



The Boat Yards

Few shipwrights can make a living exclusively from boatwork but Simeon was a notable exception. Still working, when not actually wielding an adze he is often called upon to make half models for other builders or, more frequently in the past than today, consulted to solve unprecedented situations that may have cropped up in the established boatyards on Haulover Creek.

One of these is Jones Boat Yard. Set up by Gerald Jones who died in 1993 and was succeeded in the business by his son, the yard can haul vessels up to 75' LOA, 8' draught and 50-ton displacement. They are winched smoothly on huge wooden ways liberally daubed with thick grease. Apart from repair work this yard has done some sophisticated conversions. Mr Jones sculpted the pretty stern of *Claudette* after she finished her duty as a British army motor launch. *Mermaid*, also a motorboat in her previous life, was re-shaped at her entry and stern run to change her into a successful sailor.

Directly across the river from Jones is a slightly smaller yard owned by Arthur Hoar, also an occasional customer for Simeon's designs. Quite a few sailing and motor yachts have been built here and many vessels have been repaired.

A couple of derelict cabin cruisers mark the site of the Bladen boatyard which was once busy constructing sloops. That Maurice Bladen, now eighty, is an accomplished shipwright is best shown in the classic lines of the two lighters, *Sophia* and *Lisa*. In his youth Maurice worked in San Pedro until an order for a yacht from the US Consul, Mr Oakley, brought him to Belize City. The 25' sloop fastened with screws – more labour-intensive than nails – was built in three months thanks to the town's electricity and, thus, power tools. Other yacht orders followed as Maurice's designs and work were of high order. Now that he has retired his sons have turned to making more profitable power skiffs.

The Village of Boatbuilders

At Sarteneja's peak, its 1,800 inhabitants owned about eighty sloops between them and had at their disposal six resident boatbuilders, an obvious surplus. During slack times, the shipwrights, with their natural individualism and creativity, became active community figures. Carlos Cruz, now fifty-six, built twenty-three sloops during the 1960s boat boom.

Top: A fishing sloop brought up for repairs at Haulover Creek. Centre left: Maurice Bladen holding the model of a hull he built some years ago. Centre right: Carlos Cruz, sometime political leader, still enjoys boatbuilding. Bottom: The sand lighter *Lisa* in the Jones Boat Yard, Belize City.