"We have what pertain to be the lines for the BOUNTY launch, but they leave it open as to whether it is to be built carvel or clinker," as lapstrake planking is known in the United Kingdom, Mark said. "It was probably left up to the captain or commissioning officer to choose depending what the boat was going to be used for. I opted for clinker for a thousand and one good reasons. Clinker is lighter and stronger, especially when glued with epoxy. The doubled-up planks act like stringers adding strength to the structure."

Given that he only had six weeks to build the boat, Mark didn't have time to obtain and season solid timber for planking, so he instead chose to use 12mm sapele plywood in wood-epoxy construction. The point of the exercise was to provide a test bed for a human challenge rather than create a slavish replica, so Mark reasoned that plywood would be easier to bend around the extreme curves at the bow, less likely to dry out under the hot sun, and less likely to split when the boat was being dragged up and down a beach. The planking seams were nevertheless traditionally fastened with clench nails before the whole boat was sealed with epoxy.

The rest of the boat was built using iroko for the keel; sweet chestnut for the transom; and oak for the stem, sternpost, and other visible parts.



NIC COMPTON

In 2024–25, Humphries replaced the original lug rig with a gaff configuration that made the boat more versatile and improved her windward performance.

There were a few other changes to the original design. In order to be approved by the United Kingdom's Maritime & Coastguard Agency (MCA), which the production company insisted upon, naval architect Stuart Roy, who was in charge of the design, added 8″ of beam and 6″ of freeboard to improve stability and increase buoyancy. After Bligh and his men had large following seas crash over the stern of their overladen boat, they came up with a solution of using wood and canvas to add freeboard aft.

Although wash strakes were added to the replica, the oarlocks were left at their original heights, with gaps left in the extra planks for the oars to pass through. When the oars weren't in use, the gaps were closed with specially made wooden sliding covers.

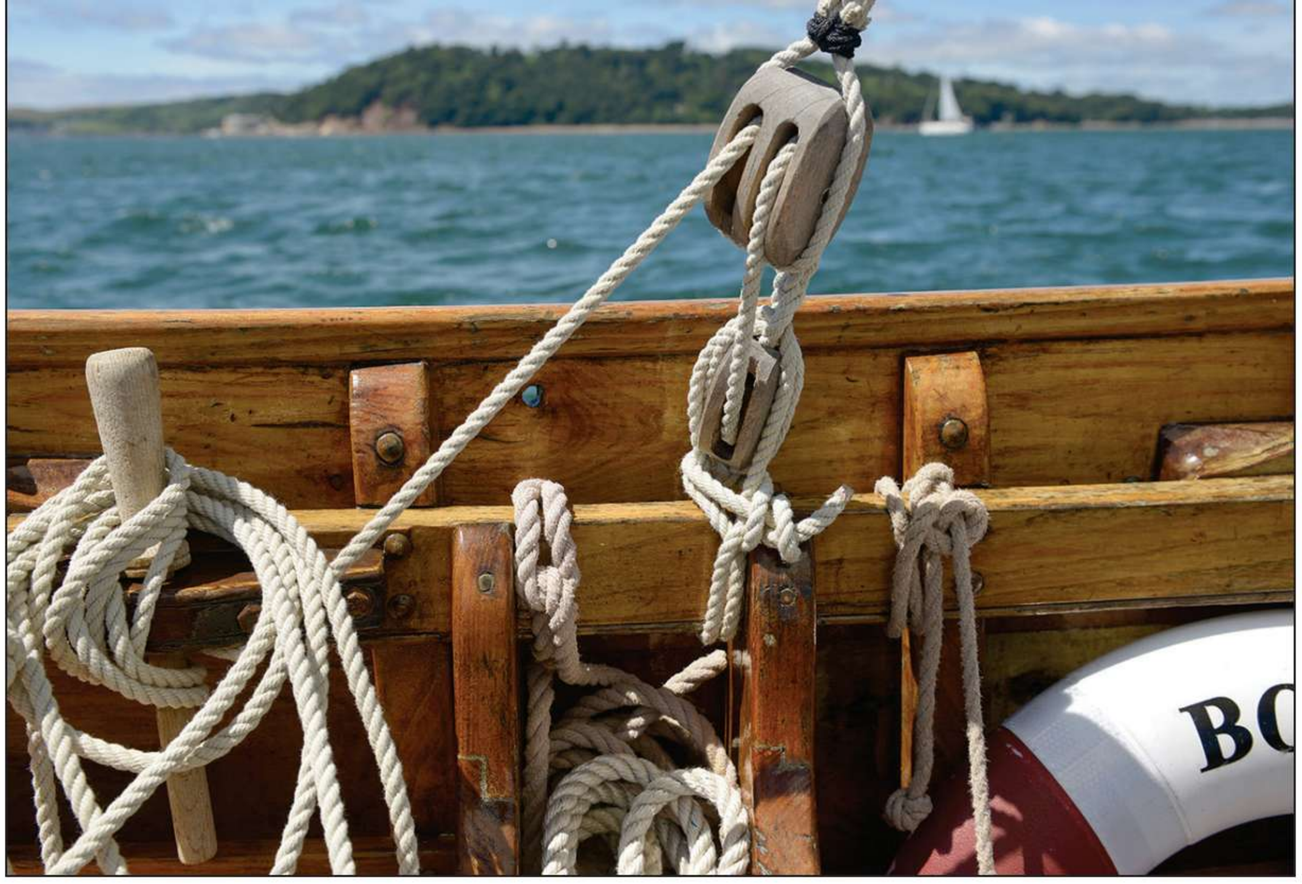
In any event, the attempt to have the boat certified proved futile. The best rating the MCA would offer would have allowed the boat "to sea within three miles from a nominated departure point" with the additional stipulation to venture "never more than three miles from land in favourable weather and daylight." But recreating Bligh's route obviously would take the boat hundreds of miles from land in all weathers and at all times of day. The MCA examiner himself pointed out that the Pacific Ocean was out of the United Kingdom's jurisdiction anyway, so the classification was irrelevant; however, just to keep everyone happy, the project planners agreed that the mothership would stay within three miles of the launch at all times, effectively providing a "safe haven" as required by the rules.

You could almost hear Capt. Bligh turning in his grave and shouting: "Health and safety be damned!" And that wasn't all. The tension between historic authenticity and practical considerations touched every aspect of the voyage: "We had discussions about all sorts of things, from toothpaste to sunglasses, to sun cream, and what sort of clothing we were going to wear," Conrad said. "In the end, we did have sun cream. We had antibiotics, and a pretty decent medical kit. They gave us a range of weird sunglasses, but no one really wore them. At one stage we were talking about making these coconut-slit things, but I just thought it was a bit ridiculous."

As a farewell gift, Mark outfitted the boat he built with a handmade wooden bailer for each crew member, to be used both for bailing the boat and as a "poo pot," and he included a small green tarpaulin for shelter and privacy.

In July 2016, some 227 years after Bligh and his men were cast off by their own mothership, the modern-day crew set off on their replica launch from exactly the same position. Aboard were skipper Ant Middleton, sailing master Conrad Humphreys, two cameramen, a carpenter, a doctor, a whiskey ambassador, an ex-convict, and a professional yacht skipper.

Despite all the health and safety measures, the men's experience of the voyage was in many ways surprisingly similar to that of Bligh and his crew. They had storms in many of the same places, they had torrential downpours of rain that rotted their skin, their food went bad, their morale showed extreme highs and lows, and they used the flight paths of birds to help them find land. Even Bligh's mood-booster—the occasional tot of rum bringing "always joyful tidings," in his words—was replicated.





NIC COMPTON (BOTH)

***Above*—The shape of the replica is almost identical to the original, although she has plywood planking and an extra strake in her topsides to satisfy modern safety requirements. *Right*—Humphries sails about 100 days a year on BOUNTY and says she's a brilliant "storytelling boat."**

The issue of clothing proved particularly contentious. Conrad had pushed for full modern sailing gear, but the producers had refused to supply Gore-Tex because it was considered too noisy for the cameras. Some compromise salopettes, which are high-waisted bibbed foul-weather pants, were eventually found but proved extremely inefficient. The producers also supplied some beautiful ventile smocks—ventile being a cotton fabric developed in Britain during World War II—that worked perfectly until they became encrusted with salt, turned hard as carboard, and then shrank by about 30 percent.

Again, Bligh's solution proved prescient: he made his crew take their clothes off, dip them into the sea, which was cooler than the air, and put them back on. The modern crew tested this method and found that it worked—though the sight of nine naked men on a boat might have proven too much for Channel 4 family viewing.

So, is "modern-day man" capable of enduring the same hardships as our forebears?

"I think arguably we are," Conrad said. "We're no less resilient than they were; we've just got very different sorts of pressures now. Most of our pressures are in our heads. They didn't have those distractions. They had much more practical challenges, such as: 'Can we get this boat from here to there with the skill set we've got?' Whereas our kids have to face harassment on social media, which is not healthy." Buying the BOUNTY launch gave Conrad a means of addressing the psychological pressures experienced by many young people.

From the outset, Conrad has worked with schools and colleges around Plymouth, Devon, close to where he lives, to provide educational sailing trips that force them to put their phones away and live in the moment.

The boat was called BOUNTY'S END for the television series, but Conrad renamed her BOUNTY OF PLYMOUTH, mainly because there was already another BOUNTY—although Conrad's boat is known locally simply as BOUNTY by almost everyone. Somewhere along the way, he was able to get the boat's MCA classification raised to permit ranging up to 20 miles from a safe haven in favorable weather and daylight, which has enabled him to take charter customers for extended day sails. The project has grown and grown ever since, with camping trips for 28-hour off-grid adventures, special day trips for Mothers' Day and Fathers' Day, wild swimming, and even a fireworks-watching night.

The boat's storytelling potential has also come to fruition, just as Conrad imagined while sitting on that beach in Timor all those years ago. In 2021, he teamed up with the History Hit television channel to film a four-part series called Conrad's River Journeys. BOUNTY played a key role as he sailed her up three rivers and an estuary in Devon, exploring the history and unique character of each location. This was followed by a three-part series sailing around the Isles of Scilly with broadcaster Dan Snow, with the boat again playing a key role.

"The idea was to explore the history of Devon's rivers from the perspective of a boat that would have been going up and down those rivers at the time, between the 1750s and the 1850s, at a time when these rivers were incredibly significant and affluent," Conrad said. "It was the same on the Isles of Scilly, when Dan Snow was up in the fort talking about how we were going to protect this vital set of islands; having a period boat sailing past the fort worked really well."

Conrad also uses the boat for his public speaking engagements—her plywood construction making her easy to move around the country on a trailer—and says his BOUNTY mutiny talks are now more popular than both his Vendée Globe and Global Challenge presentations. Apparently just as comfortable on the boards as at sea, BOUNTY has even graced the stage at the Airbus aircraft wing factory in Broughton, North Wales.

Conrad has made a few changes to the boat since he acquired her in 2017, most notably fitting an electric motor to facilitate getting in and out of harbor. More recently, he fitted a new rig, switching from the original two-masted lug to a taller gaff-cutter



NIC COMPTON

That high stern was a lifesaver in the big following seas of the Pacific Ocean.

rig. It started when he was researching the designs for another boat for another possible historic re-enactment, this time the voyages of HMS BEAGLE, for which the ship's cutters did most of the surveying work during expeditions to Tierra del Fuego in 1826–30 and, with naturalist Charles Darwin aboard, in 1831–36. Conrad was particularly interested in a half-decked cutter called HOPE. Although the envisioned replica hasn't yet been built, he had the rig made and fitted to BOUNTY instead. Combined with a new suit of terylene sails to replace the baggy old cotton ones, the change has been transformative.

"I sailed the whole of last year with this setup, and the boat sails so much better," Conrad said. "BOUNTY's hull shape is going to decide her top hull speed, so there hasn't been any improvement in that, but the biggest difference is that we get to those hull speeds much earlier. And the other significant difference is that I can sail upwind, so I can probably get 10 degrees higher than before."

Not only that, but the new rig means that Conrad can now tack the boat. With the original lug rig, he was never able to tack effectively and instead always had to jibe for course changes.

I joined BOUNTY for a day sail out of her base in Plymouth. With the upswept stern and rounded bow of a classic "cod's head and mackerel tail" hull, she was impossible to miss as she bobbed at her mooring on the River Plym. Now 10 years old, she looks more historic than ever, but she is clearly in good shape; only the EPIRB tucked under a quarter knee gives a clue that this is a boat that has sailed halfway across the Pacific Ocean.

We had perfect conditions off Plymouth that day, with a brisk offshore breeze, bright sunshine, and no waves. BOUNTY romped along with a bone in her teeth, looking quite at home sailing off one of the oldest naval dockyards in the world, and now the biggest in Europe, as Conrad reminded me. I suddenly saw what Conrad meant: this is a good "storytelling boat," one that gets you thinking about the past and why we go to sea in the first place. Fill her up with half a dozen people, and you have a bucketful of stories and memories that will last a lifetime. No wonder the BOUNTY & HOPE project is such a success (see www.bountyandhope.com).

I initially transferred to a chase boat to take photographs, and before leaving, I politely checked with Conrad that he would be okay to sail BOUNTY solo—forgetting that this is a man who has sailed twice singlehanded around the world. Back aboard, I found that BOUNTY's unusual shape and lack of a deep keel or ballast made for quite an unusual sailing experience. She is initially tender, and the movement of just one person from one side to the other dramatically alters her angle of heel even while under sail. Yet once she settles into her groove, she feels steady and safe. She's also incredibly roomy for a 23′ boat, and it's not hard to imagine that if you had to cross an ocean on an open boat with 18 other men, she would be a reasonably good choice.

"Because she's very bowl-shaped, as soon as she leans over a bit, she's incredibly stable," Conrad said. "You can literally pile everyone on the leeward side, and it's quite hard to capsize her. She's got all that resistance pushing back up on the hull. After whatever it was, 4,000 miles across the Pacific, we never really once came close to being knocked down."

Conrad didn't buy BOUNTY just because she seemed like a good business proposition. After spending 60 days at sea on the boat, he had developed a personal bond with her, which continues to this day. "I probably sail about a hundred days a year in that little boat," he said. "She's very versatile now, especially with the cutter-style rig. She's a boat that can navigate these rivers. And she's always there. My daughters have grown up with her, and we've done lots of trips up and down the Tamar River [next to Plymouth]. Sometimes we've just laid up in the mud for a few hours and then come back down on the tide. She's a big part of my life, and of my family's life."

Nic Compton, a contributing editor for WoodenBoat, *lives in Devon, England.*

A Hollow Mast for a Gaff-Rigged Boat

John Shafer recently wrote to ask, "Maybe you can point me in the right direction. I will be building a Paul Gartside–designed 22′ centerboard yawl. I'm trying to use wood only from my farm in southwestern Ohio. The two choices for the hollow mast are sycamore or yellow poplar. Both are similar to Douglas-fir in density, but I'm wondering whether the cross-grain of the sycamore adds anything to its strength that is not shown in the elasticity and rupture numbers. Any idea if the wood will be sufficient, or will some embedded carbon-fiber rods be necessary?"

I checked Paul Gartside's website but could not find a 22′ yawl. Matt Murphy contacted Paul for information, and, it turns out, the boat design was fresh off Paul's desk and just recently published in *Water Craft* (www.watercraft-magazine.com). The boat was specifically designed for John Shafer as design No. 298.

The plans show the boat is gaff-rigged with a stayed mast. Historically, conifers such as spruces, pines, or Douglas-fir have been predominant choices for spars and masts (see my columns in WB Nos. 118, 120, 263, and 286). The greater relative stiffness of conifer softwoods compared to deciduous hardwoods has often been attributed to differences in lignin chemistry. Conifers contain guaiacyl lignin while hardwoods have both guaiacyl and syringyl lignin. Since lignin provides stiffness to wood, this is not an unwarranted assumption.

However, this difference fails to account for the fact that lignin is a plastic substance that can become more plastic in wet wood—as is the case in living trees. Moreover, we know that green wood that is heated further plasticizes lignin. Yet conifers still are more recalcitrant and continue to resist bending—generally failing instead. We now know that the spiral arrangement of microfibrils of cellulose in conifer cells (tracheids) significantly contributes to this greater stiffness.[1]

The accompanying table compares Douglas-fir with yellow poplar, sycamore, and sassafras, another wood common in southwestern Ohio. I also included a conifer that grows in that area—shortleaf pine. Each of these woods has moderate but differing wood densities as represented by their specific gravity values. Examination of the table's modulus of elasticity (MOE, a measure of stiffness) column reveals that Douglas-fir and shortleaf pine have the highest values, as expected. The hardwood sycamore, with a specific gravity (SG) value comparable to Douglas-fir, has a considerably lower MOE. Sassafras has an even lower value, but it is a less-dense wood, with SG of 0.46. The surprising hardwood is yellow poplar. It is the least dense of the woods in the table, yet it has an MOE that exceeds the values for sycamore and sassafras and approaches the density-to-stiffness ratios of the two softwoods. Checking for a conifer with specific gravity that matched yellow poplar, I found jack pine with SG of 0.043. It has an MOE value of 9,300 MPa, slightly less than that of yellow poplar.

One possible reason for the greater-than-expected MOE for yellow poplar could be a consequence of its evolutionary status. Yellow poplar is a member of the Magnoliaceae family, one of the most primitive groups of flowering plants (Angiosperms). Just for fun I checked the SG and MOE values for another North American Magnoliaceae tree—the cucumber tree (*Magnolia acuminata*). It has SG of 0.48 and MOE of 12,500 kPa. Not proof, but more evidence that the wood of the most primitive hardwoods has mechanical properties similar to the wood of conifers. And this is further strengthened by microscopic evidence that reveals similar wood anatomical features.

This similarity of yellow poplar to softwoods has not gone unnoticed by the American Lumber Standards Committee. As traditional supplies of softwood lumber were dwindling and prices of southern pine were increasing in the 1970s and early '80s, the USDA Forest Products Laboratory in Madison, Wisconsin, began testing yellow poplar as a possible alternative for softwood structural lumber. As a consequence, in 1982 new grading rules allowed yellow poplar to be marketed as dimensional lumber in the structural framing market to compete with softwoods.

Choosing Mast Wood

Getting back to John's specific question: based on the data in the table, yellow poplar would be a reasonable substitute for Douglas-fir, while sycamore might not be. However, stiffness is not the only criterion to consider when choosing mast wood for a 22′ centerboard boat. I would guess this craft is designed for trailering, but I would want to know whether it will be trailered for daysailing or kept on a mooring. In the latter case, the mast will be subject to weathering and potential decay. Old-growth Douglas-fir has moderate decay resistance, although much of the wood available today from

Mechanical Properties of Two Softwoods and Three Hardwoods*

Wood Species	Specific Gravity	Modulus of Rupture (kPa)	Modulus of Elasticity (MPa)	Shear Parallel to Grain (kPa)
Douglas-fir	0.48	90,000	12,300	9,700
Yellow poplar	0.42	70,000	10,900	8,200
Sycamore	0.49	69,000	9,800	10,100
Sassafras	0.46	62,000	7,700	8,500
Shortleaf pine	0.51	90,000	12,100	9,600

*All values are for wood at 12 percent moisture content.

second-growth forests has little decay resistance. Yellow poplar and sycamore are rot-prone and should be treated with a fungicide or protected with an epoxy-and-fiberglass sheathing if the boat will be on a mooring for the warm-weather months. Sassafras is highly decay-resistant.

Since the mast will be glued-up from staves, how easily a wood bonds with adhesives is important. Douglas-fir, yellow poplar, sycamore, and sassafras all bond equally well with various adhesives under a wide range of bonding conditions.

In answer to the question of whether "the cross-grain of the sycamore adds anything to its strength," we can look again at the table and see that sycamore has an MOE in bending value that is slightly lower than for yellow poplar despite being a denser wood. What John calls cross-grain is actually interlocked grain, something also found in American elm. Anyone who has ever tried to split American elm for firewood knows what an impossible task lies ahead. Therefore, I included the property of shear parallel to grain in the table and, as expected, the interlocked grain in sycamore is reflected in the highest value in that column. As masts bend with the wind, they are subject to shear parallel to grain, so in this regard sycamore wins out. This may be a partial equalizer for poorer relative stiffness when stacked up against yellow poplar.

