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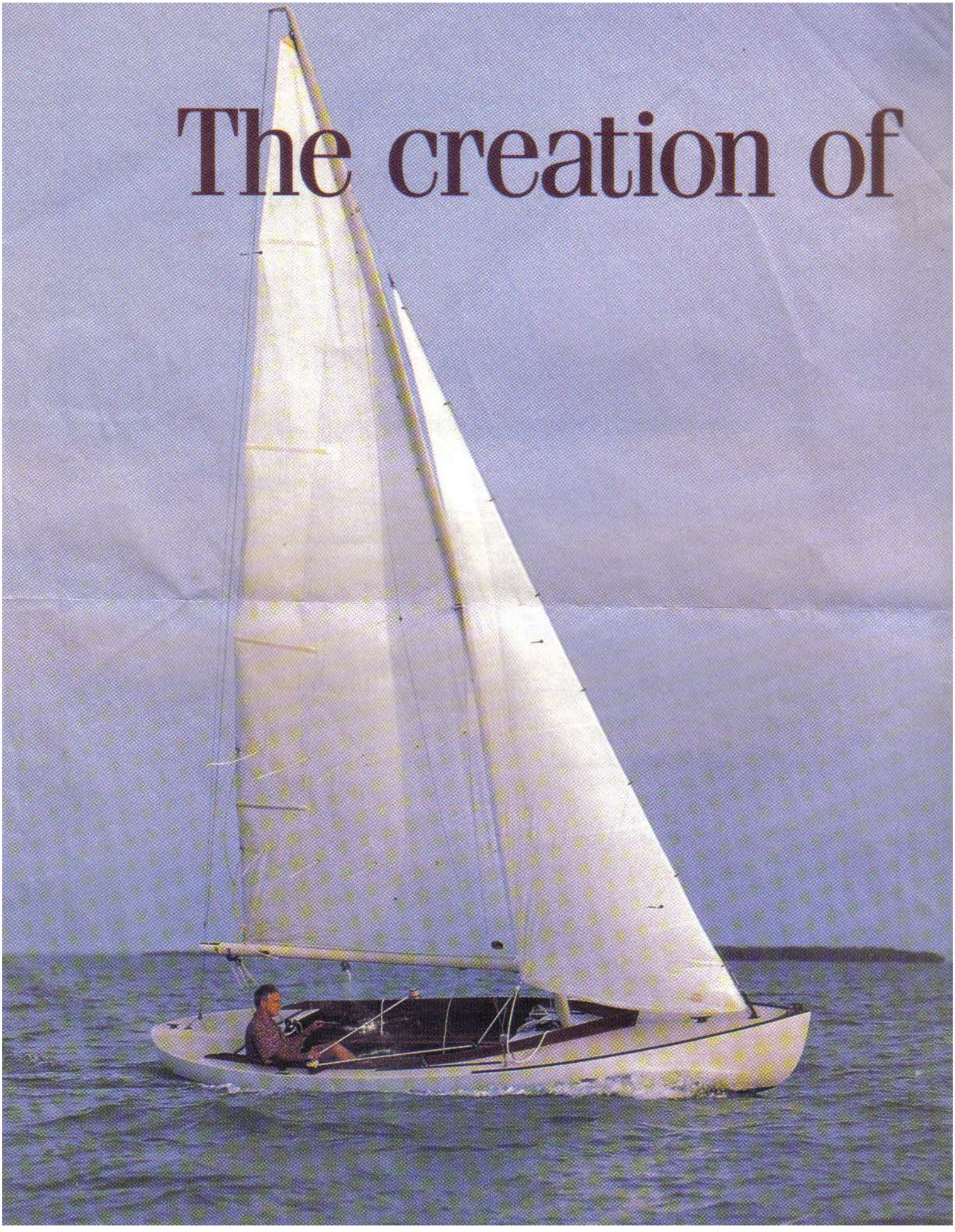
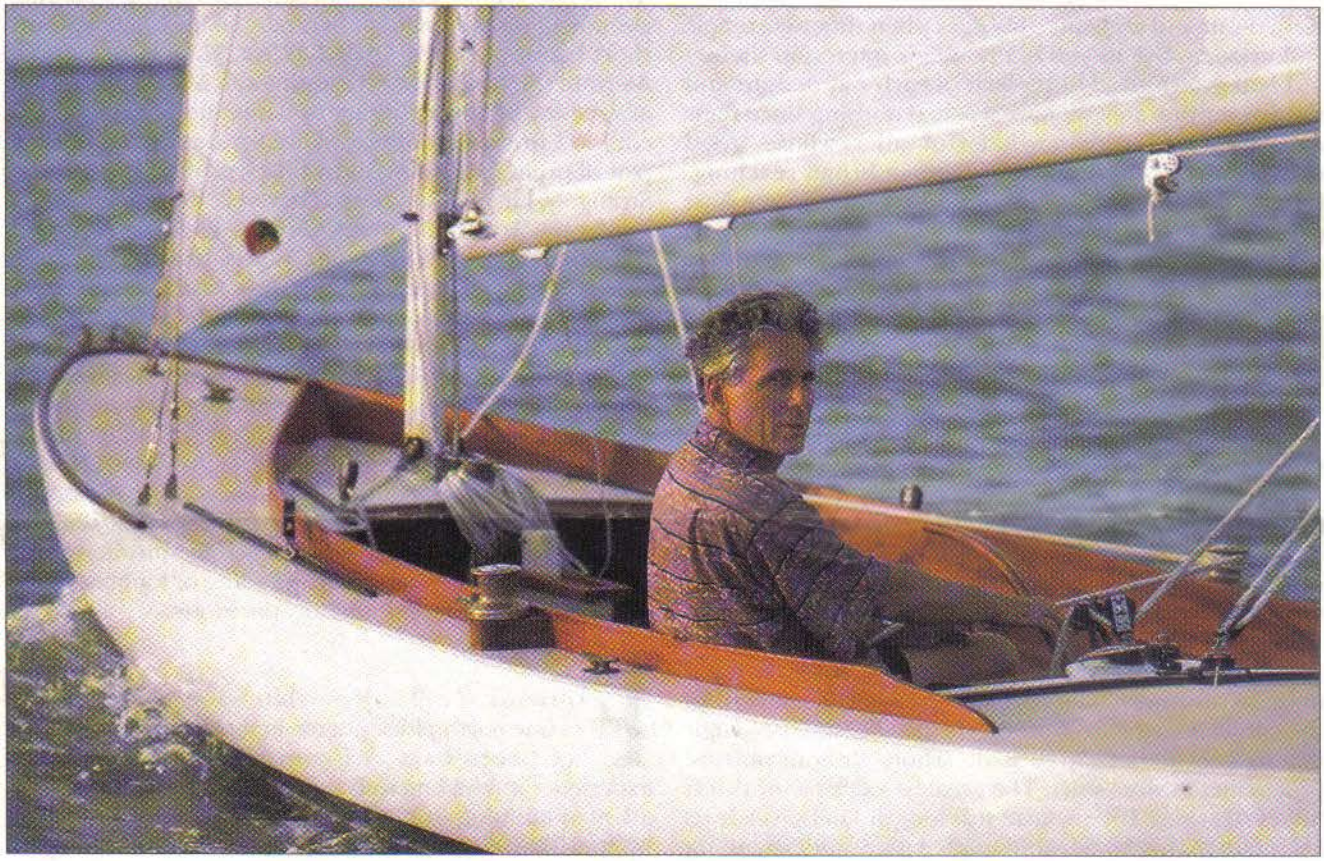


