



Dick Hancock, left, and Richard Davis, who teach canoe-building at the Tennessee School for the Deaf, sharpened their boatbuilding skills.



Rosen tested his new boat at a nearby pond and found it easy to paddle and, more important, watertight.

of boatbuilders. Groups and families of nearly any size are welcome; each group builds its own boat and hauls it away at the end of the class.

Tuition charges are per boat, rather than per person, making the classes an especially good value for larger groups.

Our classmates, Richard Davis and Dick Hancock, who teach canoe-building at the Tennessee School for the Deaf, had driven over from Knoxville to add some new skills to their boatbuilding repertoire.

When the four of us assembled at the Weinerts' classroom, we found as attractive an instructional space as anyone could hope for: an open, sheltered area next to a stately barn, with roosters crowing nearby and a farm pond glimmering just down the hill.

Karl Weinert is a boatbuilder with a lifetime of experience. At 12, to his mother's chagrin, he built an 8-foot dinghy in the family dining room (and in the process, found it necessary to nail his sawhorses to the dining

room floor).

As an adult, Weinert spent 15 years building multimillion-dollar luxury yachts in Pompano Beach, Fla.

After moving to a farm in the Gainesville area, the Weinerts developed an interest in agritourism and decided to combine their love of rural living with their passion for boats.

A couple of years ago, after a long search, they found just the spot: a roughly 200-acre farm in Big Sandy, just a few miles from the Tennessee River and a bit

south of Land Between the Lakes. There they started up the Tennessee Boat School.

Karl Weinert talks about wooden boats with an almost evangelical passion. It's not that other materials can't make fine boats, he says, but "a wooden boat just feels alive in the water. It has a natural grace that's unlike anything else."

His teaching style is efficient, methodical, calm and adaptable to folks with different skill levels. After a short safety lecture from Debi, Karl got us started.

Major parts of the boat (sides, bottom and the stem and stern) had already been cut from plywood and oak, so our task was essentially to assemble a large kit.

But this was no simple kit, with numbered instructions. For folks like us who weren't quite sure what a bevel was — let alone how to create a compound bevel, so that multiple pieces of wood come together at multiple angles to create a tight-fitting joint — it was an intimidating pile of wood.

But over the course of the day, using only hand tools (except for our cordless drill and a router, with which Karl trimmed around the edge of the hull) we bent plywood around frames, calculated more than one compound bevel, coaxed dimensional lumber into long, gentle

BUILD YOUR OWN

Tennessee Boat School
► 1327 Prince Road, Big Sandy, Tenn.

Classes

► Offered monthly through the year.

Cost

► Tuition for the one-day pirogue class is \$350, plus tax. Tuition for the two-day Bevin's skill class is \$895, plus tax. The price is per boat, not per person, and includes the cost of materials and instruction. Individuals, couples and groups are welcome. The completed boat can be hauled away on a cartop.

Information

► Visit www.tennesseeboatschool.com; email info@tennesseeboatschool.com; or call (730) 584-2003.

Louisville Boatbuilding Society

► Loose confederation of wooden-boat enthusiasts led by founder Mitch Larsen works intermittently on collaborative boatbuilding projects.

Information

► <https://louisville.org/lbs>

curves, drilled pilot holes in hard slabs of oak, drove dozens of bronze nails in odd and inconvenient directions, clamped and glued (using a quick-curing adhesive that can be plunged immediately into water), sweated and cursed (well, just a bit, and always under our breaths), measured and sawed, and planed and planed and planed.

And eventually, that intimidating pile of wood began to take shape as a gracefully curved hull.

Though Weinert didn't hover over us, it seemed that he was always nearby when we were at a tough juncture.

The secret of good teaching is to anticipate the spots that are likely to ensnare students. And whenever some step was a bit beyond our comprehension, Karl or Debi invariably showed up to do a bit of show and tell or give us some verbal instructions.

By 6:30, when the last seat had been installed and the final triangular deck nailed into place, it was clear that we'd accomplished the impossible: With our own sweat and hands, we'd built a boat. In one day.

And as the sun raced toward the horizon, we launched it on that beckoning pond and found that it was nimble, easy to paddle and utterly watertight.

Now, about that 35-foot, ocean-going sloop. ...