



DESIGNS

# CHESAPEAKE SAILING SKIFF

*Traditional character,  
modern construction*

Design by Doug Hylan

Commentary by Mike O'Brien

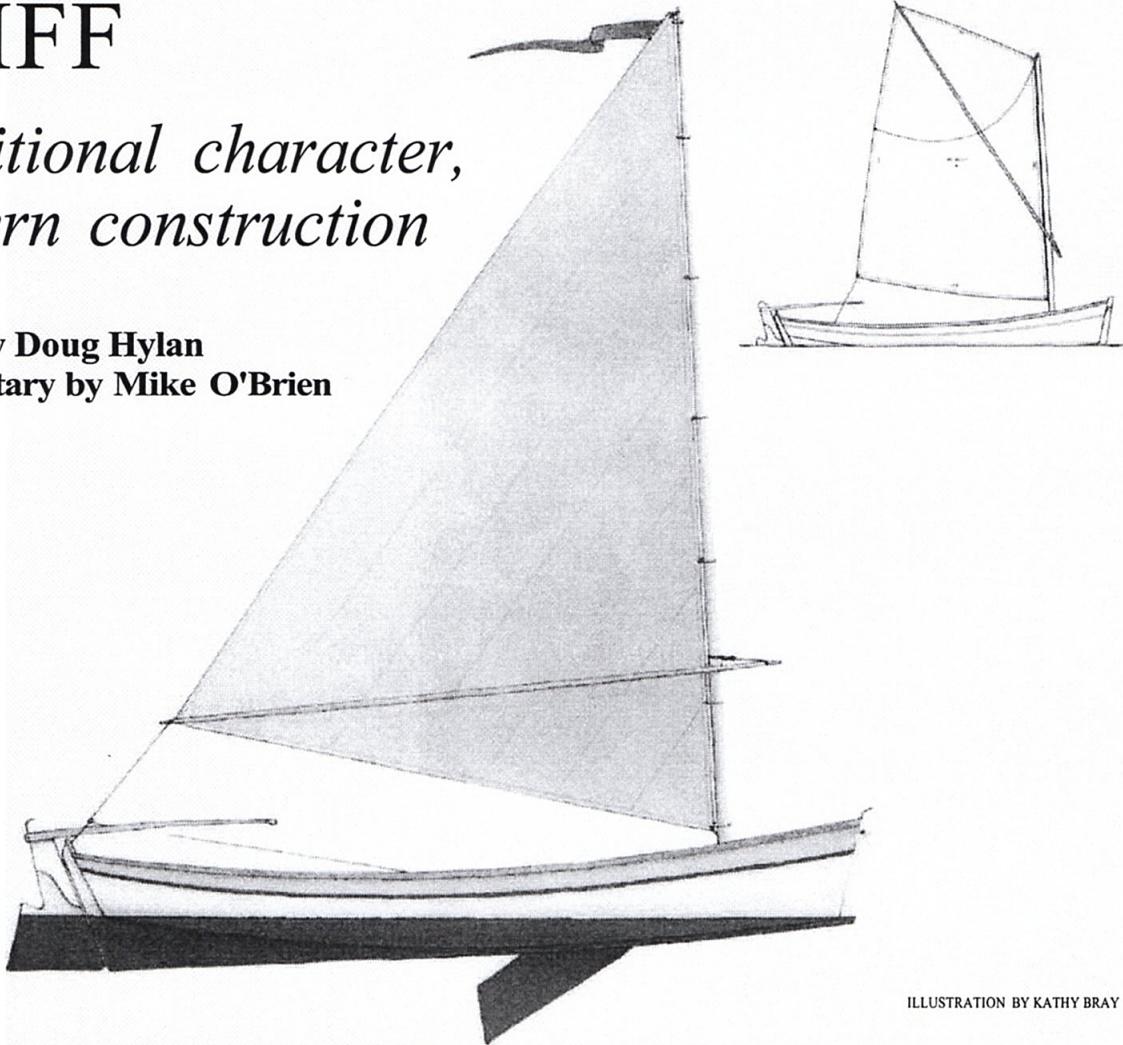


ILLUSTRATION BY KATHY BRAY

**G**ood, really good, sailing skiffs are hard to find. Here we have a fine example of the type designed by Doug Hylan (with considerable input from client Ted Okie). Starting with a large dose of traditional Chesapeake skiff from Howard Chapelle, Doug added plywood construction and a choice of sailing rigs: sprit or leg-o'-mutton. Both arrangements are simple in the extreme; neither requires standing rigging, blocks, or store-bought hardware of any kind.

The sprit rig offers short spars that stow flat in the hull. In pursuit of simplicity, Doug omitted the boom. Despite this skiff's tolerably wide sheeting base, the sail will want to roll up on itself when we're running off. On such occasions, a light boathook might serve as a reasonable facsimile for a boom. We'll want to give the matter some thought, as spritsails seem particularly sensitive to set and trim.