Finally, we need to consider wood quality. Yellow poplar trees generally grow straight, are self-pruning, and therefore produce a large quantity of knot-free wood. Sycamore's growth habitat is more varied, and some claim that it can often contain heart rot. While young trees are self-pruning, old trees are not. Instead, they are prone to limb failure—sometimes called "sudden branch-drop syndrome"—when large, healthy-looking limbs suddenly snap and fall. In my younger days, I worked as an arborist during college breaks, and we all dreaded climbing sycamore trees because of this trait. Flat-sawn sycamore boards must be dried carefully, as they are prone to twisting and warping. The interlocked grain also makes machining and finishing more difficult.

For me, I would choose yellow poplar; but if you could locate some shortleaf pine, you might consider it. If you were to choose sassafras for its decay resistance, you might need some reinforcement with carbon fiber, fiberglass, or an increase in scantlings.

Dr. Richard Jagels is an emeritus professor of forest biology at the University of Maine, Orono. Please send correspondence to Dr. Jagels by mail to the care of WoodenBoat*, or via e-mail to Senior Editor Tom Jackson, tom@woodenboat.com.*

[1] Jagels, R. and Wason, J., 2025. Tree form and anatomical determinants of maximum potential height, with focus on North American conifers. IAWA Jour. 46(4):567–579. DOI 10.1163/22941932-bja10180.

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Launchings

Edited by Christopher Cunningham

These pages, along with the Boat Launchings section of www.woodenboat.com, are dedicated to sharing recently launched wooden boats built or restored by our readers. If you've launched a boat within the past year, please email us at launchings@woodenboat.com, or write us at Launchings, WoodenBoat, P.O. Box 78, Brooklin, ME 04616.

Please include the following information: (1) your boat's name; (2) its length and beam; (3) the name of its design, class, or type; (4) the names of the designer, builder, and owner; (5) your email address, mailing address, and phone number; (6) the port or place of intended use; (7) the approximate date work began; (8) the date of launching; and (9) a brief description of your experience of the construction or restoration. Send no more than five high-resolution photographs, each with a file size between 700kb and 16mb, and the name of the photographer for each photo.

For submissions selected for publication, we'll send a free limited-edition cotton cap with the embroidered *WoodenBoat* logo and Launchings issue number.





NICOLE STEWART

When Les Stewart was growing up, his father often took him out water-skiing on the lakes and rivers of North Carolina. When he had kids of his own, he wanted to create similar memories for them. He had built a cedar-strip canoe in his garage in 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic left him extra time on his hands, and that project kindled his interest in boatbuilding. In 2023, he bought plans for Glen-L's Malahini, an outboard runabout that would provide his kids with thrills like those he had experienced with his father's ski boat. He built the hull in glued-lapstrake plywood fashion instead of with plywood panels, as designed, and outfitted much of the boat with hardware salvaged from mid-century runabouts. It took him 28 months of weekends to get to the launching on the Pamlico River in June 2026. The boat was christened BIRD LADY in honor of his wife, Nicole, an avid birdwatcher.

DAVE FARRINGTON



SUE PHILBRICK

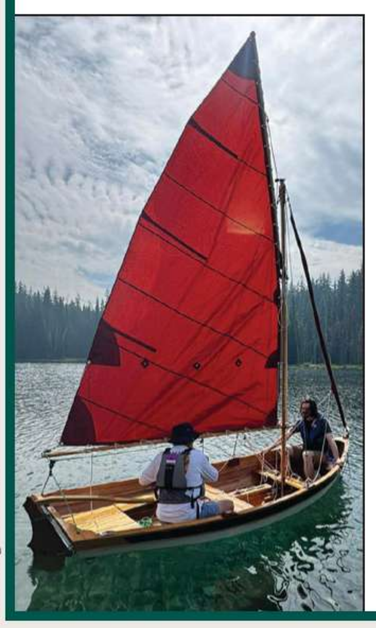


Dave Farrington wanted a day boat that he could use to enjoy the waters around his home in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. It initially took shape in his imagination, and after he talked with boat designer Doug Hylan at a boat show in 2012 in Portland, Maine, Dave sent Doug a 10-page summary of ideas and requirements. Doug used the design of his lobsterboat-inspired D'Anna as a starting point and gave the new design a rounded torpedo stern like those found on some Maine lobsterboats of the early 1900s and the raised deck popular in the same era. Dave began construction the following year and, working weekends, spent the next 12 years building CALIDRIS. Her hull is strip-built in western red cedar, the decks are 'glassed meranti plywood, and the brightwork finishing touches are cherry. The power plant is a 150-hp Yanmar diesel. She was launched in July 2025.



SHALLAMAY JAYNES

Robert Jaynes of Grants Pass, Oregon, had a lot to learn when, in June 2023, he embarked on building his first boat. He had built and remodeled houses as a hobby but the transition to working with curves was new to him. He didn't even own a hand plane; when he acquired one, he had to turn to YouTube to learn how to sharpen and set its blade. He ordered plans for the 14′8″ Penobscot 14 from Arch Davis, who also provided answers to Robert's questions. Robert spent months researching wood and ordered Sitka spruce for his spars. The plywood for the planking came from sustainably harvested okoume. Port Orford cedar for the solid wood elements came from the Oregon coast. He persevered through mistakes and fixes and launched the boat in March 2026. He christened her THE WAY so he could "get in the way, get out of the way, and go away."



TINA JAYNES





JEEP PAGEL

For the past three decades, the Door County Maritime Museum in Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin, has hosted a yearly class in wooden-boat construction. The most recent class, which included seven new students, three returning students who had already completed two or more previous classes, and three instructors, met for some 25 days of instruction on Fridays and Saturdays between September 2025 and July 2026 to build a 16′ Iain Oughtred–designed Beaver canoe. The lapstrake hull was built with imported okoume plywood and locally harvested and milled lumber: cherry for the gunwales and yoke, ash for the keel, and maple for the decks. Work on the canoe was done on a lower level of the museum in Jim's Boat Building Shop, named after the late Jim Kowall, who had taught boatbuilding in that space when the museum opened in 1997. The unnamed Beaver canoe has been displayed at events and venues around the county and was scheduled to be raffled in December to raise funds for the museum.



BECKY MASON

In 1884, Canadian John S. Stephenson patented a method of building canoes with tongue-and-groove longitudinal strips, the precursor of modern a strip-built construction. While that idea caught on, it wasn't his first brainchild. In his 1879 patent, he described building a canoe with interlocking tongue-and-groove ribs—without the use of an adhesive. The Peterborough Canoe Company used that method, then considered the pinnacle of canoe building, but in 1948 the forms and jigs were destroyed and the knowledge was lost. Reid McLachlan of Chelsea, Québec, had restored a 120-year-old 16′ cedar-rib canoe and in 2023 he decided to build a duplicate to unravel the mystery of how the originals were made. Nothing was easy about bending the 180 ribs around the form he'd built. In the ends, he notes, "the joinery got fiendishly difficult." After 20 months of work, he launched the canoe in November 2025, thrilled that it was completely watertight.



REID MCLACHLAN



TREENA RICE-BUEHLER

Throughout his life, Dennis Buehler of Green Bay, Wisconsin, had dreamed of building a boat. Having worked in a variety of woodshops, he was a skilled woodworker, but it wasn't until 2019 that he embarked on building an Arch Davis–designed Penobscot 17. His garage shop was already well equipped with tools he had inherited and collected, but he didn't race through the build. He spent six years enjoying the process, acquiring new skills, and finding solutions to problems. What he found the most challenging and yet the most rewarding was learning to recognize the limitations of plans and measuring tools and instead rely on what his eyes and hands could tell him about fair curves. He launched his gunter-rigged 17-footer, christened LE CLAIR, in September 2025.

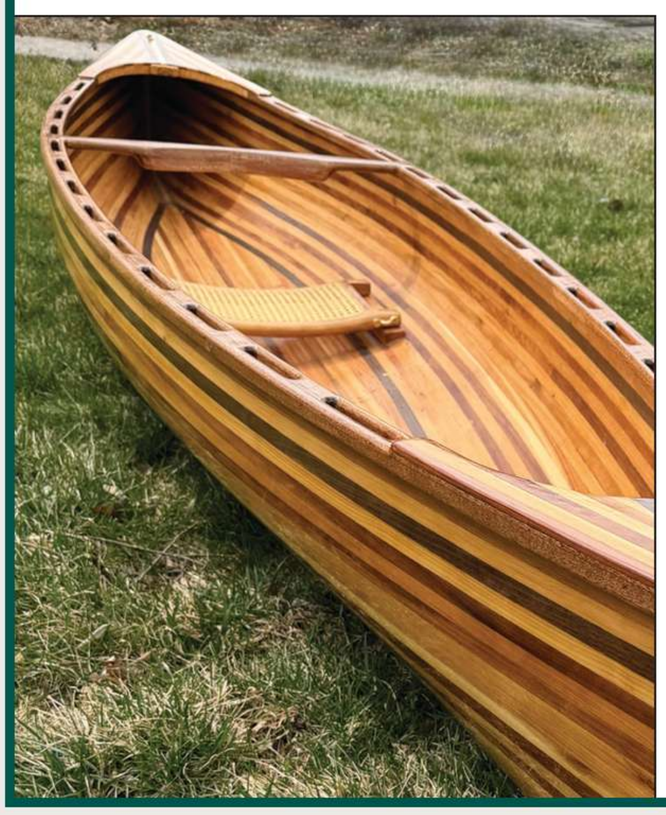


LAUNCHINGS



LOUISE GREEN

Over the winter of 2025–26, Andrew Green of Pewaukee, Wisconsin, built his third Wee Lassie cedar-strip canoe. Largely self-taught, Andrew has been working with wood most of his life, building furniture as well as the canoes and a 13′ sailing skiff. While he does his work in the basement shop of his home, he has also volunteered at All Hands Boatworks, a Milwaukee-based nonprofit that teaches wooden boatbuilding skills to youths from 10 to 24 years old. For the Wee Lassie, Andrew milled all the ¼″ × ¾″ bead-and-cove western-red-cedar strips for the hull and the ash strips for the stems. The 11′ 6″ canoe, 'glassed inside and out and finished with five coats of varnish, weighed just over 30 lbs when launched at Ellison Bay on the east side of Green Bay in May 2026.



ANDREW GREEN



DOUG HERMANN

In July 2025, Doug Hermann was among the 11 students at WoodenBoat School enrolled in a class to build an Ocean Pointer, a 19′6″ center-console outboard skiff designed by David Stimson after the West Pointer designed by Alton Wallace. Under the direction of three instructors, the students kept up a fast pace and finished the strip-built hull and plywood deck in 14 days. At the conclusion of the class, students who wanted to take the unfinished boat home put their names in a hat for a drawing; that Doug became the lucky winner was a foregone conclusion, since his was the only name in the hat. He towed the boat home to Jasper, Georgia, and spent the next 11 months making, fitting, and finishing all the parts that were beyond the scope of the class. He completed the project in time for the WoodenBoat Show in Mystic, Connecticut, in June 2026 and won the best-in-show award for an owner-built powerboat.





BILL BLACKWOOD

Bill Blackwood has built a few boats, beginning with a 12′ speedboat in a high-school shop class when he was just 15 years old. He's 70 now, and his latest boat is for his grandkids. It's a 9′ Tubby Tug by Glen-L, but instead of being built with a flat transom it has a fantail stern added to surround the outboard and accentuate the tugboat aesthetic. Bill constructed the tug in his workshop over the two-car garage he built five years ago. He had anticipated building boats there and had the foresight to make an extra-wide staircase for access. He had built the hull stitch-and-glue style and constructed the wheelhouse so it would be attached to the deck with just four screws, making it easy to separate when it was time to bring the boat out of the shop. Powered by a 2.3-hp outboard and christened FRENS & COUSINS after Bill's grandson Frens, the tug frequents Lake Attitash near Bill's home in Merrimac, Massachusetts.



... AND RELAUNCHINGS





PAUL MANNING

XARIFA, an International One Design sloop, was built in 1947 and raced on San Francisco Bay for more than 60 years. Over the course of the past 33 of those years, her caretaker and skipper, Paul Manning, saved her from loss three times. When he purchased her, she needed 38 new frames and more than 700 replacement fastenings below the waterline. Four years later, a collision during a race left her with a 3′ hole at the waterline; Manning saved her from sinking by beaching her. Most recently, XARIFA developed persistent leaks in three separate places, so Paul decided it was not only time for the boat to have more work done but also time for a new owner to see to her restoration. Spencer Fulweiler, who has been Paul's longtime sailing partner, and Spencer's wife, Rena, became the new caretakers and had the boat hauled to Gouldsboro, Maine, where shipwright Kevin Snyder rebuilt her; he estimates that he replaced more than 95 percent of the original material. In June 2025, the sloop, renamed LYDIA, was relaunched and now sails out of Mount Desert Island's Northeast Harbor.





SETH McDONNELL

In 1923, Henry B. Nevins Inc. of City Island, New York, built 16 gaff-rigged Fishers Island 24s designed by Charles D. Mower for the Fishers Island Yacht Club. When the club relocated to a deeper harbor in 1933, the fleet was sold to the Groton Long Point Yacht Club in Connecticut, where the 24′ boats were converted to marconi rigs. Fourteen of the boats have survived to this day and continue to race as a one-design fleet. No. 13, SANDPIPER, has had several modest restorations, but in August 2024, she was hauled out for more extensive work. Rick Waters of Noank, Connecticut, removed rotten wood and installed new frames, floor timbers, keel, maststep, and garboards and rebuilt the centerboard trunk. SANDPIPER was relaunched in June 2026, and owners Catherine and Seth McDonnell of Groton Long Point are sailing her into her second century.



C. STEKLI

The Peterborough Canoe Company started manufacturing canoes in 1892 in Peterborough, Ontario, Canada, and branched out to make outboard-powered boats in the 1920s. In fall 2025, Mark Avery of Owen Sound, Ontario, acquired one of those boats from a family who had recently purchased a property just five minutes from his home. The boat, left in the barn by the previous owners, was a Zephyr 14 runabout built by Peterborough in 1954 and in need of repair. Mark put the boat back in working order using locally grown ash, maple, and oak. He added some fiberglass sheathing to the bottom to make it watertight and more durable. He found a working Johnson 7.5-hp outboard motor and a gas can the same age as the boat. In August 2026, Mark, his wife, and some friends relaunched the Zephyr in the inner harbor of Owen Sound.



Hints for taking good photos of your boat

1. Set your camera for high-resolution images. We prefer jpg format, with a file size between 700kb and 16mb.
2. Stow fenders and extraneous gear out of the camera's view. Ensure the deck is clean and uncluttered.
3. Take your photographs in mid-angle sunlight for best results. Mid-morning or mid-afternoon usually work well.
4. Keep the horizon level and the background simple and scenic so your boat stands out from its surroundings.
5. Take some pictures of the boat underway and some at rest. Horizontal framing is preferred, but a vertical format works well for sailboats. Shoot a lot of images, then send us your five favorites.

We enjoy learning of your work—it affirms the vitality of the wooden boat community. We receive so many submissions that there is not room in the magazine for all of them to be published. Additional launchings can be seen at www.woodenboat.com/boat-launchings.

Toulinguet

A classic small cruiser



Particulars	
LOA	27′10″
LWL	22′10″
Beam	9′2″
Draft	4′3″
Displacement	6,600 lbs
Ballast	2,420 lbs
Sail area	415 sq ft

Design by François Vivier
Review by Tad Roberts

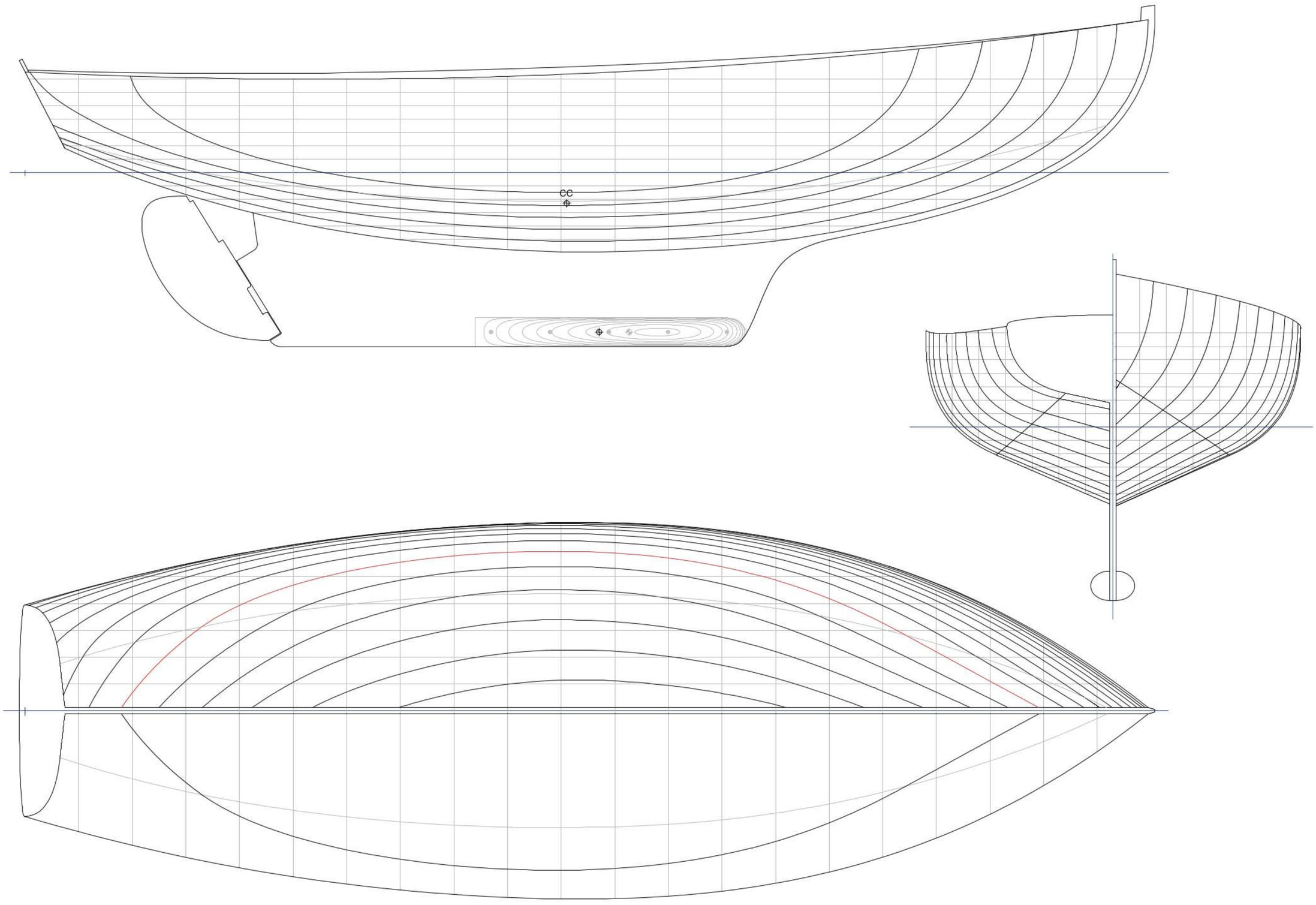
Owning, building, and sailing a very pretty small cruising boat is a great joy for the tradition-minded sailor. Small and simple boats have their place, but having built several such boats, I know that those looking for a challenge want a vessel of substance.

Building the François Vivier–designed Toulinguet is no small undertaking; the designer mentions one early builder spending 3,000 hours on the construction. However, this is a superior design that will reward all that effort, both at the tiller under sail, and just looking at the boat sitting at anchor or on a trailer.

Toulinguet is ISO-certified Category B with four people aboard. Boats that comply with the category's standards are "designed for waves of up to 13′ significant height and a wind of 34–40 knots." These conditions might be encountered on long coastwise passages where shelter is not immediately available. In other words, the boat is strong and stable enough to handle some tough weather.

