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# WATER CRAFT

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- Custom Builds: BayCruiser 23 & Salcombe Launch
- Maine's Castine Class • Building A Tomales Bay OD
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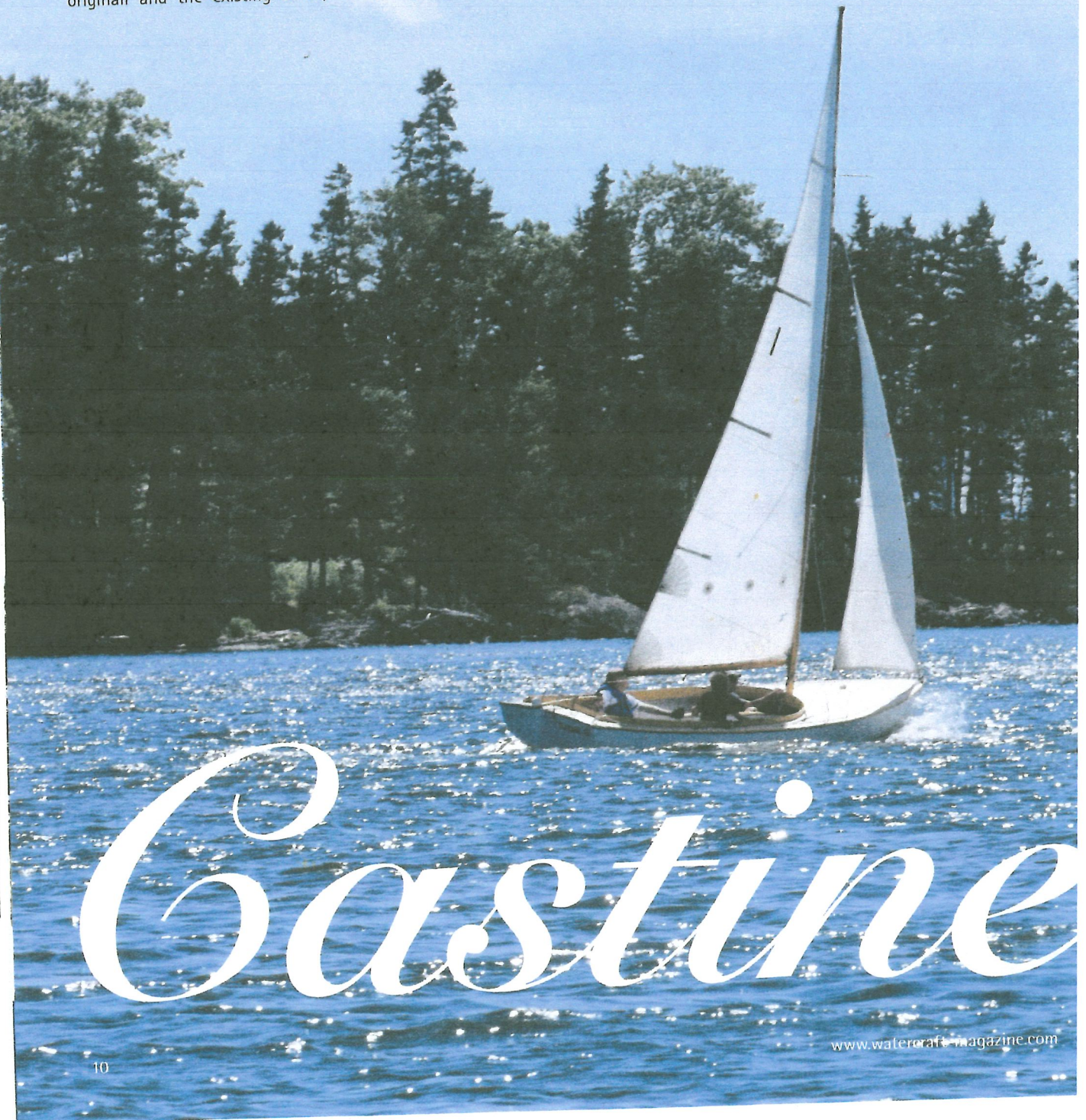
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**D**elve into a seafaring community miles from anywhere and there's a good chance you'll find tales of derring-do, nuggets of wisdom and larger than life characters in their past. And often their present. None more so than Castine, Maine in northeastern America, a small town with an uncommon history and a full range of characters – and a 18' (5.5m) centreboard one-design with a strikingly lovely shape.

The Castine class was designed by boatbuilder Mace Eaton in 1951 and built of local cedar on oak by Mace, helped by his son Alonzo and later his grandson Kenny until 1967: all but one of the original 20 are still sailing. In 1984, the late Joel White, the much-respected designer at nearby Brooklin Boat Yard, built another two based on an amalgam of Mace's original and the existing boats, all of which are slightly

different since they were built by eye from Mace's half model. The Castine class is still at the heart of the town and its sailors, many of whom learned to sail on these boats as kids and often watch their children and grandchildren sailing on them now. In today's throwaway culture, that's pretty special.

To understand the boat, it helps to know about its environs and history. Castine is about 200 miles (322km) northeast or 'downeast' of Boston, with a year-round population today of maybe 1500 but its deep, sheltered harbour in Penobscot Bay made it important to fishermen, adventurers and strategists over the centuries. It was tossed around between the French, Dutch and British from the early 1600s, eventually being named after a French nobleman who married the daughter of Madocawando, chief of the local Tarratine tribe. By the 1850s



Castine was the most important harbour northeast of Boston and an important fishing centre with salt arriving in vessels from as far away as South America for the Grand Banks fishing industry. Sailing ships were being built and a sardine factory helped to bring jobs and wealth.

