

*Since the rise of fiberglass boats in the 1960s—and because the level of craftsmanship required is not suited for large-scale production—wooden boats are a seldom-seen novelty these days. In Western North Carolina, a fleet of about 20 of them are afloat on Lake Toxaway.*



Photographs by MICHAEL OPPENHEIM

# The Boating Life

*Toxaway's Wooden Boat Club anchors  
an extraordinary handcrafted tradition  
in leisure recreation*

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With 14 miles of shoreline perched just above 3,000 feet, Lake Toxaway is a boater's delight. Indeed, this leisure boating community is devoted to its watercraft, as evidenced by the small fleet of handsome wooden runabouts that bear testament to the fading tradition of handcrafted boat building, whereby mahogany, cedar, or oak planks are planed, framed, joined, sanded, and varnished by hand to produce an exquisite masterpiece reflective of yesteryear. The owners of these historic (pre-1917), antique (1918-1945), classic (1946-1960), and contemporary wooden boats—bearing the mark of esteemed makers like Hacker, Gar Wood, and Chris-Craft—celebrate the camaraderie of their common interest with the Toxaway Wooden Boat Club. While formal wooden boat organizations exist throughout the country, this informal club began in 2002. Every summer, the group holds a boat show and parade amid convivial cocktail and dinner parties that celebrate the Toxaway community and a shared love for these extraordinary vessels.



*One club member has restored nearly a dozen wooden boats, including a few very special specimens like this 18-foot disappearing propeller boat from 1939. Opposite, his boathouse houses the "Ynyescraig" (left), custom built for Prince Edward VIII's visit to Canada in 1921, and a 1927 Hacker-Craft built by the Hacker Boat Company.*





*Clockwise from top right, among one club member's collection is a 1944 SeaBird rowboat made by Canada-based Port Carling Boats. His boathouse holds wooden canoes from 1910 and a rare one from 1890 (foreground), plus restored motors, including a 1920 Evinrude, the first maker of outboard motors. The Greystone Inn, where the parade begins; and an interior view of the 1921 "Ynyescraig."*





*Built in 2007 by Grand-Craft, "Green Eyes" is a mahogany replica of an earlier Chris-Craft model.*

*Wooden boats are made by hand and said to ride better and flex more than their modern fiberglass counterparts. And the price tag? Most run between \$25k and \$75k but can certainly top \$100k or more.*

*The "Alleghenia" is a unique—and quite valuable—24-foot Ditchburn built in 1924 by Ditchburn Pleasure Boats Ltd., which operated from 1871 to 1938 in Ontario, Canada.*

*Below, a 1927 Dolphin model Hacker-Craft*



*This 17-foot 1959  
Chris-Craft ski boat  
was designed with a flat  
bottom and V-8 engine  
for serious water-skiers.  
Just like each boat  
on the lake carries a  
story, so do many of the  
homes that surround  
it. Below, this lakefront  
property and log cabin  
(the guest quarters)  
are surprisingly new but  
built to reflect an air of  
historic character.*





*The annual boat parade, which launches from the Greystone Inn, is led by the "Miss Lucy," the inn's 26-passenger, covered, mahogany boat made by Hacker Boat Company. Guests of the inn can board the "Miss Lucy" for daily cocktail cruises.*







*This 24-foot 1947 Sheerliner was built by the former Ontario-based Greavette Boatworks, famous for their racing boats and disappearing propeller versions.*

*Below, Toxaway Wooden Boat Club founder Hal Lochner with his daughter and son-in-law*



While some boats on the lake are quite old, others, like this reproduction of an antique Hacker-Craft, are relatively new.

Below, "Dellited" is a 1941 Chris-Craft boat built in Algonac, Michigan. It was once housed in San Francisco, where it was featured in the Chuck Norris film *An Eye for an Eye*.





*The 2019 boat parade closed with a cocktail party at a historic home on the lake. Fittingly, it was also a benefit for the Historic Toxaway Foundation, which strives to preserve the Toxaway community's history and provides guidance for revitalizing its future.*

