



Spirit of St. Kitts doing what she and other day-charter cats do best: sailing fast and flat with a load of happy paying passengers.

accident. The St. Kitts native had already worked in air freight, built gas plants in northern Canada, sold insurance, and been a hard-hat salvage diver when he took a job for a marine biology education program in Carriacou, running a 47' (14.3m) catamaran designed and built by modern-multihull pioneer Peter Spronk. Brookes ran that boat aground one night, and she was grated on a ledge until, he said, "the hulls were gone, up to the waterline."

Brookes had the floating remains hauled into port, where Spronk pronounced it a write-off. Brookes was devastated, believing that with the boat gone, so too was his job. Instead, Spronk said to him, "Now you know how to break them. Would you like to know how to make them?" So Brookes joined the crew at Spronk's shop in Sint Maarten (the Dutch half of the island whose French half is St. Martin) in 1973, and credits Spronk—who was his brother-in-law as well as his employer—with teaching him

about boat design and construction.

"If Peter had been building trimarans, I'd probably be building tris today," Brookes said, by way of explaining his devotion to his teacher. Spronk, who died in 1997, was a native of The Netherlands; he'd moved to South Africa and built boats there before heading to the Caribbean in the 1960s—and establishing his niche, designing and building very lightweight catamarans, often with ketch or schooner rigs. He built *Blue Crane* in Grenada, then sailed up to Sint Maarten and set up shop on the beach in Simpson Bay. At that site he produced a steady stream of remarkably quick cats for racing and day-charter work, including *Mabo*, *El Tigre*, and *Rubatyat*. Spronk designs were seminal in the development of fast multihulls in that part of the world; some even raced well in transatlantic competition. They were also essential to the popularization and growing success of the day-charter cat business in the Caribbean islands.

Right—The construction of *Eagle*, Brookes's first cat, comprises plywood skins over bulkheads and stringers, a system favored by Caribbean catamaran pioneer and Brookes's mentor Peter Spronk.

Far right—Brookes recalls hand-cutting the stainless steel plate for this headstay fitting, with a hacksaw.



After only a year at Spronk's shop, and with a Spronk design in hand, Brookes started building a 50' (15.2m) day-charter liveboard for himself. With a financial contribution for the boat's rig from American multihull racing legend Phil Weld, Brookes worked on *Zwana* for five years, launching her in 1979 and starting regular day charters from Sint Maarten to Saint Barthelmy. Brookes also raced the boat locally in Caribbean regattas. *Zwana* made a name for herself and for Brookes; and not incidentally, she made money.

During that period, Brookes enrolled in correspondence courses in what is now called the Westlawn Institute of Marine Technology, in an effort to refine his design skills. He observed how *Zwana's* square box-beam forward, between the two hulls, would dig in to seas, kicking up spray and slowing the boat, arresting it all too dramatically at 14 knots. He thought a beam with an airfoil shape in cross section would be worth the additional effort to build. He also started looking at taller rigs.

"I'd finally found something I was half good at," he recalled. Then he took his ideas to Spronk, who rejected them as unnecessarily complicated. The budding designer argued until, as Brookes remembers it, Spronk said, "If you know so much about what you want, why don't you go design it?"

So Brookes did. Then he built it, for \$250,000, in a shop recently vacated by a St. Kitts sailor and friend, Philip Walwyn, who had just built his own Spronk design. The resulting first Brookes cat, named *Eagle*, was a cross between classic Spronk styling and construction, and Brookes's own aesthetic. Built of ½" Bruynzeel plywood [see the *Rovings* column in this

