

JAMES WHARRAM: CELESTIAL ADVENTURER OR VISIONARY ARCHITECT?



Straight out of a Jack Kerouac novel, James Wharram makes the link between flower power and the 21st century's ecological expectations...

Revered as the guru of an enlightened nautical ideology, challenged for his overtly libertine stances which were however perfectly in phase with the currents of forces and the contradictions of his era, James the Beatnik is one of the most ardent personalities of the 20th century multihull world. His designs are directly inspired by Polynesian shapes and his eco-logical creations meet the 20th century's expectations of 'happy frugality'. His vision of catamarans is simple, artistic, always accurate. He has sold more than 10,000 plans, dreaming of tribal leisure sailing, on the margins of commercial and industrial infrastructures.



Tangaroa at Falmouth: the Wharram epic can now begin...

*The first crossing of the Bay of Biscay on the way to the West Indies:
the boat is rustic, slow and wet...*



The multihull as an alternative to reconstruction!

James was born in 1928, in Manchester. He was 12 years old in 1939 and 18 in 1945! Branded by the absurdity of this second technological world carnage, he made the word liberation his creed. A diploma in technology was his only conformist concession, before giving his thirst for freedom and real apprenticeship of the world free rein. A fisherman, then a merchant seaman, he finally frequented the 'universities' of his choice, despite parental disapproval. Long jaunts in the mountains finished off his training and reinforced his inordinate taste for nature and a free life in the open air. Later, the top of the coachroof on TEHINI (darling in Polynesian dialect), his future boat, directly evoked the ridge tents!

Three girls, thousands catamarans

10 years before flower power, James Wharram prefigured all its energies, but he didn't take refuge in the hypnotic escapes of the period; his isolation and his destiny protected him from fashionable drifting. He was not looking for a guru, would never be one, almost despite himself, a generation's ocean guide. Investing his talent and his technical baggage in the myth of the edification of a globalised consumer society would never be an option for him, his references were elsewhere! Pragmatic, he needed to act and look for the way to put his ideas into concrete form. Reading Éric de Bishop, and the discovery of a Tahitian double fishing pirogue at the British Science Museum merged with his reservations about western values and his architectural curiosity. The absence of financial resources reinforced the temptation of minimalism, the union of the whole fed the transat project, and the intuition of sustainable and different development of multihulls. He glimpsed the possibility of a global process and built TANGAROA! The little 7.16m catamaran was terribly rustic, slow and quite wet, but it opened the way and took '2 women, a man, a dog and 200 books to Trinidad; when we arrived everyone was still inte-

rested in the boat, so it was a success!' The little family (a baby was born!) logically settled in a floating fare moored in the port, and James designed RONGO. This 12.2m catamaran synthesised his new ideas which had come from the experience of the Atlantic crossing (longer hulls, triangular sections, exit TANGAROA's flat bottom). The construction on the beach brought together three exceptional personalities who concealed their great hopes under the rags of a chosen tropical destitution. Bernard Moitessier had just lost MARIE THÉRÈSE II, Henry Wakelam (nautical diy genius) was looking for a boat; the improbable trio got to work! This improvised boatyard was to be the matrix for everything which followed. The youth, the determination, the carefreeness and the creative power of these solar conspirators sealed forever Wharram's faith in amateur construction and the democratisation of nautical vagrancy. In 1959, the crossing of the North Atlantic, from the West Indies (via New York) to England, ended the initiatory voyage. The death of Jutta in 1961 destabilised James, but the requests for plans coming from the publishing of the book (Two girls, two catamarans) restored him and decided his career. He loved sailing above everything, yet his open mind and his ability to collaborate (with Ruth, then with Hanneke and later with the agents) allowed him to create a full range, between 1957 and 1976, the 'Classics': from the 3.6-metre SURFCAT to the 15.5-metre TEHINI (the boat aboard which he and his tribe roamed the coasts of Europe for a long period). Then came the PAHI, TIKI, and ISLANDER families, the round the world voyage by the Pahi 63 SPIRIT OF GAIA and many other adventures. The study of the dolphin world was a momentary research direction, but the basic quest, whose roots were in the Pacific leg of the round the world trip, motivated the LAPITA VOYAGE expedition, in the tracks of the pre-Polynesian migrations, from Indonesia to Vanuatu (2008 – 2009). Nowadays, James defines himself as a marine archaeologist who designs boats; this intellectual plasticity makes him even more engaging. The timeless classic character of his catamarans will be confirmed in the future and we will discover the huge culture of this modest prophet, who has harmonised all the dimensions of his personality and allowed everyone access to a democratic multihull, a vision of leisure sailing which is also a profound reflection on the progress and links between men.

