

Spirited Away to the shed!

■ by ROB ARMSTRONG

Well that's my choice for the next couple of years. It seems like just the other day my Spirited 380 kit arrived, but it's been four months in fact. Three double pallets of Duflex and another of resins, tapes, a couple of 38ft long hulls and two weird looking and very unwieldy top decks all looked pretty lonely and insignificant in such a huge shed. The prospect of what lay ahead certainly appeared daunting.

hope my time estimates aren't all this bad. My wife, Sue, has learnt over the years never to trust my time or cost estimates. She always doubles and adds a zero. Anyway by mid September I was into boatbuilding, my first ever (apart from the 50 or so I'd built in my head over the last 20 years).

THE shed wasn't even finished when the kit arrived. A bit of poor planning on my part, but after all I was on six months leave, so why rush and who'd have thought Craig Schionning would be good to his word and actually deliver on time. I also grossly underestimated the time it would take for one person to build an 18 x 10 x 5 metre shed in the rain. I

A bit of history first. Many power boats, a couple of sail boats and a five year stint in the Torres Strait and North Queensland planted the seed years ago and a retirement horizon of five years made the timing right for a boat building project. Finally, we were almost financial enough to make a start, just one last house renovation to go. And of course, wouldn't you know it. The property market

"You want me to put glue where?
I really hate being the smallest!"





collapsed leaving us stuck in financial limbo for nearly three years. Sound familiar? We put these three years to good use though. Sue and I visited many boat building projects and picked each of the builder's brains. Thanks to all those friendly and willing individuals who shared their advice and infectious enthusiasm, we finally knew what we wanted in a cruising yacht design.

Apart from the blatantly obvious (it had to be a cat for all the reasons that I won't even bother starting an argument over) it had to have the following features: diesels in their own compartments not under our bunk, galley up (or I'd be divorced), walk through transoms, safe flat mast step area and wouldn't it be nice to build it the right way up. Unfortunately no such kit was available. Then wouldn't you know it? Just a couple of months before the house settlement, along comes the Spirited 380. Just perfect! All that remained were the three most important tasks before any boat building project could commence, convince the wife, convince the wife, convince the wife. That done and my soul well and truly sold, I could embark on the project.

So with my six months leave rapidly eaten away by the demands of others I stood staring at a stack of Duflex thinking to myself, three and a half months to go. Where would I start? Could I really do this? There was no turning back I was committed. The consequences of failure were just too ugly to consider. So one week into building and I was on a roll, with my two teenage boys, Matt and Curtis, as willing helpers (and on holidays). The entire 136 Duflex panels were joined, coded and 'Spirited Away' to various locations within the shed. Next job, strengthen the bulkheads. No drama

right from top:

Matt applying just a bit more glue before rolling up the bridgedeck; Cleaning up the kerfs saves so much sanding! They will learn this by the end of the project; Child's play – too easy working the right way up and at ground level, plenty of light, ventilation and no steps.

there either, so what's the catch? Boat building's got to be harder than this, so bring it on.

Now I'm not the world's fastest worker. I do a lot of standing around thinking (dreaming) and tend to work in bursts at random times between sun up and sun up. But I must admit that I (as were many others) was amazed that at the end of two months not so hard work I was standing looking at a boat, well sort of. At least I could walk around on the bridge-deck. All the bulkheads and chamfer panels were in, fore-beam built and fitted. I even managed to complete the underside of the bridge-deck as per all advice. Maybe something was wrong, perhaps the floors and furniture would be a challenge.

Well my time's up! Six months leave from teaching all used up, house renovated, shed built, catamaran to the stage I hoped but never really believed, time to go back to work for a rest! I'm still amazed that in barely 15 weeks or so I have reached this stage, all the floors are in and most of the furniture is dry fitted. I'm not under any elusion though; there is still an enormous amount of work to be done and money to be spent. However, I thought it would be all hard, dirty and tedious work and there is some of that but overall it's been really rewarding, and much more fun than tiling and painting houses. That's for sure. It's obviously early days but my two to three year timeline does seem achievable.



The author looking busy cutting out doors in the furniture modules.



Week 15 – time for a photo opportunity.

What has helped has been the quality of the kit. Every possible component is perfectly pre cut and the plans are excellent. All the bits actually fit. Not to mention the ground up approach where you can work with the sides off, thereby

avoiding climbing up and down stairs all day. The Spirited Assembly System has saved me an immeasurable amount of time and effort. I know Craig Schionning is renowned in the industry for his level of knowledge and support, but I didn't really expect it to be true. But yes it has been almost instant and certainly valuable. It definitely helps that the designer is also a builder. So too from the

network of other Spirited 380 builders, even professionals like Julian Griffiths at Stallion Marine haven't hesitated in sharing their considerable boatbuilding knowledge, expertise and advice. All this support has indeed made my transition from teacher to amateur boat builder very easy.

So I don't mind being 'Spirited Away' in the shed for a couple more years. It's much more enjoyable than working on a house. Hey, 'Spirited Away', sounds like a great name for a cruising Spirited Catamaran. I think I'll use that! A far better alternative to 'Slave Labour' as suggested by my sons. I did hasten to point out to them that since I was paying them a higher wage than most multinational hamburger chains they should be very happy. I also noted that other employers may not be too happy for them to disappear when the surf's up. And anyway, if anyone is going to exploit my children with sweatshop-like conditions and low pay it might as well be me! ❖