



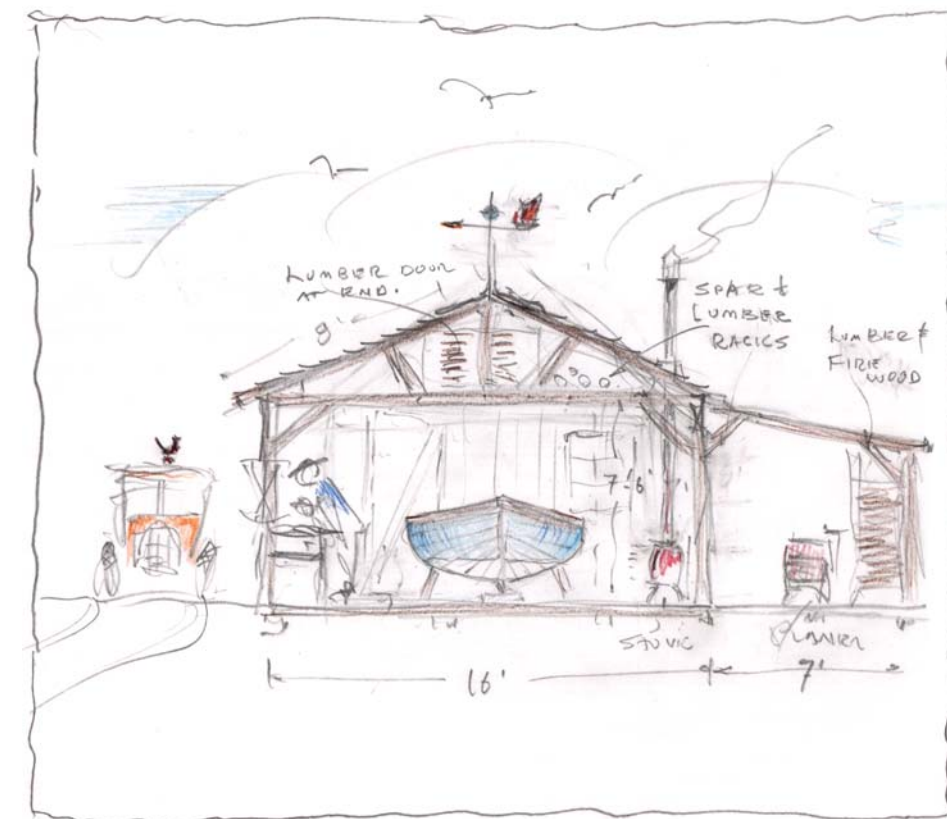
THE MAKING OF
TOM CAT

A FATHOM WIDE
BY TWO-PLUS
FATHOMS LONG

BY WILLIAM GARDEN
FOREWORD BY MAYNARD BRAY

THE MAKING OF TOM CAT

A FATHOM WIDE, TWO-PLUS LONG, AND HALF A FATHOM DEEP



BY WILLIAM GARDEN



WoodenBoat Books

FOREWORD

“Our yachts are toy boats—the glint on a lovely brief bubble of time. A boat’s importance as an escape from reality, as a change of pace, as a theme for reflection, and as an art form, gives it value.”

—From William Garden’s book *Yacht Designs II*

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THERE’S NO ONE I know who likes to draw boats more than Bill Garden. A blank sheet of paper never fails to excite him for its creative possibilities. Over the course of his 86 years, Bill has filled thousands of blank sheets with every type and size of boat imaginable—from sailing canoes to ocean racers and from miniature tugboats to high-speed megayachts.

Most of my generation got to know the name William Garden through *The Rudder* or *Yachting* magazines where his designs of the 1940s and 1950s showed up in nearly every issue. Each boat was so handsome and depicted with such warmth and clarity that it would set you to dreaming. You could see yourself as the happy and contented pipe-smoking, sou’wester-clad skipper that Bill often showed at the helm. Or the guy who just finished painting the bottom of his grounded-out boat in one of Bill’s perspective renderings. All this took place back when boats were simple and moderate-to-small in size, and the designs as Bill drew them made lots of sense. Seiners, tugboats, salmon trollers, and gill-netters as well as pleasure boats showed up on those pages, and I wasn’t alone in seeking out each new issue as it arrived at the local library. Inspiration just leapt off those pages and into our memories!

More than that, those magazines played a major role helping that young and talented designer establish a reputation and attract a devoted following.