In looks and intent, Toulinguet is a return to the 1950s, when semi-production wooden racer-cruisers were produced by small yards in volume for about twice the cost of a new car. While Vivier was not necessarily aiming the design at Spirit of Tradition racing, I have no doubt the boat could do well on a windy course with good sails and a competitive crew.

The construction of the François Vivier–designed Toulinguet is complex, but it rewards the builder in both performance and good looks.



The short overhangs suggest a classic character and yield a smooth motion—and good speed thanks to the optimized waterline length. Full sections forward balance the hull as it heels.

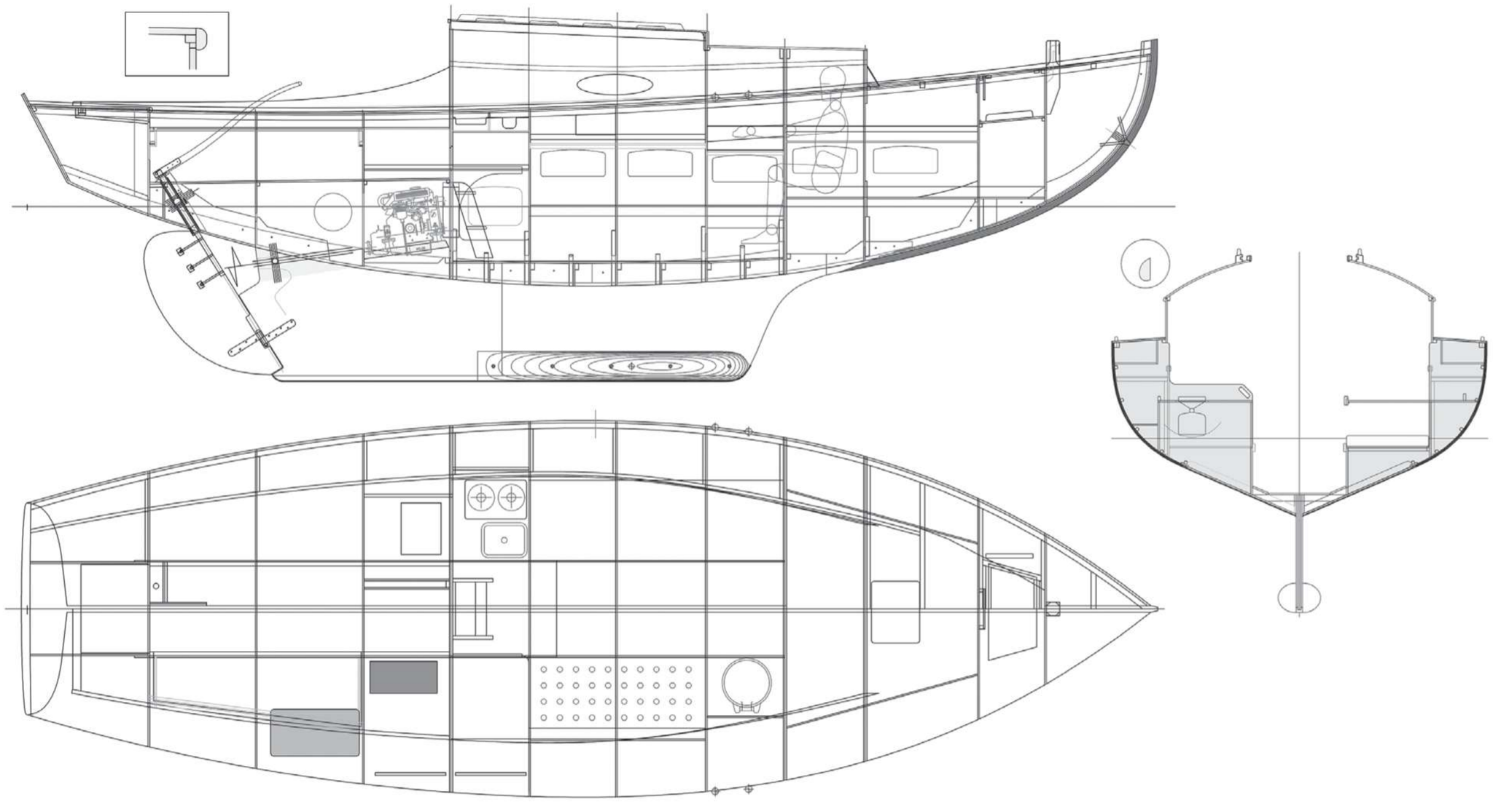
But there are some significant advantages to a new laminated-wood boat over the 1950s plank-on-frame version. Being all bonded together with epoxy, the entire structure is rigid and light compared to its predecessors; this allows more of the boat's total weight to be ballast, and the vertical center of gravity (VCG) is lower, thus increasing stability. The bonded and fiberglass-sheathed structure excludes water and won't move under point loads like chainplates or keelbolts, and this will increase lifespan significantly. Finally, the modern boat will have a lighter aluminum rig, again lowering VCG for a safer and stiffer sailing boat.

As is always the case, construction material and method dictate the hull form to some degree. Toulinguet's combination of straight-sectioned bottom areas planked with sheet plywood and topsides done in compound-curved vertical plywood laminates is, to my knowledge, unique. Toulinguet has a deep-V bottom with beautiful, softly developed, curving topsides. Again, the topsides are large pieces of plywood, so twisting shapes must be kept to a minimum.

The hull depth due to the V is a good thing; it allows the cabin sole to be low in the boat, increasing headroom while maintaining moderate freeboard and cabin height. While the hull depth certainly increases wetted surface, having weights such as batteries, water tanks, and the engine below the waterline makes a big difference to the VCG height.

The displacement-to-length ratio of Toulinguet is 247; this is what used to be called "performance cruiser" class. Today, it's the upper edge of modern cruisers. This allows some leeway in build weight for the amateur, and there's always variation in materials and the amount of epoxy used. Besides, a boat with some weight to it is quieter and more comfortable than a lighter one, because it's not always bobbing and jerking around.

The overhangs are short but maintain classic character; this effort to keep the waterline as long as possible pays off in a smooth motion and good speed. Note the full topside sections, especially forward, as is the modern style. This feature is taken to extremes in the



Toulinguet's depth of the hull allows ample headroom without excessive cabin trunk height. The interior is comfortable for weekending with four adults aboard.

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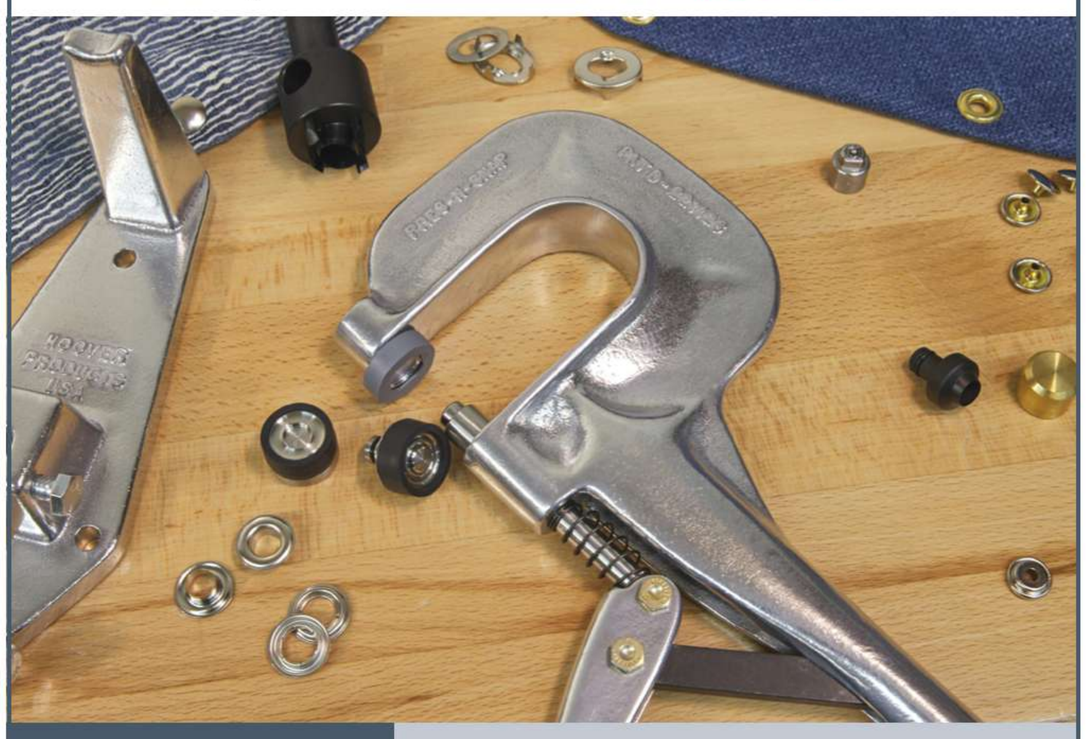

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various scow classes. Such fullness helps keep the hull balanced as the boat heels, lifting the bow instead of letting it roll down, which happens with topsides that are fine forward.

In plan view, the transom is a bit narrow, though wider than it would have been on a 1950s boat. For modern designers, the temptation is to maximize beam in the quarters for better sailing stability and horsepower. In this case, Vivier has carefully balanced the hull volumes and, judging from the photos, we have a very attractive boat.

The full keel makes perfect sense to me in this context, it's very strong and will protect the hull where a short-chord fin keel would be a vulnerable point. The full keel will dampen rolling immediately, and it provides excellent protection for the rudder and propeller. There is a penalty in wetted surface, but directional stability and the forgiving nature of a full keel will keep many sailors happy while making steering straightforward for the neophyte.

That full keel is made up of four layers of ½″-thick plywood, which is a simple solution to the backbone problem. Of course, there are compromises in a flat-sided shape, as the water flow will become detached at low speed (tacking) and cause some eddying, increasing drag when you really need an attached flow with maximum lift. But the boat has an efficient and large rig, so those low-speed tacks should be few. The speed and simplicity of just sawing out plywood and laminating versus shaping and laminating dozens of pieces of solid timber will win over many builders.

Along with the plywood keel, all of the bulkheads are of ½″ plywood with the main one between cockpit and cabin and the mast bulkhead being doubled. Much of the boat will be built from roughly 50 sheets of ½″ plywood, with an additional



The bulkheads are of ½" plywood; they support five solid-wood stringers that, in turn, support the plywood planking.



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17 sheets of ¼″ used in a double layer to form the curved topsides. The topsides are built in place with narrow strips of plywood (roughly 6″ to 8″ wide) bent over five timber stringers in two offset layers with a rabbet joint where they meet the ½″-thick bottom planking. Then the entire hull is faired and sheathed with fiberglass.

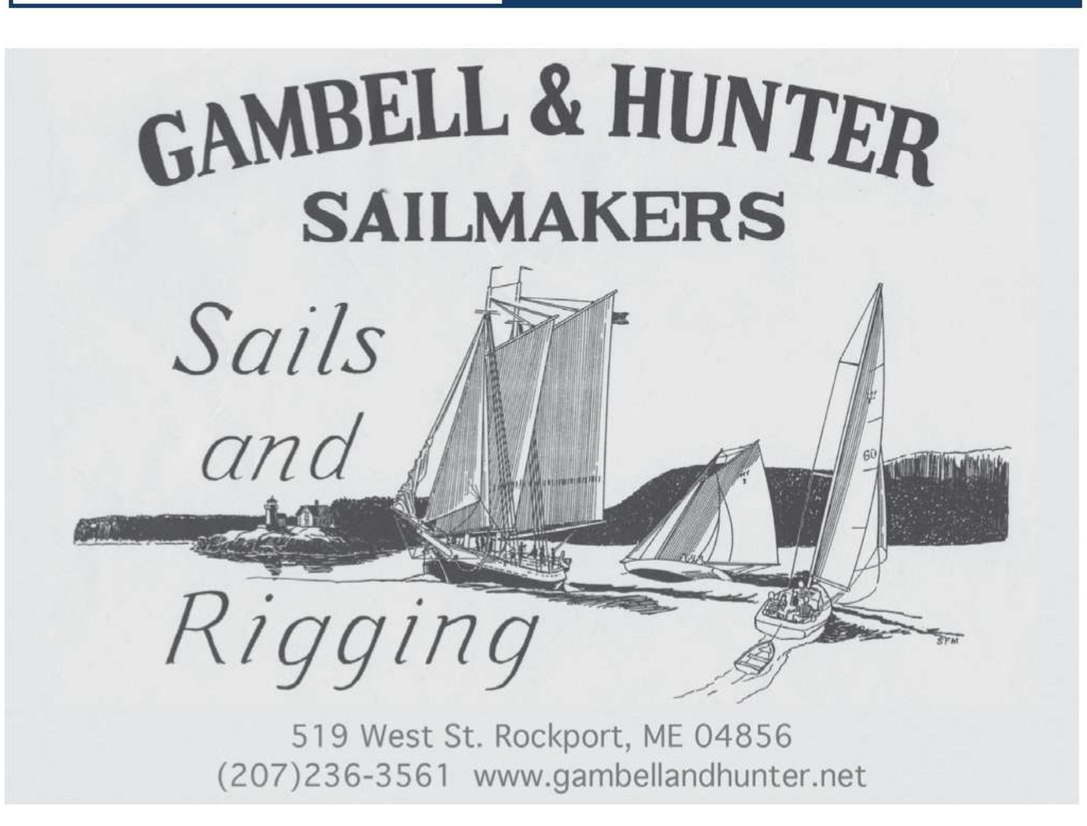
More evidence of careful design work to suit the use of this boat is seen in the rig layout and details. The ⅘ headstay height with a big mainsail and a small jib is an easy-to-handle rig that is also versatile enough to keep any sailor involved. The long boom keeps the mainsheet aft and out of the cockpit. A big asymmetrical spinnaker will transform the boat in light air. The sail area-to-displacement ratio is 18.9, which in years gone by would have been typical of a racing yacht. Vivier has given the boat this much sail because of a low center of gravity and excellent stability, but also to provide excellent sailing performance in light to moderate conditions. He has drawn three reefs in the mainsail, and they might well get used.



***Left*—Much of the hull planking comes from 50 sheets of ½″ plywood, while the rest comes from 17 sheets of ¼″ plywood needed to bend to the topside curves in two layers. *Opposite Page*—The fractional rig carries a big mainsail and a small jib; the long boom keeps the mainsheet out of the cockpit.**









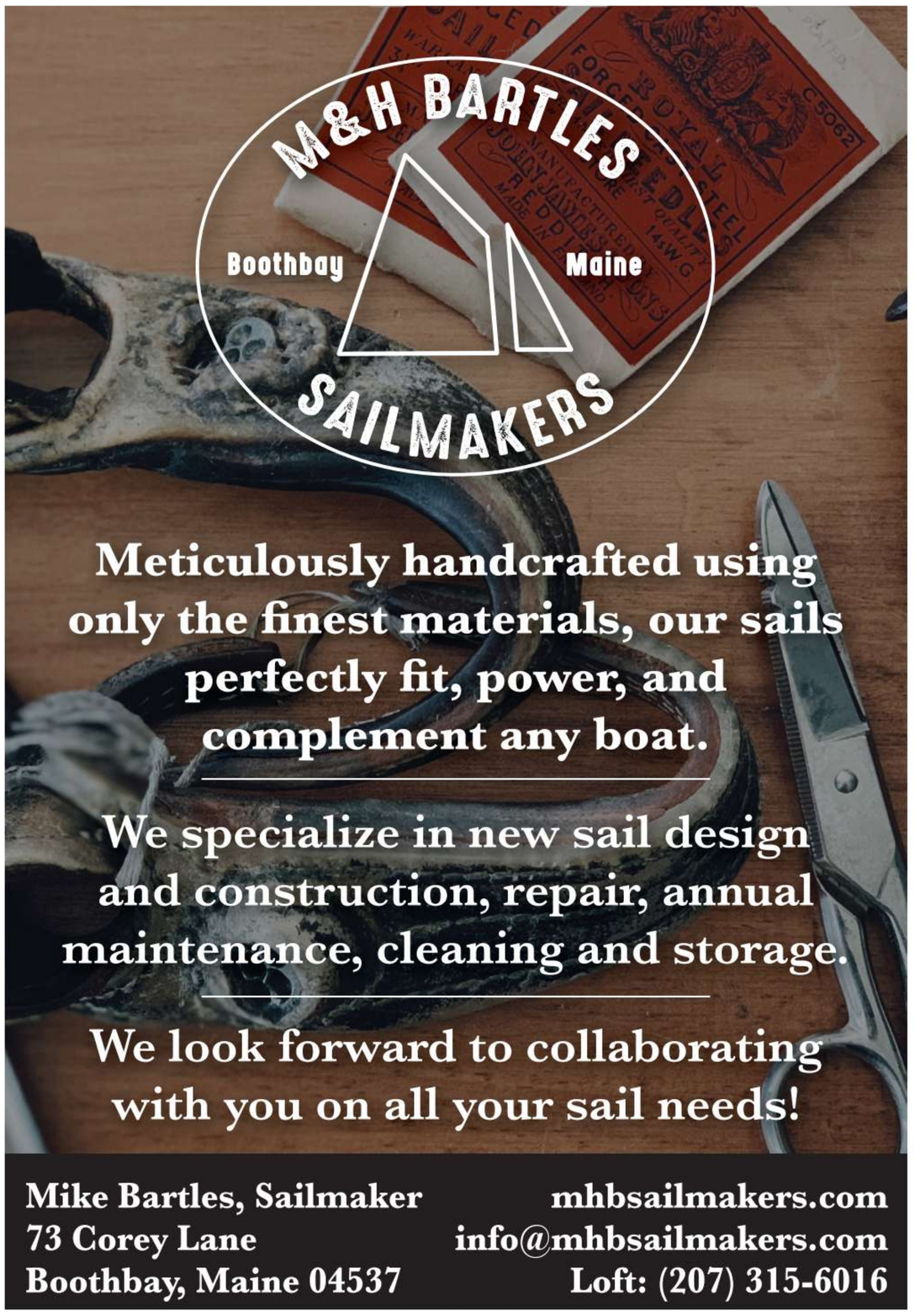
The interior is complete for weekending with four adults; there are two good berths in the saloon plus a double V-berth forward. Saloon headroom is 5′ 9″. Integral plywood water tanks are under the saloon settees, and the small diesel tank is under a cockpit seat on the starboard side. The weight of the galley and icebox will balance the fuel. In today's world, I would favor an electric auxiliary, probably in pod configuration buried in the keel. This would eliminate holes in the boat, not to mention several systems, among them exhaust and fuel. The batteries could be centered low below the companionway.

This is a very pretty boat that promises excellent sailing and dozens of compliments.

Tad Roberts is WoodenBoat*'s boat design editor.*

For more information, visit www.vivierboats.com.





