



## *The Long-Lost Buzzards Bay 18*

**Most summers, regular contributor Kathy Mansfield visits her native USA. And most autumns she returns with a story about an old design which is new to – most – European eyes.**

*Photographs by the author, with build pictures by James Newton.*

**T**hat old boatbuilders' adage 'if a boat looks right, it is right,' turns out to be culturally adaptable. A beamy Danish spidsgatter looks right when her curves run clear and true, as does a British pilot cutter when her sheer is exactly right, and a Herreshoff 12½ when her quite complicated curves look perfectly simple. And even without a great deal of knowledge, when you see a boat that just isn't right, you know it instinctively. Of course it's always easier to see the faults. Just ask any politician.

The Buzzards Bay 18 is also right as soon as you see her, once you get used to her sharp bow. She's low and lean like a racing greyhound, topped by a very fine-looking gaff sailplan. She's actually a bit beamier than a Buzzards Bay 15, which gives her extra stability, enough displacement for auxiliary power – either diesel or electric – and space below for a couple of berths and some overnighting. Not a lot of space, mind you, there's only sitting headroom – but then she's so

beautiful you'll accept a bit of privation for that. From what I've learned of the owners of the two boats built so far, their yearning for a perfect wooden boat with good performance has been amply met.

No original example of the Buzzards Bay 18 survives. 'Captain Nat' Herreshoff designed the boat in 1903 and five of them were built that winter for the Beverly Yacht Club in Massachusetts. He had designed the Buzzards Bay 15 a few years earlier and had yet to design his variations on that theme, the Watch Hill 15 and the Newport 15. This new design was a fast, well-balanced centre-boarder, 18' (5.5m) on the waterline, 29' (8.8m) overall; as a comparison, the Buzzards Bay 15's LOA is 24'6" (7.5m). They are a product of their time of course, the short waterline length to fit racing rules but with long, arching overhangs to add length to that waterline for speed once they heel in the wind. Few modern designs can match the grace of those low, sleek hulls.

Alec Brainerd found the drawings for the design in the Herreshoff archives at the Hart Nautical Collections at MIT in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The boat is very much in the Herreshoff tradition, like a big yacht writ small. In size and shape she resembles the Sparkman & Stephens Dark Harbor 20, though her extra beam means she can be more than a daysailer. Resurrecting this dormant design seemed a worthwhile project, reintroducing to the world one of the most beautiful of this designer's smaller boats.

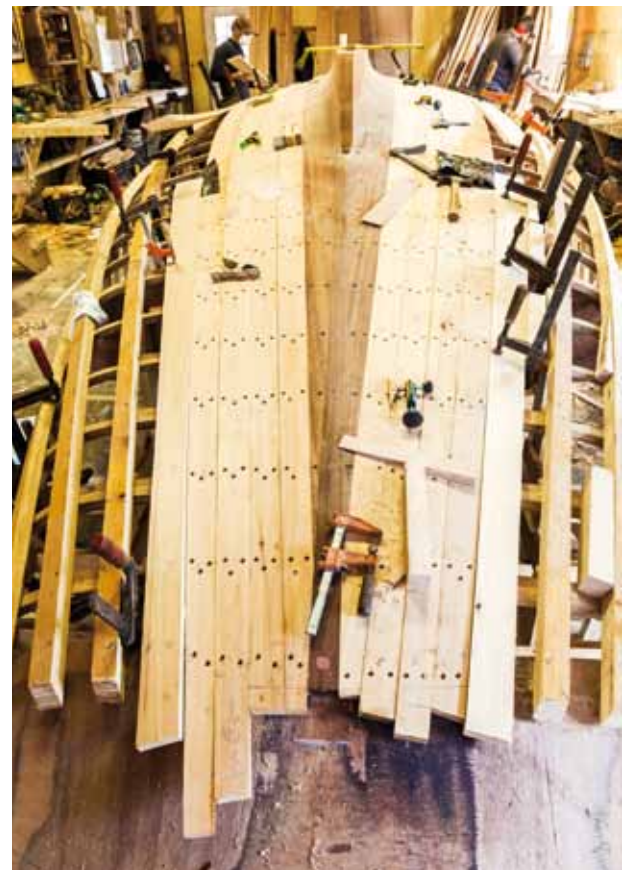
Alec has done well with his Artisan Boatworks. He opened in Rockport, Maine in 2002 after years of sailing the world on fine classic yachts, developing a penchant for perfection by maintaining these boats. He started by painting boat bottoms and varnishing canoe paddles when he was younger, and along the way learned seamanship, navigation, maintenance, boatbuilding and got his 100 ton Master's Licence. After completing a boatbuilding course he worked for five years at Rockport Marine and also for small boatbuilding shops with big projects, including a year in Auckland, New Zealand refitting a 100' wooden yawl. All this gave him an in-depth training in wooden boatbuilding and a taste for running his own business – and a realisation that after all his travels, the Maine coast still came tops. The full service business and the workforce has grown steadily, as has their reputation. Projects have included restorations and replicas and each new boat is custom built for the client using a wide range of wooden boatbuilding techniques.

### *Glued carvel construction*

Alec made some changes to the original drawings of the Buzzards Bay 18: he replaced the centreboard with a full ballast keel, as Herreshoff had done with one of his Buzzard Bay 15s and replaced the spruce mast with a carbon fibre one built by GMT Composites of Rhode Island, painted to look like the spruce boom and gaff. This allows the gaff rig to be sailed without running backstays. A Beta 14Hp inboard diesel is hidden below.