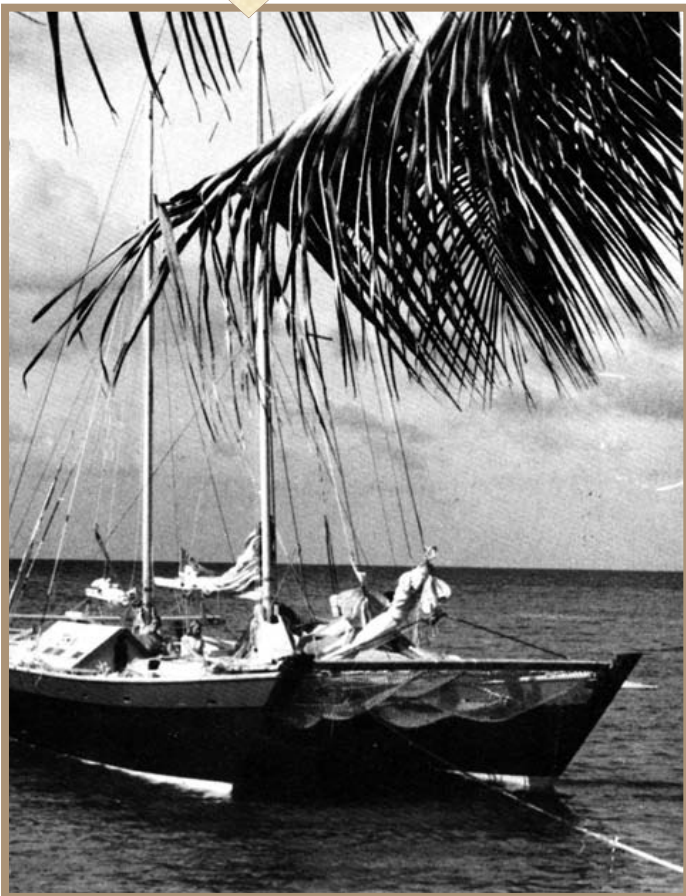
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WHARRAM: MILITANT ARCHITECT

"In a world where values are constantly changing, building and sailing aboard your own boat gives confidence, strength and the feeling of having your own way of life."

Capable of nourishing his work with his dreams, of rationalising the dreamlike, revisiting the oceanic architectural heritage to design today's multihulls, James Wharram has created the conditions for his own blossoming; in Ruth and Hanneke he has found the feminine extensions of his genius, and his inordinate appetite for sailing has provided him with the adrenaline which counterbalances his hedonism. As a designer, he has no difficulty putting himself in his customer's position and providing them with an accessible method of realisation. "In 1965, when architecture had become my main activity, the main priority was to simplify the traditional construction methods." The classic range still integrated massive and complex laminated timber parts for the bow and stern. The Pahi generation did away with them and appropriated the intensive use of epoxy and glass tissues. Inspired by origami (Japanese paper folding) the iconoclastic architect went further and perfected the 'stitch and glue' of the Tikis,

