

Zen and the Art of Hollow Wooden Surfboard Construction

By Jim Perry

As a kid on Long Island, I was always in the pool or out on the water, skiing, sailing or swimming. I literally slept in my bathing suit. My family had a 30-foot Egg Harbor and we'd go all over the Long Island and Connecticut coasts, out to Martha's Vineyard and once up the Hudson to Montreal. Dad and Mom taught us by example to cherish and care for the water around us.

As a doctor later in San Diego, a patient surprised me with a 9'6" Terry Senate longboard on my birthday. My



Bar clamps, strapping, spring clamps hold the cedar planks for the deck in place.

people to the effect of our behaviors on the ocean. At the time, I had two longboards and thought of building my own; so in keeping with a green Surfrider mentality I thought a hollow wooden board would be perfect. It felt right. Grain Surfboards is in Maine. Check out

grainsurfboards.com to see some awesome boards. Without having done any woodworking before, but enjoying working with my hands, I ordered a 9-foot longboard kit. It arrived in late December; I laid out all the cedar planks for the top and bottom decks, the frame, rail strips ... and the instructions. A box arrived from Jamestown Distributors – more new stuff to understand. Between my work hours, the long winter work on the board was an escape to a warmer mental place. OK, so I played Jack Johnson maybe a little too much. The smell of the cedar wood encouraged me as I learned my way around new kinds of

Rail strips and top deck on, rail edge all sanded and a squash tail glued.



The frame is glued to the cut bottom deck planks and set on the rocker table. Ready for the rail strips.

time with that board was limited, but it spoke an invitation to get

back to the water where I felt at ease and eventually how I might, in some measure, find a way to give something back. Helping start the Connecticut Chapter of the Surfrider Foundation in 2006 was part of that chance: an opportunity to get into the fray of restoring Long Island Sound to the beauty I knew as a child and alerting



mistakes, seeing it through to a board I would eventually ride. As I returned to the hardware store for assorted clamps and drill bits, the woman at the checkout enjoyed saying, "See you tomorrow!"

After gluing up the decks to the frame, the board took shape. The rails went on – this was hard to do, getting the wood to bend without cracking. A good life lesson: I had to relearn being patient more than once. The B&C joints also *must* be tight. My wife Nicole said it looked like a big snowshoe! Before putting the top deck on, I took the board off the rocker table and asked her to stand on it, tracing her feet on the inside, so she can come surf with me. OK, a little hokey, but also feels right.

When it came time to shape the rails and decks with the block plane and spokeshave, the curls of shaved wood built up around the floor and said, 'Yeah, you're building a surfboard.' I made up an alternating wood pattern for the squash tail and glued it on, chose a rail edge and sanded away, chiseled the fin box in place (without entering open space in the hollow board!) and ordered a Wingnut 9" wooden fin.

At this point, the board didn't show off its true colors, but when the basement finally warmed up enough for me to put the cloth and epoxy on, wow! The wood patterns came right up and it was a gratifying time. After many hours working on the board, seeing that it might actually come off looking great was fantastic. I put a Grain logo at the tail next to the vent plug (the board's inards need to vent and stay dry) and put the leash hole right through to the fin box. The varnish layer went on and the longboard looked great. (See the photos at surfrider.org/connecticut/blog.html)

On the bottom deck is a Surfrider Foundation laminate, a tribute to a first rate organization that does a great job and gives me a means to contribute. (See Surfrider Foundation CEO Jim Moriarty's blog at oceanwavesbeaches.blogspot.com)

This is one life experience that will stick with me forever, in and out of the water – I'm looking forward to my first session out with it; a board I made with my own



Finished board, 9 feet and waiting for a session!

hands and one that's in harmony with the principles of caring for the oceans that my parents passed down to me. ♦

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