

# Spira International Boat Building Articles

## Choosing The Best Easy-to-build Small Boat Design

By Jeff Spira

Novice boatbuilders often look at the confusing array of different designs offered by boat designers and are perplexed at what style of boat is right for their needs and intended use. All too often an inappropriate boat design is selected because of looks, or other non-functional consideration when the builder would be far happier building a boat whose performance and intended usage more closely fits intended application. This article will attempt to address the more common boat designs and arm the new builder with the information he needs to make the best choice in a small boat design.

One of the most popular boat designs being built these days is the drift boat, or sometimes called McKenzie River Drift Boat. While these boats have their place, more often than not, this design is selected for its looks, or because they're popular with a certain group (usually the fly fishing devotees.) Drift boats are an excellent choice when used as they are intended – drifting down-river, but are highly unsatisfactory for much else. If you wish to travel back up-river or wish to use the boat on a calm lake, the difficulty powering such a boat by rowing becomes apparent. They're designed such that the operator can keep them pointing down-river, but are very difficult to row in a straight line and have very little glide as compared to other types of row boats.

Some designers have separated the standard McKenzie river drift boat into two distinct styles: the Western type drift boat, intended for fast moving narrower rivers, and the Midwestern type drift boat, more suited to wider and deeper rivers and lakes. The Western style has severe rocker and high sides to handle wild whitewater, while the Midwestern style has less rocker and lower sides to facilitate both rapids and calmer water where the user can more easily power the boat by rowing.

For the person who doesn't intend to use the boat in white water rapids, a whole host of other small boat designs make for more sense. The Grand Banks Dory is one such design. These are simple to build, incredibly seaworthy, and a joy to row or sail. In 1876, an 18-foot Grand Banks style dory (named

“Centennial” after the 100-year anniversary for the Declaration of Independence) made a single-handed crossing of the North Atlantic from New York to England. Grand Banks dories are easy to build, and ideal for most lake, river, and ocean use. Their only downside is that they don’t power very well, and only slower speeds are possible.

For a small boat that can both row well and power well, the Carolina Dory is a wise choice. These were developed after the advent of power when it was discovered that the Grand Banks types were too narrow in the stern to power well. A Carolina dory moves along quite well on modest power and yet still is easily rowed (an important consideration in the early days when gas engines weren’t very reliable.) For an all-round stable family boat, these are a very wise choice. With moderate power they’ll plane to cross long stretches of water rapidly, but retain their very seaworthy dory heritage. They’re also one of the easiest boats to build.

For an easy-to-build boat that is to be powered only, one of the best choices is the Pacific Power dory design. These very seaworthy boats were developed in the Pacific Northwest to power through rough water and remain stable and safe. These boats have a heritage of being launched through the surf and are sturdy enough to be used as commercial fishing boats. They’re also very easy to build for the first time boat builder.

There are hundreds of different boat designs available to the amateur boat builder that offer all sorts of different capabilities and require a wide variety of skill levels. Some require careful fitting of parts and learning specialized skills used by the shipwrights of the past, while others require only basic carpentry skills. Drift boats and dories, though remain the easiest of all to build and offer the novice a great first boat building project. Selecting the proper type for the individual’s need, though, is important to make sure the first project experience is a positive one.

Visit my website at <http://www.spirainternational.com> to see the many different designs of boats you can build at home.