"Its beauty is breathtaking, its aesthetics are beyond fashion, and its taut lines of a pirate ship dominate in the ports! For 10 years, with 5 crew members, I have experienced the happiest and most creative moments..."
(James Wharram)



which was applied wonderfully to the small creations (up to 30'). James took an interest in the technical progress of his era, and frequented the nautical symposiums; he exchanged regularly with Mead Gougeon, and generalised West System's contribution to the use of ply/epoxy/glass composites; he received the prize for architecture from the American magazine, Cruising World. Plywood was the fetish material for Wharram, who chose it for all of its mechanical and working qualities, but also because it was a support of the future, well-suited to computerised cutting-out. Plywood can do without noble species of wood if it is combined with epoxy impregnation and thus becomes a perfect by-product of the ethically-managed fast growing forests; the carbon traps the atmosphere needs! "In the end, you obtain a boat made from a new material, which offers the rigidity and durability of fibreglass, combined with the beauty of wood."

The basics:

The pirogue shape: at least 10 times longer than it is wide, it presents low resistance to movement and can reach high speeds with a small sail area. Combined with the raft's geometry, it offers great stability and a boat which is easy to build and manoeuvre.

V sections: the tulip shaped ends and V-section hulls (or rounded V) allow it to sail to windward without mobile appendages, and offer a comfortable passage through the sea.

Flexible assembly: the many crossbeams, attached to the hulls via textile lacings, give the platform a bit of flexibility, making beaching easier. No coachroof: key point of an easy construction, easy transport and simplified assembly, this bias reduces windage, improves privacy and safety, and doesn't exclude added pilot houses.

Accommodation: what is flexi-space?

James Wharram declared that he had passed via 3 main approaches in the design of the accommodation. The classic range benefitted



At New York, the crew (Jutta, Ruth and James) increased with the arrival of a baby...

firstly from the partitioning you would expect from an efficient living machine. From the 70s onwards, under the influence of the boat shows, even the Wharram clientele demanded furniture and sophisticated interiors! The answer came quickly: the Flexi-Space. Applying Ludwig Van der Rohe's 'less is more' to the nautical world, James reinvented the organisation of the volumes and the functions aboard. Influenced by Feng Shui (literally the wind and the water!), this interior architecture was disconcerting before it was appealing. For certain people, there is nothing! The others will appreciate the simplicity and flexibility of the areas (two cabins become a meeting room or a dormitory). Always pragmatic, the architect defends the idea that at the launch, it is too early to decide on the interior choices, and that it is better to leave than to build (implied: useless, heavy and expensive things)! The li-

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ving space will be developed en route, with the help of 'boxes' (more or less sophisticated portable technical lockers dedicated to the galley, d-i-y, stowage...); in short, we are not so far from the principles supported in ocean racing, but with different motivation.

James by James

- "I felt that it was vital to get away from the complicated building process, countless templates and measurements, to exploit the techniques of joining wood with the help of the new epoxy resins."

- "Rounded V-shaped hulls can be obtained



Wharram-designed catamarans scour all the world's seas. And when you meet one, it is immediately recognisable!

without screws, nails or complex implementation; we first make a full half hull, superimpose the second, and after adjusting the edges of the keel, the bow and the stern, we sew the panels with copper wire and insert the bulkheads – in short, an instant boat!”

- “I represent architecture as a circle, an ascending spiral that I roam, adding my knowledge and experiences. When designing a boat, I imagine myself inside it, I become a part of it and return constantly to three kinds of craft: the double pirogue, an extension of my body which allows me to go to sea; the family boat aboard which I can live safely at sea, and the tribal vessel.”

- “A long ocean crossing clarifies the architectural options remarkably.”

I HAD A WHARRAM

Jean Yves Poirier's Tane Nui.

