



Besides building beautiful boats, Karl also restores old cars. He and wife, Debi, both enjoy this fully restored Chevy.



A cordless drill is one of the only power tools used at the boat school.

near your source of income, you can always bring it to you.

So three years ago, they started the Tennessee Boat School, which allows students to finish the course in one or two days. During the one-day session, students build a 15-foot-long canoe, called a pirogue. Students in the two-day school build a 12-foot-long rowboat, called a Bevins skiff.

"I thought we could attract more people if they didn't have to commit much time," says Karl. His hunch proved right. Students have created 50 boats at the ranch, with no signs of the business slowing. Next Karl and Debi plan to add a bed-and-breakfast to their enterprise. Future students will not only learn the art of boatbuilding, they'll also enjoy the serenity of the secluded farm.

A Day in the Life

Building a boat in such a short interval requires long days. Watching your boat slowly transform from lumber to a curvy, functional craft makes the time seem irrelevant.

The day begins with Karl and Debi discussing the logistics of the pro-

gram. Then Karl launches into the essence of wood boatbuilding—the tools. His philosophy reflects that of a long lineage of boatbuilders: Take care of your tools, and they will take care of you.

Karl uses power tools sparingly. He believes new boatbuilders learn more by feeling the effects their tools have on the wood. "Power tools may make some things easier and certainly faster," says Karl, "but they rarely make them better."

With a crowd of boatbuilders intensely working, the only sound is that of the scraping of a hand plane on a piece of wood or the tapping of iron on bronze. The end result is a beautiful and (hopefully) functional handcrafted boat—and a very soothing experience.

The work begins with Karl showing the first step—gluing the oak stem to the plywood sides. Throughout the rest of the class, he walks around giving pointers to the students, still allowing us to do the actual work. With the inevitable mistakes of first-time boatbuilders, Karl often repeats his favorite phrase: "You've left room for glue." He then further explains that a

good boatwright never leaves room for glue.

After a busy morning, the major pieces are in place, and my pile of wood actually looks like a boat. During the next day and a half, my work slows as details become important. I cut and screw in stringers and install seats. Then there's sanding. And sanding. And more sanding. Did I mention sanding?

The Big Moment

After all the sanding is done and the final touches are in place, students are ready for the christening launch of their boats. We load our vessels on Karl's trailer and proceed in a slow parade to the lake. After giving a brief description about basic rowing techniques and outfitting everyone with life vests, Karl helps us gingerly slide our crafts into the pond.

My heart skips a few beats as the water creeps up the sides of my boat. Did I use enough caulk? My mind races. Did I remember to put all those nails in the bottom? Judging by Karl's success rate for floating boats—100%—he possesses an in-