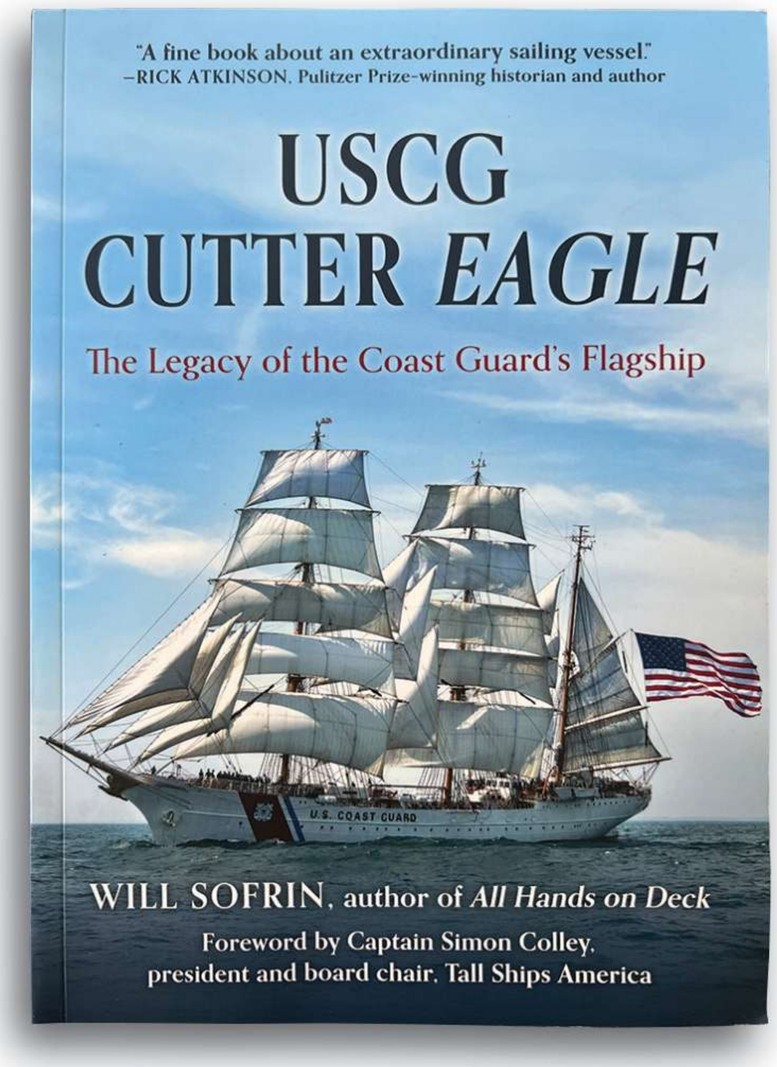
WoodenBoat REVIEW

PRODUCTS • BOOKS • VIDEOS • STUFF

USCG Cutter EAGLE: The Legacy of the Coast Guard's Flagship

USCG Cutter EAGLE: The Legacy of the Coast Guard's Flagship, by Will Sofrin. Lyons Press (an imprint of the Globe Pequot Publishing Group), www.globepequot.com/imprint/lyons-press/. 232 pp., illus. $24.95

Reviewed by Elliot Rappaport



It is always interesting to learn how many institutions arise from backgrounds of chance and adaptation. The U.S. Coast Guard is often described as the oldest branch of the American armed forces, but in name it dates only to 1915, when the Revenue Cutter Service (founded in 1790) merged with the U.S. Lifesaving Service and went on to further swallow the U.S. Lighthouse Service two decades later. The characteristic red racing stripe of Coast Guard cutters showed up only in 1967, created by a design firm whose portfolio also includes logos for Exxon, Greyhound, and the interior of Air Force One.

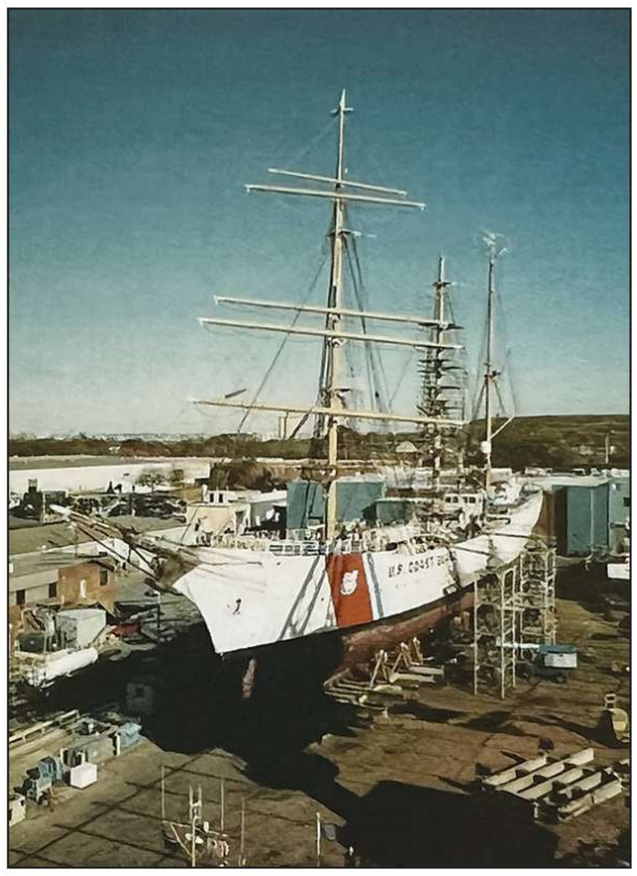
Branding aside, the Coast Guard has deployed personnel to every major war in U.S. history—all while simultaneously tending buoys, busting smugglers, issuing licenses, breaking ice, and coming to the aid of civilian mariners in every imaginable form of distress. One collateral benefit of a maritime career is the opportunity to meet a lot of people from the Coast Guard along the way, and they are a collectively upbeat and resourceful bunch—well accustomed to complex missions with limited support and equipment that may or may not be state of the art.

It should thus not be surprising that an eventful history also precedes the Coast Guard's best-known cutter, the magnificent steel-hulled sailing bark EAGLE. Built to train German naval cadets in 1936, the future EAGLE was conveyed—somewhat by chance—as a war prize to the United States in 1945. Patched up with scrounged parts, she was sailed home through a hurricane by a young captain named Gordon McGowan, who had no substantive experience in the command of sailing ships. None of this would have been possible without assistance from a large crew of German sailors, recently detached from Hitler's navy and perhaps shrewd enough to know that they'd have more to eat at sea than amid the austere conditions back home.

From this checkered beginning, EAGLE has since sailed through eight decades of fair and adverse winds to her current station as centerpiece of the Coast Guard Academy's sail-training program and a gleaming agent of American diplomacy. Anyone captured by the magnetism of sailing ships is likely to have heard this story in parts, but author and Connecticut native Will Sofrin has done us all a service in compiling an up-to-date history of this remarkable ship, drawn mostly from the primary accounts of men and women who have sailed her. None seem sorry for the experience, despite her log's occasional entries of challenge and tragedy.

Richly supplemented with photographs, much of the narrative has a certain behind-the-scenes quality in its details: There is an ambitious voyage to Australia in 1988, apparently spurred by a casual promise at a party from President Ronald





***Left and far left*—The U.S. Coast Guard cutter EAGLE was built to train German naval cadets in 1936 and came to the United States after World War II as part of a war reparations settlement.**

Reagan—who in the moment had no idea what "The EAGLE" actually was. The following years included landmark visits to the U.S.S.R. and the new Russian Federation, both under the brief hopeful glow of the waning millennium. Most gripping of all are accounts of the knockdown EAGLE suffered during a Tall Ships Race from Bermuda to Halifax, Nova Scotia, in the spring of 1984, during which the fleet was overtaken by an intense cold front and the ship—with cadets aloft at their sail stations—heeled past 55 degrees and nearly dipped her yardarms into the water. This same squall led tragically to the loss of a smaller British vessel, the MARQUES, racing nearby, and while EAGLE escaped without serious injury, the incident was a significant warning about the vulnerabilities of sailing ships and their margins of safety.

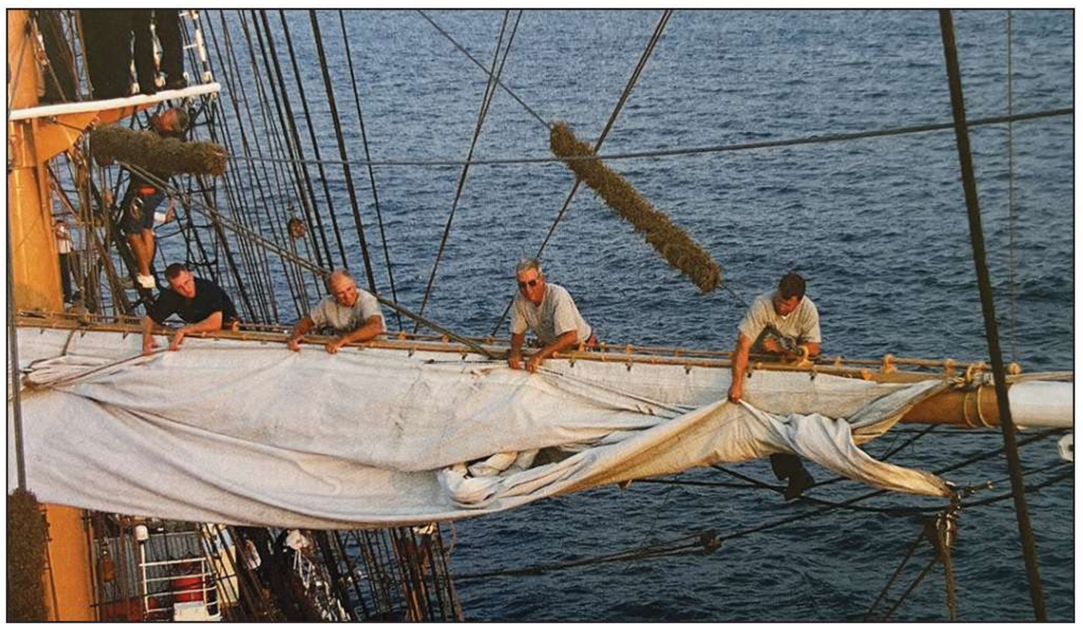
Sofrin's book is a compelling look, on a day-to-day basis, at the rigorous process of training in a close-knit service: Junior cadets plodding through the compulsory rigor of assigned tasks, the bonding of teams, personal growth, and gradual ascension to leadership. The book also addresses the challenges of the environment itself—the discomfort of spartan accommodations, the fatigue of watchstanding, and the social isolation of regimented systems, where it is possible to feel both surrounded and utterly alone. Together with this are more personal stories, including those of the female officers and cadets who have sailed amid the Coast Guard's efforts to become a fully inclusive service. And behind it all is the unifying momentum of the ship—under sail in its elegant complexity, steadfast, and ceaselessly demanding of attention.

These stories are the strongest part of the book, and I found myself wishing that more of them were closer to the front, where things are slowed somewhat by a shoal of background material—first a long, detailed history of the U.S. Coast Guard and a sprawling history of sail itself, which in places I found a bit speculative. These sections—informative as they are—might be abridged in favor of material connected directly to EAGLE. I was surprised not to see more written about the legendary Richard "Red" Shannon, who was the ship's sailing master across multiple commands and something of a large and Irish Yoda figure to American square-rig sailors. Similarly, it would have been interesting to learn more about the less-celebrated predecessors to EAGLE in the fleet: The bark SALMON P. CHASE, launched in 1878 and still the only sail-training ship built specifically for the U.S. Coast Guard, and the Danish national school ship DANMARK, loaned to the United States for safekeeping during World War II and doubtless a seed from which EAGLE's program grew shortly afterward.

Sail training, as a concept distinct from simply *sailing*, emerged as the arriving convenience of engine power began to buffer sailors from exposure to certain fundamentals of seamanship—most of all the careful execution of teamwork in all conditions, and the ability to remain vigilant while enduring epic levels of discomfort and boredom. During the years of overlap between sail and steam, most maritime nations required ship officers to have experience in both disciplines as a prerequisite for licensing. As steamships grew more sophisticated and wind ships became rarer, seafarers were less likely to learn sailing on the job, but many institutions recognized its value and maintained sailing ships specifically for training. EAGLE is thus just one in a generation of such ships, and several of her sisters remain in service to civilian and military academies around the globe.

As Tall Ships America President Simon Colley notes in his foreword to the book, these ships look magnificent at the dock, but for a real appreciation of their value one must go to sea. A billet in EAGLE is beyond reach for most readers, but Sofrin's book, with its wealth of firsthand stories, succeeds in at least conjuring the world of a sailing ship for any who might not experience it firsthand: a beautiful analog machine, unforgiving of negligence, and inoperable without the harmonious work of many. From here it is easy to understand the powerful forge for leadership that EAGLE has been over her history, and what a compelling symbol of outreach she has provided for her nation.

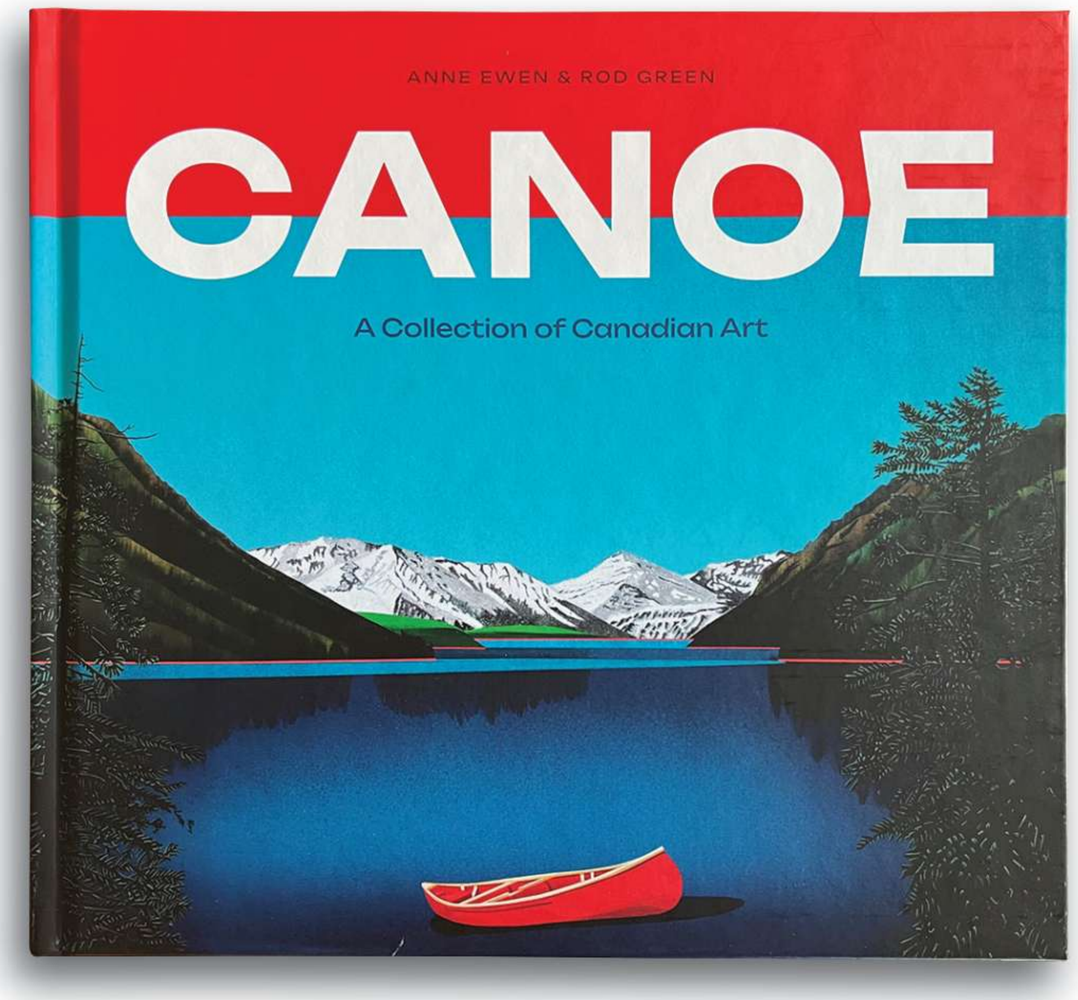
Elliot Rappaport is a faculty member at Maine Maritime Academy. His first book, Reading the Glass: A Sailor's Story of Weather *(2023) explores his life at sea, the history of seafaring, stories of explorers and discoveries, and the science of weather.*



EAGLE has trained uncounted Coast Guard midshipmen in the foundational experience of traditional sail.

Canoe: A Collection of Canadian Art

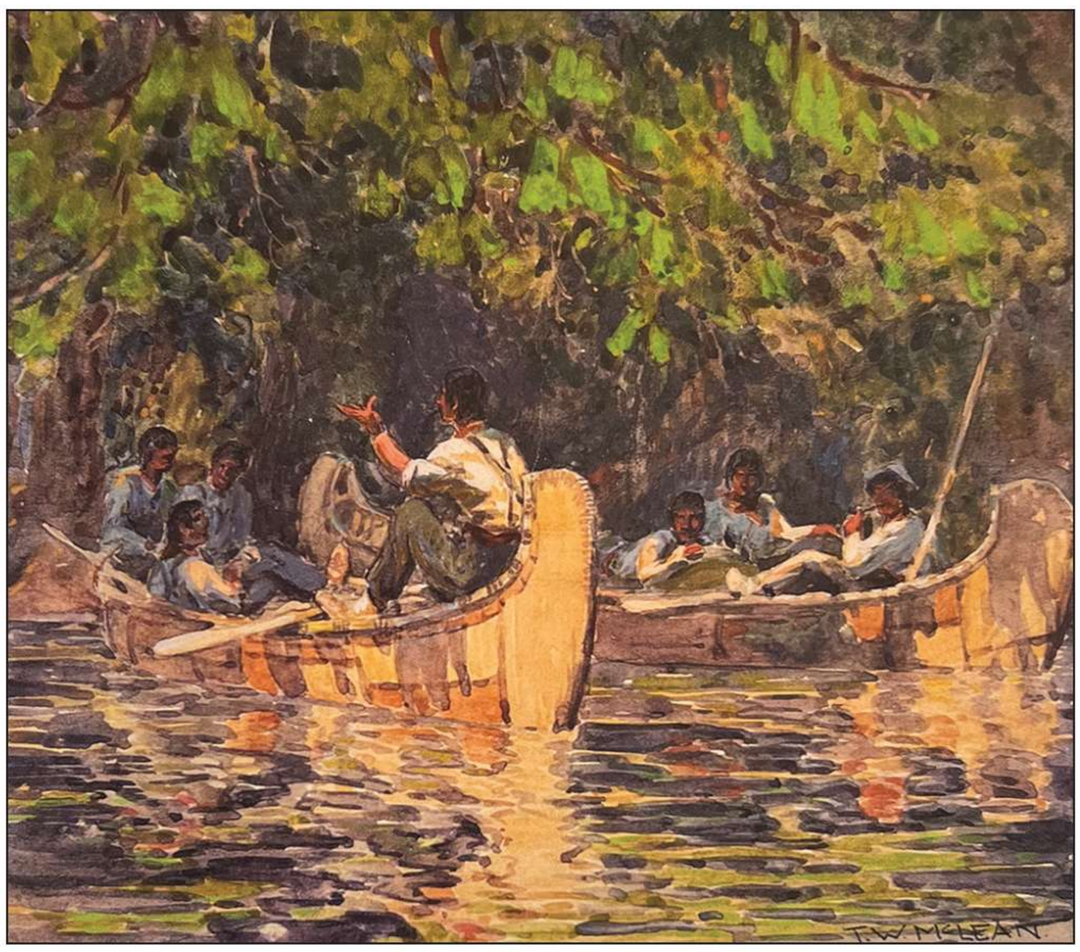
Canoe: A Collection of Canadian Art, by Anne Ewen and Rod Green. Figure 1 Publishing, www.figure1publishing.com. 182 pp., illus. $50.00 CAD



Reviewed by John Carter

Canoe: A Collection of Canadian Art is a book-length catalog of the personal art collection of Girt and Scott McCreath. The collection, whose unifying concept is the book's title, was begun in 2006 and contains 80 pieces of art relating to the North American canoe as rendered primarily by Canadian artists. The media represented are varied, and include oils and watercolor, sculpture, printmaking, carving, glass, and ceramics. The canoes depicted are mostly wood, bark, or skin, with a few Northwest Coast carved log canoes also present. The book is published by Figure 1, a self-described hybrid publishing house whereby authors or corporate partners typically contribute to production and printing costs. Some of Canada's best artists are represented in the collection, including The Group of Seven, a collective whose members concentrated their efforts on landscape painting and the Canadian wilderness.

The authors are Anne Ewen and Rod Green. Ewen is a curator and consultant who has held various positions in Canadian museums over the years. She was the director and chief curator at The Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies in Banff, Alberta. Rod Green is a former limnologist who joined the Master's Gallery (a commercial art gallery) in Calgary, Alberta, in 1977, eventually becoming a partner and president until 2016, when he retired. Green is currently a board member at The Whyte; both authors believe the McCreath's collection is "the most significant collection of canoe art in Canada."

