

# The Master of the Method

Using stitch-and-glue boat construction, some 1,200 of Sam Devlin's designs have been built all over the world



You can't talk about Pacific Northwest boatbuilding without talking about Sam Devlin. More than 40 years ago, he established Devlin Designing Boat Builders on the shores of Puget Sound in Olympia, Washington, where he's built as many as 40 boats per year. But Devlin is not a production builder.

He has nothing against production boatbuilding, but he knows himself well enough that it would bore him to tears. "Imagine painting the 'Mona Lisa' over and over," he says. "It would drive me crazy."

Devlin uses the stitch-and-glue method. With plywood, wire "stitches" and epoxy, he has built everything from his 7-foot, 6-inch Polliwog tender to a 65-foot power catamaran. He is a widely admired master of the method. His book, *Devlin's Boatbuilding: How to Build Any Boat the Stitch-and-Glue Way*, has sold more than 50,000 copies. In May, McGraw-Hill is publishing a larger, updated, hardcover version.

Devlin has designed dinghies, rowboats, sailboats, motoryachts, motorsailers, catamarans, trawlers, runabouts and more. "I really don't spend much time thinking of the past accomplishments of my career," he says. "I would rather think about the next designing and building adventure."

He may not like to define himself by numbers, but more than 1,200 of his designs have been built, 482 of them by his own yard. Currently, there are builds in Brazil and Russia, and his designs have been completed in Korea, Japan, Argentina, Chile, New Zealand, Australia, Iceland and Congo. In all, he's sold plans to builders in 90 countries.

One of his favorites is the Blue Fin 54, which he drew as a 48-footer, but stretched for a Russian who wanted to build it for himself. "That is the quintessential Northwest

go-to-Alaska boat," Devlin says. He flew to Stockholm, Sweden, to take it for a ride. "It had a nice presence on the water," Devlin said. "If I had the money, I would build that boat for myself."

The Blue Fin was powered by a diesel, but Devlin is power agnostic. Besides oars and sails, he's designed boats with inboards, outboards, pods and solar-electric drives. "We're flighty on the power thing," he says.

Even though he is old enough to collect social security and is still recovering from double-knee replacement surgery, Devlin is currently finishing two smaller boats. One is the Goose Lodge 22, an outboard-powered bay runner with a walkthrough windshield that is modeled after his Surf Runner design. The other is a small tugboat design that Devlin plans to use for a new business venture: towing and pushing things around Olympia's harbor.

The idea was born when he spotted a tug pulling a 45-foot Chris-Craft that was on the verge of sinking. When Devlin learned how much the tug operator had been paid for a day's work—\$6,500—he told his two adult sons that they might all be in the wrong business.

He had a tug hull lying around, so he and his four-man crew decided to finish it. The tug has a 110-hp Yanmar diesel, but Devlin says he might build a second tug using an old 3,200-pound Gardner diesel that would provide more pulling power. "It's a massive piece of iron that can swing up to a 38-inch screw," he says.

A 40-foot solar-electric catamaran is next on the build schedule, once again showing his desire to build something different.

"I'm starting to embrace my quirkiness," he says. "I don't want to build the same thing all the time. I love dancing around." —PVH