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How I Got Started in Boats

by Warren Jordan, **Jordan Wood Boats**,
South Beach, Oregon - USA

I grew up on a saltwater estuary in Oregon, in a town bustling with every imaginable sort of maritime activity. So, it was probably inevitable that I would develop an interest in all things nautical. After college, travel and marriage, I was drawn back to the waterfront where I pursued a variety of marine-related jobs including crew on oceanographic research ships and deckhand on commercial fishing vessels. Those adventures were always interesting but my overriding fascination was with the timeless, functional beauty of the boats themselves, and that led me to pursue the boatbuilding trades. After apprenticeships in two boatyards and a course of study in boat design, I launched my career as Jordan Wood Boats in 1980 and started developing a number of original designs and experimenting with construction techniques.

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16 ft. Sea Bright Skiff (John Gardner design), an early boatbuilding project, was very favorably reviewed by John Gardner in "The National Fisherman."



11 ft. peapod canoe



36 ft. Venetian Gondola (from Venetian plans).

The boat market was virtually dominated by fiberglass and aluminum production boats by then, so, in the early years of my career, I had to shore up my fledgling enterprise by doing boat repair and design work at local boatyards, building models for a naval

architect, custom woodworking, commercial fishing and forest surveying.



Boat models built for a naval architect.

The other unavoidable reality was that, like most independent, artistically-inclined folks, I never was comfortable making more than one of anything. There just wasn't time to build all the boats that interested me if I had to do production work besides. So I shifted the emphasis of my business to designing my "dream" boats, building and testing the prototypes, publishing and marketing the plans, then moving on to the next project.



**15 ft. beach cruiser
Footloose**



**9'-6" sailing pram
Scamp**



**10 ft. Norwegian Pram
Dulcibella**

To compete in a market literally awash in boat plans, however, I needed to produce designs that would strike a resonant chord in some unsaturated niche. By happenstance, this opportunity presented itself when I was commissioned by an expectant father to design and build a cradle boat. Cradle boats have for centuries been a part of the maritime tradition of seafaring nations throughout the world, being built mainly by shipwrights and sailors for their first-born child and then passed down through the generations as family heirlooms. Therein was the answer! Sensing an untapped market, I took extra pains in developing the prototype and plans for Baby Tender. Photos of the cradle boat were published in WoodenBoat Magazine, and the response and demand for plans was instantaneous and compelling.



**Cradle boat Baby
Tender - my first
published design**



**Cradle boat Baby
Tender II**



Cradle boat Wee Pumpkin



Cradle boat Papoose



Cradle tugboat



Jolly Boat rocking toy boat

After establishing myself as one of the very few cradle boat designers in the world, I expanded my miniature fleet with several other cradle boats, and then went on to focus on small sailing and rowing craft. From simple utility boats for the sportsman to more elegant types, my emphasis was on producing meticulously detailed plans aimed toward the first-time or non-professional builder.

Although not particularly computer-savvy, I saw in the internet the potential for a real boost to my plans business, so I built a website to showcase my products. That strategy made my products and message universally accessible on a global level, and to date my plans have helped launch wooden boats in more than fifty countries.

As a companion to my plans, in 2006 I published my book "**Jordan Wood Boats, Boatbuilding My Way**". Aimed toward the non-professional, the book is in its third edition, and details the construction methods, and time and labor-saving techniques I have developed over the years to simplify and enhance the boatbuilding process.



12 ft. jonboat Jon Buoy



8 ft. sailing pram Sprite

In all of my designs I try to incorporate the best qualities of traditional boats that have stood the test of time. I like to employ hull forms that have proven to be the most efficient for their purpose, keeping in mind that the "old salts" who used these boats had only oar, paddle, sail or low-powered machinery for propulsion. Their boats simply had to be of efficient design; a concept that makes good sense, even today. This philosophy is integrated into all of my plans.



15 ft. pirogue Swamp Rat

One of my most popular designs, Newt, was featured in WoodenBoat Magazine's 2011 "Small Boats." Designed as a quickly, easily and inexpensively built, lightweight solo canoe, I also wanted to develop a boat that would fit comfortably into the "build-a-boat" workshop setting seen at many wooden boat events, and community, family and youth development programs where many of the basic skills of wooden boat building can be explored by the builder with minimal woodworking experience and only basic tools.



12 ft. solo canoe Newt

Next came Growler, an extremely versatile transom-stern cruising canoe designed for paddle, oars or small outboard motor. Growler is based on the same hull form as Newt, my popular 12 ft. solo canoe, but is capable of carrying considerably larger loads.



**15 ft. transom stern canoe
Growler**

Next up and launching soon is Li'l Longship, latest addition to my cradle boat fleet, designed in the spirit of the classic Viking Longship.

Keeping busy now in semi-retirement, I've got a number of other projects on the drawing board including Scalawag, a 10 ft. mini drift boat for river work, Fancy Free, a smaller, lighter version of Footloose, and a compact shanty boat for minimal houseboat living.

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