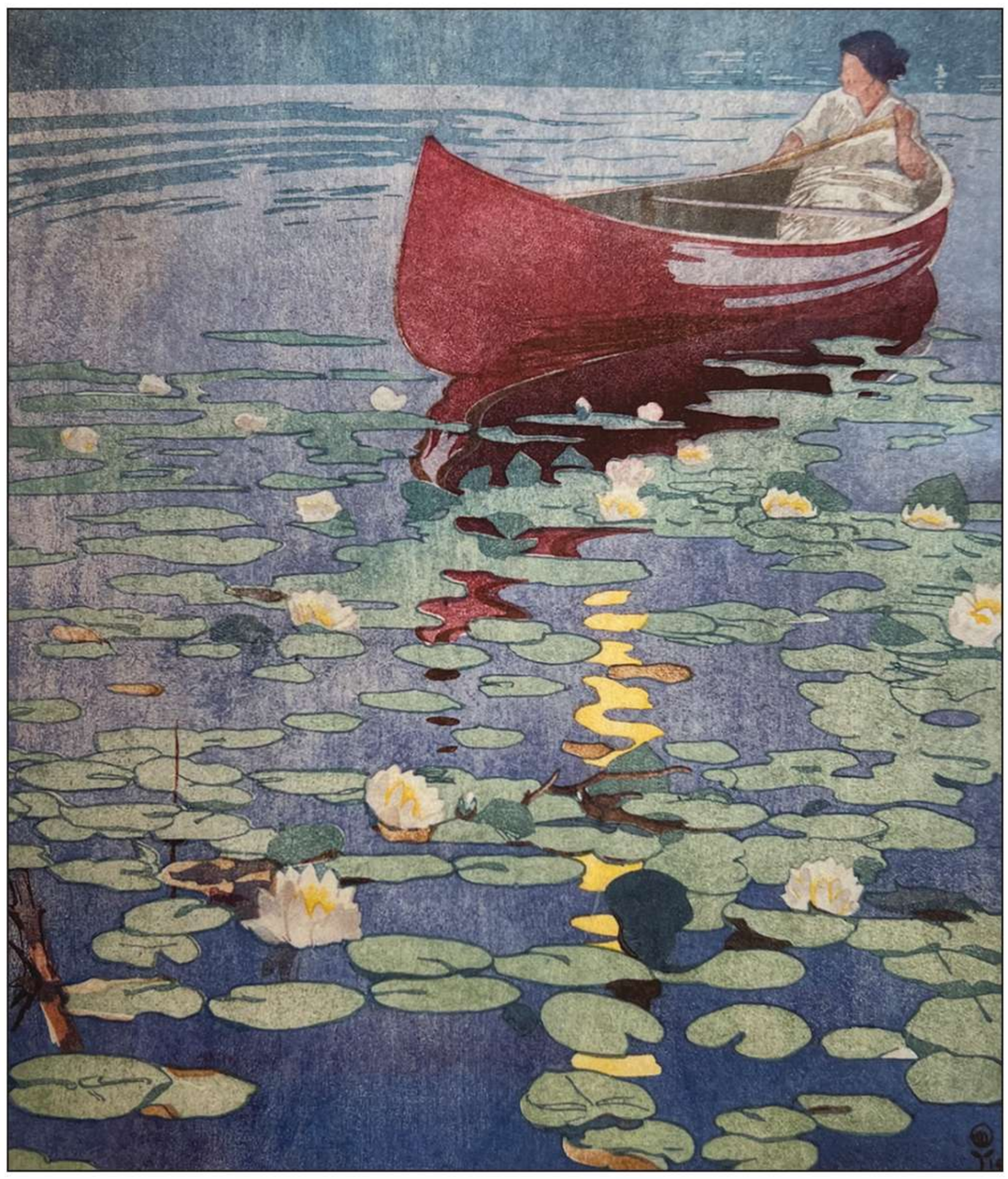


Several pieces in the collection are modernist in their interpretation, while most dwell on natural realism. The representational sculpture pieces fall into the folk art category—that is, vernacular art created using local traditions and styles. Several artists have multiple works in the book; William Armstrong has three, Ernest Lindner has six, and Frederick Verner has five.

The art in the catalog is visually extraordinary. The earliest piece, which dates to about 1820, is a watercolor attributed to John Wedderburn Halkett, who was a director for the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) in the early 1800s; it shows a Montréal canoe on Lake Superior. The Montréal canoe, or *canot du maître*, was a massive birchbark vessel capable of carrying up to 6 tons of furs or up to 16 men; no such historical canoe exists today in its entirety, except for reproductions built for museum collections. These massive canoes were crewed by *voyageurs*—essentially waterborne truck drivers—in the 19th century.

The catalog is roughly chronological and ends with the McCreaths' most recent acquisition: a 16′ birchbark-and-ash traditional canoe built by the Anishinaabe carpenter Keegan Nepinak in 2024. In between the Halkett watercolor and this canoe are an array of individual works by both historical and contemporary artists. They include another birchbark canoe built by the outdoor enthusiast Don Gardner; it was recently donated to The Whyte Museum by the McCreaths. The accompanying text includes artists' biographies as well as interpretive commentary by Rod Green. There is a good bibliography, though I feel compelled to note the absence of John McPhee's seminal treatment of the subject, *The Survival of the Bark Canoe* (1975).

Figures in Canoes near Shore with Storyteller, **watercolor, undated.**



***Gloaming*, colored woodcut, 1921.**

Much credit for many of the earliest works in the collection must go to early corporate interests, particularly the HBC and Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), which hired artists to accompany their survey and working crews to create art and photographs to be used in marketing the transcontinental Canadian rail lines. HBC employees included worker-artists who documented activities both along the trails and at various posts throughout the company's vast network. *Northwest Canoes Anchoring* was completed in about 1870 by the British-born artist Frances Anne Hopkins, whose husband was in charge of HBC's Montréal department when she participated in various tours to inspect fur-trading posts. She likely completed plein air sketches while on-site and finished the half-sheet watercolor later. Frederic M. Bell-Smith's watercolor *Camping in the Rockies* of about 1890 was the result of a CPR journey.

Twentieth-century artists in the collection include painters known as "realists," such as Ken Danby, Alan Bateman, and Steve Menniel; their paintings have a photographic quality. Mennie's *Water Bodies*, a serigraph (1988), shows two canoeists on a glassy lake surface with soft morning light pervading. Bateman's *Waskesiu Canoe* (2000; oil on Masonite) illustrates a beautiful traditional wood-and-canvas canoe pulled to the shore with two paddles left leaning against the central thwart; we can see the interior and therefore the construction of this lovely watercraft. Ken Danby (1940–2007) is likely Canada's foremost realist artist; the collection is lucky to hold his *Algonquin, In Homage to Tom Thomson* (1997), a mystical early-morning scene of a canoeist paddling across a still lake. (Tom Thomson was an outdoorsman and well-considered artist who drowned while canoeing in 1917.)

The art of printmaking is also well represented. Walter Phillips (1884–1963) was a noted woodcut artist and watercolorist in the Banff area who taught at the Banff School of Fine Arts (now Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity). His woodcuts are in the Japanese style, and the collection has five of his original prints, including *Gloaming* (1921), a colored woodcut showing a red canoe with an occupant, in a pond strewn with lily pads. Margaret Shelton, who practiced block printing, is represented by two similar prints from the mid-1940s: *Fishing on the Bow* (1945) shows two boys fishing from the bow of a canoe with a man astern, perhaps a parent or a guide; the canoe image is repeated with a different-colored background in *Fishing on Two Jack Lake* (undated).

The collection holds several paintings by prominent Canadian artists. Illingworth "Buck" Kerr's *Portage* of about 1930 is a masterpiece with its heavy brushstrokes and distinct coloration. An "almost" member of the illustrious Canadian Group of Seven, Kerr had a stylistic approach akin to several early American modernists, particularly Marsden Hartley. *Portage* depicts two men preparing for a portage, each shouldering a red canoe next to a wild river, with the forest in the background; it is all shapes and color. Alex Colville's *Study for Woman, Dog and Canoe* (1982) utilizes a near-pointillist style in this mixed-media painting of subtle and washed coloration. The subject, a woman poling her canoe among the reeds with her dog, is rendered with little detail; the angle of the canoe, away from the viewer, draws one into the work and out into the Bay of Fundy in the background.

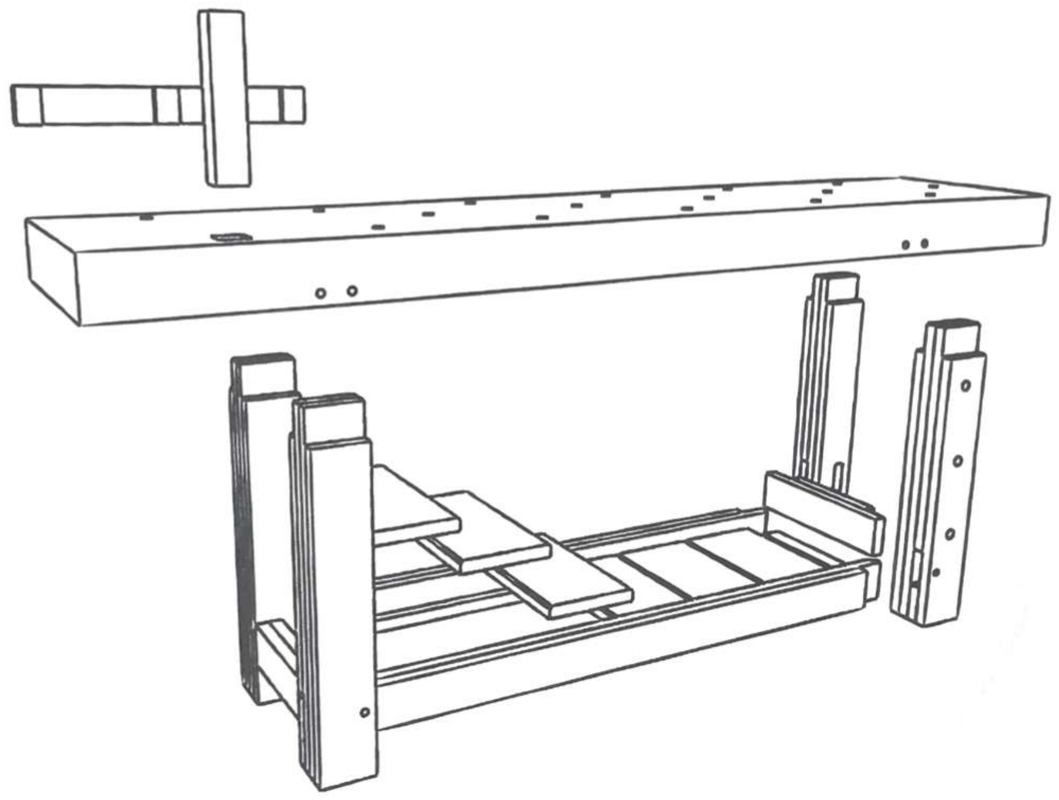
This catalog is a remarkable achievement. It combines the love of a cultural artifact—the canoe—with artwork rendered in multiple media. The collection is not displayed in a public gallery, and there are no plans to do so. This book thus provides a rare glimpse of a remarkable collection.

John Carter has been a curator and director of various museums as well as a shipwright in both shipyards and maritime museums. He is an avid canoeist and owns a 1932 Old Town featherweight.



***Indians on the Albany River*, oil on canvas, 1940.**

The Anarchist's Workbench



The Anarchist's Workbench, by Christopher Schwartz. Lost Art Press, www.lostartpress.com. 256 pp., illus. $37.

Available from The WoodenBoat Store (www.woodenboatstore.com)

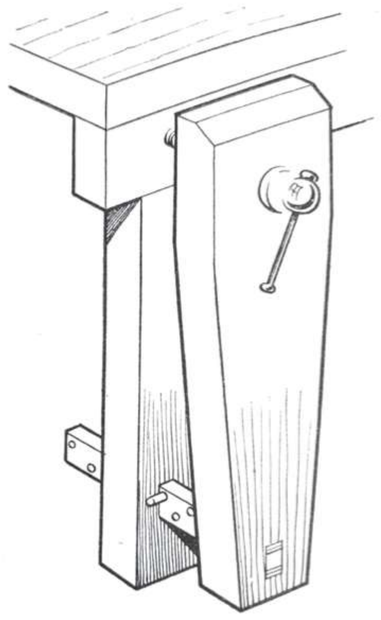
Reviewed by Bill Thomas

I've always admired Christopher Schwartz's writing and his countercultural, down-to-earth approach to woodworking, so when I picked up his latest book, *The Anarchist's Workbench*, I knew I was in for a treat. He pretty much had me at anarchist. The book is well written and packed with information on the history of workbenches, with solid guidance on selecting a bench and perhaps building one yourself.

The layout of the book invites browsing, and although I read the whole book, it was not a linear journey. Instead, I bounced among chapters while sipping my morning coffee and delving into the subjects that interested me on any given day. For example: if you're contemplating taking the road less traveled or, perhaps, seeking to justify a decision already made, I highly recommend Chapter 10, "Afraid Of Fire!" The point is, there's more going on in this book than just solid information on solid workbenches.

This is a substantial volume. Schwartz sets the tone early, counseling the reader to find what works and move forward. He starts us off with an exploration of the wood from which we might make a bench: anything but white pine seems to be a good choice. Next is a history of woodworking benches dating back to the 1500s. Some earlier examples are also cited, but the focus is on benches from Europe. I was particularly interested to see how these European benches were adapted by craftsmen in North America.

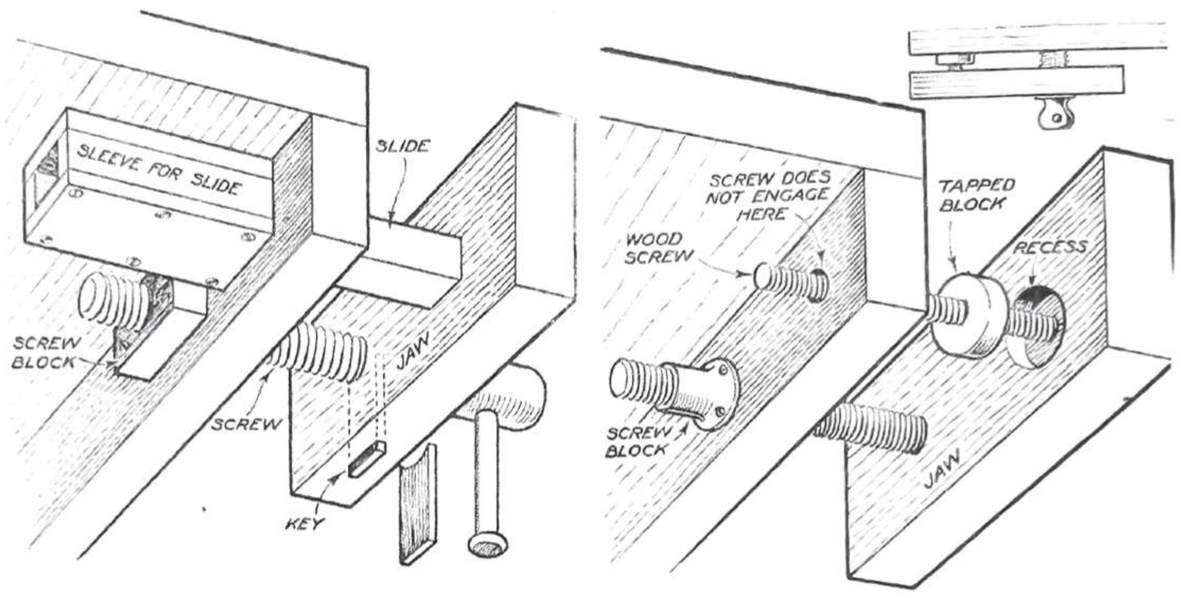
Chapter 5 is one of the most comprehensive, offering a wealth of information on workbench design. It's a cornucopia of information on hardware, vise configurations, construction techniques, and bench shapes. The chapter that follows takes an equally deep dive into joinery. Based on years of experience, Schwartz has definitive and well-founded opinions about what works and what doesn't, such as solid-wood joinery over metal fastenings and draw bolts.



Exploded view of the anarchist's workbench.

Chapter 9 covers holdfasts, leg vises, bench dogs, end and shoulder vises, and numerous other ways of holding wood while working it. If you're going to build a bench, read this chapter carefully, twice. You'll need to make some decisions before you start. Again, Schwartz goes deep with information. I've been in the trades for nearly 50 years, I have built numerous workbenches for myself and other woodworkers, yet I just learned about double- and single-start screws. Each time I pick up this book, I learn something new.

All this new knowledge seems intended to educate and then inspire the reader to build a custom workbench. About halfway into the book, Schwartz takes us down that path as he lays out the design and reasoning behind his workbench. His overall design seems to be an interpretation of a French bench from the mid-1700s, and I find the simplicity and function fascinating. It's a departure from what I'm used to—the traditional European workbench with shoulder and tail vises and a row of square bench dogs along the leading edge. Traditional European benches can be challenging to build, though, and they are best suited to furniture-making rather than a broad array of woodworking tasks. Also, the vise hardware necessary to build them is expensive. Schwartz has addressed both of those problems with a highly versatile and solid workbench.



Vise detail of the anarchist's workbench.

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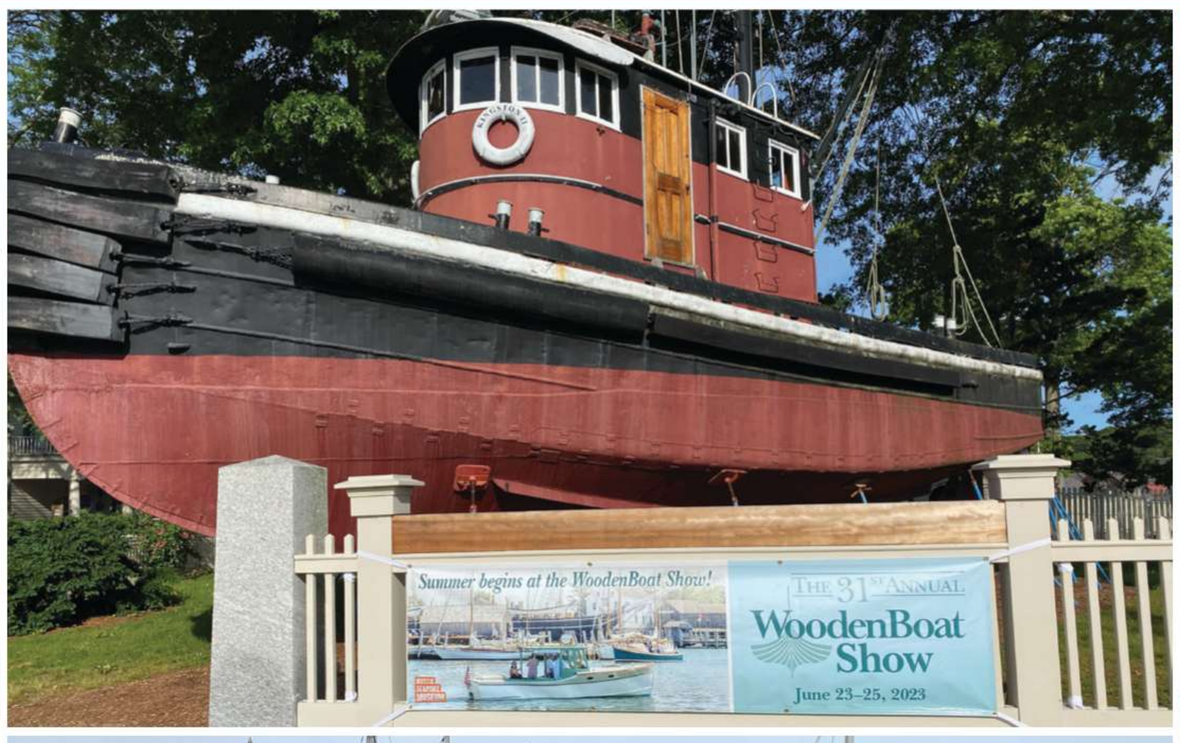









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In Chapters 11 through 14, Schwartz lays out and guides the reader through the process of building The Anarchist's Workbench. The design of the bench and the methods used to build it are both clearly explained. Building the bench is a big undertaking, but the skills acquired while building it—and the bench itself—are worth the effort.

