

# Grand Designs

Back in the 80s, designer Andrew Wolstenholme collaborated with master boatbuilder Jack Chippendale to launch the Sprite, an elegant kit-built rowing skiff.

Sitting on my office bookshelf in its faded dust jacket is a copy of John Leather's *Sail and Oar*, which I bought soon after it was published in 1982. For many years it had pride of place at the end of the shelf so that I could enjoy the evocative cover picture of a pretty double-ender becalmed off Vancouver Island.

This wonderful book introduced an eclectic mix of fascinating small boats which most other books ignored and provided plenty of inspiration for a young designer. Back then, I had been thinking of designing and building a rowing boat to get some exercise and my thinking gelled when I saw the chapter with boats built by Arthur Martin at Martin Marine including his Appledore Pod and Alden Ocean Shell. I began to understand the sliding seat recreational rowing boats which were then growing in popularity in the USA and I felt sure that this was a kind of boating which would also find favour in the UK and Europe.

I had already worked with the late Jack Chippendale on other projects, so I took my book and thoughts over to see if he would be interested in developing a kit. The result of that meeting was to become Sprite. My sketches were for a single chine double ender but Jack pointed out that a double chine hull would be simpler to build as there is less twist in the bottom panels and when my old boss Leslie Landamore saw my drawings, he suggested that she would look better with a small transom.

Such is the way that designs can evolve. Jack and I spent many hours in his cosy little office working through construction ideas on his blackboard, striving towards an elegant design that would be simple for amateurs to build and of which they could be proud. The resulting design is, I believe, as simple and pure in design terms as we can get, with no unnecessary components. Several of our construction details have been taken up on other builders' designs – but then that's how boatbuilding evolves with builders and designers seeing ideas on other craft and adapting and maybe improving them on their own boats.

The stitch-and-tape construction uses 4mm ( $\frac{3}{16}$ " ) marine plywood over 9mm ( $\frac{3}{8}$ " ) ply frames. There is no jig: she is simply stitched to the five frames; frames 2 and 4 have extended tops which act as feet during the build when she is upside down. When completed the tops of these frames are removed as are frames 1 and 5 which are temporary. There is no internal gunwale – or inwale – allowing the frames to be simply filleted to the inside of the hull right up to the sheer. Accuracy in the

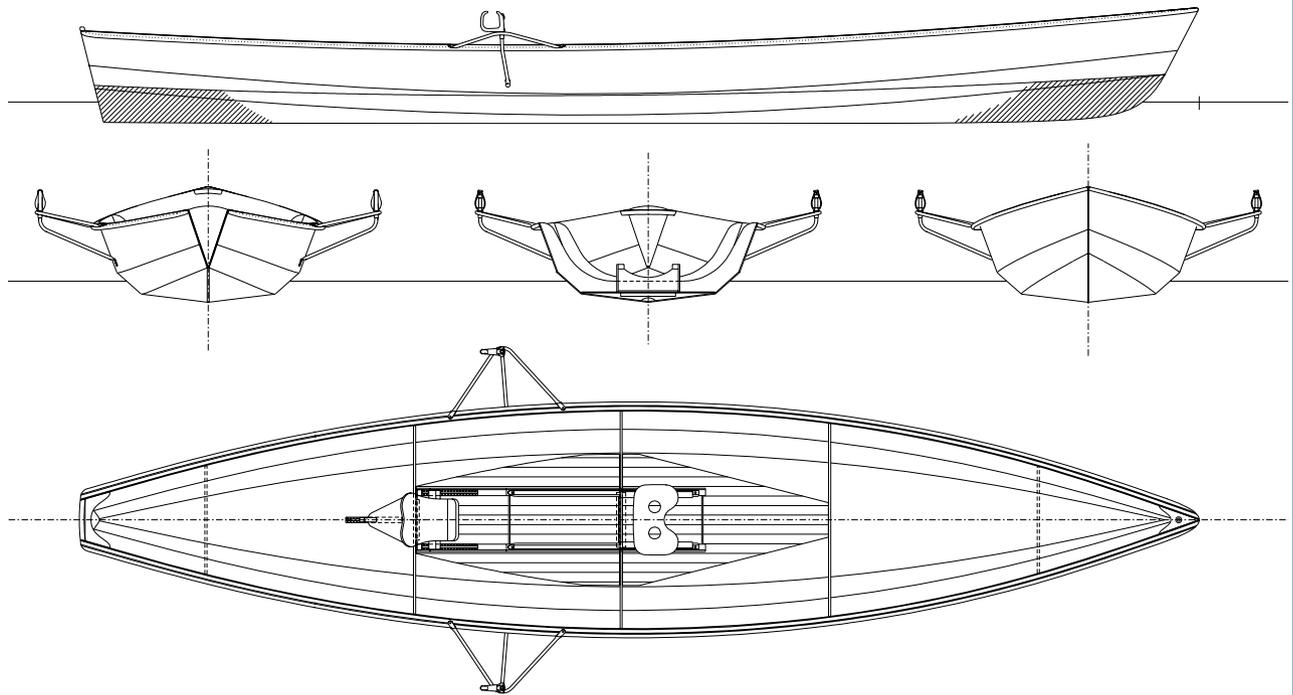
shape of the hull panels is critical as this determines the shape and fairness of the hull. The 'glass scarph' which Jack developed for the Fireball is used to scarph the hull panels to full length – rather than a conventional overlapping scarph the joint is put together bevel edge to bevel edge – keeping that edge the thickness of a single veneer to clearly define it – and the open shallow vee filled with layers of glass mat and resin. This is a simple joint for an amateur and results in a clean line on the external side suitable for a bright finish.

The finished boat is light and easy to row, tracks well and is forgiving for the novice. And I like to think that she is pretty. I have never capsized mine and am unaware of one having ever tipped over although surely someone must have. She exceeds hull speed effortlessly and is a revelation to people not used to sliding seat rowing. Soon after she was built I took mine over to Ireland and was delighted with her performance on the choppy waters of Lough Derg, slicing through waves upwind and surfing downwind without taking on a drop of water.

We went into Sprite with ideas that she could have a removable aft seat and a centre fixed thwart as well as the removable sliding seat unit and my prototype was tried with these but we soon concluded that we were better just to have her as a single person sliding seat skiff. We also went into the project knowing nothing about sliding seat sculling, as it should be termed and had quite a learning curve there. Jack was keen that the sliding seat unit should be removable and ideally kit built – partly to reduce weight for car topping and partly for maintenance. This worked well although I never remove my seat unit for transport. Simple riggers are bolted to the gunwale and the topside panel.

Jack sold a reasonable number of kits but recreational rowing has never taken off in the UK as well as we hoped that it might. He had played such a large part in Sprite's development I suggested that she should only be sold through him as a kit or as a completed boat.

With the demise of Chippendale Boats – and subsequently Seabird Boats – I have decided to produce a set of drawings and make plans available for scratch builders in the hope of getting more Sprites on the water. For those who would prefer to build from pre-cut parts as we originally intended, Jordan Boats can supply CNC-cut plywood components and is prepared to produce full kits if the interest warrants.



### SPRITE ROWING SKIFF SPECIFICATION

LOA: 15'5" (4.7M)

BEAM OVER RUBBERS: 3'3" (0.99M)

BEAM OVER RIGGERS: 4'9" (1.45M)

### DESIGN & PLANS

[WWW.WOLSTENHOLMEDESIGN.COM](http://WWW.WOLSTENHOLMEDESIGN.COM)

### CNC-CUT PARTS & KITS

[WWW.JORDANBOATS.CO.UK](http://WWW.JORDANBOATS.CO.UK)

