

Off Center Harbor Houseboat Design Contest Entry by Terry Mason

Working on the design for these houseboats has been particularly satisfying. The houseboat form brings together many streams of experience from my life to culminate in this perfect little vehicle for imagination.

As far back as I can remember I have been besotted with small dwellings. At 10 years old, the first objects of obsession were the customized vans of the 1970s. A Ford Econoline that you could live in, purple shag carpet and all! What's more, an advertisement from a 1973 magazine promised that the hobby of customizing vans "would pay me BIG MONEY... \$10.00 - \$20.00 an hour, easy". I mark this as the first seed of my future career as a builder and designer.

Overlapping with (but soon superseding) the van phase, were the "cabin cruisers" that I saw during visits to my Uncle Dan's cottage on the Chesapeake. These were anything from a Bayliner to a beautiful 55 foot Trumpy Cockpit cruiser. I spent hours drawing "cut-away" views of the interiors, imagining what they might look like, and fantasizing about the life that I might have in one of these floating homes.

In 1984 I was lucky enough to be able to buy five acres in Brooklin Maine. My wife & I built a 500 square foot house that was without power or running water for most of our first year there. It was **so peaceful** without the hum of the refrigerator or the sound of a furnace. We didn't have a phone! We still remember that time fondly. Living this way reminded me of the time that I spent with my Grandma Mason. She lived in a very small, old fashioned wooden house. This was a place where if you were cold you got on a sweater or put an extra blanket on the bed. Toast was made in the oven. I now realize that this was a seminal building block of my temperament, and of my desire for simplicity and appropriate technology.

These strands of experience, the custom vans, the cabin cruisers, the early peace of our simple utility-free home, Grandma's house; these were all very much in my mind as I worked on my houseboat designs. The vision of a simple existence is very intoxicating, and for me The houseboat is the place that embodies this vision. It would not only be a temporary respite from the phone, the computer and the responsibilities; not only a place of deep connection with wind, water and sun; but also a much needed dip into a life of Leisure. Brother David Steindl-Rast defines Leisure as: "the virtue of those who take their time in order to give to each task as much time as it deserves to take."

I imagine my time on a houseboat, as well as the time spent building it, to be entirely devoted to that sentiment.

Finally, a word about the designs themselves. These houseboats are inspired by the Canal Barges of Europe, houseboats of the west coast, tugboats, Maine camps, and modern architecture. Their narrow width would make them easy to tow from harbor to harbor. I spoke with The Maine DOT, as well as several local boatyards to find out the limits of over-the-road transport, as well as the parameters for size & weight in regard to launching. All my designs take the information gleaned from those sources into consideration.

I imagine these houseboats moored in Herrick Bay, or anchored off Torrey Island (both in Brooklin Maine). The smaller designs would be "Week-Enders", and the Larger one would be usable as a summer place, or as a year round home.

