Building (and Carving?)
the “Le Canot Imperial”

Photos by Janos Nemeth,
commentary by Janos Nemeth and Tom Wolf

Once again we take great pleasure in publishing an article in which the entire building of a model from laying the keel to the finished product is set out with photos and comments. Janos is well known at Sydney Model Shipbuilders Club for the quality of his carvings, and his incredible skill is exemplified by this model.

“Le Canot Imperial” is Napoléon's oared barge and is the only boat of this type that France has retained in its integrity.

Its construction was decided in great secrecy in the Spring of 1810 when the Emperor Napoléon Bonaparte proposed to go to Antwerp to visit the arsenal, which he had ordered to be established a few years earlier.

Guillemard provided engineering plans of the boat, while Théau (master builder originally from Granville) supervised construction.
On April 30, 1810, the ceremonial canoe (a barge) made a splash in Antwerp: Napoléon Bonaparte and the young Empress Marie-Louise were on board, accompanied by Marshal Berthier (Minister of Marine Decrés) and Admiral Missiessy who commanded the Wing of the Scheldt.

With a true naval procession around them, for several days the barge provided transport for the Emperor to visit the "Charlemagne" (the flagship), witnessing the spectacular launch of the "Friedland", and to inspect the entire fleet.

In 1814 the barge was shipped to Brest, its ornamentation as originally designed was completed but it remains sober, with an eagle at the bow.

Subsequently in 1858 the barge underwent further changes in its decoration in time for the visit to Brest of Napoléon III and Empress Eugénie, the barge is shown in artwork.

It is at this time that the current sculptural elements, including the figurehead representing Neptune, the rear group with the imperial arms, the decorated deckhouse and the large crown supported by four angels were installed.

The barge of the Emperor could have been blown to oblivion by the bombs which annihilated Brest near the end of World War II but by miracle of good fortune it was saved because the Marine Museum was being established at the Palais de Chaillot and as there was space for the barge it was moved to become the Museum’s centrepiece greeting visitors as they arrive.

Under the protection of the German authorities, the barge left Brest on May 9, 1943 and the transfer to Paris by truck was a real spectacle for the onlookers.

With great attention to detail and precision the whole operation was carefully planned, organised and controlled, every detail (but for one thing) was measured and timed.

- 2 -
Then, when the barge arrived in Paris it was discovered that at the Palais de Chaillot there was no provision to enable the barge to enter the Museum as the doors were too narrow!!

More than two years of negotiations were needed to find a solution but finally in August 1945 a huge hole was created in the wall of the Palais de Chaillot and, slowly, the imperial barge entered the sepulchre from which it will probably never emerge.

A complete restoration of the boat was carried out in 2002-2003 with the support of the Foundation Napoléon.

The model is scratch built to a scale of 1:25 by Janos and based on the plans bought from the Paris Maritime Museum.

Different materials had been used for the hull and for the cabin, namely Pearwood, Walnut, Hornbeam, Peroba Rosa and South American Boxwood (Costello).

The oars are made of Costello and the material of the carvings is European Boxwood. The model was completed in about 800 hours between September 2015 and June 2016.

The model as completed is highly decorated and shows the state of the barge after the redecoration was ordered by Napoléon III around 1858.

Janos first exhibited the completed model at the Sydney Model Shipbuilders Club “EXPO 2016” and has exhibited it since to the admiration of both fellow modellers and the public visiting the exhibitions.
1. Plans purchased from Paris Maritime Museum
2. The frame shapes are prepared
3. The hull plug is made of Jellutong, using bread-and-butter method
4. The hull plug under way, side and plan views are roughed out
5. The plug is shaped further and the frames' positions are marked
6. The plug is ready, aft section shown
7. The bow section of the plug is shown
8. The plug is ready and marked with the plank lines
9. The bow of the plug, marked