The details of Schwartz's bench are intriguing. There are no shoulder or tail vises; instead the left end of the bench houses a leg vise and the top has a specific and well-conceived pattern of holes to accept holdfasts. The leg vises I've encountered in other shops did not work well, and I can see by studying the drawings and photos in Schwartz's book that the ones I've worked with were poorly designed. I believe it would be a pleasure to work with Schwartz's vise. He also details a pattern of holes in the top that will allow several holdfasts to be used to secure wood for planing and laying out joinery. Because I built-in a tool cabinet for my European bench, I've only been able to drill a hole for one holdfast, and I find it extremely useful. I'm sure I'd be more than pleased to work with a well-thought-out system of holdfasts, and suspect that I'd not miss my vise and bench-dog system all that much.

Chapter 15, "Making it Work Right," details a few shop-made accessories and finish techniques that would enhance any shop workbench. I plan on adding several of these to my personal bench.

And, finally, there's an appendix that consolidates much of the information contained in the book. It's a great source for quick references and contains a few pieces of knowledge not contained in the main text.

No single workbench design works for everyone. What the woodworker is building, where they are working, and how they work will dictate the best personal style of bench. If you need a workbench, and you do if you're working with wood, I believe this book, and Scott Landis's *The Workbench Book*, are the two definitive resources on woodworking benches.

Chapter 16, "The 'A' Is Now At An End," could be one of the most important in the book. It's not actually about workbenches or woodworking, but it lays down something more important: a way to work and live in the world. Schwartz explains why he's moving away from using the word "anarchy." It's a compelling and interesting personal story. He has not changed his philosophy, so he has made the book available as a free downloadable PDF, part of his original anarchist ethos. But buy the book. Support the choices of the author on how to fairly work in the world, and enjoy holding a real book in your hands. The cloth-bound hardcover volume's black-and-white photos and drawings are refreshing. My copy is already starting to show signs of wear after what is probably my third pass through the text. But with each reading, I learn something new.

Bill Thomas's article on building the Fox double-paddle canoe appears on page 72.



The Wooden Boat Care and Repair Bible

The Wooden Boat Care and Repair Bible, by Uwe Baykowski and Anna-Marie Frick. Published by Adlard Coles, www.bloomsbury.com, 160 pp., illus. $44.95. ebooks are available.

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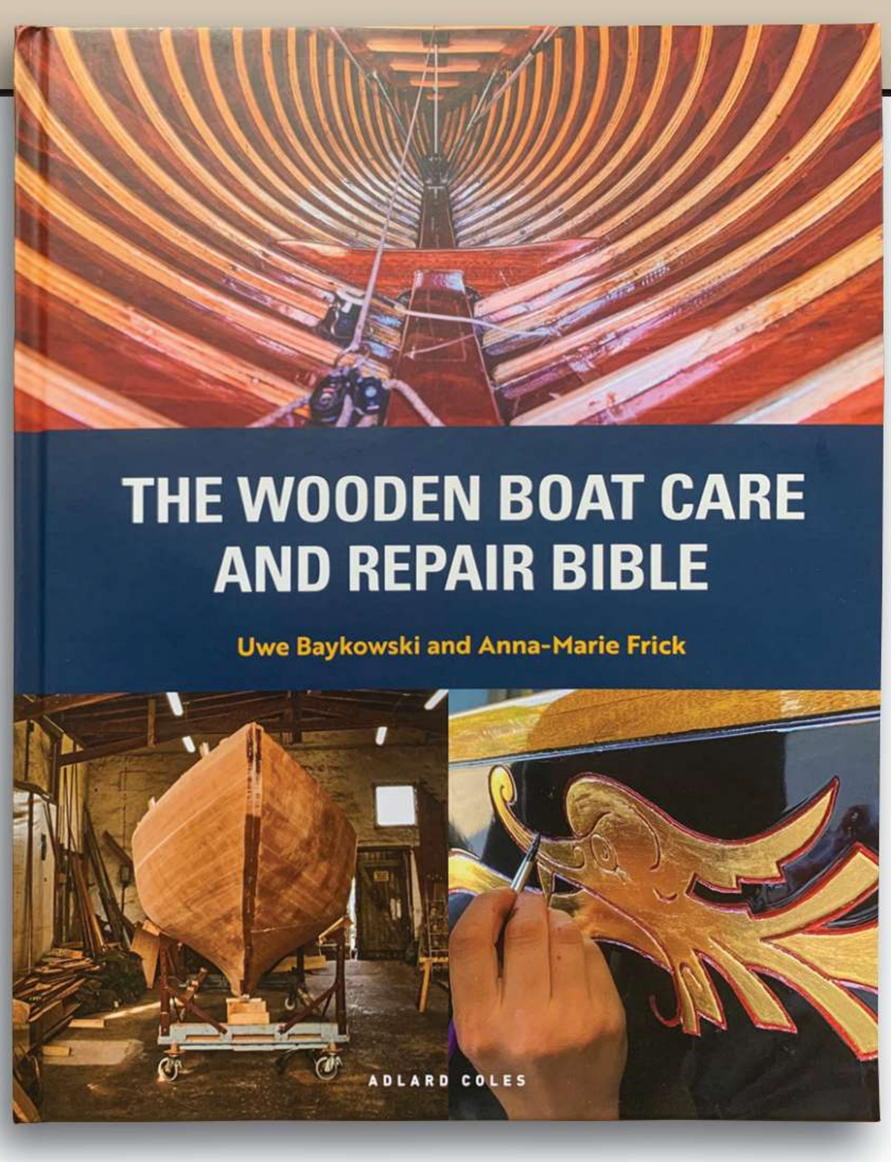
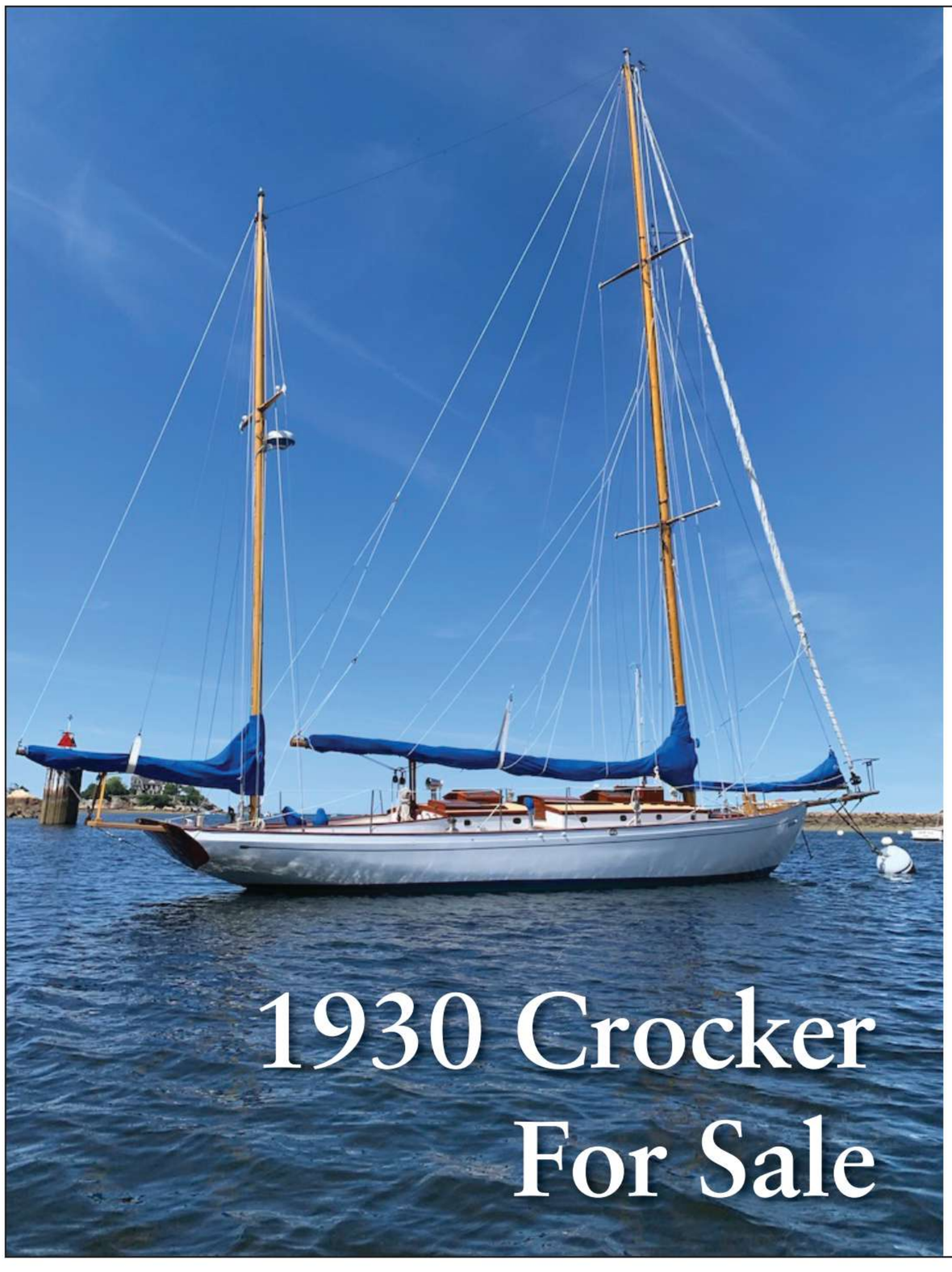


Reviewed by Nic Compton

Uwe Baykowski is something of a legend in German wooden-boat circles. Since he built his first boat at age 11, he has been passionate about the sea; in the 60 years since then he has built up a phenomenal trove of knowledge. At age 13, he set off with his brother for a cruise to neighboring Denmark without his parents' knowledge. At age 16, he was given a dinghy cruiser, which he sailed around the Baltic Sea for several years. He taught himself boatbuilding by working on boats in Greece, Portugal, and the U.K. In the 1980s, the German government asked him to build a replica of a medieval Hanseatic cog. Since 1987, he has advised boatowners on the restoration of (mostly) old





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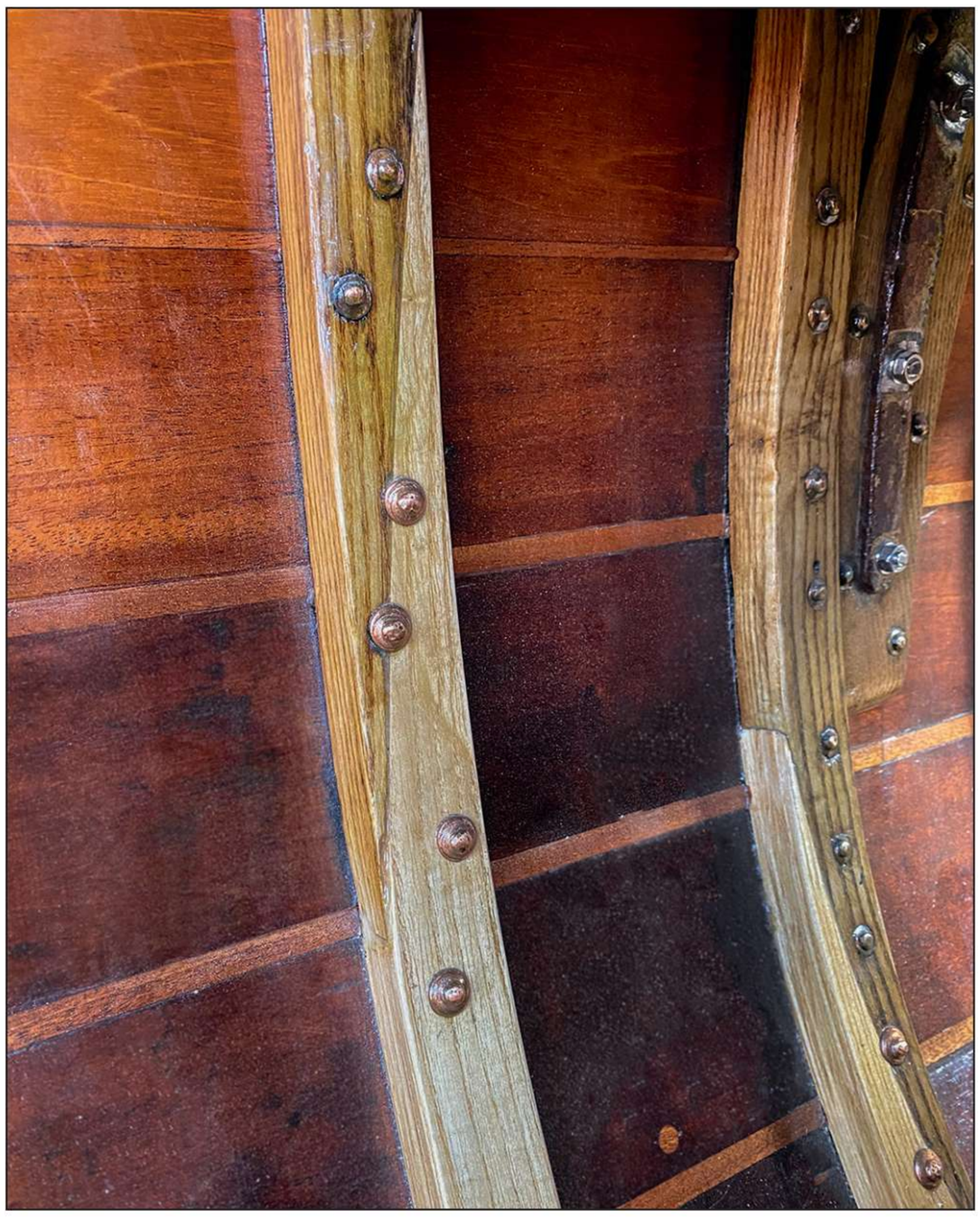

A frame repair, from *The Wooden Boat Care and Repair Bible*.

wooden boats, not just in Germany but around the world. In short, Baykowski knows his stuff. And it's his calm and knowledgeable voice that carries you steadily through his new book, *The Wooden Boat Care and Repair Bible*, which he co-authored with Anna-Marie Frick—a literature scholar and sailor. Baykowski's knowledge of boatbuilding and repair is indisputable, and it's a service to the wooden-boat community that, with Frick's collaboration, it's been captured and committed to paper.

The structure of the book isn't always ideal. For example, the section on assessing a boat's condition morphs into a detailed description of galvanic action, which is illuminating but perhaps belongs elsewhere in the book. The skill level is also somewhat varied, with a detailed description of how to remove keelbolts (God forbid), while dismissing replacing steel frames as "a nearly impossible task for the amateur." There is a detailed section on how to sheathe a coach roof with canvas and paint but only a paragraph about using fiberglass and epoxy for the job, which arguably is the technique most boatowners would use these days. That said, there's probably much less to say about fiberglass and epoxy than the more esoteric canvas and paint. Likewise, there's a great deal about splining planks, but much less about caulking them.



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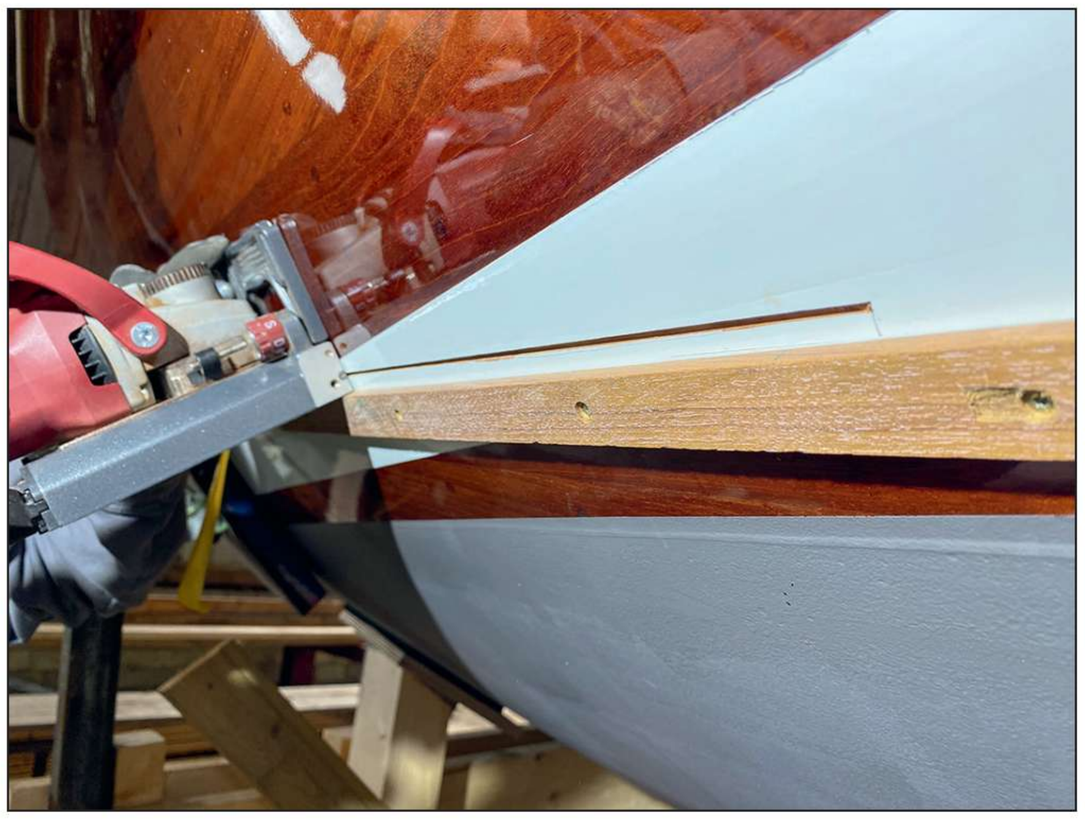

Hull splining, from *The Wooden Boat Care and Repair Bible*.

But these quibbles don't really matter. As well as detailed descriptions of the construction of wooden boats, which will be helpful to beginners, there is much here to interest the more knowledgeable boatowner. Did you know, for instance, that steel frames (and other fittings) inside the boat have different condensation rates than the surrounding wood, which results in moisture getting between the metal and the wood and leads ultimately to metal corrosion and wood decay. And there's something else I hadn't thought of before: cracks in the hull could be caused by sail tracks attached to the toerails, exerting "an upward tensile load" on the topsides.

There's lots of good solid advice here, such as not using epoxy to repair cracks in the planking, because it will act as a wedge when the wood swells and make the cracks worse. Use a soft sealing compound instead. When sailing a leaky boat, keep a "leak book" to register any leaks, rather than just writing them in the ship's log only to be forgotten. When winterizing a wooden boat, hang some wet rags on a clothes line inside to maintain moisture levels and prevent it from drying out. I learned a new word while reading this book: *spongiosis*. That's what happens when seawater penetrates the pores or voids in cast iron and corrodes the metals from the inside out.

The focus here is mostly on the long, narrow yachts so beloved of German and Scandinavian sailors, and there are many mentions of spidsgatters, skerry cruisers, and the ubiquitous Folkboats. Some of the building techniques, materials, and even tools are also distinctly German or Scandinavian. Ever heard of a Mozart trimmer? It's a precision cutting tool with numerous applications and variations. I wish I'd known about it sooner. And there's Ettan, a traditional Swedish planking sealant made from pine tar and beeswax. It sounds wonderful.

