The Advantages of Building Small Craft
I love all types of wooden boats, but small craft 12 to 20 feet in length have always held a special appeal for me as a boat designer and builder. There are some very distinct advantages to building boats in this size range: 1) They can be constructed in a relatively small space (like a garage), 2) The costs of construction are reasonable and much lower than those of larger boats, 3) They are generally light in weight, and 4) They can be built in a reasonably short time. If you’re anything like me, you want to get it built and be out on the water within a few months at most.

Design Goals for This Boat
When I started planning the design that eventually became the Wanderer Skiff, I was focused on three inter-related goals: portability, good performance, and ease-of-construction. I wanted to create a watercraft light enough for two people to lift on and off a small boat trailer and carry right down to the water’s edge. (Nice to be able to bypass the “queue” of rocket boats at the ramp). It also had to be both a good rowing and sailing boat, with no debilitating compromises in either area. And finally, it had to be easy-to-build, within the reach of anyone with basic carpentry skills.

Good Performance
Wanderer’s hull was carefully designed to optimize the twin functions of rowing and sailing. Most of us prefer one over the other, but I wanted this boat to have “multi-function” appeal and be an able craft on either count. As one example of the blending of hull characteristics, a relatively narrow beam was retained to aid rowing, but the hull bottom was made as wide as practicable to prevent excessive tenderness under sail. (Sitting right on the bottom of the boat while under sail is recommended to lower the center of gravity and enhance stability.) And an added bonus of the lightweight construction is the minimal effort required to move the hull along, either by muscle or wind power.

As for the sail rig, the gaff mainsail with jib is modestly sized to be easily manageable and a 24” reef is specified for rough weather. The mast, yard, and boom fol-
low the structural and aesthetic theme of the hull—light, strong, and functional, and showcase the natural beauty of wood. The entire sail rig and the oars fit inside the hull.

**Portable & Easy to Build**

I decided on stitch-and-glue construction from the start, knowing this method would help me create a boat that was both easy to build and transport. Utilizing high quality marine plywood, fiberglass cloth, and epoxy resin, I knew I could create a light, very strong hull that would be perfect for the intended use. The simplicity of this method and the rapid progress it makes possible meant I could build and use the boat within one season.

**On the Water**

Taking a new design out on the water for the first time is an exhilarating, almost transcendent experience for me. I recently took Wanderer to one of Arizona’s most scenic lakes, Theodore Roosevelt, for a water trial. What with the blistering July heat (104°), power boat exhaust and wakes, and lack of significant breeze, the conditions were a bit less than ideal. However, I consider the trial a success and was pleased with the overall performance of the boat. A slight bit of hull tendency was noted, but disappeared as the heel angle exceeded about 10-15 degrees. Then the hull became quite resistant to further heeling as more pressure was applied, no doubt due to the shape of the hull section, with a second chine located between the lower chine and sheer. Wanderer moved easily under oars, and I was surprised at how much distance I covered in just a few minutes of leisurely rowing. As aforementioned, the wind was lackluster, but the rig functioned as designed and the boat moved along without any problems. I received a pleasant surprise when I knelt on the aft seat to set the rudder in place; the trim of the boat did not change dramatically and I felt totally secure, even leaning over the transom. A non-skid surface on the aft seat would be a plus, though, as varnished surfaces get mighty slippery when wet. One item I completely forgot about was a plug for the daggerboard slot—it could have prevented the entry of a gallon of Roosevelt Lake into the boat as I rowed along! I am planning a return trip soon for another test, when the forecast is for stronger wind. I’m looking forward to seeing what she can really do under sail.

**The Plans**

If you decide to build Wanderer and purchase the plan set, you will receive seven 24 x 36” detail sheets, a photo-illustrated building manual containing step-by-step instructions, and full-sized patterns for most of the boat components. I do not use conventional offset tables to loft the hull panels, as I feel the transfer of dimensions is laborious and prone to mistakes. On my layout diagrams the dimension is shown in its exact location on the panel in question. If problems are encountered, you can always reach me by e-mail, which I do my best to answer promptly. I wish all of you builders, new and old, best of luck on your Wanderer construction project and would love to see pictures of the finished boats, on the water or off.—WB

**Study plans available as a free download at the SCA website store. Complete plans $99 plus $5 s/h available at www.Small-CraftAdvisor.com or 800-979-1930.**

Bill has been paddling and sailing since he was a teenager in the Lakes Region of New Hampshire, where water was never far away. His interest in boats and boatbuilding has grown over the years, resulting in the construction of a number of small boats and eventually a study of Small Craft Naval Architecture through Westlawn School of Marine Technology and CAD Yacht Design through MacNaughton School of Yacht Design, both of Eastport, Maine.

In 2006 he began an intensive self-navigated effort to combine classic small craft aesthetics with modern construction methods. That endeavor resulted in a catalog of new designs which are just now being built and the plans offered for sale. Nomadic Sailcraft, LLC was recently organized to present Bill’s plans to the general public.