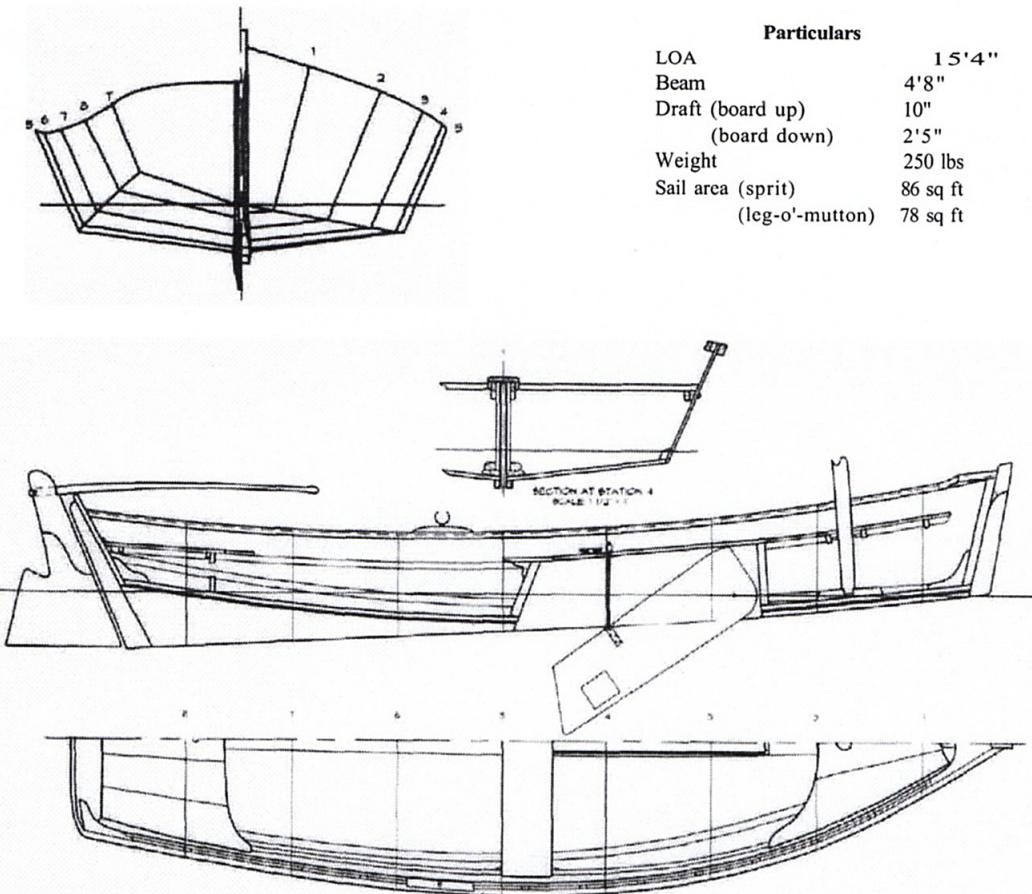
The sprit-boomed, leg-o'-mutton rig comes directly from this skiff's Chesapeake ancestors. It is self-vanging

and infinitely adjustable. When sailing in light air and/or off the wind, we'll reduce tension in the snotter (a stout line that secures the boom to the mast) to throw deeper draft into the sail. When it breezes on, or for serious windward work, we'll harden up the snotter to flatten the sail.

Our sailmaker should sew the foot dead straight, just as drawn. Much tension resides in this lower edge of the sail as it, working with the boom, acts as a vang to reduce sail twist. If we force some roach (downward curvature) into the foot in a search for extra area, the sail will cease along a straight line between the tack and clew.

The Chesapeake Sailing Skiff shows some deadrise to its bottom. This athwartships V-shape clears the run, slightly reduces wetted surface, and mutes criticism from those sailors who reflexively find fault with flat bottoms.

The first boat built to this design spends much of its time trailing behind GRAYLING, a converted sardine carrier capable of maintaining speed in rough water (see



Doug Hylan's skiff shows an easy run, slight deadrise, and clean plywood construction. The plans detail a sprit rig (small drawing, opposite page) and a Chesapeake leg-o'mutton.

WB No. 141). To produce proper behavior at the end of a towline, Doug kept the hull shallow forward and drew a large skeg back aft. This skiff faithfully follows the long, narrow double-ender and doesn't trip over its own forefoot.

Some observers will note that the raked transom wastes length that could have been given to the skiff's bottom. May be, but this arrangement provides a luxurious backrest for crew lounging in the sternsheets. It can be argued that the raked transom will keep us dry when backing down into a harbor chop or light surf. Logic aside, which is where it belongs sometimes, the transom looks fine.

A powerful rudder, tucked behind the substantial skeg, allows this skiff to sail (not just float) in shallow water. To this end, the specified pivoting centerboard is more effective than a simpler (and deep-water efficient) daggerboard. If this skiff were a pure sailboat, the designer might have drawn a larger board, which would require a tall and/or open-topped trunk to house it. As rowing is part of the equation, this low trunk (with a watertight cap)

ensures comfort for the oarsman. When raised, the centerboard fills its trunk. This, combined with a strongly raked after head ledge, reduces turbulence and drag—no small matter when we're rowing.

The frameless, plywood-sheathed hull (3/8" for the sides, 1/2" on the bottom) makes for a clean interior—about as clean as we'll find on the traditional cross-planked pine and juniper Chesapeake skiffs. Bead moldings, running the full length of each side, mimic the lower edges of lapped rising strakes that are found on some of the old skiffs—and on the prototype for this class. The illusion will save us time in the shop.

Doug Hylan has drawn a striking skiff that looks sharp in any company. It is simple and inexpensive, but it is not cheap.

*Mike O'Brien is senior editor for WoodenBoat.*

*Plans are available (for \$60) from D.N. Hylan & Associates, P.O. Box 58, Brooklin, ME 04616, 207-359-9807.*