

# Adrian Morgan



## On the never-never

*Adrian* considers a new approach to the business of building boats

A friend of mine – artist, in an abstract kind of way, of international renown – sells his paintings on the never-never. Works like this: go into his studio, clap eyes on a few paintings, one in particular perhaps. “Strewth, but that’s fine” you think (that’s “God’s truth by the way” – I’ve been asked to explain it several times). “But £1,500? I could buy a new Wykeham Martin for the old girl for that, and a pair of bronze sheet winches from Classic Marine.”

Then Paddy, my painter friend, hoves into view. “So, d’you like it? Then take it away wid yer.” (I’ve laid that on a little thick, by the way, as he’s a perfectly civilised Irishman, with just a trace of the old country.) “What can yer give me now,” he’ll say. “Make it a tenner and she’s yours. Just pay me what you can when you can.”

I’ve had several paintings off him on that basis. Fact is he’s sold most of them like that, and last time I saw him he told me that he’d never, in over 40 years, had anyone renege on a payment. Regular as clockwork, the little sums come through the post, in fivers here and tenners there. I tell a lie: there was a snag one time. A fellow bought a painting cash down, and never came back to collect it.

It sounds like an idea I should take up as I can’t bear to hear any more people saying “she’s a lovely boat but a bit out of my price bracket”. Gor blimey, guv’nor (“God blind me, governor”), how is it that you can slap down a deposit for the same amount on a poxy BMW and plead poverty when it comes to a piece of artistry that took months, not three German robots three hours, to make?

I’ve touched on this subject before, and will do again, as it lies at the heart of the wooden-boat-building revival. Commission a chair from Viscount “I’m the Queen’s bleedin’ nephew” Linley and you’re looking at a few grand, and he rarely even lays his hand on a spokeshave these days (so my royal mole tells me). Might as well commission my supremely talented friend Dan, who works at Tim Stead’s studio in the Borders, to make you something really, really fine.

Oh, the injustice of it all. Was it ever thus? The fruits of man’s hand, the sweat of his brow and peanuts to show for it? Why is it that a photographer can flex his little finger and pick up a grand a day, and I’m on £100 (at best)? Arrange some bricks in a nice pattern and the Tate Modern will bung you £50,000 (from the tax payer).

Now this faering I’ve just delivered is a work of art as well as a practical vehicle



CHARLOTTE WATERS

for getting her owner and family around the East Coast creeks. That should make her worth double that vase with no bottom (a useless vessel).

But life is not fair and boatbuilding has never paid the bills. So I am curious to try a new approach: taking a leaf out of my boatbuilder friend Robb White’s book (he never sets a price or delivery date) and Paddy’s (who is happy to wait 10 years to get full payment), I propose to operate thus. From now on I will not give a price, or delivery date, and will encourage my owners to send me whatever they can afford for however long they feel inclined to send it. Like that restaurant where you pay what you reckon the food’s worth. I expect to be opening small brown envelopes containing fivers and tenners in a steady trickle from now on. And I’ll also know (when the trickle stops) exactly what any of my boats are really worth. Come to think of it, that restaurant went bust in very short order...

*“Life is not fair and boatbuilding has never paid the bills”*