

**Mahogany Masters**  
**Van Dam Wood Craft**  
By J.R. Watson

If boat building was ever in a period of renaissance, it is now. One center for the revival in exquisitely constructed yachts is Van Dam Wood Craft near Lake Charlevoix in Boyne City, Michigan. Business partners Steve and Jean Van Dam have a 23 year history of building interesting wooden craft. Although Steve is a sailor, most of their work involves powerboats, custom one-offs and restorations. They are particularly noted for the fine detail of their wood/epoxy composite boats and their willingness to experiment with materials and structures.

We had the opportunity to visit Van Dam's shop late this summer where the 32' 9" sport boat ALPHA Z was built. As Steve commented, "We like restoration and maintenance work, but it sure is fun to start with a clean sheet of paper." The ALPHA Z is like no other boat. It is a stepped V-bottom planing runabout designed by Michael Peters Yacht Design. The hull is stringer and frame construction with a layer of Honduras mahogany laminated over two diagonal layers of Okume plywood using WEST SYSTEM® epoxy. It is powered by a Keith Eickert 825hp fuel injected V-8 turning an Arneson surface drive. With a displacement of 6500 lb, it can reach 100 mph.

During hull construction, dry wall screws were used to provide clamping pressure until the epoxy cured. The screws were then removed and the holes countersunk and bunged to preserve a traditional look.

ALPHA Z was finished with a water-based stain over the mahogany to highlight the grain. This was coated with WEST SYSTEM 105/207 Special Coating Hardener and then sprayed with Awlcraft 2000™. Steve reports excellent long-term success with water-based stains over mahogany. Since ALPHA Z is trailered, the bottom was coated with white epoxy paint in lieu of antifouling.

Currently under construction at Van Dam's is a custom 38' fast commuter (*photo*), designed by Michel Berryer of Van Dam Wood Craft. It will be powered by two 300 hp Yanmar, 24 valve diesels—pretty lightweight power plants at 800 pounds each. Recessed propeller tunnels will allow the boat to operate in as little as 2' of water. The commuter also uses stringer and frame construction. Its sides are 3/4" thick—two layers of 1/4" plywood, one layer of 1/4" mahogany laminated with WEST SYSTEM epoxy. The bottom is 15/16" thick.

Van Dam Wood Craft now offers a design service and intends to offer some stock plans. Its reputation for exquisite craftsmanship combined with state-of-the-art engineering will help carry the tradition of excellence in wooden boat building into the new millennium.

*Van Dam Wood Craft, 231-582-2323*

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