Lala

A Daysailor's Dream



by Thomas McGuane
Photos by Benjamin Mendlowitz

It's hard to imagine a sunnier prospect than having a boat built. Like many who do, I wish I were a boatbuilder myself; and like most of these wishers, I lack the talent. I suppose we all have the time.

LALA is the only one-off boat I have ever had built, but I came to it from serial boat ownership that has followed a cyclical pattern modified by one constant: my life is not cyclical, I am getting older. But for years, the marine spin-dry cycle I was locked in to went as follows: I would sail around in a small boat and then announce that I wanted to *go* someplace. There would follow a cruising boat which would be severely underused for several reasons. Working for a living was but the beginning. On our trips to Cuba, the Bahamas, and the West Indies, my wife, the original "La La," revealed her love for port, while I revealed mine for the open sea. I could always feel the sometimes unspoken question "When are we getting there?" while, in port, she gloomily counted the hours before we headed into the unknown. I then resorted to buddy-cruising with the guys. Male bonding being the unreliable thing that it is, personality problems bloomed in the tight quarters.

I began to admire once again the fellow who rode the train home, hung his suit coat in the forepeak of a pretty daysailer, and sailed 'til supper. There were people like this when I was growing up, and I thought a lot of them. The accreted hours in well-found small craft had made pretty good sailors of them. Sailing was part of their lives, but they were not the sort of affected salt one runs into in an age rich in discretionary hours.