At the time I was a plastic arts teacher in Paris, and one day I fell in love with a Tangaroa which had stopped at la Rochelle. I ordered the catalogue and the plans of a Tane Nui (sister ship of the boat belonging to Michèle Manassé and Julien Quérue, who tell of their Atlantic trip in 'Audonien', Editions Chiron) and built it in a shed rented by the 'foyer rural' in Corneilles en Vexin (my neighbour then was Bruno Ferhenbach, who was working on a 10-metre trimaran). Ruth had the idea of bringing together all the amateur builders in the Paris region, we got on well and I became the Wharram France agent! Working then at SPF (which has become Sicomin), my skills as a plastics technician, my taste for archi-

itecture and my knowledge of the applications of the new resins predisposed me to collaborate with the Wharram Design Team to perfect the 'stitch and glue' of the Tiki range (the Pahi 26 is 70% J.Y.P.!). In 3 years, I must have sold around 250 plans, a good hundred of which became boats. My Tane Nui is now on the island of Réunion. For me, Wharram is a 'modern', he was able to promote, against the current, techniques which were then heartily approved of by everyone (lashings, square-headed main-sails...), but I especially admire the simplicity and elegance of the obvious things, in the man as well as in his boats. The Wharrams are affordable and safe; when you show an interest in this type of catamaran, you will also reflect on existence and the place of leisure.

My Tiki 28, by Philippe Echelle

So much nonsense has been said and written about him that James Wharram one day decided to sub-contract close to his home a series of coastal cruisers, whose construction he kept an eye on and in which he instilled a digest of all the ideas dear to him! This boat, with minimum scantlings and original geometry

Spirit of Gaia, the Pahi 63 on which James, Hanneke and their crew sailed round the world...

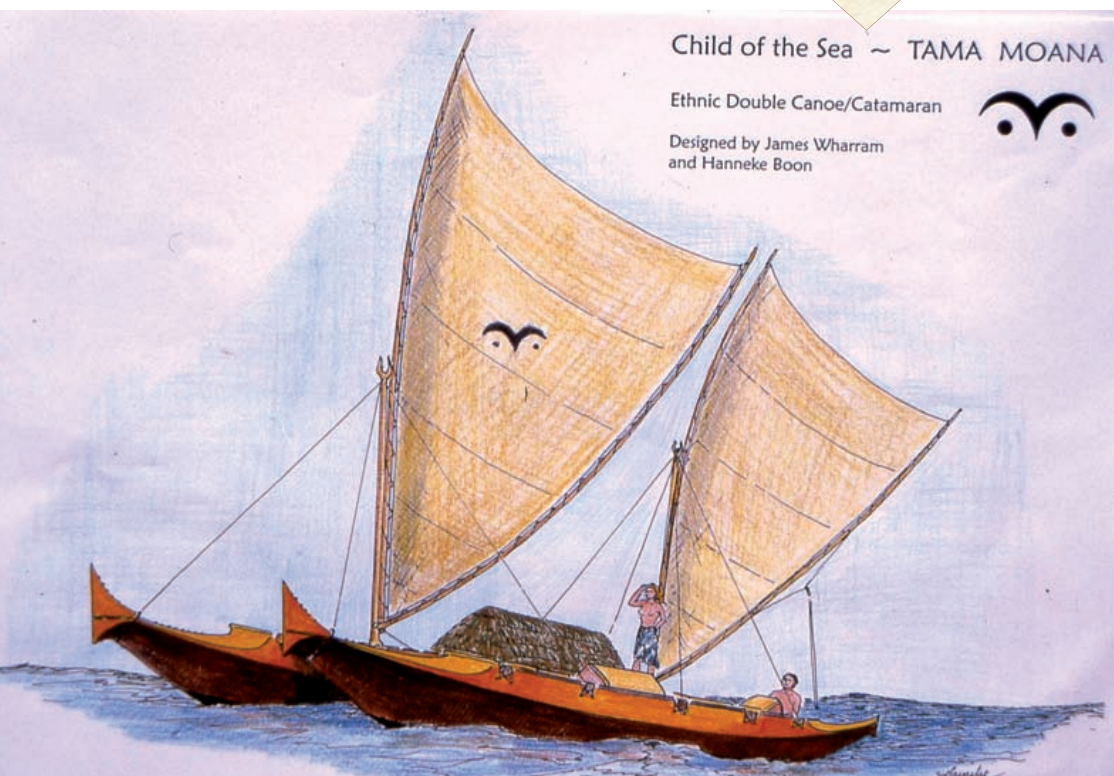


At 83 years old, James continues sailing round the world, as the Lapita voyage proves...

