



talking shop ...

with Craig Schionning

Building your own boat is a major undertaking and something that needs to be taken seriously. As a boatbuilder myself I can fully appreciate the time and effort that goes into building and completing a well finished boat of any description. Amateur builders in most cases do an excellent job of finishing their projects but most need some guidance along the way. Choosing the right design which comes with a good build system and in a reasonably advanced kit-set can be challenging and often the 'preferred' design may be discarded because it is too difficult for an amateur builder to take on. Unfortunately the more advanced the kit the more it tends to cost so there is always a balance here to suit the average home-builder's sometimes meagre budget.

THE PRIORITIES DIFFER from person to person but if you ask any experienced yachty about their connection to their boat it in most cases can be an emotional one and difficult to explain. Hence the first factor in choosing a design or boat is usually the look or appearance and then of course the boat must fulfill all other practical criteria. Personally it must always be pleasing when approaching or leaving your boat by dinghy, this for me is part of the 'emotional' side mentioned before. Working down the list, of course size, performance, general usability, build



system and choice of material will be other common factors in the decision process. The one thing that I feel a lot of buyers don't put enough emphasis on is the type of building material. The structural material used to build any boat is vitally important and can make all the difference in the performance and handling. Going into this further, a lighter structural frame will improve not only the power to weight ratio but also increase your payload capacity therefore allowing for more cruising gear. One thing to remember is that unlike loose payload items, you can't reduce/remove the weight of the structure; you are stuck with this for the life of the boat.

To gain more of an understanding of what other prospective buyers are looking for in a catamaran these days I thought I would approach a couple who started their Spirited 380 project in April this year: Will Stephens and Tina Hoffmann comment on their decision making process:

"We first came across the Spirited 380 design in 2006 I think in an edition of the Multihull World magazine. It was on the cover as I remember. We had been looking at cats in this size range for some time but had been put off by the fact that nothing really suited what we wanted. Simple stylish lines and rig, potentially outrageous speed, light weight, bridgedeck clearance, composite construction but above all true liveable functionality. Being known to cook a bit, I also wanted a living platform that was capable by design with absolutely no short comings and as far as possible with practical function in the galley, wet and sleeping areas. Dual protected helms were a must have, as well as a good sized rear deck.

The other items addressed so well with this boat were ventilation which is more than adequate for the tropics, two heads are better than one, especially if you intend to have guests (who are already seriously

The Spirited 380 kit boat. (left)
Will and Tina's Spirited 380. (above)

queuing!). Daggerboards! and the ability to still beach the boat safely. Rare this. Less haulouts.

Also admired was the fact that aerodynamics are taken seriously and that there is not much left in terms of monohull legacy about the shape or space, inside or out. I like to sail fast but safe, and by all accounts this will be only a question of time ..."

But what about the importance of the kit-set and build system?

"The build is officially six months on (at time of print) and to be fair I feel we are a bit behind, two or three weeks perhaps. We have simply accepted this as no big deal in the grand scale of the project as a whole. To this stage the build has gone smoothly and in the direction that we wanted. Nothing has been done with too much haste, or not enough forethought and preparation. The parts fit well in general and provided one remembers that most parts are 'relative to' each other and don't get in a mess with silly changes that create even more work, it's a great system!"



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Port hull of Will and Tina's Spirited 380.

A lot of time has been spent with areas that would later become huge jobs with restricted access, which has been avoided. The bridgedeck surface underneath will only need topcoat once fitted, everything else has been done. All the bulkheads were also fitted almost finished. The rule of the thumb seems to be, do what you can in the shed before doing it in situ on the boat. Less mess etc. Dry fitting until you are blue in the face works really well as does measuring too many times to mention. That probably just applies to me though perhaps but anyway. It is great to see the form of the boat come to life. It does so quite quickly and this has a motivational effect, which was unexpected and welcomed.

The time frame was to be one year from start to finish but you have to be flexible and realistic, which translated means it could take a month longer!"

With plenty of wives and partners involved in home building projects it is always interesting to get their point of view. Tina Hoffmann shares:

"More than ever I am enjoying our sabbatical project of building our Spirited 380 in the shortest time that two people can do it. As I had no idea at all what it was all about, except of a beautiful sailing catamaran one year ago, I was very lucky to have a multi-skilled and building experienced partner, who has been planning to build a Spirited 380 for a couple of years now, before the final decision was made in Sept 2009 in Switzerland. Will has been looking for a suitable work shed in March in Far North Queensland and set up for the arrival of the magical kit shortly before my arrival from Switzerland. There I reduced my possessions to 40kg (travel baggage max) incl. family photos, books, documents etc ... this in fact suited the project exceptionally well, as we prepare ourselves for the light-weight Spirited 380 as our future dwelling.

