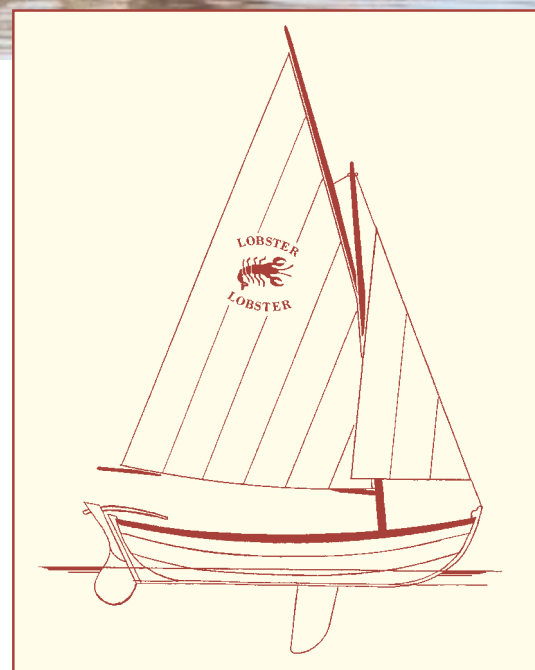




When the World is your Lobster



What started as a hobby for woodwork teacher Bart Linnartz has grown into a burgeoning boatbuilding business.

Our Man in the Netherlands Ron Valent tells his story.

It was a sunny Tuesday morning in October. My designer sunglasses looked pretty cool on my suntanned face. My cap read *Emilia, 1930*; my t-shirt said *Hallowe'en 1926*. Both were souvenirs of classic yachts I had sailed on during the Voiles de Saint Tropez of the previous week. The only trouble was that no one could see that t-shirt because of the thick jumper I was wearing; I was no longer in the south of France, I was in the south of Holland. Anyway, there wasn't anybody out on this filled-in gravel pit who was taking the

slightest notice of my yachty attire.

However, though no-one was paying any attention to me, there were several admiring glances for the lovely little open boat I was sailing, a boat that was actually shorter than the bowsprit of a classic yacht I raced on just three days before. Life is full of contrasts but sailing with a perfect breeze under a blue sky on a beautifully built boat is always a pleasure; doing just that on the Lobster 12.5 it certainly was.



Lobsters are now being built in schools – see previous page – as well as on Bart’s boatbuilding courses, where students get to build the hull and then take it home to complete the fit out. **Below:** Bart Linnartz – left – and Ger Vorstedt.

Linnartz-Adema Houten Botenbouw of Heerlen designs and builds small, open, sail, oar and motorboats. My acquaintance with Bart Linnartz dates back to 1999 when I convinced him to exhibit at the *Klassieke Schepen* – the Classic Ships Show – in Spakenburg. Since then his company has slowly but steadily developed from a hobby that got out of hand into a serious boatbuilding business with seven different models in its range.

It all started several years earlier when Bart was building a boat for himself in a shed in his backyard. He read an article about boatbuilding courses and schools in England and the USA, seemingly very normal in those countries but there was nothing like that in the Netherlands. Only Cees Prins whom he met at the HISWA, the international boat show in Amsterdam, was setting up something similar but that was in Enkhuizen. Although only 150 miles (240km) to the north of Heerlen, for a Dutchman that is way over on the other side of Holland and therefore out of reach.

Bart is a qualified carpentry teacher. He has taught in various technical colleges but for the past 18 years he has been attached to an MLK school, a school for children with learning problems. Since he introduced it there many years ago now, the children have been building small boats with an enormous amount of pleasure and enthusiasm. Hence his decision to teach boatbuilding on a course for grown-ups was only a small step further. He placed ads in local newspapers, gave out flyers and organised an open evening at his ‘yard’. Then he received an invitation to attend the Harbour Days in Rotterdam. A company exhibiting there which had nothing to do with anything marine wanted a boatbuilder with a boat on their stand to give it a nautical flavour. Working day and night, he made his still unfinished first design, a Lobster 15, presentable and with that he attended the show. He got two people to sign up for a course.



Starting up

On that first course, a second Lobster 15 was built. From these humble beginnings the business has grown. He made a ‘reasonable profit’ which in Bart’s case meant breaking even but he derived enormous pleasure from it and that made it all worthwhile. A course lasted 10 weeks and normally would have between 6 and 8 students. Altogether there would be 40 hours of lessons and because he still had a full-time job, these were split into five alternating Saturdays. In this way the students would always complete the hull. One of them would then buy it to finish it at home.

After a while he introduced a second design, the Lobster 10, which was also built during the courses. This was actually the first model which was fully completed in his workshop and this is the boat he exhibited at Spakenburg in 1999. The still unfinished Lobster 15 also went along to make the stand more impressive. He had enormous self-doubt, worrying whether he could match the standards of the ‘professionals’ at the show but after hearing three days of compliments, he knew he could pass muster.

In 2000 and 2001, Bart also exhibited at the HISWA in Amsterdam. Here, during the week of the show, a number of his boats were built by families in a joint venture with a Dutch yachting magazine. In the meantime, the boatbuilding courses and orders to build hulls for home completion continued steadily. In 2002, he received an order to make two identical finished boats which were used in a Rivella tv commercial and also in a full length movie produced by postcard manufacturers Hallmark. These orders forced him to give up full-time teaching. He now works three days at the school and two days at his yard but in reality he and his building partner Ger Vorstedt work every evening till 12 and every weekend.

Designing and building by intuition

Bart has had no formal education in boat design. He designs a boat purely by intuition and an instinct of how it should be. He derives his inspiration from time-proven designs that he reads about in books and magazines. His first design, the Lobster 15, was inspired by an article in *Water Craft* about American Peapods. They were described as extremely seaworthy 12-15' (3.5-4.5m) boats in which fishermen would venture out quite far to sea and more importantly would also return safely. These little double-enders were ideal rowing boats and he wanted to make something similar but to his own design.

