

Building of an Ohio Sharpie *Steve Brookman*

“Nice boat, did you build her?” At the boat ramps and on the water, Vika, our 19' Ohio Sharpie draws attention to herself. Put some oiled wood on a classic design and you get some strokes. While I have to admit to a bit of swagger when she is being admired by onlookers, I cringe a bit too, seeing the 101 flaws that indicate she really was built by an amateur. That being me.



With few tools and not much wood working experience, almost every aspect of building the sharpie was a challenge, since every step was a first time effort. I had ordered Reuel Parker's plans and his Sharpie Book after reading Mike O'Brien's review in *WoodenBoat* magazine. I locked on the comment that sharpies were suitable for a first time builder. We'll see about that.

The frames were lofted from the table of offsets. My first challenge was to find suitable wood. I quickly discovered that you don't find it at the big box stores. A local lumber yard had Douglas Fir, but even marine plywood had to be special ordered. Parker says not to fret too much about the wood and use what you can find as it is a “garage sharpie” not a yacht. Maybe a little fretting is good as I realized that I didn't want to be sailing in a boat made out of the select pine I used for the first few frames. Scratch that idea and back to the internet to search for more suitable wood. As luck would have it I found a sawmill just a few miles away complete with drying sheds full of white oak, black locust and ash: a boat builder's dream.

Having a nearby sawmill with the right wood for the project was great. It was, however, rough cut and it didn't take long to realize that going after it with a belt sander was neither fun nor efficient. An investment in a Dewalt planer upped the budget for the project but magically transformed the boards. The flimsy pine was soon replaced with hefty white oak.



My skill at cutting the thick oak with a jig saw with any precision was not impressive. Next I was on Craig's List and a very used Delta 14” bandsaw joined us and I now felt that I had a real shop. I couldn't help but think how nice those frames would have been if that bandsaw had showed up earlier.

Parker's plans provide the side and bottom panel layouts and butt blocking the plywood kept it quick and simple. The transom was glued up with 2 pieces of 1/2” marine ply. I made what I later read in John Brook's book is a classic beginner's mistake by miscutting the bevel. (Remember next time: wet side smaller) After some cursing and fussing, I decided to hang it in place anyway and actually liked the look of the finer stern.

The rudder and center board were glued up from 2x6 Douglas Fir and attacked with a power plane. What a wonderful tool that is! I acquired some 30# ingots of lead which in a previous life held down scenery for plays on Broadway. The thickness was the perfect size to fit into a cutout on the board which saved me from melting it and dealing with the noxious fumes. Both were covered with 1/4” ply, xynole polyester cloth and sealed with epoxy.



The same cloth and epoxy were used on the hull exterior and everything was primed with a 2 part

epoxy sealer. The xynole-polyester cloth is great to work with compared to fiberglass, but it does suck up epoxy. The gooping and fairing with thickened epoxy was not the most enjoyable part and since the cloth could have been laid better, it was a lot of work to get it even to an acceptable amateur level. The slot for the CB was cut close to where it needed to be and the turnover was accomplished with a chain hoist and help from my wife, Susan.



Quarter inch ply made up the deck, covered with X-P cloth and with one coat of epoxy it did a good simulation of canvas. The deck set off the sheer and I had to step back and admire her lines, she was looking like...a boat! Black locust was used for the thwarts, stern sheets, sheer strake and trim. It was a pleasant surprise when I oiled the wood. Cutting the black locust had filled the shop with fine yellow sawdust but when it was rubbed with tung oil it took on a lustrous golden sheen: American Teak!

Another pleasant surprise was discovering that the sail plan for this design was in the database on the SailRite website. Susan volunteered to give sewing a suite of sails a go so they were ordered and I began working on what would be the sticks to support them. I ripped and glued 18' and 20' lengths from 2x8 lumberyard DF, and sandwiched a 1" slice of spruce to get the required 3" thickness. While Susan was sewing I was shaping. The unstayed spars are designed to be round so they can rotate, and mine were round, in places anyway.



I followed Pete Culler's advice on making "boat oil," snotters, even tallow. Ah, the smell of turps and pine tar! Now we're talking, or least smelling, boat shop. I had purchased some stainless steel cleats but they didn't look right and since I was really enjoying working with the locust that's what I used for the thumb, jamb, and line cleats. The plans didn't call for them, but she really needed floorboards. I had just enough black locust left to make them.

Interlux white for the topside, Hatteras off-white for the deck, a mix for the interior, and red porch paint for the bottom and we were about ready to see if she would float. With "VIKA" painted on her stern, she sat proudly on her newly assembled Trailex trailer as she was readied for her first launch.

Although I still was not convinced at this stage that I hadn't built some expensive firewood, I discovered that I didn't have to step too far back to be pretty proud of her, 101 flaws and all. Yes, I did build her.