In the beginning I felt quite confused and awkward in the work shed. As a body therapist I was rather used to working with women. An Australian work shed is traditionally a male refuge ... so what the Heck is SHE doing here? ... and the next question, written in their eyes, was: ... CAN she handle tools? ... can she do it? The swearing died off surprisingly fast and the blokes found out quickly that yes, SHE CAN do it! This was a very interesting process for me! I've often heard that it is very rare to see a woman building a boat. Well, maybe few have seen it, yet we know there still are ladies out there with their hands in the glass (fibreglass not the champagne glass!). And certainly there is a nice, respectful camaraderie in the shed now! Since the start of the building process, I feel very confident and able to do any of the work related to the build. We steadily forge ahead day by day, with some help from our friends and some great colleagues to talk to, we should be able to be on the Water by Spring 2011.

Our plan is to live on, sail'n stay, work'n cruise the Australian waters and at some point beyond! See you out there, somewhere, sometime!"

The common theme influencing the decision to self-build seems to be either affordability or not being able to find exactly what suits, or a combination of both. I think another factor is the enjoyment and reward that comes from building your own boat. Nowadays the kit-sets available are fairly advanced and give even the totally inexperienced enough confidence to attempt such a project. But even with a liberal amount of sugar-coating there is a lot of work involved and an enormous amount of commitment needed to see it through to completion.

Another couple building a Spirited 380 in Nowra NSW, Chris Downing and his partner Desiree offered their views:

"My search for a catamaran started with Seawind 1000's and 10-year-old cats that I thought were financially in reach but for that money I would end up with something old and tired. I started broadening my search to include building a catamaran especially one in kit form. With my search criteria set, I narrowed it down to two or three kits.

It was getting hard to make a decision. It was then that I read the article 'Spirited Away to the Shed' in Multihull World magazine #84 and I fell in love with the idea of building a Spirited 380. Building upright on top of the moulded hulls which provided great access made the final decision easy. I contacted Craig to discuss some of the finer details and booked into one of Spirited Designs' Boatbuilding Workshops. The work shop was great and gave me the confidence to say, yeah I can do this. The layout of the 380 was almost perfect but I wanted to make some minor interior changes. Craig was very open to my ideas and after a couple of productive discussions we came up with the changes that met my needs. These changes were all incorporated into the kit-set and supplied computer-cut. They say timing is everything, the sale of my house had just gone through and I was ready to make a big change in my life so I took the plunge and signed on the dotted line!

I didn't have any boat building experience apart from some minor glass repairs on my surfboards but I'm good with the tools. I found the build process relatively straight forward with well laid out and easy to read plans but whenever I've had any issues or



from top:

Chris and Desiree's Spirited 380 well underway.
Decks fitted.

Furniture modules assembled ready for installation.

Two Spirited 380's turning on the speed

technical questions, Craig and Marina have been very accessible and extremely helpful. It's a big advantage that Craig is a boat builder and that he built the first 380.

I've been working on the boat part time for about 21 months and recently I've been lucky to have had five months on her full time. I think I'm now inside my estimated four year build time so hopefully I'll have her finished in a bit over three years. Look out for a launch in 2012!

My partner Desiree and I plan to sail her locally on Jervis Bay and surrounding areas with family and friends but eventually we'll head north to explore the Great Barrier Reef and maybe go as far around as the Kimberley coast. When you have a boat this good the world's your oyster!"

Desiree again added her comments from a woman's perspective:

"How do you describe a project of such a large scale? Commitment and satisfaction! These are the two things that first come to mind. When Chris first came up with the idea of building the boat I knew Chris had the skill and the drive to start and finish a project of such a large scale, but knowing it would take four years of part time building, now that is a little daunting.

Well here we are almost two years in and time has gone quickly but when I look back at the stages of the boat building process I do get a little excited to see how much it has grown and the end result. I am learning more and more each week about different parts of the boat, through helping out and with conversation and I'm sure that by the time the boat is built I will know most parts of the boat. I have even started reading the odd sailing article to keep the motivation going. But the boat build has changed our way of home life with all the research,

emailing, buying and talk, it's a project that does come into the house, one that will be part of your lifestyle for quite some time but I must admit it has been an enjoyable process. I think you have to be a bit prepared for the long hours of hard work and the thought process of planning all that has to be done.

In saying that I would not change a thing at the moment and Chris, like myself I'm sure has the big picture of the end result in his mind. I'm sure the next two years will go just as quickly as the first and before we know it the boat will be getting launched and that will be a day to look forward to!"