I decided that if I was going to give up my dreams of the open sea, I was going to insist on one hell of a daysailer. Having a boat built is an invitation to, if not unreason, idiosyncrasy. After all, it's your boat; you are parting company with a market sector. It's a one-off. I honestly think that if a production or semi-production boat is out there, then that is a better idea; there is much to be said for the debugging that takes place in series production. But I had a firm idea of what I wanted, without quite being able to picture it, and I simply couldn't find it in the current marketplace.

Several things affected this sense. My growing-up sailing was in Lightnings and Cape Cod Mercuries. The Lightning is a great boat and the Mercury, as I remember it, is a bombproof dog. But Lightnings have gotten so teched-out and racy since my days when they were simple and wooden, I've lost all but nostalgic interest in them.

I had grown tired of replicas of early-day designs and the assumption that we have learned nothing since their day. Many are less-than-wonderful sailers whose "good turn of speed" is available only when broad reaching. Indeed, I had come to feel that when salty, Down East expressions were used to describe the performance of any boat, they were invariably euphemisms for goat-cart sailing characteristics. I didn't want a racing boat, but I wanted a boat with liveliness and natural fleetness under its basic sail plan. There are some decisions implied here about ultimate seaworthiness. Since I am a short-range sailer able to pick my days, I weighted the criteria toward the boat's responsiveness and my willingness to put up with a reasonable amount of spray.

Barring special circumstances, I believe every daysailer should be a centerboarder. A daysailer is limited enough without being prevented from sailing straight up to the beach allowing its occupants to step off. Besides, in turning to your builder for a leakproof centerboard trunk, you are offering him a sporting challenge to set against the many tedious and repetitious tasks he will have to do to build your boat. The only exception I can think of to the centerboard rule is when the boat is small enough that its keel allows you to wade ashore without putting your wallet in your shirt. The greatest example of this is the Herreshoff 12½, whose full-length keel gives it its justly famous big-boat feel (though it is my understanding that the Haven 12½ achieves this with less draft while saluting the builder with the challenge of a leakproof trunk).

A daysailer must support other activities than simple sailing within its short range. Yes, I know about the long voyages made in daysailers; and there are the vertical ones made in barrels over Niagara. Birdwatching and picnicking are the big ones to me. And what Roger Taylor once suggested was the real purpose of sailing, the observation of the weather, is ideally done in a daysailer. Finally, it is hard to escape Phil Bolger's contention that a boat ought to be big enough to live in in real comfort, or it ought to go in the garage. My own wish to sail my boat both in the Gulf of Mexico and the Northern Rockies meant it had to roll down the highway pretty well, too.

Daysailing reminds us that sailing is an outdoor sport, and protection from the weather—achieved by ingenuity, boom tents, and so on—seems to rise commensurately in our esteem. With a daysailer, a three-day trip of forty-five miles can leave more substantial impressions and memories than a long trip in a cruiser. While not completely avoidable, virtually any decked-over area should be regarded with extreme suspicion by the daysailor. After all, he has his standards to look to: If he is like other owners of daysailers, his will be one of the few boats to regularly leave the dock or mooring.

The final requirement was that the boat be good-looking. I find this extremely important, as it is the thing that draws me back day after day to the purposeful messing about that keeps a boat decently maintained. It is also a subjective matter. The yacht designer whom I saw quoted as saying "Overhangs are dumb" is someone whose language I will never speak. Yet, through the years, there has been a high degree of concurrence among disparate people about the beauty of certain boats. I had my own short list of favorites: QUIET TUNE, N.G. Herreshoff's Alerion, the North Haven dinghy, and a few others. But, despite my billowing library of boats and boat designs, I couldn't find what I was looking for until I ran upon a pair of preliminary designs in a back issue of *WoodenBoat*. Strangely, I liked them both. They were double-enders—one by the British Columbia designer Paul Gartside, and the other by Joel White. The White boat was a much lighter boat all the way around, more the daysailer and beach cruiser I envisioned. The Gartside boat looked to be a solid little sea boat; the White boat looked to be fast and not meant to be sailed absent-mindedly. A call to Joel White revealed that the design had been completed through construction plans. I ordered a set of plans. When I got them, it was love at first sight. The boat had a kind of purity, like a long bow, or a canoe. It had a tall, birdlike rig and shapely interior volumes that seemed to invite sunshine and fresh air. It had simplicity and completeness and produced the feeling of longing in my solar plexus that controls all my decisions.

