

ABACO: A Wharram Tiki 30 Built to Modern Yacht Standards

By Scott B. Williams

It's hard to imagine anything more exciting than to be building a small, seaworthy catamaran with the promise of over-the-horizon adventure waiting when the project is done. The only thing more exciting is the prospect of making a living building the boats that will make other people's dreams come true, too. That's exactly what David Halladay of Boatsmith, Inc., is doing, and I've been fortunate enough to be able to help him get started.

I first met David Halladay in 2001, shortly after arriving



David Halladay and the Boatsmith crew getting the first hull set up. This photo illustrates the "stitch and glue" method of wiring plywood hull panels together prior to opening them up for inserting bulkheads.

in North Palm Beach as a liveaboard cruiser, running low on cash and looking for work as a carpenter—preferably a boat carpenter. I had been a cabinetmaker and trim carpenter, and had also built a few small wooden boats and restored the old Grampian I had sailed south from Mississippi. A business card in the marina office advertising Boatsmith Marine Carpentry led to a phone call and a short meeting, and the next day I was helping David install a new teak deck on a 70-foot sportfisherman.

One of the small boats I had built was a Wharram Hita 17 catamaran, and I was pleasantly surprised to learn that David had also long been fascinated with the somewhat eccentric designs of British multihull pioneer, James Wharram. It seemed an interest in these almost primitive plywood boats designed to be built in the backyard by amateurs was inconsistent with the state-of-the-art craftsmanship David applied to multimillion-dollar motor yachts in his day-to-day business. But his talk of building a Wharram design persisted over the years after I sailed back to Mississippi, lost my Grampian in Hurricane Katrina, and started building my own Wharram cruising cat, a Tiki 26.

David called me one day last January to discuss the Tiki 30, the next size up from the boat I was building, saying that he was thinking of building one on spec. We went over the numbers, based on the time and materials I was putting into my boat, and David ordered building plans. A couple days after they arrived, he was cutting out parts with his highly capable crew, and I was on the road to South Florida, eager to get in on the project, if only for a few days.

Wharram's Tiki series of designs ranges from the Tiki 21 (which still holds the record as the smallest catamaran to circumnavigate the globe) to the Tiki 46. David chose the mid-size Tiki 30 for the Boatsmith spec boat as it offers an ideal compromise between the larger and smaller designs. Perfect for Florida waters, this is a proven offshore-capable catamaran that draws only 2 feet and can go to weather well with-

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Both hulls were built side-by-side, braced to the shop floor and rafters to keep them aligned until they were rigid enough to be moved. Here you can see the forward deckbeams have been installed.

out any underwater appendages such as dagger boards that could be damaged in a grounding. Designed as a tropical cruiser, the Tiki 30 features a double bunk in each cabin, as well as immense deck and cockpit space, part of which can be converted to accommodations under an optional deck tent. There is a basic, but adequate galley in the port hull and a nav-station to starboard. Wharram designs boats that sail well, and above all are safe and seaworthy. He refuses to compromise these characteristics for comfort, so you won't

see ungainly, high houses on any of his designs built to plan. As a result of this philosophy, you don't get standing headroom in the Tiki range until you go to 38 feet. But the Tiki 30 has comfortable sitting headroom below in the cabins and over the bunks and so much deck space that you won't need or want to spend much of your time below.

A big plus of the Tiki 30 and smaller sizes like the Tiki 26 and Tiki 21 is that they can be dismantled, the individual hulls narrow enough to fit side-by-side on a trailer without

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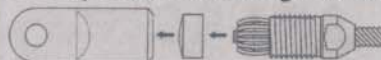
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Here is the 32-foot mast after laminating but before final shaping to round. The first step in rounding a square mast is to cut it to 8 equal sides, then 16, then 32.

exceeding the legal width limit. While the Tiki 30 is not the kind of boat you can keep at home and quickly put together for an afternoon sail, it is quite feasible to dismantle it and trailer it to the Chesapeake or the Sea of Cortez. For Southeastern sailors, the ability to get it on a trailer to move inland or north in advance of a hurricane is something to consider.

Most of the Tiki 30s and smaller Wharram designs are built by amateurs in backyards, barns and makeshift sheds. James Wharram is one of the most successful boat

plan salesmen around, having sold thousands of sets of plans around the world. But building a 30-foot composite plywood and epoxy catamaran on your own and with limited tools and skills is no small project. Many builders spend years on a project this size, and homebuilt boats always have a way of costing far more than the builder anticipated in the planning stages.

Having worked with David Halladay and his BoatSmith crew on a number of challenging boat projects, I was well aware of the experience and skills he could bring to a Wharram catamaran build. With a huge array of serious shop tools at his disposal and a gang of motivated craftsmen willing to work six hard days a week, I had no doubt that this Tiki 30 would go together in record time.

