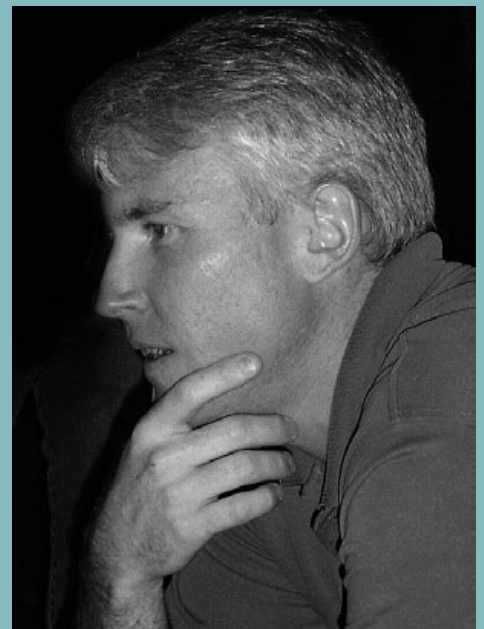


DOCKSIDE

Kevin Leiner

With Bill Baldwin



Bill: Kevin, tell our readers a little about your background, especially that gorgeous sailboat you built for son, Kenny.

Kevin: I am a scientist by training and vocation, a wooden boat enthusiast and woodworker by avocation. I have always loved the water and being on the water—and I have always wanted a boat. I had some great toy boats as a child, and well I remember having to swim after them! As an adult, I would crew on other people's boats whenever I could, but I did not get my own boat until I built it, at the age of 34. It's a 14-foot, lapstrake sailing dinghy I built in a storage unit outside my apartment when spouse Jen, my son Kenny, and I were living in New York. I built the boat for Kenny, so we could go sailing together as he grows up—and it is in my stewardship until he is old enough to care for it. So actually, I did not get my own boat until last year when I picked up my current project.

My primary interest has always been sailing and sailboats, but I like stinkpots, too. Where I live in the North Carolina Piedmont, sailing is best in Spring and Fall. Conversely, winds are often light and variable in the Summer, so I wanted to complement my boating with a power boat for Summer use: to create my own breeze, if you will. I really like work boats and pleasure craft that trace their lineage more or less directly to work boats, particularly power boats that travel at displacement and semi-displacement speeds. While this may

be heretical to some, I feel the need to additionally confess that I have a fondness for paint. To my eye, there is nothing that sets off brightwork as nicely as a contrasting, low-sheen painted surface. The project boat that I acquired last summer, a 1958 Chris-Craft 18-foot Sea Skiff, is very pleasing to me in this regard.

Bill: When did you discover you had been bitten by the wooden boat bug?

Kevin: It was during an "intervention," when I was forced by my wife, close friends, and family members to confront my boat obsession. Probably, I can place the blame squarely with my parents—after all, doesn't everyone blame his or her parents for their own shortcomings? Anyway, in this case they really are to blame—no really—and have caused irreparable and life-long enthusiasm for wooden boats by recklessly taking my brother and me to Mystic Seaport just about every year during our childhood and exposing us to all manner of things old and wood. My brother and I loved those trips, because, well, when you are young, even merely staying at the Howard Johnson's and gobbling all-you-can-eat clam strips for dinner is quite exciting, never mind all the other things to see and do at the Mystic Seaport.

Bill: Intervention, hah! Clearly it didn't do any good at all! What caused you to build that beautiful sailboat in spite of having to

do it, literally, in a container outside your apartment?

Kevin: The proximate cause was probably lack of a boat. The idea of self-sufficiency has always appealed to me, and I like to do things for myself, so when I felt the time was right that I could own a boat of my own, my natural inclination was to build it myself. This desire to build a boat evolved from a strange mixture of practicality and whimsy. I felt that I could build a better and more beautiful boat for less money than it would take to buy one used—and I did.