Forward. A call to Joel White's son, Steve, himself a fine boatbuilder, put me in touch with Joe Norton of Green Lake, Wisconsin. Through his long experience in building iceboats, Joe has become extremely adept at building in the cold-molding process indicated by Joel White's plans. As the Midwestern son of New England parents, I was drawn to this personal symmetry. Joe and I set out on our project with a handshake, and I began to receive a stream of photographs of the boat under construction. In the course of construction, as you will learn elsewhere, Joe Norton made his own creative contribution, and it was pleasant to watch his growing infatuation with the design. It is heartening to hear, halfway through the project, that the builder is seriously considering building one for himself.

Unless one's experience is far wider than mine, it is hard to visualize a boat from its plans without some surprise. Boatbuilder Peter Duff made a half model of the hull; but the aesthetics of a boat can be a product of scale and volume, too. So, I had to wait until a book tour took me to Wisconsin. Joe Norton picked me up in Madison, and we drove out through the gaunt winter landscape to Green Lake, a very pleasant, old community where Joe's family have been the local boatbuilders since the last century. As we drove along, I thought that you

LALA began as a creative exercise for her designer, Joel White. Several years after the boat's conception, Thomas McGuane, above, discovered in her lines his perfect daysailer.

would have to be an independent and dedicated boatbuilder to hold an edge among these corn silos and wood lots. Here, a scantling is something you hit the dog with for eating the cat's food.

Joe's shop is a sensible, small, modern building: "Norton Boat Works." A couple of cars were parked outside next to the Chris-Crafts awaiting restoration. My excited impatience was cresting as we entered a side door to the bright, open space of the shop, in the middle of which sat the recently completed hull of my sloop. There were the lines I had tried to imagine. My earlier concern that the sheer was a little flat just showed me how much less I know than Joel White about lines. The overall feeling of a capacious canoe, and the entry of the bow, the delicacy of the stem profile, made all the dreaming and even the lightened wallet seem worth it.

A couple of months later, Joe and I were aground in LALA, just as we sailed out of Boca Grande, trying to tack into a 22-knot breeze out of a narrow canal. Joe jumped out, pushed us off, and away we went with a reef in the main we wouldn't be able to shake out for a week. We quickly found her to be a responsive thoroughbred. Her light helm changed with every extension of her centerboard, every change in her backstay tension. We had elected to take the single jib-sheet winch out of the forward part of the cockpit and have instead two winches outside the coamings. This cleaned up the interior, but under a strong breeze the leeward side of the cockpit is a long climb downhill. For some, the pulpit-mounted central sheet winch, as drawn by Joel White, would be a sensible choice. In a hard blow, we simply led the sheet around the leeward winch, across the cockpit to the windward winch.

For the worst-case scenario, I installed wedge-shaped whitewater air bags under the decks. Joel White shows a truck innertube, which would be fine once a way was discovered to accommodate the multipart centerboard tackle which leads forward from the centerboard trunk to the aft face of the stem.

I sailed the boat for a couple more months after Joe went home. In moderate air, she really shone. I could generate many angry letters to the editor by naming the much larger boats whose lees she sailed through; I rarely encountered a boat anywhere near her size that could stay up with her. She's no better than light-displacement boats closehauled into head seas, and she requires careful, though not excessively careful, steering off the wind.

She has been sailed now by racers, cruisers, delivery captains, and long-distance solo cruisers. The feeling among all is that she is a bit of a Porsche—not exactly an entry-level boat, but one you are unlikely to use up and grow tired of.

I soon became accustomed to strangers telling me how beautiful she is, including an old gentleman, a friend of L. Francis Herreshoff's, and one of the first to build a Rozinante. He said she was the prettiest thing he had seen since his little Lie-Nielsen gem. And I recall when Steve White, who had suggested I call Joe Norton, stopped about 40′ from LALA's slip, took a breath, and said, "Wow."

I've got to get ready: I'm not going to have the only one in town.

Thomas McGuane, a novelist, lives and ranches with his family in McLeod, Montana.

Designing *Lala*

by Joel White

Designing boats, no matter what size or type, is such a juggling act! If one crowds on the sail area, it must be balanced by enough hull stability to keep things reasonably upright. Lines developed purely for speed under sail may have insufficient volume to contain the cabin plan the prospective owner cannot live without. Shallow draft, so convenient to have in many sailing areas around the world, may bring with it the penalties of insufficient lateral plane and reduced power to carry sail. For every gain in one area, there seems to be a counterbalancing loss in another.

Most boats are required to be adaptable to a wide range of uses. Cruising boats, needing to have a large volume for accommodations, are also expected to sail well and be seaworthy. Even a simple dinghy must perform well under a wide range of loadings and displacements.

The requirements for daysailers, however—at least *my* requirements for a good daysailer—are pretty straightforward. She must be fast, great fun to sail (which includes really comfortable seating), and as good-looking as possible. If the boat is also trailerable, so much the better. None of these elements are in great conflict with each other.