10. The plug is covered with cling wrap and temporarily fixed to the base board with rubber strips

11. The mid section of the hull, ready and planked. The planks overlap each other, ('clinker' planking)

12. The bow section, showing the planks overlapping each other.

13. The inside of the hull, after removal from the plug. Some glue still needs to be cleaned up.

14. The hull before finishing. Note the grooves in the keel prepared for the frames.

15. Nearly all of the frames are installed. Their shape follows the plank's inside lines.

16. The frames finished, deck shelves and cross beams installed
17. The bow section showing all of the frames installed

18. The cabin's plug in temporary position

19. The cabin frames fabricated with the cabin plug.

20. Cabin parquetry pieces are made of Yew

21. The false decks installed into the rear section

22. Walnut wales are shaped and installed.

23. Parquetry ready for installation

24. The cabin prior to installation. The frames are of Peroba Rosa, planking is Hornbeam.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>Cabin aft view before partition walls are installed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>Cabin is being glued together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>Cabin is ready, doors and window panes still to be installed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>Cabin positioned into hull.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>Cabin with working front doors and hinges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>Cabin partition wall with working door installed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.</td>
<td>The rear door is working too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32.</td>
<td>Cabin top removed (top is removable) showing inside details and window panes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>33.</strong> Cabin front - note door hardware</td>
<td><strong>34.</strong> Cabin ready, top removed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>35.</strong> Neptune version 2 and his bounty is carved.</td>
<td><strong>36.</strong> Oar banks and mid walkway installed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>37.</strong> Bow, showing Neptune version 2 and version 1 (too anorexic, discarded)</td>
<td><strong>38.</strong> Diverse decorations at different stages of carving.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>39.</strong> Neptune version 2 close-up</td>
<td><strong>40.</strong> Cabin wall decorations carved</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
41. Side wall scrolls carved. Decorations are carved using European Boxwood.

42. Hull decorations and coat of arms eagle carved - note the different boxwood colours.

43. Cabin outside decorations (between windows) finished

44. Wreaths to go on cabin walls and doors. Note the individual leaves.

45. Cabin port view.

46. Cabin starboard view. Lower scrollwork is not yet installed on the hull.

47. The aft group of angels installed. The eagle sits on Bloodwood base.

48. Aft view, top crown is under way.
49. Cabin port view. Note the honest dust.

50. Top angel group version 1 is in the making, crown is finished.

51. Aft view, note the cabin end wall decorations.

52. Rudder and tiller installed (working) with the covering helmet. Note the holly gratings.

53. Some internal lighting installed

54. The crown carrier group version 2

55. Crown group in front view.

56. Leaf strips in the angels' hands have some 600 individual leaves
<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>57.</strong></td>
<td>Oarlocks installed, note the base board with catfish supports.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>58.</strong></td>
<td>These scrolls (lower strip) still need to be installed. They are individually carved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>59.</strong></td>
<td>Oar set version 1 made with joints in the middle but replaced later by version 2 oars (without being joined in the middle).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>60.</strong></td>
<td>The brass strips on the cabin top are individually fret-sawed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>61.</strong></td>
<td>Crow carrying putties showing leaf strip details.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>62.</strong></td>
<td>Fret-sawing wouldn’t have been enough, upper holes were made through all the strips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>63.</strong></td>
<td>Ready cabin aft view. Note the brasswork and covering helmets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>64.</strong></td>
<td>Cabin and decorations ready</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
65. Cabin starboard side.

66. The front decoration group under way.

67. Oars are still version 1

68. Oarlocks and version 1 oar holders installed.

69. Le Canot nearly finished.

70. Front group finished. Oars sit now in oar holders version 2.

71. Rear close-up. Note the installed flag poles.

72. Cabin front with newly installed main flag pole. Note the oar holders version 2 on the right.
73. Rear angel group finished. Note the maker's signature plate underneath the coat of arms.

74. Oars version 2 (without joint in the middle) are now decorated.

75. Oars version 2 are installed into oar stands version 2.

76. The gold plated throne is also installed in the cabin. The pillows are made of Ebony.

77. Le Canot is ready. Note the self-made flags.

78. Le Canot in aft view.