A Canadian by birth, Bill’s family moved to Seattle via Portland, Oregon, in 1928 when Bill was 10 years old. In Seattle, he found himself surrounded by wooden boats of all kinds and sizes—and took full advantage of

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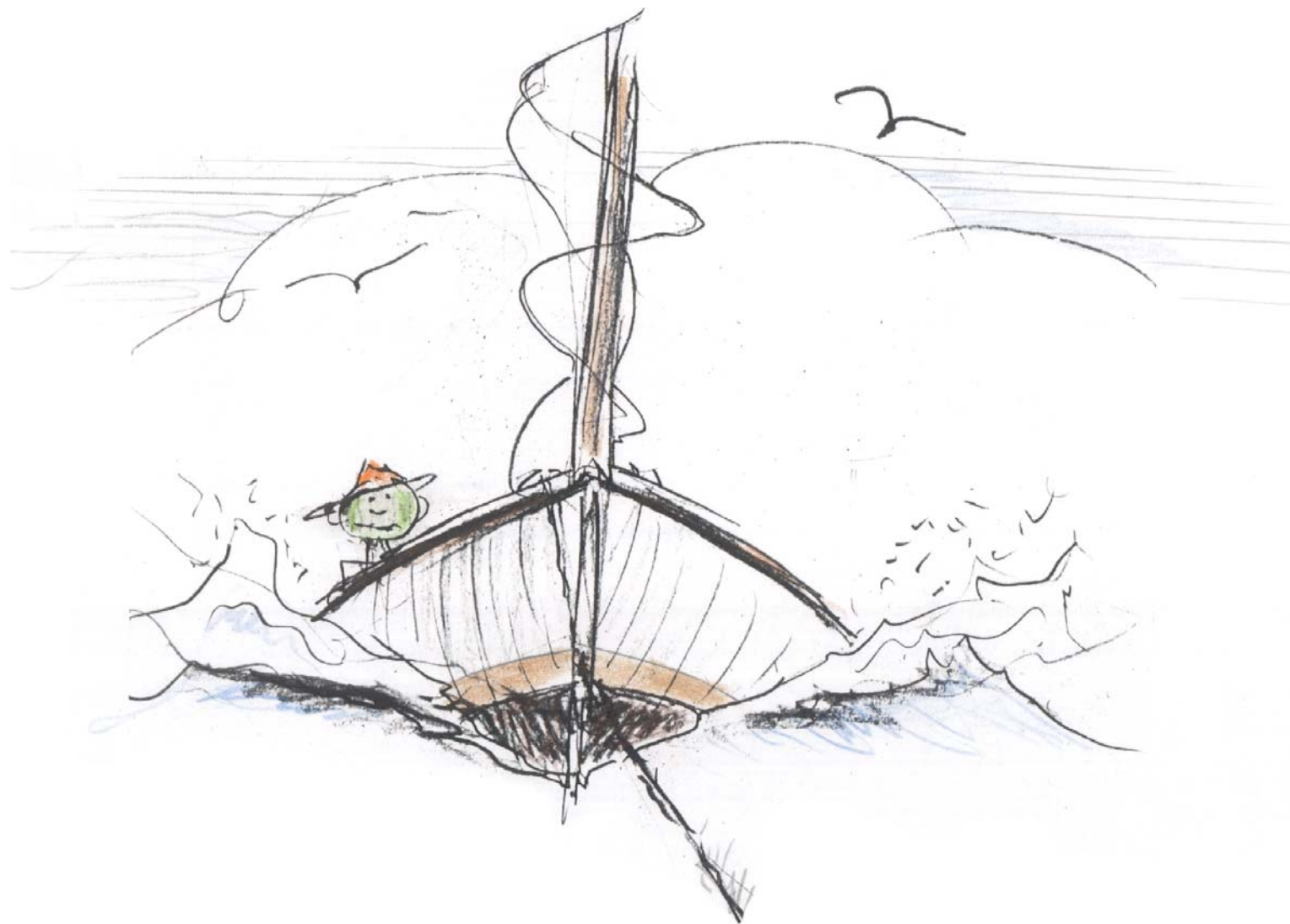
that wonderful environment. Money was scarce, but resourcefulness prevailed, and he and his chum John Adams found endless ways to mess around with small boats—converting whatever craft happened to be available so it would sail and they could go cruising. For them, life was nothing but swell in those early years, and full of adventure despite the Great Depression.