For the BoatSmith Tiki 30, *Abaco*, no expense was spared in choosing top quality materials meeting professional marine standards. The Tiki designs are built of plywood in the "stitch and glue" method, which means the hull sides are first assembled with wire stitches at the keel and then spread open to insert the bulkheads, floors and bunks, which are held in place with epoxy fillets and fiberglass. All the plywood in *Abaco* is imported marine-grade Okoume, which is lightweight and free of interior voids and defects. West System epoxy was chosen for its proven qualities and strength properties. All structural solid wood in the hulls, beams and mast is lightweight but strong, vertical grain Douglas fir. Decks, coamings, interior trim, beam blocks and other solid wood parts requiring hardwood are all made of teak. All the wood parts inside the boat are coated with a minimum of two coats of epoxy, under finish coats of primer and Awlgrip paint. All exterior parts are not only coated with epoxy, primer and Awlgrip, but are sheathed with Xynole polyester fabric, which offers better abrasion and impact resistance than fiberglass.

During the course of construction, which stretched over a period of almost five months due to other ongoing BoatSmith projects, I twice made the 800-mile road trip to David's shop in Jupiter to work on *Abaco*. On my first working trip down in February, we assembled both hulls up to the point of installing all the bulkheads and completing the interior keel fillets and fiberglassing. The second time I visited the shop I spent nine days building the mast and the mast tabernacle that goes on the central crossbeam, as well as many other small parts. Having recently completed the mast for my own Tiki 26, I was familiar with the process, and building the larger spar went just as smoothly. The Tiki mast is laminated from Douglas fir, hollow on the inside, first glued-up in a square box section, and then taken to the round by means of hand-held power planers and other tools. The hollow wooden mast is relatively lightweight and stiffer than aluminum, plus wood just feels right on a wooden boat. With epoxy and Awlgrip coatings, it should last indefinitely as long as the finish is maintained.

In addition to the actual hands-on work I participated in during the *Abaco* build, David also hired me to create and write an ongoing blog detailing the construction. I had been blogging about my own Tiki 26 project since its beginning, and seeing the worldwide interest this generated, David thought it would be an ideal way to get the word out about

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From left to right: David Halladay, James Wharram and Hanneke Boone in the comfortable cockpit of Abaco at the Mystic Wooden Boat Show.

what he and his crew could do if anyone wanted to commission him to build a Wharram cat of any size. The result was Pro-Built Tiki 30 (<http://tiki30.blogspot.com>), which has attracted a dedicated following of Wharram enthusiasts and generated other business for the Boatsmith shop.

Writing the blog kept me deeply involved in the project from start to finish, as David would call me almost every day to give me the details of the latest photos he uploaded so I could write the descriptions. I felt as if I were right there building, as I wrote the updates, and seeing the step-by-step details and the decisions made at each juncture, I can attest to the quality of work and attention to detail that went into each phase of the project.

In a final, frenzied push of long days near the end of May, David and the crew finished the boat just in time to have it ready to launch and display at the 2008 Wooden Boat Show in Mystic, CT. *Abaco* was loaded onto a trailer and trucked from Florida for this important show, because getting her there in time would mean David would have a rare opportunity to meet the designer himself, James Wharram. Wharram was there with his co-designer, Hanneke Boone, for a special event honoring multihull pioneers including himself and other notable designers, such as Dick Newick and Jim Brown.

James and Hanneke were so impressed with *Abaco* and the quality of the Boatsmith construction, fit and finish, that they entered into a contract with David, making him the first and only official U.S. professional builder of James Wharram designs. Until now, if you wanted a professionally built Wharram catamaran, you had to contract with Wharram's other approved yards in the Philippines or in Thailand. The only way to get one here in the United States was to build it yourself, as I am doing. Now, with James Wharram's official approval, David Halladay and the Boatsmith crew are ready to turn your catamaran dreams into reality, whether you're looking for a 21-foot daysailer or a 46-foot liveaboard cruiser. Best of all, the Boatsmith shop is located conveniently near Jupiter, FL, close enough for east coast and Gulf Coast sailors alike to drop in for a visit and discuss the design that best fits their needs. With all the warm shallow waters surrounding the Florida peninsula, the Keys, the northern Gulf Coast states and the Bahamas, what's not to like about the Wharram cat?



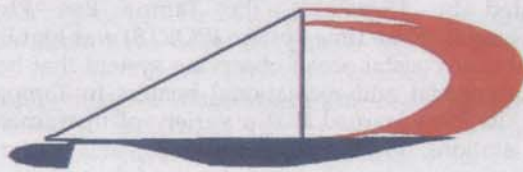
Abaco on display at the Mystic Wooden Boat Show. The 30-foot catamaran drew a steady stream of interested visitors.

David Halladay can be reached at www.boatsmithfl.com, or (561) 744-0855.

Abaco will be at the St. Petersburg Boat Show, Dec. 4-7.

Scott B. Williams is the author of three books on sea kayaking and sailing and is a frequent contributor to *Sea Kayaker* magazine. He lives in south Mississippi and enjoys boatbuilding, sailing and paddling at every opportunity. Scott can be reached via his Web site: www.scottbwilliams.com

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