LAPITA VOYAGE

Between 1995 and 1998, James, Hanneke and their crew (including their young son, Jamie) sailed round the world aboard SPIRIT OF GAIA (63'). More and more intrigued by the pre-Polynesian migrations, the Wharram Design Team crossed the Indo-Pacific as far as the Santa Cruz archipelago (New Guinea), looking for these stone age navigators and the vestiges of their boats. In the same way as Thor Heyerdahl, but according to a reverse itinerary, he surrounded himself with a scientific team, designed and had built two catamarans whose architecture was as close as possible to the proto-multihulls which set off from the Philippines 3,000 years ago. The two 38-footers were however built using durable modern methods, so they could be given to the populations of Tikopia and Anuta for their daily activities. This odyssey-homage also had archaeological and scientific aims, apart from its humanitarian aspects, and aimed to rediscover and restore, with the last holders of this ancient knowledge, the techniques of navigation without instruments from the past.

Still just as prolific, James Wharram and Hanneke Boon continue to offer new designs regularly. Wonderful!



(no arms, but a structural bridgedeck bolted to the inside edge of the hulls!) was not intended for individual construction. 8.65m long and weighing 700kg empty, this sports coupé was capable of astounding performance and easily exceeded 20 knots in strong winds (shorthanded). However it took us to Corsica as a family, with 2 young children! Despite an awful load carrying capacity, and the absence of headroom, its charm bewitched me and I spent hours admiring it! This perfect wood-epoxy cocoon provided me with some of the most beautiful emotions in my sailing life; I still regret having sold it without having crossed the Atlantic with it singlehanded, to prolong the beautiful story.

Nicolas Vivier's Tiki 26

10th June 1999: the South Guérande buoy was behind me, the rare boats I met certainly didn't suspect that this little catamaran less than 8 metres long, with a strange rig and sailing fast on a close reach, had just covered 3,500 miles directly from Pointe à Pitre in Guadeloupe!

September 1998: in the early morning, the Pointe du Raz had been left behind, Nicolas accompanied by his two sisters set a course for Galicia. He descended as far as Lisbon, then set off singlehanded for Madeira; alas 3 days later, he had to turn back with a turn genoa. "The wind (on the nose!) never got above force 7, but my lack of experience and seasickness made me make some mistakes." Setting off again a few days later, he stopped at Porto Santo, then Gran Canaria, before crossing the Atlantic to Guyana. After a long stopover in Tobago, he then headed for Pointe à Pitre to prepare the return Atlantic crossing, which was "longer and much harder than the first. You have to be able to use your energy to advance when it is worthwhile, or slow down to rest the boat and the crew at other times. After several days of good progress, I encountered variable winds and calms, then three gales, one of which, north of the Azores, lasted for 4 days, with contrary winds of force 7 to 9! No need to say that in these conditions, comfort was limited, but the grandeur of the sight of the ocean churned up by the breakers repaid my efforts. After the first gale, I noticed



The Wharrams: complete ranges for everyone.

THE WHARRAM CATAMARANS

Tangaroa, Raka, Narai, Ariki and Tehini are the ocean-going models in the classic range. Their timeless voyager silhouettes have not dated (with the reservation of applying modern epoxy techniques to an old model or a new construction). This attractive family has proved itself on all the world's oceans, with for example Henk de Velde's Oro, which, during its round the world voyage faced typhoon Oscar in the Indian Ocean.