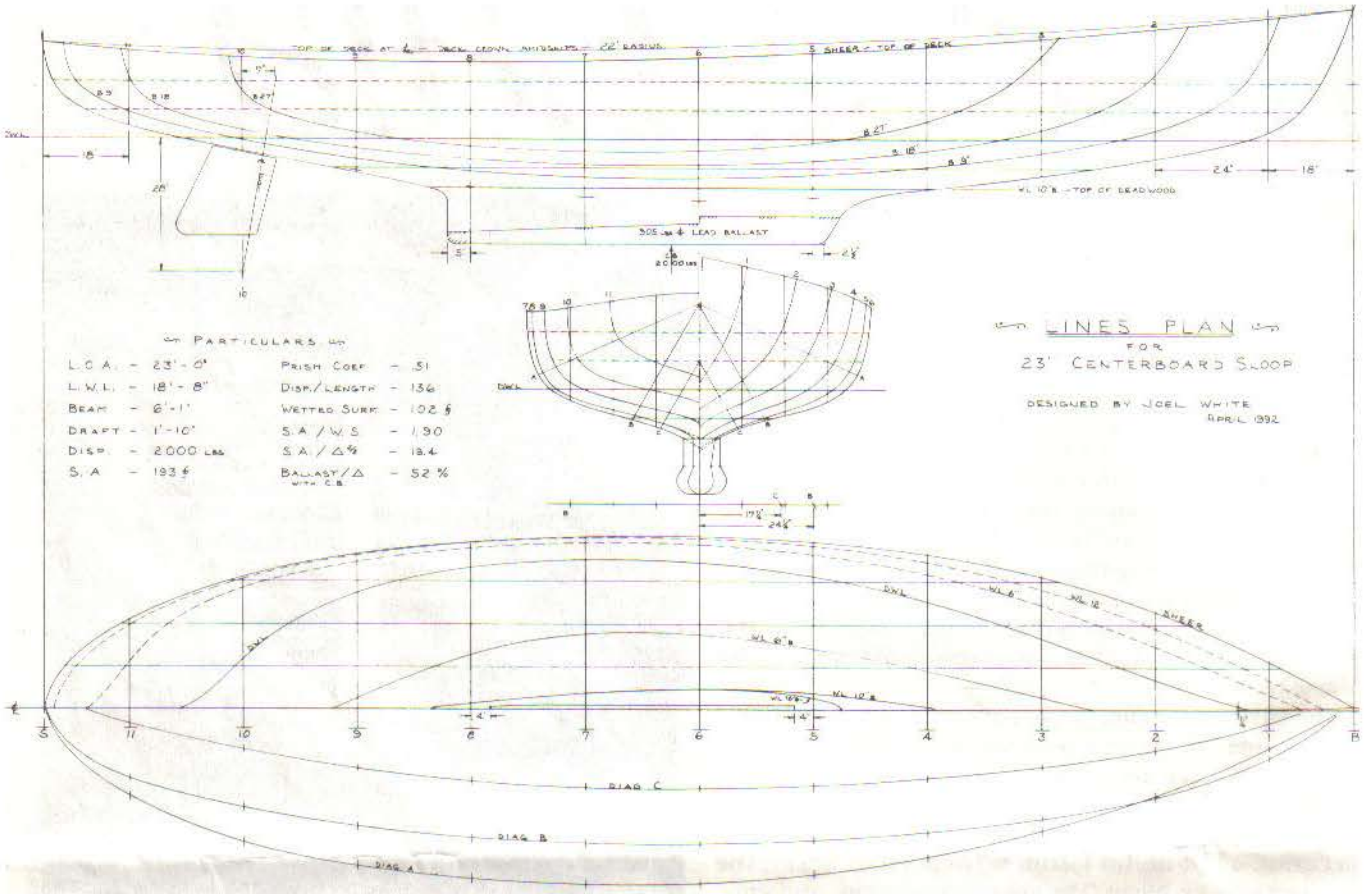
Perhaps this low level of required compromise was what attracted me, and started me daydreaming about this long, shallow, and fast double-ended sloop. I had no client for the design—it was purely for my own pleasure that I drew the preliminary plans. I had no intent to build the boat for myself, as I already owned a daysailer which fulfilled all my needs. I really can't remember why I did it. Most freelance designs have some precipitating circumstance that leads the pencil to the paper, but recollection fails me on this one. Unearthing the early notes and preliminaries shows January 1991 as the time—the shop was then building a 43′ cutter of my design. Perhaps I was a bit bored by turning out the dozens of detailed drawings required for completion of the cutter, and needed the relaxation and pleasure of the purely creative effort of a simple, new conception.