This idea evolved over time, however, from looking at a boat purely with the utilitarian perspective of getting it on the water to developing a keen aesthetic sense of proportion and fairness. While form usually follows function—and when it does often results in incredible beauty, both in nature and in man-made creations such as boats—there are also perfectly functional boats that are quite simply, "butt ugly." As I developed this appreciation for what a boat is to me, I also began to develop a strong dislike for mass-produced boats whose shapes are defined to a large extent by the requisite function that they easily pop out of molds and whose numbers visually pollute our waterways. Building this boat consumed me. I was devouring books and magazine articles on the subjects of boat building, wood working, wooden boats, and the like, thinking and dreaming about it all the time, and working on this boat every chance I could get, such as

during my son's naps on weekends and after he went to sleep in the evening (on those evenings when I still had energy in reserve). It was a thoroughly enjoyable and deeply enriching experience.

Bill: Kevin, you are truly the kind of boater we'd all like to mimic if only we had your drive. Where and when did you learn about our Chris-Craft Antique Boat Club?

Kevin: I had the good fortune to discover and join the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill (North Carolina) Chapter of the Antique and Classic Boat Society shortly after its inception in 2005. I remained suspicious of power boats for a couple of years — despite enjoying the excellent camaraderie of this club — but eventually, immersion in the world of Chris-Craft and other, predominantly gleaming, mahogany boats began to take its toll on me. At last, I was left powerless to resist the dark side of boating and the infernal combustion engine. Once I acquired a Chris-Craft, my fate was sealed. So you see, Bill, as the founding President of this chapter, this was your fault, not mine.

Bill: Sigh... So, what led you to your current project?

Kevin: I knew that I wanted a lapstrake hull with inboard power. I was torn between Lyman and Chris-Craft, but I ultimately found a Sea Skiff, or rather it was found for me. I was most fortunate to have a terrific friend (named Bill Baldwin) who knew me well enough to understand just what I was looking for, and when he came across my boat, he knew it. It would take me another year to realize it, however, and in that time this scoundrel of a friend absconded with the generator and voltage regulator from my boat for his boat [Scoundrel-Editor's note: I admit to this theft; my 1951 Chris-Craft 18-foot Riviera Merlin runs with Kevin's generator and voltage regulator]. So, I obtained this boat from a friend of Bill's, a gentleman and master-restorer named Dave Lawson, whom I now also consider a friend. I brought the boat home from Jamestown, New York on Lake Chautauqua using a trailer that I borrowed from another friend, Charles Mansfield (Show Chairman of the Raleigh-Durham Chapter). Upon arrival home in Raleigh, yet another friend, John Justice, (President of the same chapter) and my brother Ted helped me pull the engine



before we temporarily blocked the boat up in my garage, safe and sound. A common thread in antique and classic boating circles, and in wooden boats in general, is good friends. In fact, aside from boats, friends are what the ACBS is all about.

This boat was worth every effort in bringing it to Raleigh, and it will be worth every effort during restoration, if for no other reason than I like this boat. I am enamored of its lines — which are emphasized with each shadow the plank laps cast on the white hull — and by its classic and timeless style. There are other elements that I like a lot as well, such as the shape and proportions of the windshield. I also like the simplicity and honesty of the boat. It is not fancy or presumptuous, and yet would not appear out of place among the finest yachts. Much like Shaker furniture, which I also greatly appreciate, there is little there for the sake of adornment or embellishment alone.

Bill: Wow! Beautiful metaphor! What would you suggest people do when they want to get into this avocation?

Kevin: I would strongly, and in no uncertain terms, suggest that they jump right in.

If they cannot immediately do so, then they should persevere until they find a way! There are many levels of engagement in this wonderful hobby, which may or may not culminate in the ownership of a Chris-Craft or other antique or classic wooden boat. For me, I knew that I wanted to restore my own classic wooden boat and save a watercraft that otherwise might not have ever been used and appreciated again. Like water, other inquirers will similarly find their own levels.

Bill: Where do you see yourself taking this avocation, and what aspects are most important to you?

Kevin: For me, the aspect that is most important is maintaining a hands-on connection with the boats, either building or restoring them. While I have a deep appreciation for the end result: a beautiful wooden boat, the process of learning and discovery, and further developing my skills is more important to me. I see beauty in potential, and that is how I choose to look at the world. 🚢