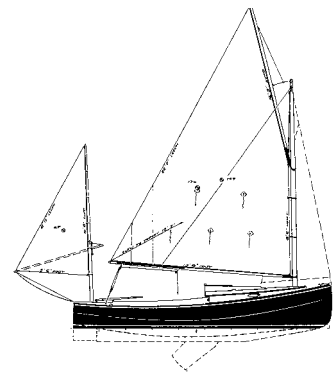


# Building the OUTDOOR BOAT in WINTER



From the sublime to the editor's backyard

*With photographs by The Woman in the High Poly-tunnel*



**F**or the cottage dwellers of this far corner of south-west Cornwall, the first joyous sound of spring is the siren song of the electric plane at seven of a Sunday morning. We're still letting them sleep in.

Long-term readers not yet on the statins may just recall that a year ago, we finally had the hull of our Chebacco Boat the right way up and to prevent it filling with rain in every storm, we had bought online a 'garden poly-tunnel'. Cheap and not even slightly cheerful, nonetheless it did the job – once swaddled in an extra tarp and anchored down with old tyres and odd lengths of rusty scaffold pipe.

*Next winter, I told my fellow poly-tunneller, there'll be none of that hibernating on the sofa from November to March reading your salacious bodice-rippers, we'll be able to spend whole weekends working on the boat – together! Isn't it great?*

I forget her reply, perhaps because it didn't quite work out like that. You see, although your common or in this case garden poly-tunnel is tallest on its centreline, like a boat ashore, our poly-tunnel is but a gnat's smidgeon wider than the boat; even with the hull tight against one side of the tunnel, to get around it on the other side requires the build of a long-distance runners; a short long-distance runner.

Plan B was that we would start the fit-out at the bow, where there was space to swing a power tool and work steadily sternwards. So through the summer, I fitted a watertight bulkhead – not quite where designer Phil Bolger had intended – and fashioned a built-in buoyancy compartment beneath a well-deck for the anchor, incorporating a samson post and a mast tabernacle just to complicate the process.

Thus, by September, despite the distractions of a magazine to run, we

**Below:** *Instead of consigning them to the woodburner, building moulds with added 'fingers' can often be recycled as templates for bulkheads.*



had fitted out the first and simplest 4' (1.2m) of the hull, which only left the more complicated and much beamier 80% to go.

Hence Plan C. We could not make the poly-tunnel any wider but we could make it higher, allowing us to work more easily at the side of the hull amidships. And – mission creep setting in – by fitting wheels – six 8" (200mm) Industrial Castors from Screwfix – to crude plywood brackets under the poly-tunnel frame, not only would it gain height but mobility. Not much mobility, it's true but enough to allow the tunnel to be shunted back and forth to get the best working space.

It's generally a success, with an unexpected upside: with the wider air-gap below the cover, the extra ventilation seems to cure condensation inside the tunnel. There's also an unexpected downside: though we've never witnessed a take-off, after a wild overnight westerly we can find in the morning the whole tunnel has somehow jumped sideways. needing shunting all over again!

Thus, despite a wet winter, progress has resumed; my Longterm Plan just got longer but we're not the only ones with that problem.

At this time of the year, the birch ply from which most of the boat is built – Robbins' finest! – lives in the warm and dry behind the living room sofa, only emerging temporarily to be cut to shape. Then on the least damp days the components receive three coats of Resolcoat 1010, the water-based epoxy primer from Resoltech.

This method has evolved by trial and error, as has pre-heating the appropriate area of the boat and the components to be fitted under a trio of pig lamps to remove any latent dampness before epoxy-glueing. And leaving the lamps on overnight in case the temperature drops too much.

These empirical methods may not have much application for those building in a garage or workshop and I would certainly not advocate building a boat outdoors from choice. But we're lucky to have a garden to build in and devising ways to work around problems is now part of the fun of backyard boatbuilding – we tell each other.



**Above:** Building outdoors, we seal every piece of non-marine ply with 3 coats of Resolcoat water-based epoxy primer. The first coat has 33% water added; the second around 15%; the final one is just resin and hardener. It goes on milky white but dries to a clear gloss.

**Right:** It's a bodge but it works: the poly-tunnel is now 9" (225mm) higher and more mobile on its large castors.

**Below:** Testing the fit of the primed cabin sides. The lamps, used by farmers for farrowing pigs, provide good light and a safe, gentle heat – here just for the benefit of the builder. Temporary cross-beams and wedges hold the cabin side firmly against the inwale.