At the bottom of the file I found a tiny pencil rendering of the sail plan and deck layout, to the scale of $^{3}/_{16}$″=1′—the whole boat being about 4″ long. What startles me is that except for some minor tinkering with the stem profile, the final design precisely mirrors this initial sketch—nothing has been changed! Rummaging through the plan files trying to reconstruct the chain of events, a very rough set of lines with a sectional view through the cockpit seats, a more polished sail plan and deck layout, and a revised set of lines emerged from the bottom of the drawer labeled "Preliminary Sketches, Odds & Ends." It seems evident that I was after a very fast sailer with quite shallow draft (22″). Part of the fast concept was narrow beam of only 6′, and I do remember feeling considerable concern about the boat's stability. The rig is tall, displacement is less than 2,000 lbs, and her sail area-to-displacement ratio is a high 19.4, all indicators that stability must be carefully checked.

The three factors contributing to good stability are displacement, hull form, and the location of the vertical center of gravity. The first two, displacement and hull form, were not much help in this boat, as light displacement and narrow beam have a negative impact on the stability numbers. So, getting what weight there was down low in the boat took on increased importance. From the beginning it was clear that there must be a large centerboard for lateral plane and windward ability; stability concerns dictated that it be ballasted. I do not like heavy centerboards or drop keels unless they pivot, because of the potential for serious structural damage in a high-speed grounding.

Almost all my designs are drawn with the construction material and building method in mind from the beginning. This, I suppose, because I am a builder first and a designer second. I did not start with the building material in mind in this case. The preliminary lines show the bottom blended into the ballast keel and fin with hollow, curved garboards. This is easy enough to build in plank-on-frame or fiberglass, but not so easy with cold-molded wood.

The preliminary drawings, which were published in *WoodenBoat* No. 105, and reviewed by Maynard Bray, show the sloop with 185 sq ft of sail and a displacement of 1,863 lbs. She has a displacement/length ratio of 131, and a sail area/displacement ratio of 19.5; these figures ensure a fast boat. The all-important stability analysis showed that despite narrow beam and shallow draft, her high ballast ratio (about 50%) and a centerboard weighing close to 200 lbs put her stability numbers right on the median line for boats of this type. With the centerboard down, her righting moment at a 20° heel is 10% higher than with the board up. In addition, one person sitting on the windward seat will add 350 ft-lbs of righting moment, a 20% boost.



After the early sketches were published, letters began to trickle in, asking about the boat: Had it been built? Were there building plans available? Despite negative responses on my part to both these questions, a number of people continued to express interest and inquire for plans. So, in the spring of 1992, more than a year after drawing the initial studies, I settled down to the final construction drawings. After much circling about, I decided that the boat should be cold-molded wood—a technique I am familiar with and like—which required that the hollow garboards be eliminated. New lines were drawn, the ballast keel became bulb shaped, displacement increased to an even 2,000 lbs, and sail area increased a bit to 193 sq ft to keep the horsepower numbers in the same range. More detailed weight studies were done, the stability refigured and confirmed, and the 10 sheets of drawings finished. It is interesting to note that her displacement of 2,000 lbs is exactly half that of the Bridges Point 24, another daysailer of my design.

Joe Norton, who built LALA for Tom McGuane, recently paid me a compliment by saying the plans were the most detailed he had ever received. Experience has taught me that more detail leads to fewer telephone calls from distressed builders. He also said that the double-ended stern was a bear to plank, which I knew it would be. My response was to send him a few days later a new lines plan with a counter stern—much easier to build, and probably slightly faster because of straighter sailing lines. But I really prefer the double-ended shape aesthetically.

We had planned to build a prototype boat here at Brooklin Boat Yard, as I dislike selling plans for an untested new design. But work schedules at the shop prevented this, and a few people purchased plans, with the understanding that her performance was an unknown quantity. Several boats are under construction, but Tom McGuane and Joe Norton have conspired to put the first one in the water. They must speak to her performance, as I have not yet sailed the boat. Pictures show her to be all I had hoped for visually, and it is obvious that Joe has done a splendid job of building.

Nothing is more satisfying than to start with a tiny pencil sketch on a pad of paper, and carry the process through to the completion of a handsome boat in the water. The minor struggles and thrills of the design process are what get me up each morning and back to the drawing board. A designer should count himself lucky when his daydreams can be shared with others and boats like LALA are the result.

Joel White designs, builds, and writes about boats in Brooklin, Maine.

