

The Apprenticeshop

By Grace Ombry

The Apprenticeshop in Rockland, Maine, teaches students decision-making skills, care, patience, forethought and responsibility through traditional boatbuilding. Instructors guide each apprentice through building two to four boats during a two-year apprenticeship.

The philosophy behind The Apprenticeshop is that learning is best accomplished through direct experience. Apprentices in this program learn craftsmanship and problem solving through each step of wooden boat construction from lofting, molds, framing, planking and decking to finish work and rigging.

Traditional carvel or lapstrake are the construction methods used most often at The Apprenticeshop. But many different construction methods and types of projects are usually going on side-by-side because the shop depends on commissions. This provides the apprentice crew opportunities to learn a wide range of skills and techniques.

The shop occasionally takes on restorations as well, but only after the staff evaluates them for their educational value.

Each week, students participate in “walk-around,” an exercise where they



The shop has a longstanding tradition: when an apprentice graduates, he nails his shoes to the wall, thereby leaving a piece of his soul.

Traditional carvel or lapstrake are the construction methods used most often at The Apprenticeshop. Students here are working on a traditional lapstrake dory.

observe, ask questions and share information about every project going on in the shop.

During apprenticeship, each student is assigned “beagleship” or full responsibility for some aspect of the shop community. The truck beagle must keep the shop truck in good running order, while the fastener beagle inventories and reorders screws, rivets, etc. so every boat project has what it needs.

Some apprentices arrive as complete novices, while others already have extensive experience in woodworking. Most are 18 to 40 years old, and graduate from this two-year program understanding a wide array of boat construction methods and confidence in problem solving. The shop has a longstanding tradition: when an apprentice graduates, he nails his shoes to the wall, thereby leaving a piece of his soul—or sole.

The Apprenticeshop has been in operation since 1972 and is one of the oldest traditional boat building schools in the US. Originally located in Bath, Maine, the shop moved in 1982 to the old Penobscot Boatworks shop in Rockport, Maine. ■