After sail gave way to power, the town welcomed summer visitors instead of fishing schooners and it was these summer visitors who decided they needed a one-design sailing class to keep their children occupied. Jake Dennett, the local sailmaker, was doubtful, thinking the strong tides and rock ledges would make sailing difficult, but three families decided to press ahead with a boat to be designed and built by a local boatbuilder.

### Mace Eaton...

...had arrived in Castine by dory in 1924 with his family and belongings from nearby Little Deer Isle, where his father and grandfather were boatbuilders. He had married a local woman at the behest of his parents since her husband had died leaving her with two children and together they had three more. He had been digging clams to help support his family but a job had come up in Castine to lengthen a sardine fishing boat. He cut the vessel in half with a chainsaw and added another 16' (5m) of planking and frames. Though he had almost no schooling and could not read or write, Mace could cut a piece of wood by eye without measuring and it seemed to always fit.

He went on to build rowing boats, then large vessels on the Castine beach. One customer commissioned a 60' (18m) schooner, the *Eileen Booth*, requesting that a grand piano be

installed before the deckhouse was built around it. When the boat was finished, the customer sailed off without paying. Years later, after getting a commission and fighting in World War II, the owner returned and paid him.

Life was not easy. His son Alonzo would be given two shot for the rifle and told to come back with two duck; they would use the down and feathers for pillows. In 1939, Mace managed to buy an early 1800s shoreside building near the town dock, formerly a salt store for offshore schooners, an ice house and later a lumber business. There he continued to build boats, using a table saw and bandsaw, originally powered through the wall by a Model T Ford engine. One winter the ice ripped off the wharf beside the building, another time there was a serious fire. The charred wood of a lightning strike is still visible.

### A wonderful hotchpotch...

Castine still feels much the same today. A few years ago, I visited Kenny Eaton and his daughters Ruthie and Suzanne at their boatyard, along with David and Marian Bicks, who first dropped anchor in Castine in the 60s. It's a wonderfully atmospheric and chaotic hotchpotch of boats, timber, tools, gear, spars and rigging. Besides repairing boats, they have visiting yachts moored on the dock, diesel and water available along with chandlery. Kenny offered us some lobsters and took me down to choose them from his supply in a wooden lobster pot hanging under the dock. Back inside the boatshop, he lit a fearsome burner, blue flames running up the tub of water on top of it – not far from tins of paint and turpentine! – and threw the lobsters in when the water boiled.

*With photographs by the author.*

In this age of 'one size fits all', it's great to find local boats for local waters. Kathy Mansfield reports from Maine.

# Class



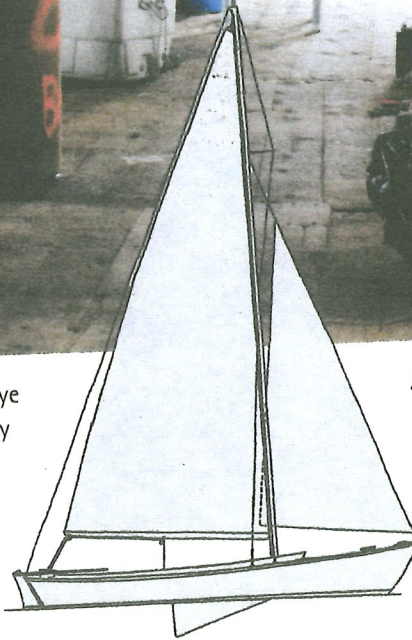
Mace built two 14' (4.3m) versions of the class around 1940 – David Bicks managed to track one down in Massachusetts and have her restored – but the rest of the class are about 18'3" overall, 16'1" on the waterline and with a beam of 7' (5.7 x 4.9 x 2.1m), which makes them roomy and seaworthy, great boats for learning to sail. The original commission asked for a boat which could accommodate 5 or 6 people plus picnic gear, with a centreboard for beaching, yet unlike other local boats at the time, handy enough to race competitively. Mace worked



Above: *Castine's Eaton's Boatyard today  
- and probably yesterday too.*

from his half model using his well-practiced eye rather than a measure and the boats have a very handsome sheer and shape; "I never used a blueprint in my life," Mace had said.

David Austin recalls asking the naval architect Winthrop Warner to design a modern rig, perhaps using the rig from the successful Rhodes 18. "Mace was horrified at the tall mast and said the boats would be unstable but was finally persuaded to go on with the work... By the end of that summer Mace was singing their praises."



of us that don't put engines on the stern."

The boats are hard to capsize, though it has been done. They have remained a strong and much loved

aspect of Castine summers. The locals watch for them out on a spinnaker reach on a Sunday afternoon, knowing by the colour of the spinnaker and the hull which boats they are, deciding whether they are doing well or have been swept downstream by the tide. Class volunteers are out with a committee boat and a cannon, plus sandwiches and drinks, watching the fun. It takes commitment to keep a class of wooden boats sailing regularly and Castine has been fortunate. "The Castine class and the Eatons are the lifeblood of our sailing community," says David Bicks, "a unique tradition which will endure for generations to come."

### Anchoring mid-race...

More boats were built, land was donated for a fine little yacht club where races and sailing lessons are organised. There is a weekly race during the summer and many of the families who first bought boats can be seen out in the harbour. About ten boats regularly race for the Eaton Designers Cup.

The boats have a little weather helm, not a bad thing and the strong tide adds interest to the races; "An anchor was often used in mid race when the tide was stronger than the wind," remembers Kate Robinson. "I recall numerous times, after perhaps a long picnic excursion, anchoring until the tide changed or someone's parents sent a boat out to rescue those who failed to get home in time for dinner. There's still a few

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