The PAHII, from 26' to 65' offer a different approach; their shaped hulls constituted a technical advance (more volume, less internal reinforcement) and are particularly suited to the use of plywood coming from fast-growing woods. The Captain Cook 42' is the pacesetter of this group, whose prototype took part in the 1978 round Britain race, finishing this very selective course in bad weather with top speeds of 17 knots! The TIKI offer a development of the two previous inspirations, with the aims of saving weight, intensive use of stitch and glue, bound rudders, clinker stiffeners and the use of pine-based plywood... The ISLANDER are mainly dedicated to professional construction and are available in big sizes (50 – 60'), whilst a new 'eco-charter' 39-footer has just been designed by the Devoran team. The Amatasi 27' (2011) is a low-technology catamaran, intended for construction by fishermen far from any infrastructure, or for sailing schools practicing coastal raids. Inspired by the Wayfarer 21, its minimum construction budget is €3,000, and it shows the multi-objective vivaciousness of the Wharram team. In all sizes, Wharrams are able to meet the expectations of sailors who fall under their spell; the quality of work and the respect of the design weight should guide future Jasons.

that one of the two fittings holding the forestay was broken; fortunately the second one held, otherwise the voyage would have been longer...under a jury rig." During the night of 9th June, I caught sight of the Belle Ile lighthouse after 45 days at sea.

Albert and Marie Thérèse's Tangaroa MkIV

Albert and Marie-Thérèse are two apparently ordinary personalities who are so out of the ordinary that their charm is infectious; they seem to be able to do without almost everything and have a lot of fun in their lives! Their recipe: forget the tests, build a good boat on the veranda of the house in Buenos Aires, cross the oceans and use it as a marine home at the stopovers (which can be long!). Their spartan taste allows them to do without most of the usual equipment and, at 68 and 72 years old (meeting in 2002), to keep a juvenile freshness and a proud indepen-

The little 7.16-metre catamaran was terribly rustic, slow and quite wet, but it took '2 women, a man and a dog' to Trinidad...

dence. In October 96, after having sold their house, the nurse and the former air taxi pilot cast off their mooring lines and suffered a force 11 storm in the mouth of the Rio de la Plata, which they remember bitterly.! They tried several defence strategies in the wild seas of the forties, and finished by falling asleep through exhaustion. The storm pushed them 400 nautical miles south; they took 28 days to reach Brazil with winds of force 7 to 8! Since that day, Albert has had unlimited confidence in his boat. In 25 additional days at sea, they reached Trinidad, before dawdling for a whole year in Venezuela and crossing the Caribbean from north to south in nine days. Porto Rico held MAR Y VENT back for 6 months; the little 10.5m Tangaroa then crossed the Atlantic in 22 days, to Lisbon, then Castellon, where Albert found the family again that he had left at the end of the war. 18 months later, equipped for the first time with an outboard motor, (!) the catamaran set off again to conquer the Mediterranean and complete a tour of the western basin (Balearics, Tunisia, Sicily, Sardinia, Marseille) in 84 days. 10 years later, MAR Y VENT settled its keels in a dry port in the south of France and still appears to be like new!



*The emblematic PAHI 42 or CAPTAIN COOK...
A legendary catamaran, here in a 52' version...*

THEY SAID:

- "I would be happy to present something as relevant to cruising as James Wharram's designs." (Nigel Irens)
- "These boats don't impose themselves on the sea, and don't make wagers with it in the search for more speed or more luxurious accommodation. They are moderate in all respects and use flexibility instead of strength; the ease and simplicity instead of power and technology to guarantee their success and their harmony with the environment." (D.Mac Naughton, Wooden Boat magazine)
- "Go and find a naval architect, you will leave with a bundle of plans. With Wharram, you will leave with a philosophy." (Bill Davis, Yachting Monthly)



*Hanneke and James, still accomplices
in life as well as on
the drawing board.*