Building *Lala*

by Joe Norton

Thomas McGuane's first impression when he saw LALA halfway through construction: "The overall feeling of a capacious canoe...the entry of the bow, the delicacy of the stem profile, made all the dreaming and even the lightened wallet seem worth it."

This project started as most boatbuilding jobs do: with a phone call. Tom McGuane called and asked if I was familiar with Joel White and his "pretty little double-ender" that was in a *WoodenBoat* "Designs" column. After a short conversation regarding the construction of a new boat, we struck a deal. Tom was interested in making the boat look like a classic, yet sail as if she were shot out of the proverbial cannon.

The hull was to be strip-planked of Western red cedar with two diagonal layers of cedar veneer cold-molded over the exterior.

In order to save time, I had the lines sent to Aerohydro, a computer lofting service in Southwest Harbor, Maine. Within just a few days, the full-sized loftings appeared and we were on our way. I was a bit skeptical of their accuracy, considering the work it takes to produce a *really* accurate set of useful loftings. No need to worry; the loftings were excellent. The lines were accurate, and since they were on Mylar, they could easily be transferred to the molds and other parts of the boat. To reduce the possibility of introducing builder error in the layout process, I had the loftings done as whole sections (both port and starboard sides).

After transferring the lines, we began construction with the building of two permanent bulkheads. We cut the plywood bulkheads to shape, pre-coated them with epoxy, attached laminated deckbeams and frames, and gave them a pre-sanding. These bulkheads, along with the temporary molds, then had their legs attached and were set in position to form the building jig.

To define the shapes of the inside of the stems and the batten keel, we notched these members into the molds and set up laminating forms directly on the building jig. These forms later facilitated the mounting of the stems and keelson in exactly the right place and attitude.

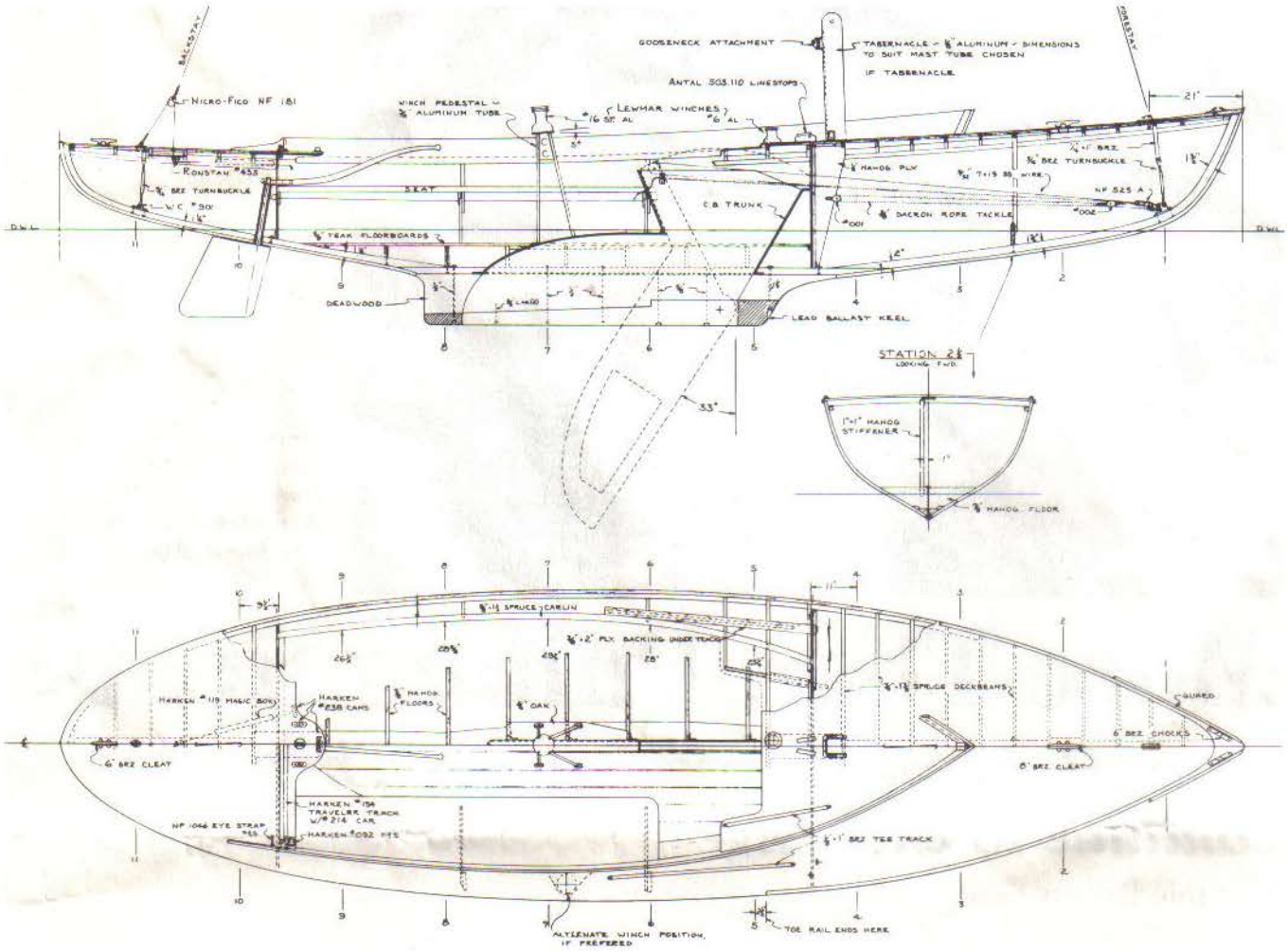
We were as careful and as accurate as we could be in the process of setting up the molds. As each one was positioned the boat's shape became more defined, and the excitement began to build. Everyone should experience this feeling at least once in a lifetime!

