

Adrian Morgan



Building by numbers

Adrian constructs his first faering... the not-so-traditional way

Who'd be daft enough to build a faering in any way other than the traditional Norwegian way – ie without moulds, by eye, using sticks braced against the roof joists to keep the strakes down and an axe to cut the scarphs? Me. But then I'm not Olaf, and this is not my 300th faering. If it were then I'd heft a razor-sharp hand axe to cut the scarphs and bevels and set up the stem and sternpost to ancient beams, and employ sticks on which my father, grandfather and great-grandfather had marked the measurements of every faering, and variation of faering, they'd built since 1860.

This, you will gather, is my first faering. The brief called for "a faering-type shape" but it's turning into a faering, thanks to the genius of designer Iain Oughtred. I can't now get away with anything less than a precise replica, which is why a sheaf of plans arrived by post from the Isle of Skye last month. They leave little room for interpretation. Every plank land is marked, every dimension noted. This is not the way they built faerings, and it is not the way I am accustomed to building boats. But it does work – if you stick to the plans. Stray and woe betide.

Nevertheless, it is a crazy way to build a simple old boat. Like using offsets to make a dugout canoe. See, I can't make it up as I go along. The garboard, shaped like a double scimitar, was made from a plywood template. To make plywood throwaway templates smacks of wastefulness. And yet I do not have those deceptively slow old Norwegian boatbuilders' time-learned hands, or strake patterns in my head or a shed where the precise height from every beam to every plank land is known. If I am to make a decent fist of this faering, I cannot do without Iain's careful plans. And this I find disturbing. Will someone please tell me why?

How much better to build this most simple of boats the old way. You want to know how? I'll tell you, from a 13-minute film shot in the 1960s, in black and white, inside a wooden shed near Bergen.

"How much better to build this most simple of boats the old way"



CHARLOTTE WAITERS

First hoick up some lumps of oak, seasoning in brine under the floorboards (your shed is built over the fjord side). From templates carve out the stem, in two pieces. Scarph (using just an axe) and rivet. Do likewise for sternpost. Shape and set up on rough wooden blocks, and posts braced to floor joists.

Shape keel with axe to take garboard and scarph to stem and sternposts. Line all up using string and a pair of dividers held at eye level (to set the angle of the garboards? Who knows).

Get out twisted fore and aft garboard sections from solid using a pit saw. Nail to stem and sternpost, and rabbet, holding plank edges down using sticks to ceiling and from floor. Scarph garboard pieces together. Cut bevel using axe. Fit and scarph next strake. Joggle in frames, fit sheerstrakes, rangs, thwarts etc. Cover with pine tar and launch. How is the shape of each strake determined? By eye? Ancient templates? Search me. Nowhere did I catch a glimpse of a plan.

I am having immense fun building by numbers. Must save an awful lot of time; time being the most obvious difference between the faering I saw being built on the scratchy old film and mine. Mine will take just three months. What's that Olaf? Did I hear you say three days...?