

# Brackley Boats – a new Muskoka boat-building tradition

Count Paul Brackley as one of the few people who has actually made money off the Internet.

The owner of Brackley Boats — www.brackley-boats.on.ca — has picked up \$73,000 in sales since last September.

He's about to ship his latest craft, a 21-foot cedar-strip electric canoe-launch to Berkshire, England.

He has only met the owner of the boat, Ken Baynton, twice. Once on Sept. 11, last year, when they first met only minutes after the terrorist attack. They sat in Brackley's Gravenhurst industrial mall shop and watched the TV coverage most of the rest of the day, hardly discussing the boat project. And again this spring Baynton flew over for one final look at the boat he will christen "Muskoka." Otherwise it's been an exchange of e-mails and digital photos.

Paul figures he got the job of building the boat because



While Brackley built the electric-canoe, Wade's Custom Canvas in Huntsville did the upholstery.

Brackley is a popular family name and trusted business name in England.

It's also a well-known and trusted Gravenhurst family name. His father, Jim, and grandfather, Bill, were insurance men.

That and the fact his boats are considerably cheaper than overseas — by about half.

"It takes a lot of trust to do this over the Internet," says Brackley. "They don't know me from Adam."

Brackley has been building his own boats since high school, about a dozen years. He learned the trade working first with Muskoka Fine Watercraft, then Butson Boats and finally with Mike Schumacher, at Sundance canoes.

He figures he's built a couple hundred canoes in his time and says he can now craft a cedar-strip canoe in about two weeks — if he has the time.

Brackley builds with all kinds of wooden materials — but only wood now. He even does oars and paddles.

Other boats he's built this year include another electric canoe to South Carolina; a row boat to New Jersey; a Catspaw dinghy to Minnesota and a run-about to Oakville.

In between commissions he also does repairs. He has an old Ditchburn canoe waiting to be restored.

He says the old guys really knew how to put together a boat.



Paul Brackley poses with his latest pride and joy, an electric canoe-launch he's built for a customer from England he found on the Internet.

While the old canoes had ribs, today's boats rely on layers of fiberglass and lamination for strength.

He prefers to tackle more challenging projects now.

The Muskoka — like all Paul's work — is custom-crafted.

It's electric, because there are no longer petrol depots on the Thames River, where Baynton will drive his pleasure craft.

Brackley says it's "fun to take on new challenges."

So, what's his most unusual boat.

"Well, some guy wanted me to build a replica of the Nina, you know from Columbus' Nina, Santa and Pinta Maria."

While word of mouth is a big part of Brackley's business, the Internet has been his best friend this year.



The old and new Muskoka boats can be seen here, as Paul Brackley's family goes for a test run recently before being shipped to England.



Somewhere under the rainbow...

Kahshe Lake photographer (and Farmer's Market profiler) Rik Robinson snapped this gorgeous digital image of a magnificent rainbow connecting an island to the mainland Tuesday afternoon, following a thunder shower.

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