



COURTESY OF HIRO KAGI

Douglas Brooks of Vergennes, Vermont, was contracted to build traditional boats in Japan for a Kuma River tour boat company, building the first boats in late 2022 and returning this spring and again this fall to complete six boats. He is working with former students who took his class in Japanese boatbuilding at Middlebury College.

■ **Douglas Brooks** of Vergennes, Vermont, a specialist in traditional Japanese boatbuilding and author of several books on the subject, writes that he was in **Japan** in late 2022 working on a large commission **to build six boats**: “The boats are for the Kumagawa Kudari, a downriver **tour boat company** based in Kyushu (www.kumagawa.co.jp). Originally the company approached me for two new boats, but record floods in 2020 destroyed half the company’s fleet of 12 boats. I partnered with Yuuwamokuso, Inc., a woodworking firm based in Kagawa that was originally founded as a builder of wooden fishing boats. The boats are **32’ long**, made **entirely of cedar**, and based on a traditional design from the Kuma River. They carry 15 passengers and two crew, one aft using a sculling oar and the other forward with a sweep dropped into a notch in the stem to row the bow sideways to navigate tight turns in the river.

“The boats also have a curious reverse rocker in the bottoms, something I have seen in other river boat types in Kyushu but nowhere else in Japan. Construction is traditional, using blacksmith-made nails throughout. The only framing in the boats are three beams shouldered into the sheerstrakes. The hulls will receive a layer of fiberglass on the outside covering the bottom and garboard planks.

“I was joined last fall by Milo Stanley, a Maine boatbuilder I met when he was a student of my first Japanese boatbuilding class at Middlebury College in 2015. I will return for two one-month stints in spring this year with Milo and in the fall with another former student, Christian Woodard of Alaska, and his wife, Kari Nielsen, to finish the project.”

Douglas Brooks Boat Building, 84 South Maple St., Vergennes, VT 05491; www.douglasbrooksboatbuilding.com.

■ “Things have come full circle this year for **Clarion Boats of Muskoka**,” Bruce Kemp writes from Ontario. “The company is **refurbishing CHOPPER**, which **Dwight Boyd**, the founder, built in 1987 as **Clarion’s first new boat**. He had been restoring wooden boats for a number of years before then, but he wanted to try his hand at building something extraordinary. ‘I was inspired by **BABY BOOTLEGGERS**,’ he said, ‘the George Crouch design built by Henry Nevins in New York City for Caleb Bragg’ [see related article, page 74]. That boat had a pedigree that Dwight admired—it won consecutive APBA Gold Cup championships in 1924 and 1925—but he decided that such a boat would benefit from the wood-epoxy cold-molding techniques then being developed. He sought the help of the Canadian yacht designer Steve Killing for a new design. ‘It was pretty revolutionary at the time,’ he said.

Dwight’s instructions to Killing were to produce a vintage-looking boat about 22’ long with comfortable seating for four; the result was Killing’s elegant plan for a 25’, two-cockpit boat he called the **Gentleman’s Gold Cup Racer**.

“Boyd built the boat on speculation and named it **CHOPPER** after his own nickname. Three more boats followed, built employing a bulkhead-and-stringer construction to form a monocoque framework. ‘I always had a fascination with aircraft design,’ Dwight told *WoodenBoat* at the time ‘and realized applying the same construction technique as an airplane wing—bulkheads and stringers with most of the center material removed—would make the vessel light, strong, and fast.’ This first boat’s stringers were of solid wood, but subsequent boats used laminated plywood for dimensional stability. Clarion’s first four Gold Cup Racers, built with two partners, premiered at the Toronto International Boat Show in 1989. ‘I got the feeling its radical design thinking intimidated a lot of traditional wooden-boat people at the time,’ Dwight said, ‘but since then, I believe I’ve proven myself right in adopting the new construction philosophy.’

“The first planking layer was 6mm meranti plywood laid up diagonally, which because of the curvaceous sheer required a lot of handwork. The final layer is of ¼” mahogany. ‘Where the laminates curve up to the cockpit, it is pure sculpture,’ Dwight said.

“During the restoration, the boat proved to have been not only strong but durable. ‘The only structural issue I had to deal with was with the inner plywood skin on the bottom,’ said **Paul Brackley**, the owner of **Brackley Boats** (see WB Nos. 246–248), which is **Clarion’s building partner**. ‘We had to scrape it out and fill it with epoxy before rot could set in.’ Much of the work has involved refinishing. Several mahogany planks had aged to a chocolate brown, so Paul chose to stain the hull and deck a darker color than the original for uniformity, followed by 10 coats of varnish.

“Today, Dwight is semi-retired but still consults for the company occasionally, and he has made molds for new hardware, including step panels on **CHOPPER**’s deck. ‘I didn’t mind handing my first boat over to Paul, because he does a such good job,’ he said.”

The boat will relaunch in the spring.

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BRUCE KEMP

CHOPPER, a cold-molded Gentleman’s Gold Cup Racer of 1987, was the first new boat that restorationist Dwight Boyd built at Clarion Boats of Muskoka, Ontario. The boat is being thoroughly overhauled for a spring relaunching.

■ Bruce also writes about another restoration going on in Ontario: "One of the projects that **Andrew Lee** of **Sirens Boatworks** in **Merrickville** inherited when he bought the property for his business was a building housing **KAHON**, a 38' Wharram Tiki catamaran. Now, nearly five years later, he has begun a restoration for the son of her original owner and builder.

"She was built in the 1970s by Leonard Taylor, working with several college buddies while he was an engineering student in Florida. After launching, he voyaged to the Bahamas, Haiti, and Florida Keys, but he put the boat in storage when he moved to Ottawa, where he started his business. After 10 years, he commissioned Ayling's Boat Yard to retrieve the boat and store it. But when Ayling's closed their business four years ago, they offered Andrew, who worked occasionally for the yard, part of the property to start his own business. The building housing **KAHON** came with it.

"At first it was just a storage deal," Andrew said. "Then the owner learned this is what we're doing [restoring wooden boats] and he approached me." Taylor had envisioned fixing up the boat, but a health problem not only prevented him from doing so but also caused him to lose his memories about the boat's construction details. His son, Robert, stepped in to keep the project going.

"To attach the hull and crossbeams, Andrew had to do some detective work: 'Some of the designs showed them lashed on, some of them show them bolted on,' he said. 'These appear to be lashed-on pipes, based on the type of fittings.' It was not clear whether the boat had a fabric trampoline or wooden bridge deck.

"The hulls were built stitch-and-glue style, using $\frac{1}{2}$ " Douglas-fir plywood with $\frac{3}{4}$ "-thick battens at the joints. In the bilges, Andrew found that someone had tried to dry them out by sprinkling some kind of granules, which caused deterioration in the plywood. Both hulls needed keel work; 25' of the starboard hull's keel had to be replaced, using six layers of $\frac{3}{4}$ "-thick Douglas-fir glued up with epoxy. Both hulls were given new sheathing of fiberglass cloth set in epoxy. He also built a new deckhouse on the starboard ama using $\frac{3}{8}$ " Douglas-fir plywood; the port ama's deckhouse only needed refinishing.



Sirens Boatworks of Merrickville, Ontario, is restoring a 38' Tiki catamaran built by her owner in the 1970s to a James Wharram design.

BRUCE KEMP

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