Keeping your eye on the prize is of course crucial to success and also a way of keeping motivated. Being lucky enough to have experienced this process from designing the Spirited 380, building our own and then through to enjoying the use of it really makes you appreciate it. I think that anyone contemplating buying or building a new boat would have an idea of what they would ideally want, this part of the process I would relate to

designing/creating your 'ideal' boat. The downside to buying a fully finished production boat is that there is not much flexibility in choice of options and there is usually absolutely no choice when it comes to structural materials. Building your own boat allows you a range of choices starting with the structural material and if the client had very specific requirements this could even include exotics like carbon-fibre or kevlar. For example any of the Spirited designs can be built using a number of different material choices. The standard kits can be supplied in either balsa or foam

core, and further to this there is a choice of the kit being configured to comply with Australian survey or CE classifications. It becomes even more interesting with foam core because the density can be optimised and chosen to suit each particular area of the boat. For example for beaching the hull bottoms will be higher density core whereas other areas less prone to impact can be reduced in core density.

I also see weight and weight distribution as an important part of any boat's performance. This is also a factor that can be controlled/refined to suit the particular vessel being built and I always recommend that this work is done before building is started. With weight being saved in either the structure by way of lighter/more exotic material or by making smarter equipment choices such as choosing a water-maker which can halve your water capacity, these choices can have a profound effect on performance and weight-carried aboard. Saving weight is not necessarily to have a super light go-fast boat but in my opinion



facilitates more provision for payload which accommodates for more cruising gear when living aboard for extended periods. Another place to save weight is the rig where a carbon spar could save around half the weight of an alloy spar. Also associated with the rig, synthetic rigging products are now a viable option and are a fraction of the weight of stainless. Any weight taken out of the rig is even more critical given that it is above deck. Most people want it all in terms of inclusions and luxuries on a boat and a good design should accommodate most things within reason. For example the Spirited 380 has proven itself as a capable cruising design, not only does it perform extremely well in lightship trim but it performs well when fully loaded and this is a sign of a good design.

Optimisation seems to be important to home builders as well as affordability. In most cases even if the client purchased the kit and employed a qualified boatbuilder to complete the boat for him, the cost would come in under a similar production boat and almost certainly less than a custom-built boat done by a professional yard. This has been a popular option and the client gets a custom-built boat to his exact specifications at a

reasonable cost. At Spirited Designs we offer a custom design service for our clients which allows them to have their changes approved and included in the kit-set cut to size. Often amateur builders have an idea of what they would like but don't know how to implement it so we assist them to ensure the final concept will work.

“We have taken into account all of the above mentioned elements to create a stylish, safe, well engineered performance catamaran at an affordable cost”

There is more work and responsibility involved in an owner built project if compared to a turn-key production boat but there is no doubt that a self-built boat should be of better quality and cost less. And why shouldn't it, the client can choose the best design to suit his needs and modify it if required, optimise the materials by having the choice of the highest quality, cutting edge material on the

market, and further to this choose the best of the best in fittings and equipment. It is little wonder that the kit boat section of the market is increasing at a steady rate.

At Spirited Designs we have taken into account all of the above mentioned elements to create a stylish, safe, well engineered performance catamaran at an affordable cost. The Spirited Assembly System (SAS) enables either an amateur builder to carry out the construction or a professional boatbuilder to assemble the

shell very quickly because of the advanced kit. A kit-set boat shouldn't have to look like one, the SAS system combines moulded sections with light weight flat panels to create a production-style craft. Unsightly chines are always a tell-tale sign of a kit boat and can often detract from the value of the boat. The SAS cleverly avoids chines to provide clean smooth lines. If you want it all in your new boat, the SAS process incorporates the latest technology in composite fittings like rig chainplates, stanchion bases and carbon fibre wheels. Whatever can be built using composite is included, for example the forebeam and striker are built as an integral structure. All these fittings are glassed into the surrounding structure as a one-piece integral part and painted to match the boat. These fittings are superior in strength and are there for the life of the boat.

As with most buyers, the main motivation is to get out on the water as quickly as possible within the restrictions of their particular budget. Choosing which is the best route for each person is a decision they need to make suitable to the circumstances but as with most things in life, the more difficult option is usually the one that will give you the best result. Such as building your own boat exactly the way you want it, this will be something you will appreciate and enjoy while using your boat. These feelings of pure satisfaction and reward of seeing your dream materialise and being 'one of a kind' is something you can't put a price on.

For more information about our range of kit designs please view our website: www.spiriteddesigns.com.au