After graduation from high school in 1935 Bill signed on with the brand-new Edison Boatbuilding School, as enrollee number five,

to study under respected Scottish boatbuilder J. B. Chambers. There he learned hands-on construction as well as theory. Following theory, he began designing boats professionally in 1938 at age 20, and a glance through his two books, *Yacht Design* and *Yacht Design II*, clearly shows Bill's amazing diversity. Throughout his career, Bill has built and owned boats—lots of them—but he still finds the small ones totally consuming.

Working professionally on occasion, but mostly filling his days now with pleasurable boat-related activity, Bill Garden lives on a fairytale island called Toad's Landing near Sidney, British Columbia, where his design

office has been located since he moved back to Canada 35 years ago. Among his recent activities, he designed, then built with his own hands, the first Tom Cat (named *Catspaw*) which he's tweaked to perfection. At 12'6", she's a dear little boat and one that we trust will provide the same level of joyous engagement for you as she has for Bill Garden.



HOW IT ALL BEGAN

BACKGROUND

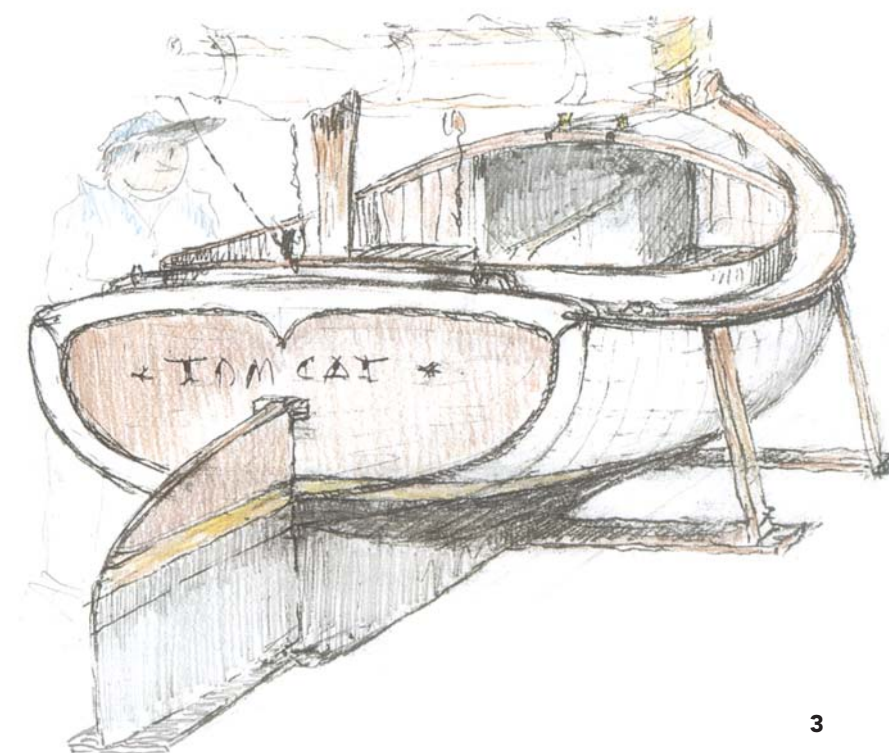
SOME THREE OR FOUR years ago, our neighbor Dennis Kranz was having such good fun daysailing his jib-and-mainsail dinghy in the cove off our island that he inspired us to put our old sailing peapod back afloat to join in these short afternoon sails. Three minutes to get underway for a quick sail outmatches the 20 or 30 minutes it took to have our schooner off the dock to pick up what often proved to be a fickle breeze. So, after a bit, we also rigged up our 14' clinker-built skiff *Neverdun* with a daggerboard and a sprit-rigged mainsail and jib to add another member to the local daysailing fleet.

*Three minutes to get underway
for a quick sail outmatches the
20 or 30 minutes it took to have
our schooner off the dock...*

These small boats—about the minimum that one can climb aboard and sail off in—are bung-up with charm. They're the next size up from sailing pond models, but here, aside from standing on deck and gripping a shroud for a sweep of the horizon, we can emulate Stuart Little in a small boat that one can actually hop into, donning a ribboned sailor hat, set up the sprit or hoist away on the halyard, and then, with the mainsheet trimmed, bear off for that wonderful feeling as the sail fills, and the bow wave starts its chuckle, and the wee boat comes to life.

Certainly, tacking up a wooded shoreline on a fresh morning breeze in an open sailboat must be one of the all-time highs for the dedicated waterman. First we head off with an inshore tack with a lovely shoreline to contemplate as we work up along the beach, then over to the offshore tack with its great sweep of horizon ahead. Maybe starboard-tack a duck or accomplish some other brave deed; then, with the peak *just right* for a perfect set of the sail, off it is around the headland on a great close reach as she slides along at the three knots that feels like eight.

