**A Builder of Snekker in Maine**

It may seem unlikely that a craftsman on the tradition-steeped coast of Maine comes to be a builder of exotic, authentic Norwegian snekker, but that’s exactly what Andrew Wallace has done. Wallace, who does business as Traditional Boatworks in Eliot, Maine, has a Norwegian mother, and spent many of the summers of his youth at his family’s ancestral home in Grimstad, Norway.

“I was a bit of a wild child,” he said. “From the time I was five years old, my mother would send me out the door at 5:30 in the morning with a local friend of hers who was a handline cod fisherman. I’d sit at the table with him in the morning and have bread and sardines and jam”—a traditional Norwegian breakfast. Then they’d head out on the water—for just an hour or two when Wallace was very young, but for 8-10 hours per day by the time he was 13. “He showed me how to handline for cod, from a snekke,” said Wallace, and that experience stuck with him after he’d decided to make a career of boatbuilding.

Snekke were not his first choice when he began his career. During his 1990 Apprenticeship at the Maine Maritime Museum’s Apprenticeshop, Wallace focused on skin boat—particularly the kayaks of Greenland and the Aleutian Islands. A later apprenticeship at the now-defunct John Gardner School of Boatbuilding in Maryland opened his eyes to the world of larger timbers, and rekindled those dormant memories of the snekke of his youth. With the help of his yacht-designer friend Tim Estabrook, Wallace designed and then built a snekke of his own in 2008. As luck would have it, a customer materialized for that boat the same time.

The heavily timbered boat has 3” x 3” double sawn frames—a massive proportion for a 23-footer. Per the owner’s requirements, it’s powered by a modern Yanmar diesel. It ran well, said Andrew, but it didn’t sound right. Andrew’s second boat, built on speculation with the aid of two eager and able apprentices, was more authentic: It’s powered by a 22-hp Bergen-built Sabb diesel—a 1960s vintage motor he had shipped over expressly for use in this boat. “It’ll give me another 100 years,” he said.

Andrew has built uncounted other boats of Norwegian ancestry, but he’s adapted many of them to the local requirements of Maine and New Hampshire. In this way, he’s an active participant in a 3,000-year-old tradition, in which Norwegian builders created their own local variants of particular boat types, to suit regional conditions and requirements. For example, one of Andrew’s prams, built by eye, measures 18’ overall and is powered by a 15-hp outboard motor. It looks like a traditional Norwegian boat and runs like a clam skiff. “You’ve never seen a pram go so fast,“ he said.

“Building traditional Scandinavian vessels is not the easiest way to make a living,” Andrew said. “But I’m sticking with what I’m passionate about. My mother, an old-school Norwegian—she thinks I’m crazy.”

—*Matthew P. Murphy*

*For more information, visit Traditional Boatworks, www.traditionalboatworks.com.*