



After many years as a yachting journalist, Adrian Morgan decided to repay his debt to society by becoming a traditional boat builder. Kathy Mansfield tells his uplifting story.

With photographs by the author.

I had travelled to Ullapool to see a new traditional fife being built by Mark Stockl of Ullapool Boatbuilders, excited to see these very Scottish boats reappearing on the seas and lochs, just where they should be, their shapes reminiscent of their Scandinavian forbears.

Walking in that first day, I was surprised to see another new boat being planked up in the local larch; a boat which did not look Scottish, more Norwegian. But then not quite Norwegian either; there appeared to be some hollow in the ends which surprised me.

“That’s because her designer, Karsten Ausland, who was Norwegian, worked for Nevins Boatyard, City Island, New York – and picked up on the hollow found in American boats,” explained her boatbuilder. And to my surprise the boatbuilder was Adrian Morgan, recently of corporate London and yachting journalism, now with a plane in his hand and a smile on his face. He had given up 25 years of office life for the adze, the city for rural life and had been given a section of the boatshed for a year to learn about

boatbuilding. He had good teachers, that’s for sure and after building a small loch boat under supervision, he had decided to move on to this 18’ (5.5m) double-ender started on spec by Tim Loftus. Tim had scaled up the plans he’d seen in *Design Quarterly*, set up the centreline and fitted the garboards, building a clinker rather than a carvel hull. The boat was an ambitious undertaking for a rookie boatbuilder but her planks were building up steadily to form her shape. I looked at a photocopy of her lines, pinned up on the wall. She was lovely and she had an interesting story.

Karsten Ausland, the designer of the original boat known as *Jan*, was born in 1895 near Risør on the east coast of Norway. Ten generations of his family had been born on the farm where he grew up, and they adopted the farm’s name as their surname in the early 1900s when surnames first became a legal necessity. His father was a sea captain; the farm’s harvest was wood for boats and ships. Ausland became a naval architect at his brother’s shipyard but while still a young man, he left to seek work in the USA.

He was fortunate to get a job at Henry B Nevin's shipyard on City Island, where many famous yachts were built. To make ends meet during the Depression years, he supplemented his salary by taking in lodgers and designing and building small craft in the basement of the family home. When one of his clients with an interest in small Norwegian designs commissioned an 18' (5.5m) camping cruiser, Ausland looked to the Norwegian sjekte, a double-ender used for inshore fishing. He gave it an American flavour with the hollow I had noticed in Adrian's boat.

The history of *Jan* has a fine romantic twist to it which is worth mentioning, for it brings together her Norwegian designer with other designers and shipyards famous in his day, and in the history of American yachting. A young protégé of Ausland's client was Al Mason, studying at that time to be a naval architect. He checked very regularly on the progress of the sjekte during its design and build, eventually owning the boat himself and taking it to Boston, where he had landed a job with the design firm of John Alden. It seems that *Jan* made quite a name for herself, regularly beating L Francis Herreshoff sailing his own boat *Suicide* in races on the waters off Marblehead, just north of Boston. Once Al Mason's career was well established, he returned to Karsten Ausland to ask for the hand of his eldest daughter Christine, whom he had met during those regular checks on the building of the boat. Al had warned her seven years before that he did not plan to marry until he reached the age of thirty. His mother had also suggested to him that if he wanted both a wife and a boat, he should buy the boat first and that had worked well too.



Adrian had been in touch with Anita Mason, daughter of designer Al Mason and granddaughter of Karsten Ausland and was now building the first copy of *Jan* here in Ullapool.

The sjekte on which *Jan's* design was based came from the inshore waters of southern and eastern Norway, where Karsten Ausland was born. Sjektes were popular working boats, used commonly for fishing and related trades. The full, rounded sections make them easily driven under sail with an easy motion and their clean lines make them fast as well. There is plenty of flare on the sides and rake at the ends, so they tend to be dry boats, pushing the waves and chop out of their way and able too to carry a lot of fish -- or people for that matter. Like many Norwegian boat types, that rounded hull makes them initially tender but they gain stability as they heel in a wind or are weighed down with a load. Most sjektes were sailed with a large metal centreplate and a tall, fractional sloop rig, the big main giving plenty of driving power. The sjekte and other Scandinavian versions of the boat are still sailed today, some being converted to fine pocket cruisers.

It was a surprise to come across Adrian's newly finished boat, called *Felicity John*, on her maiden voyage up the Caledonian Canal on the first annual Sail Caledonia week of small boat cruising and racing. Adrian had bought the boat plans from Ausland's granddaughter who included a smaller 12' (3.7m) version as well. He had spent six months on the

build, since he does not work full time as a boatbuilder and still supplements his income with journalism. I liked her shapely pale grey hull, her varnished top strake and rudder. Varnished floors sat on top of the stringers, slatted to let any water drain through and the ribs were varnished to contrast with the painted white interior. The hollow spruce mast from Collars, weighing just 20 lbs (9kg), was well secured at the first thwart. Adrian made the mast tangs, spreaders and boom himself, taking 6" (150mm) off the latter to clear the helmsman's head and allow a centre mainsheet. It's a very high aspect fractional rig, with plenty of sail area. Sails are nicely made by North Sails.

The good deep centreplate is 5/16" (7mm) epoxy-coated steel and the rudder is sturdy and quite large, a good idea along the Scottish waterways where a following wind can be threatening to small boats. The best place to helm her is sitting right in the stern on a small seat, in good Norwegian style or else perched on the gunwales. The latter proved to be a good idea when I sailed her on Loch Oich, because one job in those last hectic days of preparation that didn't get done was the insertion of her designed ballast. "She sails like a Flying Fifteen or a big Wayfarer," enthused Adrian but after one of those fearsome following winds that hurtle down the length of Loch Nevis, putting all small boats on their mettle, the decision to add more ballast became final. With 100 lbs (45kg) already, in her lead keel and another 250 lbs (113kg) due to be added as water ballast, she will sail more comfortably and securely. She was certainly light and responsive to sail, big enough to take a family and their luggage with ease. She was fast to row without ballast, though I

did find the rowing thwart uncomfortably high and too far aft, a problem that has been corrected in the new second version. One addition will probably be more built-in buoyancy and I like Adrian's idea of using the silver liners from wine boxes. I could imagine a happy winter of draining enough wine boxes to have sufficient bags to blow up for flotation; they're strong and flexible, though I hear that mice are partial to gnawing through them to check for the last drop or two of liquid which could mean that the process would need to be repeated each winter.

One of the other Sail Caledonia entrants decided to commission an Ausland boat from Adrian. The new boat is slightly shorter, wider by about 4" (100mm) and stronger, with more closely spaced ribs. The extra sheer Adrian had put in has come out, bench seats around the sides will be more comfortable than the gunwales for sitting -- as long as the boat is heeling more sedately with the addition of ballast -- and the rowing seat is lower and more central. The rig has been changed to gunter to enable the spars to fit inside the boat for trailing, and the sail area is somewhat smaller. All of these sound good alterations. The *Jan* design is a handsome one, Ausland was a good designer and Adrian has set up on his own as a boatbuilder in the Ullapool area. Since leaving London, he has built a 15' (4.6m) loch fishing boat, four sjektes -- all clinker -- and has just restored a 1965 18' (5.5m) Blackwater Sloop for a local owner.



Top: Felicity John at Sail Caledonia 2003 when she won her first race. Above left: Steamed oak timbers at 9" (228mm) spacing. Above right: The bumkin allows the backstay to clear the boom.

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