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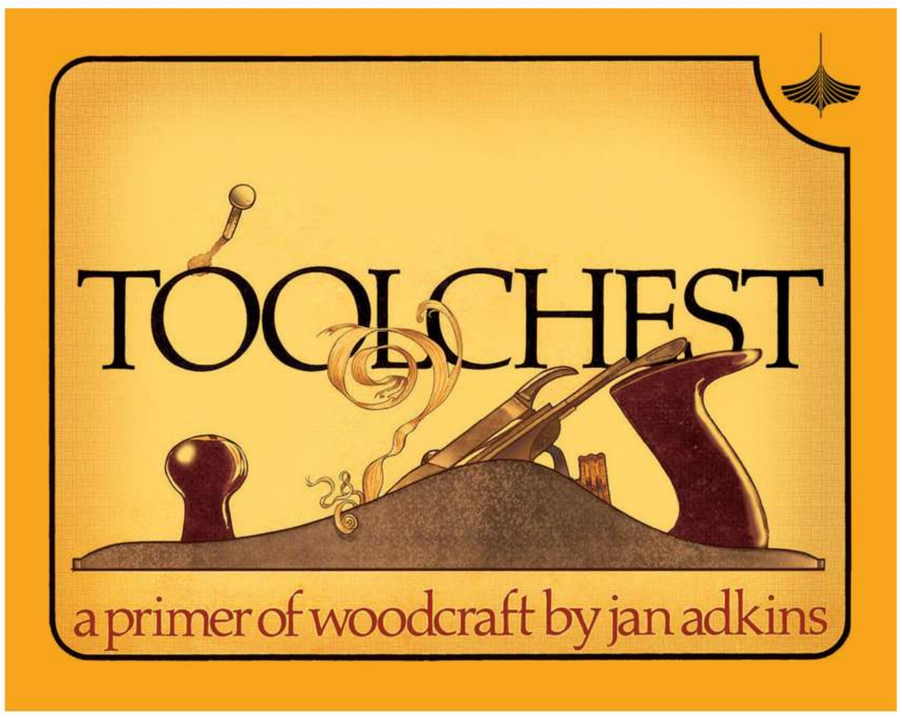

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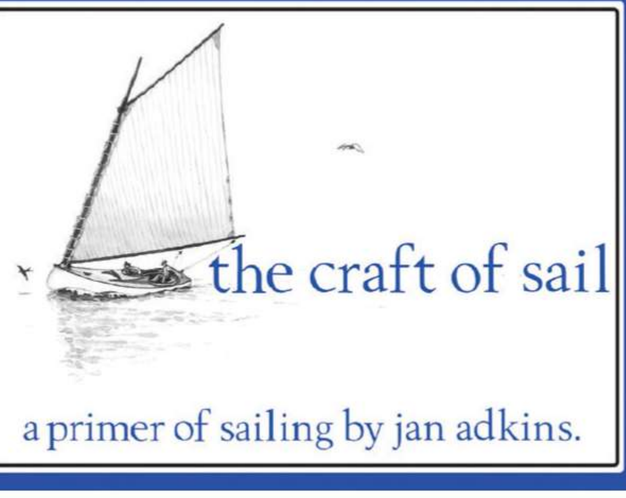

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This gentle trickle of mid-European boatbuilding lore adds spice and discovery to the text—especially when you know it's coming from such an authority on the subject. Where else would you find such gems as, *eiche auf eiche leimt nicht*, or "oak on oak won't glue," referring to laminating oak with Cascamite glue? And I was fascinated to learn that *de grote kraweel* ("the great caravel") was the carvel-planked forerunner of the clinker-built, or lapstrake-planked, Hanseatic cog. Who knew? Baykowski did.

Despite his undoubted erudition, however, Baykowski is rarely dogmatic. When discussing which sealant to use for rebedding the ballast keel, for instance, he is cautious about using epoxy, saying, "However, it is wise to consider carefully the implications of such 'permanent' bonding of ballast and hull before you chose this option." I read this as implying that the lack of flexibility in such a rigid bond will lead to cracks in the keel-to-hull joint, though Baykowski doesn't spell this out.

On laminating frames directly onto the hull, he says: "Be aware, though, that laminating 'in situ'—without making a proper gluing jig—is a risky undertaking and can easily degenerate into an epoxy-resin-fueled disaster." Again, he's not saying don't do it, just advising you to think carefully before you do.

Not that Baykowski is a die-hard traditionalist. He dismisses the old-fashioned view that epoxy is the "burial shroud" of wooden boats and describes it as "highly versatile" and "straightforward" to use, while noting that it has poor resistance to ultraviolet light and needs to be protected with a topcoat. He even cautions against the use of linseed oil which, he says, was once the "gold standard" for wood preservation but can do more harm than good. Linseed oil varnish (a.k.a. boiled linseed oil) is apparently preferable because it dries more quickly and reduces the risk of mold and fungal infestation.

There are some things that do bother him. Top of the list (and I suspect top of the list for most boat surveyors) are poor-quality seacocks. "One cannot be too careful when choosing seacock materials," he writes, before attempting to clarify the classification of various types of metals used to make them. It's all rather confusing, though in the end he seems happy enough with Blake seacocks. Elsewhere he notes that "faulty seacocks have been the cause of more than one boat sinking in the harbour."

Garboard and plank repair, from *The Wooden Boat Care and Repair Bible*.





Steel-frame construction, as practiced in many Baltic countries, from *The Wooden Boat Care and Repair Bible*.

The translation from German is mostly very good, though I spotted one small error in a diagram showing the plank ends in lapstrake construction, where the joint on the land is described as "notching." Strictly speaking, the beveled joint shown is called a gain (or jerrald, in British parlance), while a stepped joint, with a right-angled notch, is called a "notch." Call me pedantic.

At 160 pages, this book feels a bit too short to be called a "bible," especially bearing in mind that Adlard Coles's generic *Boat Maintenance Bible* (which, in the interest of disclosure, I co-edited) is nearly 300 pages long. And guess what? They're exactly the same price. And yet, I wouldn't begrudge paying a bit more for some Baykowski wisdom.

Last but not least, this book smells wonderful. I'm not quite sure how they've done it, but bury your nose in its open pages and you get the unmistakable waft of varnish—or, more specifically, Deks Olje D1. Or perhaps International Spinnaker? Buy a copy and let me know what you think.

Nic Compton is a contributing editor to WoodenBoat. *His article on a replica of British Navy ship BOUNTY's longboat appears on page 82.*

The Wooden Boat Care and Repair Bible *has recently been released in the United Kingdom and is scheduled for release in the United States in January. Pre-order at www.bloomsbury.com.*

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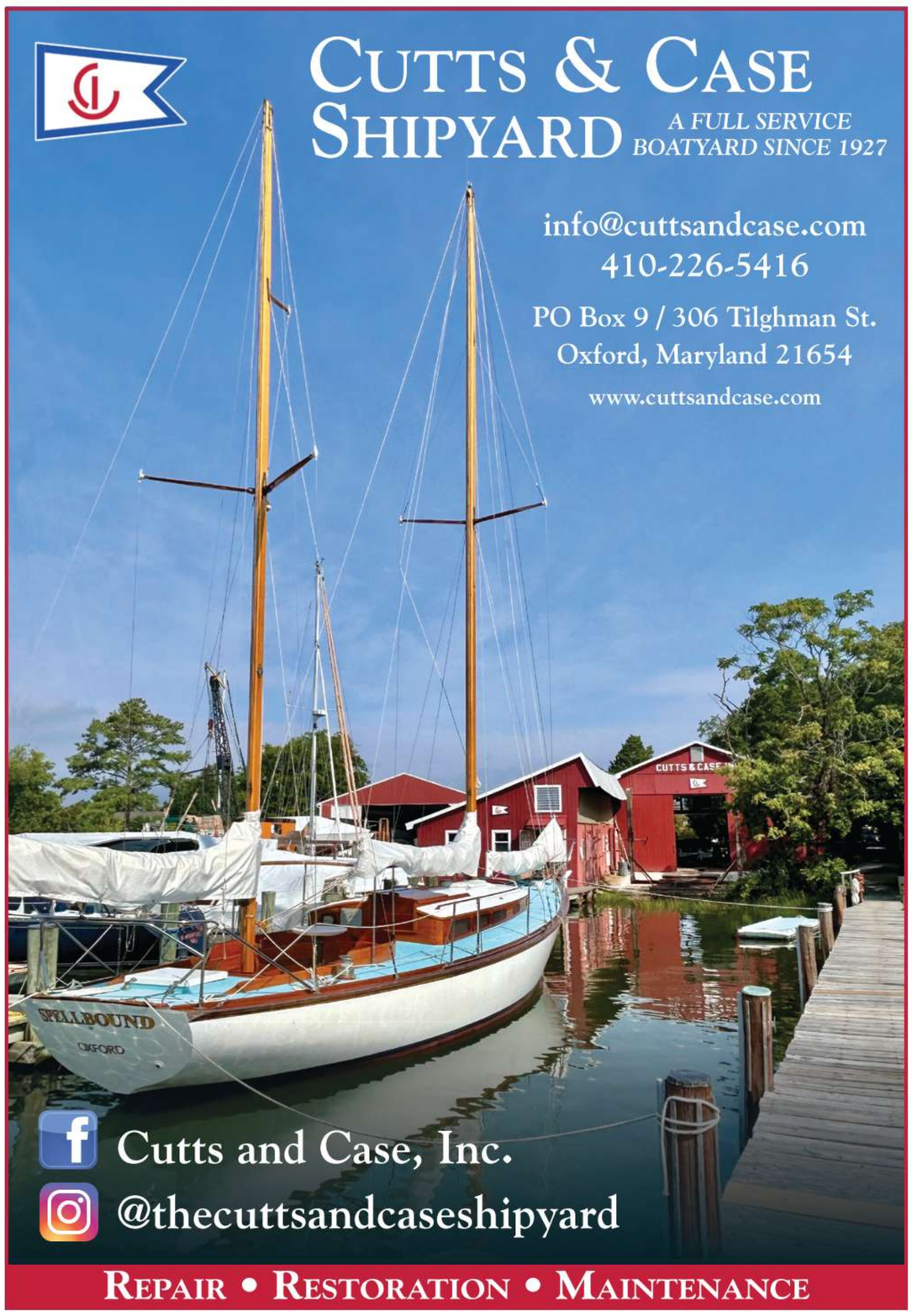



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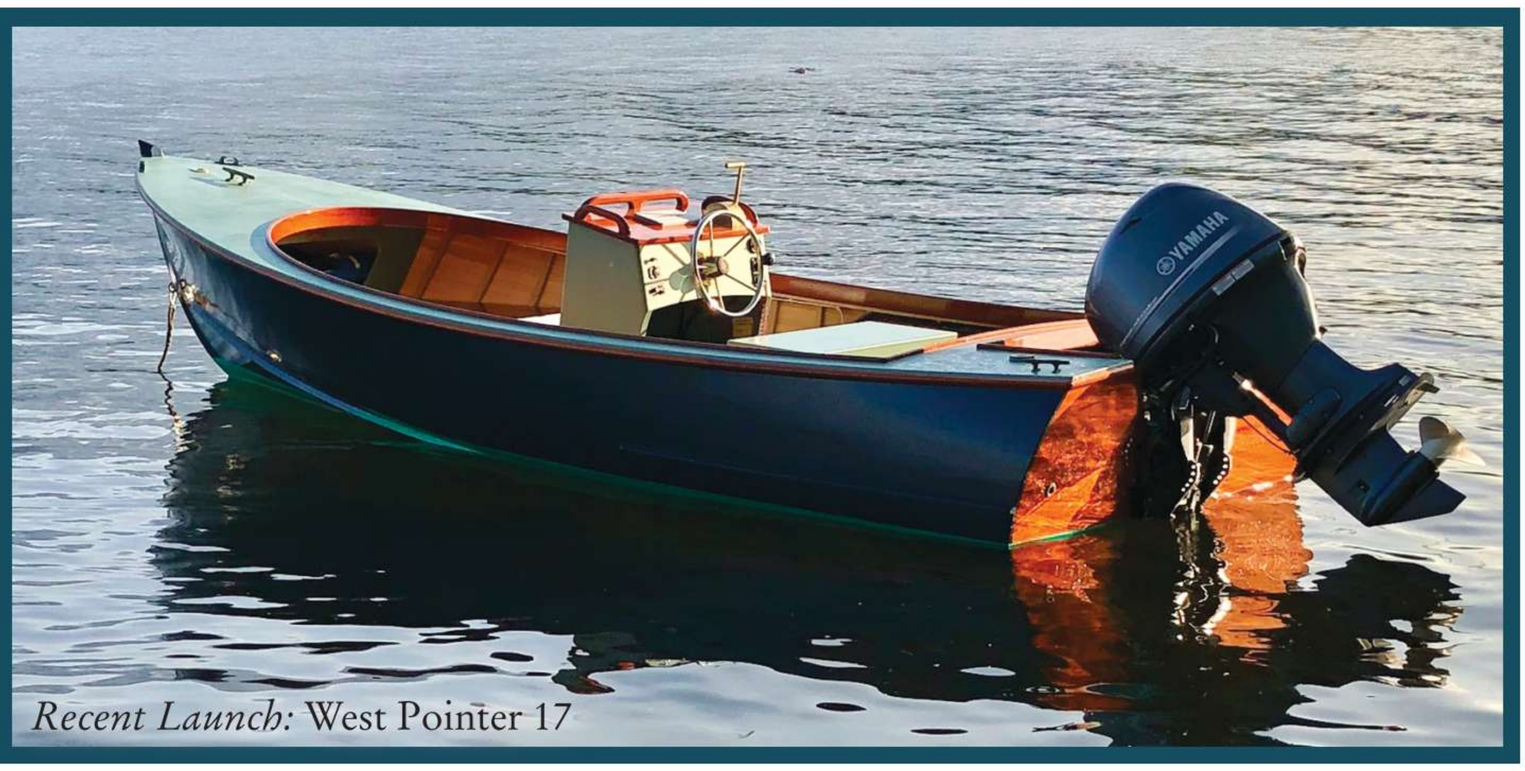

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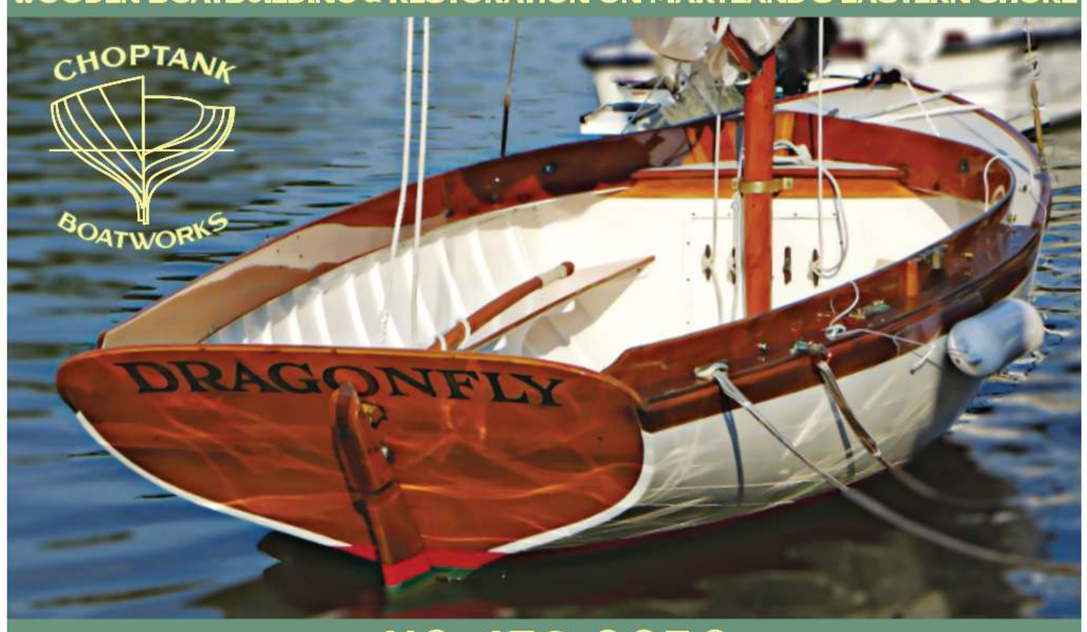

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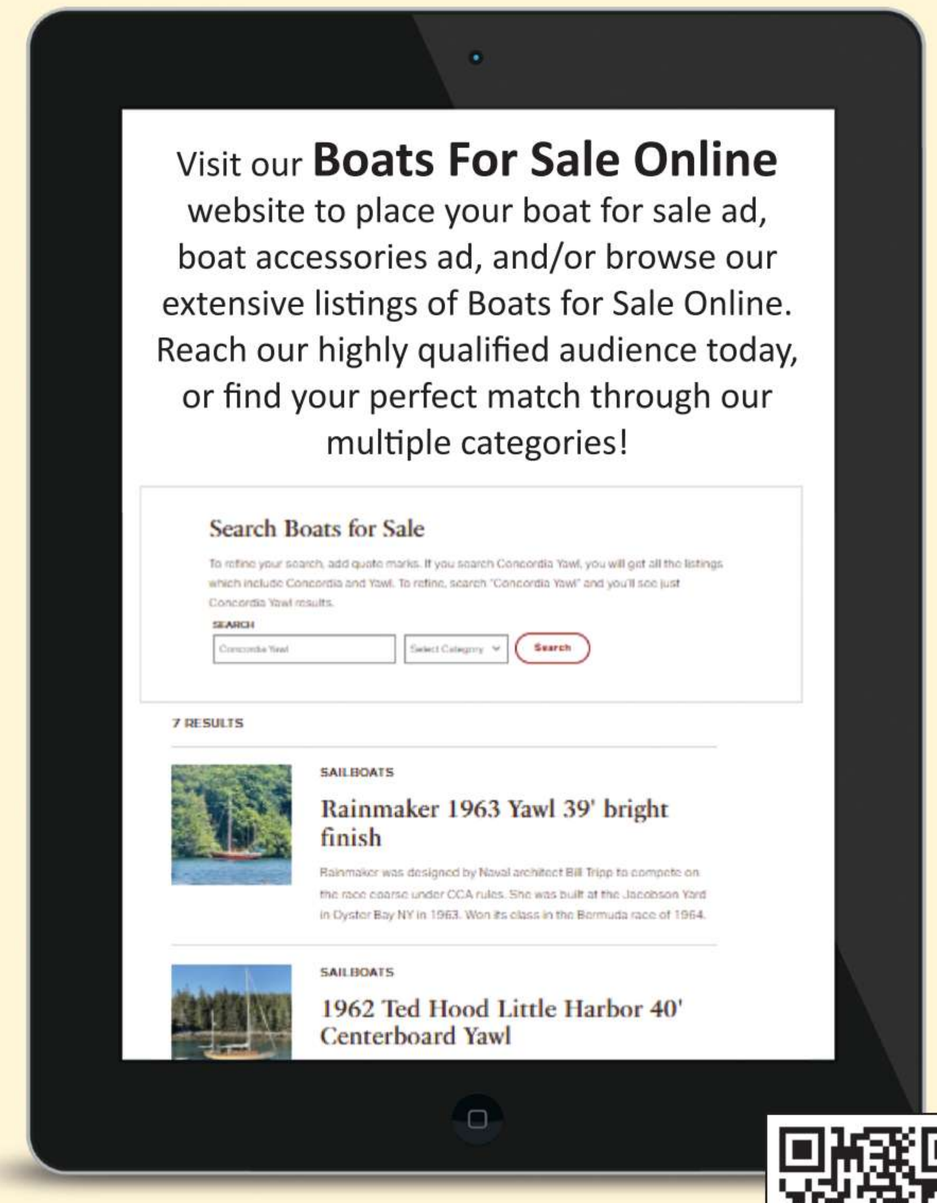