During a couple of summers of sailing these dinghies, our thoughts turned toward what might be an ideal small sailing boat for our summer's light-weather area here in the Gulf Islands off Canoe Cove, British Columbia. Some sort of boat with elbow room for two, and light to handle. She'd be an unballasted centerboarder with a non-fouling rudder for



sliding through the prevalent kelp patches off our island, which we call Toad's Landing (see *WoodenBoat* magazine Nos. 60 and 166); all this plus a high ratio of sail area to wetted surface to ensure a good drifter. A little catboat seemed to suit these particulars and brought to mind the 12' Beetle Cat (see WB Nos. 51–53), which looked to be ideal for the young and limber.

So it came to pass that all sorts of Beetle data was exhumed, and Dennis was off on a Beetle hunt to replace his jib-and-mainsail boat. But we seemed to be a Beetle-free coast. Lots of dead-end leads were chased down, and then other island neighbors also got steamed up Beetle-wise. So the search turned eastward to the thick of catboat country, New England, where Maynard Bray helped Dennis find two Beetle Cats to ship west. Beetle #1812, named *Overture*, was one. The other, in better shape and needing only a normal cosmetic cleanup, was renamed *Top Cat*—although *Overture* thought this a bit much. With a couple of little orphan Beetles scheduled to come west the following spring, we decided to work up plans for a Beetle-sized catboat of our own to build here at Toad's Landing over the winter—a boat with raised seating, for more comfort. (The leg cramps generated from sitting on the floorboards can

take the sparkle out of a good sail.) Although this was the number one requirement, the following considerations also came to mind for the design of Tom Cat:

- A high sail area-to-wetted surface ratio, at least matching that of a Beetle.
- A tumblehome stem with a slightly hollow waterline to best work through our short chop or summertime powerboat wake.
- Some exposed keel for beaching and directional stability with the centerboard raised.
- A non-fouling barn-door rudder with end plates for a real bite when broad-reaching in a breeze.
- A hole through the stem at waterline height for towing without broaching and overturning.
- Freeboard enough for a dry boat and to allow for the cockpit seats.
- An under-deck stowage area for life jackets, picnic basket, and miscellaneous gear.

So the design was worked up and construction went on as time allowed and winter turned to spring. But still no sign of *Top Cat* and *Overture*. At last the long wait ended. The month of June saw an 18-wheeler come rolling down the road to Canoe Cove after a hard voyage westbound across Canada with a big

sailboat onboard and two small Beetles poked under its bilge—an indignity furthered by the Beetles having ridden the whole weary distance stern-first. There was much to do in putting things shipshape, and then a get-together on shore at Toad's Landing to welcome the immigrant Beetles to our waters, complete with a barbecue and speeches to put them at ease. Here's the welcoming speech:

“Beetle lore tells us that some four score years ago there was born on the far-off New England shore a small catboat, conceived by Elder Beetle and dedicated to the proposition that the time had come to create from a small pile of lumber and canvas the most possible fun to be had for boys and girls of all ages, a boat within the least practical dimensions that would furnish accommodations for a crew of four, or for singlehanding, while giving pleasure and a chuckle to all who beheld her small, rotund, pancake-like form.

“We are come on this auspicious occasion to welcome to Western waters two small immigrant Beetles. Wee cats with the courage and audacity to make the long, arduous passage over what must have been a seemingly endless portage, buoyed up by the hope of a friendly welcome from their airman mariner sponsor, who we must now applaud... [pause

for heavy applause]... who also through the kindness of his heart and deep pockets... [more applause, whistles, and foot stamping]... caused to have his own Beetle accompanied by a small older sister, who, despite being in need of boatyard attention, had bravely faced the awesome westbound transit. [Pause for crowd and applause to settle down.]

“We are fortunate to have these newcomers sailing in our Western waters, bleak I'm sure, and strange without a fleet of fellow Beetles bobbing happily nearby. But I trust that the new young gaffer soon to be laancht... [Downeast pronunciation here to give the Beetles a feeling of security]... will help ease homesickness. Soon the little cats will go scunning along our island shores in a nice flag-snappin' breeze, with the travails of the past long forgotten. [Cheers, some claps and sobs.]

“Three cheers and hats in air.” [Heavy cheering while we do the crowd for handclaps and back-slaps. One chap of literary bent remarked, “You girls done good on that awesome transit bit.”]