The Dutch are used to rather full-bodied and stable launches. The Peapod was a bit too tender for this market so Bart decided on more volume, a harder entry and a flat transom so as to attach the rudder more easily. He tried to transfer what he had in his head to paper but this was a total disaster. He then thought, well, if great designers like Herreshoff and Fife designed their boats from half-models who am I to be different? So he sawed, planed, carved and sanded until he had fashioned exactly what he had pictured in his mind. He then cut his half-model into slabs and from these he drew the sections on paper. Since then he has made all his designs in this way.

With his designs, Bart wants the beholder to get the impression of the traditional craftsmanship and beauty of a classic craft but one built with modern materials. So he doesn't use fragile exotic woods or have masses of exquisitely made, steam-bent, copper rivetted frames that complicate the design and building and need a lot of maintenance. His boats are built on moulds in plywood and epoxy. They must be easy to maintain. So once you remove the bottom boards, there are only simple, flat areas to clean



and paint. The strength of the design comes from the ring-frame which is integrated into the structure and so becomes invisible. The traditional feel of the boat is enhanced by details like the varnished bottom boards, thwarts and ornamental trim. The craftsmanship is also evident in the fact that all fittings, from the lovely varnished masts to the cleats and belaying pins, are handmade by Bart and Ger.

Kit boats

The latest development at Linnartz-Adema is kit boats. Due to the labour intensive nature of building small, open boats, their prices are quite high. Only true enthusiasts are willing to put down the kind of money for a 12' (3.5m) sailing dinghy which might buy a small yacht. Bart is convinced that providing a kit is a good way to make small boats affordable. What's more, the owner experiences the joy of boatbuilding without having had to acquire the necessary skills or tools to build a boat from scratch.

The first kit that Bart has produced is for the Lobster 12.5 and it comes complete with the materials for the hull, inside and out, centreboard case and rudder plus a how-to-build video at €2,295, around £1,515, excluding BTW, Dutch VAT. Finished like this she can immediately be used for rowing or with an outboard. To finish her as a sailing boat, there is an additional kit at €2290 euros – £1,511 – ex BTW which includes sails, spars, stainless steel fittings and all standing and running rigging including mooring lines.

The hull kit includes CNC-cut plywood panels for the shell and the internal watertight compartments, lockers and outboard well, together with all the hardwood needed supplied profiled but over-length. The stitch and glue method is straightforward and ideal for amateur building.

Above: Bart designs all his boats the old way by first carving a half-model. Below: This 'Dutch Peapod' is beamier and thus has more initial stability than the traditional American sailing workboat which provided its inspiration.



The plywood panels are simply laid across the bulkheads and attached to the keel, stem and transom. Stitching everything together with wire is simple and once the epoxy fillets are applied to the seams, you suddenly have a boat. Once this is done, the hull can be flipped over to allow the bulkheads to be filleted, together with the seats and floors which also automatically create the Lobster's six watertight compartments. There are also four lockers, an engine well and a battery box. You can buy paint and epoxy for sheathing yourself but Bart will also provide it as a package if owners prefer. He is planning to develop kits for all his designs which now range from 7'6" to 20' (2.3-6m).

Sailing at last

So in October last year and after over 4 years of talking with Bart about his boats, I finally got my chance to sail one on my way back from France.

When I arrived at the gravel pit near Roermond on a cold but sunny day, the Lobster 12.5 was sitting proud and shiny on her trailer. Although this was only the second time he had taken her out for a sail, it only took about 20 minutes to raise the mast, tighten the stays and hoist the sails; wonderfully simple and quick. Thirty minutes after I arrived, we were launched and sailing. For me, this felt like a trip back in time, to almost 40 years ago when I first sailed a dinghy on the Mooloolaba River in Queensland, Australia. After becoming so absorbed in the world of large classic yachts I had almost forgotten the joy of small boat sailing.

The Lobster 12.5 is fast, agile, stable and just as important, extremely pretty. With a beam of 5'5" (1.65 m) on a length of 13'9" (4.23m), she looks a trifle beamy when sitting on her trailer but as soon as she is in her element she looks slim and sporty. But that beam does give her a large amount of initial stability, ideal for a boat intended for family cruising. Despite my 210lbs (95kg), she hardly heels

when I step aboard. Just to test her, I put my full weight on the end of the thwart and only then do I manage to tip her anywhere near the water. So children who cannot sit still are not going to be a problem although I expect they would probably settle themselves on the foredeck to feel the sensation of speed to the full.

Our intended short test sail somehow stretches into a long afternoon of pleasant sailing; my other appointments for the day totally forgotten. For hours and hours, we tack and reach across the lake. Upwind, downwind, tacking, jibing, everything is simple and thoroughly enjoyable. Some small boats have to be carefully sailed through the wind or even given the last push by moving the crew around but the Lobster needs none of this. She just tacks whenever I want her to and she is no slouch either. We search out various equally sized boats on the lake but none are in the same class. Later, when Bart joins Ger and myself in the boat, the heavily laden Lobster still points higher and sails appreciably faster than a field of Optimists we encounter.



Bart's second design in his Lobster range is this 10' (3m) transom-stern clinker dinghy.

The Lobster 12.5 is a lovely boat that despite her simple construction is very nicely built,

with plenty of details to please the purists. Her high peaked gaff rig on varnished spars makes her look extremely pretty and her good turn of speed should please anyone. The standard of finish is excellent and the well-thought-out design with her watertight compartments and stability should make her a safe and seaworthy boat. She has been inspired by fishing craft that have proven their worth over centuries of use and this shows in her design. A joy to sail.

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