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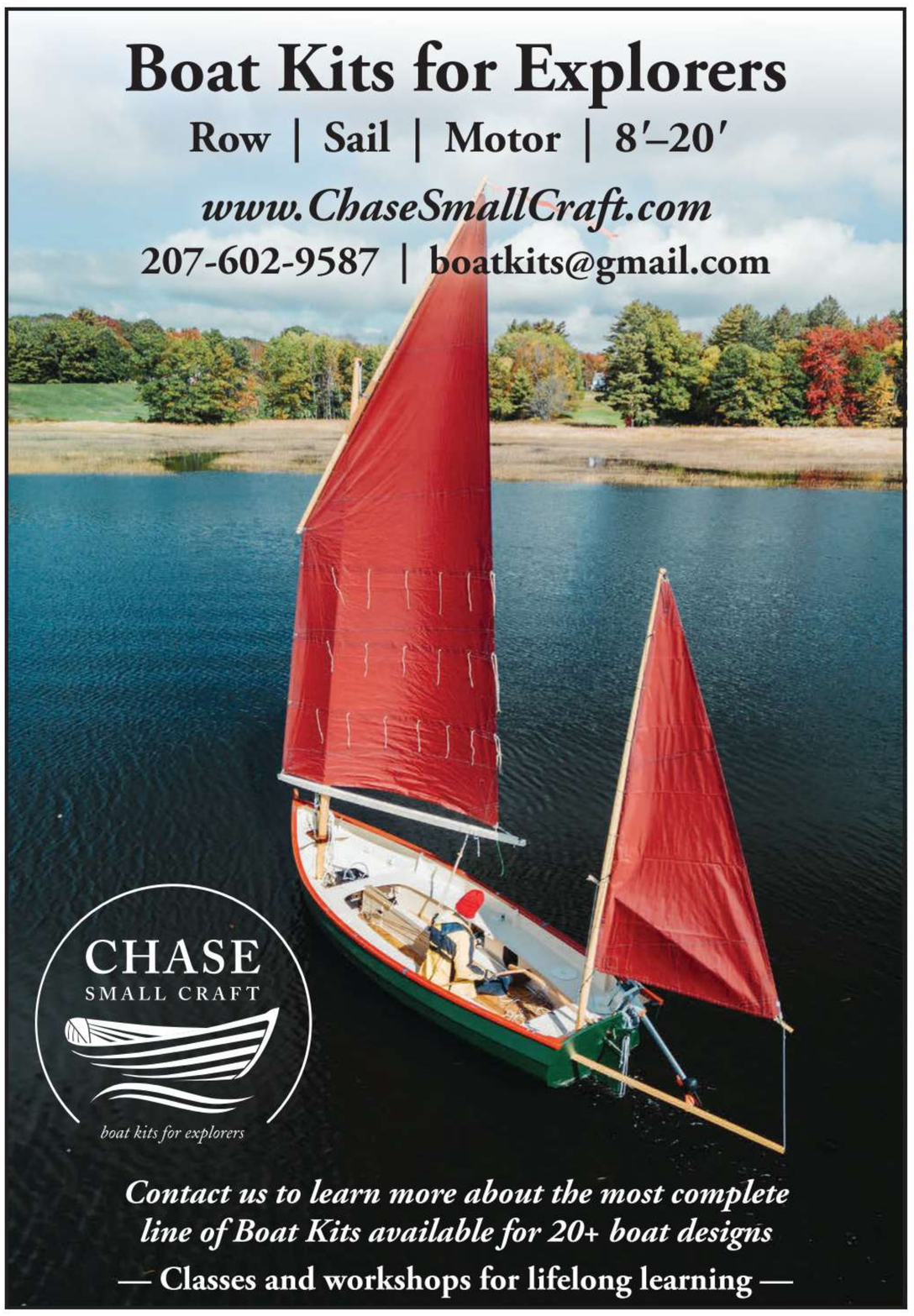



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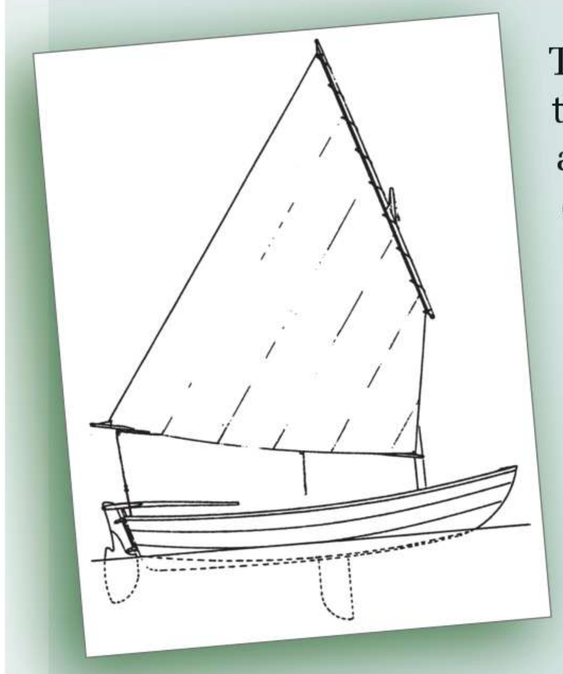

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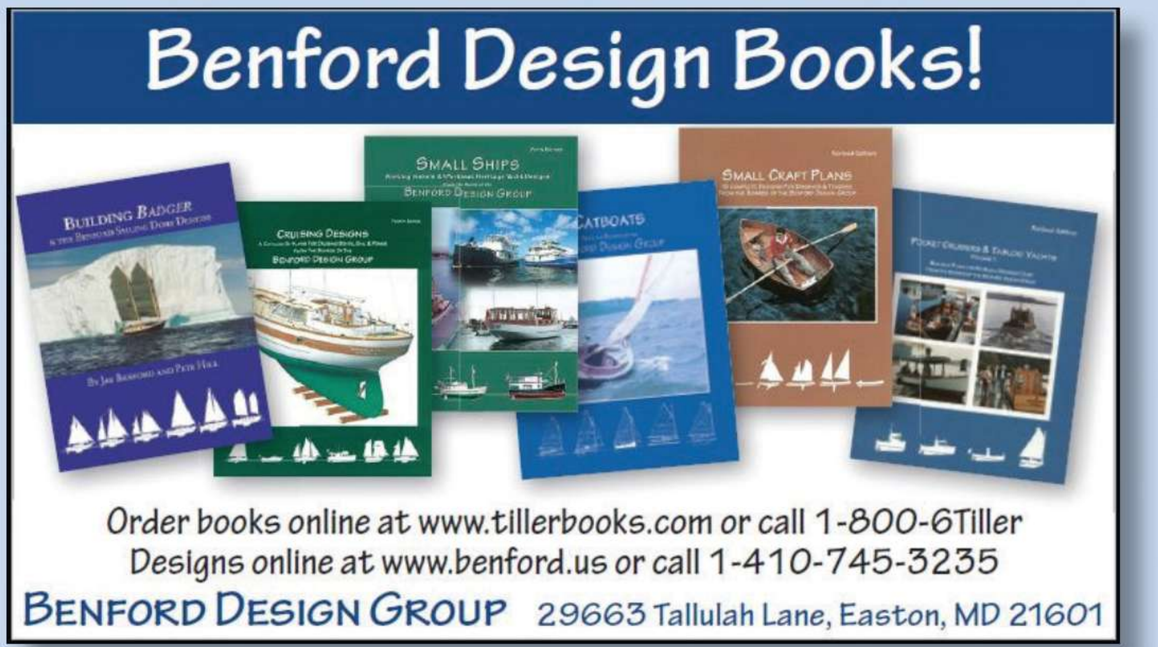







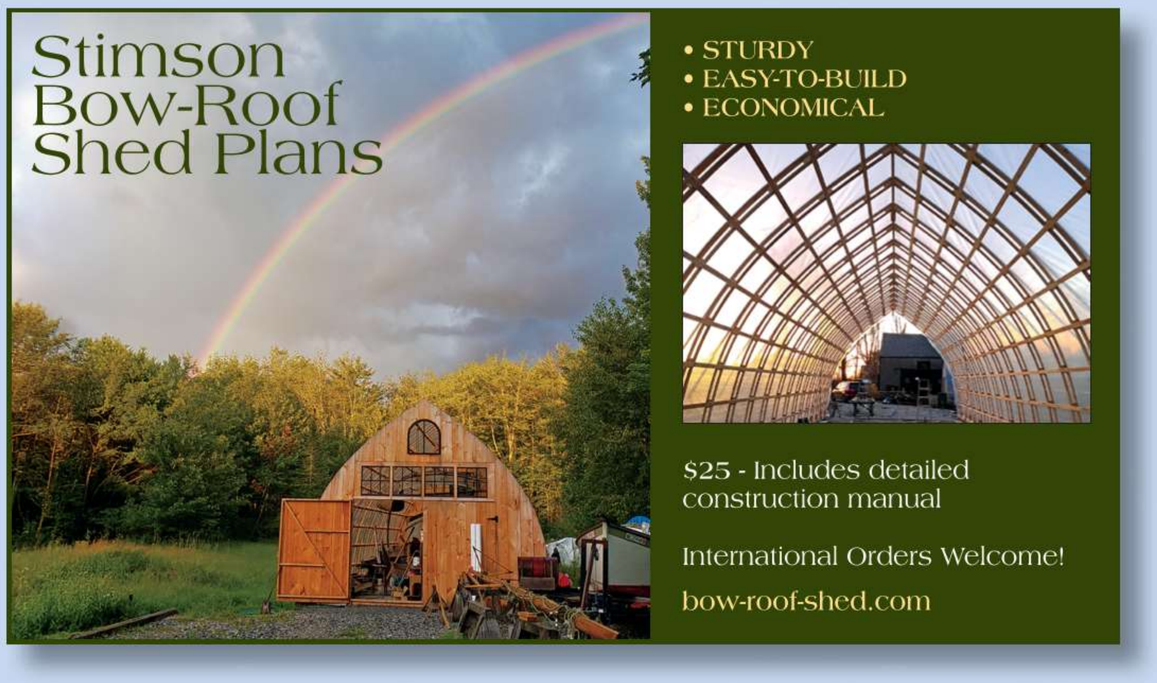

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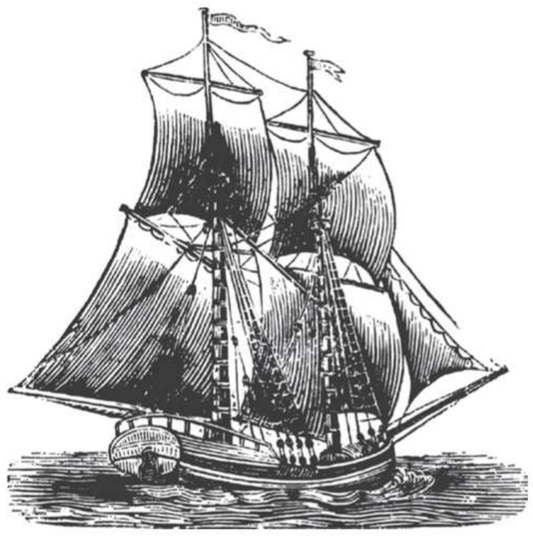

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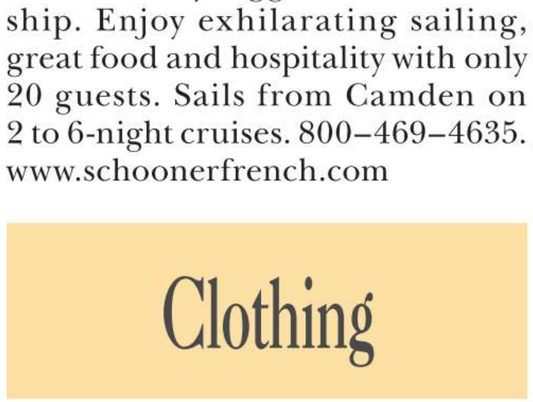

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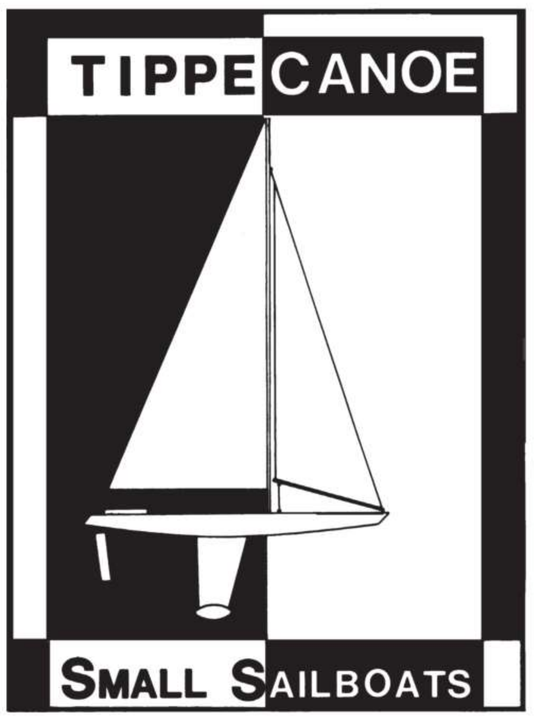

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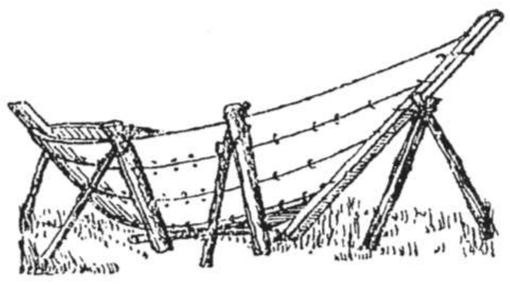

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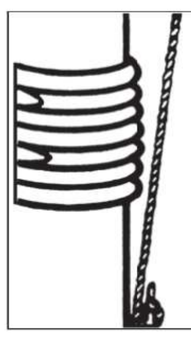

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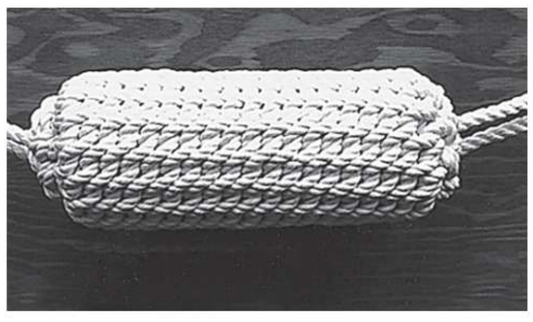

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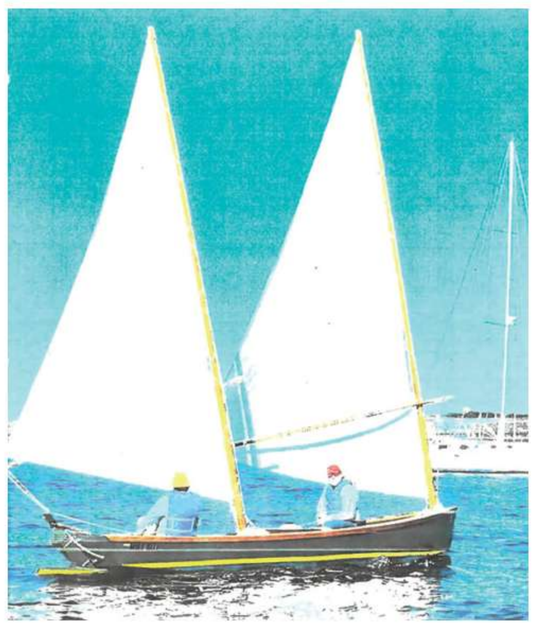

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by Maynard Bray



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MAYNARD BRAY

Particulars

LOA	35′4″
LWL	24′
Beam	9′6″
Draft	4′9″
Power	Beta 25 diesel with 2:1 gear
Doc No.	290238
Designed by	Sparkman & Stephens (K. Aage Nielsen)
Built by	Henry R. Hinckley Co., Southwest Harbor, Maine, 1956.

***Left*—HUNTRESS is believed to be the first of the eight wooden Pilots built by Hinckley. She was launched in 1956, and by 1962 the company had converted entirely to fiberglass construction. *Above*—Though currently cluttered, HUNTRESS's interior shows promise for comfortable cruising accommodations. *Below*—K. Aage Nielsen, who drew the initial Pilot class plans for Sparkman & Stephens, gave the boat a fractional rig but today she carries a masthead jib.**

HUNTRESS

A Hinckley-built Pilot-class sloop

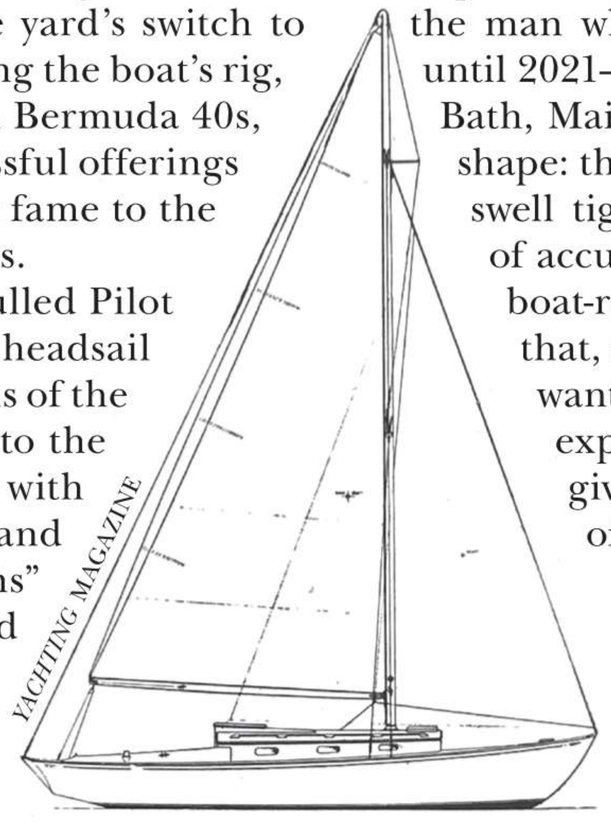
As a beamier outgrowth of the Islander design that Hinckley built as a stock offering before World War II, the Pilot offered what most cruising sailors of the postwar era expected: four berths in two cabins, full headroom, auxiliary power, and an easily handled sloop rig. Aage Neilsen drew the plans for both designs while working under the Sparkman & Stephens banner.

Hinckley began building Pilots (design No. 1219) of wood using traditional plank-on-frame construction, and HUNTRESS, completed in 1956, is said to be the first of this batch. But in 1962, S&S redrew the Pilot design as their No. 1727, adapting the earlier plans for the yard's switch to fiberglass hull construction and modifying the boat's rig, overhangs, and layout. Pilots, along with Bermuda 40s, became Hinckley's initial and very successful offerings to be built of the new material, bringing fame to the builder and iconic names to both designs.

Nielsen's drawings for the wooden-hulled Pilot show four interior arrangements and a headsail that reaches upward only about four-fifths of the length of the mast. HUNTRESS is close to the most popular of the four arrangements, with a galley aft, settee berths amidships, and V-berths forward. Between the two "cabins" are a fully enclosed head to port and lockers and drawers to starboard. But in HUNTRESS, the bridge deck was omitted, making room for a pilot berth fronted by a settee on the port side of the main cabin. While HUNTRESS's arrangement remains pretty much as built, her rig now has aluminum spars and a masthead rig. (Spars and sails are reported to be in good condition.) The boat has a teak deck, cockpit sole, and seats; mahogany planking and trim; and oak framing and backbone timbers.

Her Beta auxiliary engine was installed new in 2012 and is said to have only a few hours on it.

The hull, having been stored in a sometimes-heated shop, has dried out, especially in the deadwood aft. The boat was bequeathed to the present owner upon the recent death of the man who had owned and maintained her from 1983 until 2021—the last year she was launched. She's located in Bath, Maine. The boat generally appears to be in decent shape: there are no large areas of rot, and the hull should swell tight upon soaking. HUNTRESS is being cleared of accumulated clutter to remove personal items. Only boat-related stuff will remain, and there's plenty of that, and then some. I suspect that a new owner would want to continue emptying the boat in order to fully expose her structure for examination, and then give the interior a good paint job. There'll be lots of labor but, with luck, few major repairs.



YACHTING MAGAZINE

Maynard Bray is WoodenBoat*'s technical editor.*

For more information or to view HUNTRESS, contact owner Richard Fisher at 207–481–6181, leannfisher3@gmail.com, or P.O. Box 225, Woolwich, ME 04579.

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