With the building jig completed, the keel, laminated stem and stern, and centerboard trunk were installed permanently. While I did the final shaping of these, a couple of my crew were busy scarfing 1" cedar boards into 26' lengths. Once scarfed, the boards were ripped into strips. We finish-planed the strips to ½" thickness and machined a ½" bead on one edge; the other edge was given a matching cove. Shaped thus, the planks nest together in good alignment.

Planking the hull was a group effort. Working from the sheer down, we spread glue on each strip, with someone always ready to align the new strip and staple it to the strip below it. As a strip was being stapled on one side, glue was being spread on the other side. At the bow and stern, each plank was cut to let the opposite one fit across its face. Without consciously trying, we ended up with a really cool herringbone design.

The only place that we had trouble while planking her was in the stern. The boat's stern is a good deal fuller than a typical bow, and requires much tapering and fitting to maintain the designed shape. However, we realized that the time and effort we spent on the stern were well worth it when we stepped back and looked at the completed hull.

By the time we had all the strips on, we had already begun fairing the hull using a plane and long battens. By fairing the hull at this stage, the two subsequent diagonal layers of Western red cedar veneer lay perfectly smooth on the strip planking. Cold-molding over a hull



such as this is really easy, because staples will hold well anywhere on the surface. The veneer was easy to fair and sand, and coating with epoxy soon followed. As the epoxy coating progressed, we fitted the keel deadwood and fastened and filleted it to the boat. We had sent the pattern for the lead ballast keel to the foundry early in the project so we would have it ready when we needed it.

After giving the hull three coats of epoxy and a final sanding, waterlines, bottom paint, and a topsides base coat were applied while she was still upside-down. We like to let gravity help us whenever possible. We then turned the hull over, then set her in a simple cradle that was very low so climbing in and out would be easy. It was then that we could see what an artist Joel White really is: The hull seemed to float lightly above the shop floor. This is what brings a simple guy like me to work every day

The inside of the hull still had all the molds in her, so removing these was the first task. Sanding the inside of a hull that has been strip-planked with bead-and-cove-edged planks proved easier than I had imagined, because every strip is fair to the adjoining one. In no time at all, the interior was sanded and epoxy-coated.

Our crew now split into different tasks. Some built deckbeams, coaming, and deck, while others fit floors, floorboards, and seats. The whole interior was to be bright-finished to offset the boat's white-painted exterior.

Her centerboard is plywood sheathed with 'glass and has a large piece of lead sandwiched in the middle; the rudder is also 'glass over wood. Her aluminum mast and boom were easily cut down from the rig of an E-scow. Running rigging is all by Harken (I love tradition on traditional boats, but these modern blocks work so well).

She trails easily and launches like a dream. Which brings us to her sailing characteristics: She sails like a raceboat, her helm is light, she goes where you point her, fast!

Joe Norton has spent a lifetime racing, renovating, and building all sorts of wooden boats in Green Lake, Wisconsin. Since building LALA in 1994, Joe has restored about 20 runabouts, built his own deep-V center-console outboard runabout (also designed by Joel White), and has just finished building a 29' open-cockpit cocktail launch. During his summer vacation, he teaches at WoodenBoat School here in Brooklin.

We are pleased to announce that plans for LALA are now available from The WoodenBoat Store (1–800–273–7447). The set includes 13 sheets and can be purchased for $150.