Artisan Boatworks have perfected glued carvel planking to give a flawless, watertight wooden hull with traditional detailing. "It's a method that works for planks up to 3/4" (20mm) thickness," explains Alec. "After that you should caulk the planks or double plank in two glued layers. With our glued carvel boats, the shape, width and thickness of the planks – as well as the frames and every other structural member – are exactly the same as the original boats were built; the only difference being that they are glued together with epoxy rather than caulked with cotton."

He uses Northern white cedar or its equivalent, dried to around 10% moisture content. That's important and perhaps not as simple in damper climates such as Britain's. "If it's not dry enough, the wood might shrink while under construction; it shouldn't be allowed to dry out more than when it was built." Few moulds are needed and plywood moulds become







**This page:** *The delight is in the details: running rigging led back to the compact unfussy cockpit; access to the low-slung cabin made easier by double louvred doors; and space for two berths and an inboard diesel below.*

**Facing page:** *James Newton's Uncas: easy to sail single-handed yet large enough to take out the grandchildren.*

bulkheads. Every third or fourth frame is laminated from oak and set up like a mould and the steamed oak frames are added in. The keel is laminated mahogany. Everything is epoxy glued together: the planks to each other and then glued and screw-fastened to the frames, the moulds and the rabbets. Any joints are scarfed and glued. All surfaces are then painted with a minimum of four coats of a single component paint, not using epoxy so that repairs further down the line are easier. And in the unlikely case that a plank splits, it can be carefully splined to look like new. It's essentially a watertight monocoque hull but with the traditional appearance of conventional carvel plank-on-frame. That creates an ambience in the cockpit and down below as important to the aesthetic appeal of the boat as the hull profile and the sailplan, in Alec's view.

*Herreshoff would surely approve...*

Two Buzzards Bay 18s are now sailing. I had admired the first a few years ago in the distance on a sunny late afternoon in Maine as it sailed past Deer Isle in Penobscot Bay. I had heard of Artisan Boatwork's wooden daysailers and at the time wondered if it was one of them, as I was completely won over. *Uncas* – named after the chief of the Mohican tribe in the James Fenimore Cooper novel *The Last of the Mohicans* – is owned by James Newton, who grew up in an industrial town hours from the ocean. He read all the classic sailing stories and novels and managed eventually to buy a used 22' (6.7m) GRP sloop and a 'how to' book of sailing. Finally in retirement, he and his wife decided they wanted a small wooden boat with a cockpit large enough for grandchildren that he could also sail



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*Sleek hull, low house, clean uncluttered decks; Josh Goldberg's Besherte on the town dock at Castine, Maine.*

on his own. And it had to be beautiful. "She is all we could wish for and then some," says James.

And then last summer I really did encounter a Buzzards Bay 18. *Besherte* was on the town dock at Castine, Maine: diminutive compared to the other boats there but with a classic simplicity that won me over. Her lines were razor sharp and every detail seemed carefully constructed, never overdone, just right. Owner Josh Goldberg told me of their delight and also of her name: connecting with his Lithuanian Jewish heritage, it has a multi-faceted meaning in the range of 'meant to be' or 'God given.' It works, and meets with the approval of Sarah, his writer/poet partner who is learning to take the helm. Josh too did not come from a sailing family, but had an uncle by marriage who taught him to recognise the small classic craft of Maine. He made the momentous decision to commission a Buzzards Bay 18 two weeks before the 2008 crash and had to cancel but five years later managed to return. As we talked a light wind sprung up, and somehow we managed a sail – we couldn't resist – before the Classic Boat Symposium of wooden boatbuilders.

And what a pleasure that sail was... stepping into the cockpit, feeling the boat come alive as we hoisted sails and headed out. She is manageable by one person under a

wide range of wind and sea conditions. The full length jib boom makes tacking easy. The tiller – personally designed by Herreshoff – is the most delicate of Herreshoff tillers, with a spherical knob held with two fingers under most conditions. The boat tracks like a yacht, tacks like a yacht, thanks to the keel and is as fast and stiff as our expectations. And the subtle detailing of frames, bench legs, hatch doors and deck add to the experience. Sadly, however, Josh has made another momentous decision and is putting his *Besherte* on the market through Artisan Boatworks.

An updated Buzzards Bay 18, called the Artisan 30 or A 30, is the result of a request for a spirit of tradition boat for a client. The naval architects Stephens Waring were asked to develop a concept with a fin keel and high aspect Bermudan rig. The new design has those graceful overhangs and knuckle bow but is also trailable with a high performance underbody, foiled bulb keel, roller-furling self-tacking jib and an optional asymmetric spinnaker. I can't help feeling that Herreshoff, always keen to adopt new ideas, would surely approve.

### *Contacts*

Artisan Boatworks: [www.ArtisanBoatworks.com](http://www.ArtisanBoatworks.com)  
 Stephens Waring Yacht Design: [www.stephenswaring.com](http://www.stephenswaring.com)

*Buzzards Bay 18 Specification*

LOA: 29' (8.8m)  
 LWL: 18' (5.5m)  
 Beam: 8'1" (2.4m)  
 Displ: 4430 lbs (2009 kg)  
 Sail area: 472' sq.ft (43.8m<sup>2</sup>)