

After the Depression the emphasis returned to power yachts and then to extensive boat-building efforts for the government during World War II. Roy Stephens retired after the war in 1945, turning operations over to his nephews and sister-in-law.

—Daniel B. MacNaughton

OLIN J. STEPHENS II

Born April 13, 1908 · United States

"I was lucky: I had a goal. As far back as I can remember I wanted to design fast boats." These first two sentences of Olin Stephens's autobiography, *All This and Sailing, Too*, summarize a lifetime's vocation on the part of the most successful and influential designer of the twentieth



Olin Stephens: Nancy. Design No. 17, from 1932, is shown racing for the British-American Cup at Cowes with Stephens at the helm. An early 6-Meter, she was followed by numerous others, with *Goose* of 1938 being the best known. Prior to World War II, Stephens was also designing 8- and 12-Meter yachts to the International Rule. © *Beken of Cowes*

century. He was raised near New York City and, as a boy, was introduced to boats during family vacations on Cape Cod. Along with his father, Roderick, and younger brother, Roderick Jr. (called Rod), he learned to sail in a series of family-owned boats. Fascinated by sailing and its technology, the boys absorbed all they could from yachting magazines and their own experience, and were encouraged and supported by their father.

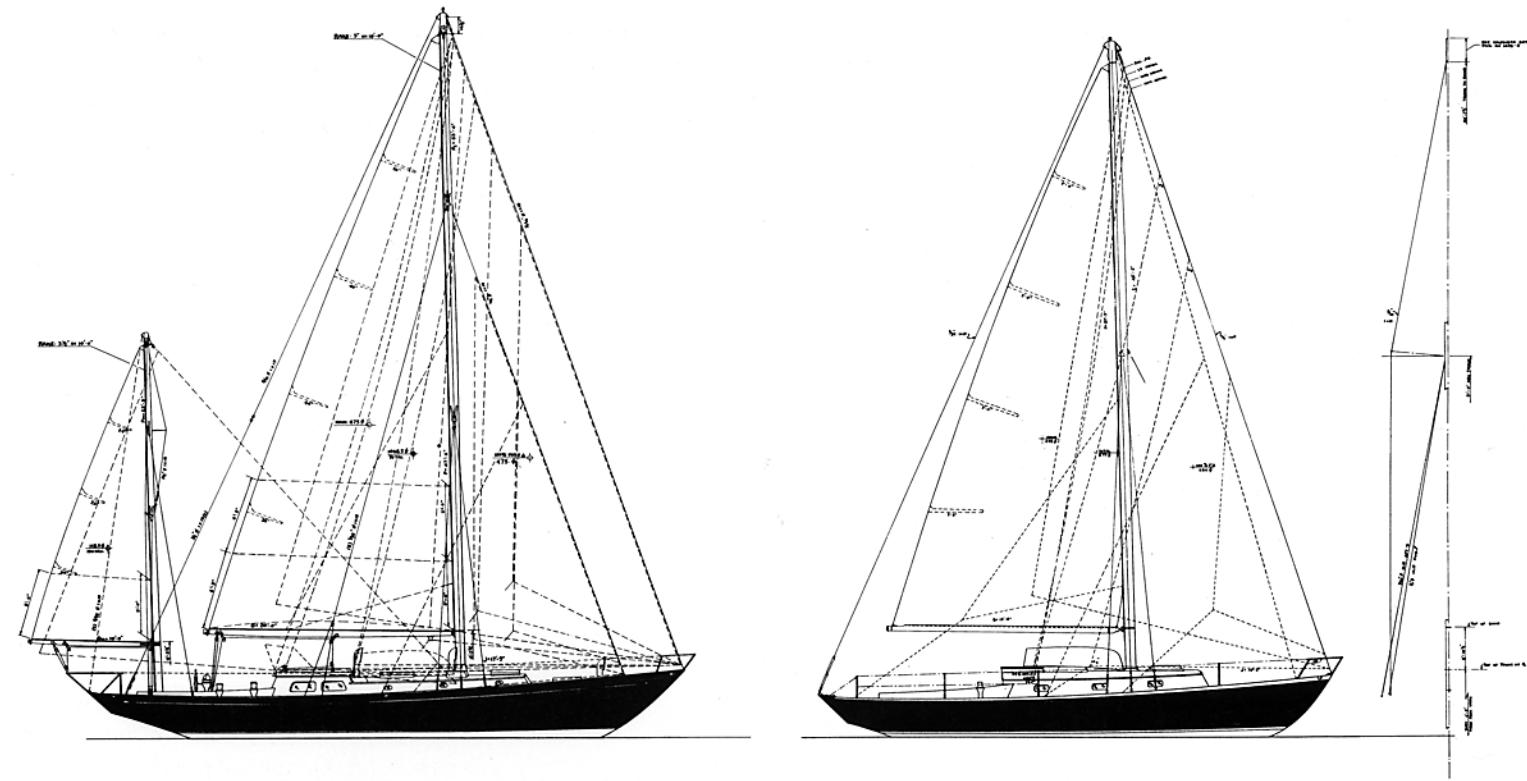
After graduating from high school, Olin Stephens entered MIT in 1926, only to be forced to drop out during his freshman year because of illness. Throughout his life, although he was a pioneer in scientific yacht design, he would say that he regretted his lack of training in mathematics and engineering. Yet Stephens had aptitudes that suited his calling.

"I started my career with the tools of observation and intuition to which quantitative analysis has been gradually added," he wrote in his autobiography. "Whenever possible I studied lines and tried to see the way shape was coupled to performance."

By 1926 Stephens was sailing regularly at Larchmont Yacht Club in 6-Meters, a restricted-design keelboat about 34-foot LOA and the hot racing class of the day, with top-flight sailor/designers like Clinton Crane and Sherman Hoyt. Six-Meter racing was Olin's laboratory for identifying and analyzing the features that affected a boat's performance—what made a boat of a particular design a little faster upwind or on a reach. By 1928 he was working at a drafting table at home and, with the help of Norman L. Skene's manual *The Elements of Yacht Design*, was teaching himself how to draw plans. His bible was *Yacht Cruising*, by Claud Worth, an English medical doctor, yacht designer, and offshore sailor who favored the idea that sailboats should have balanced lines.

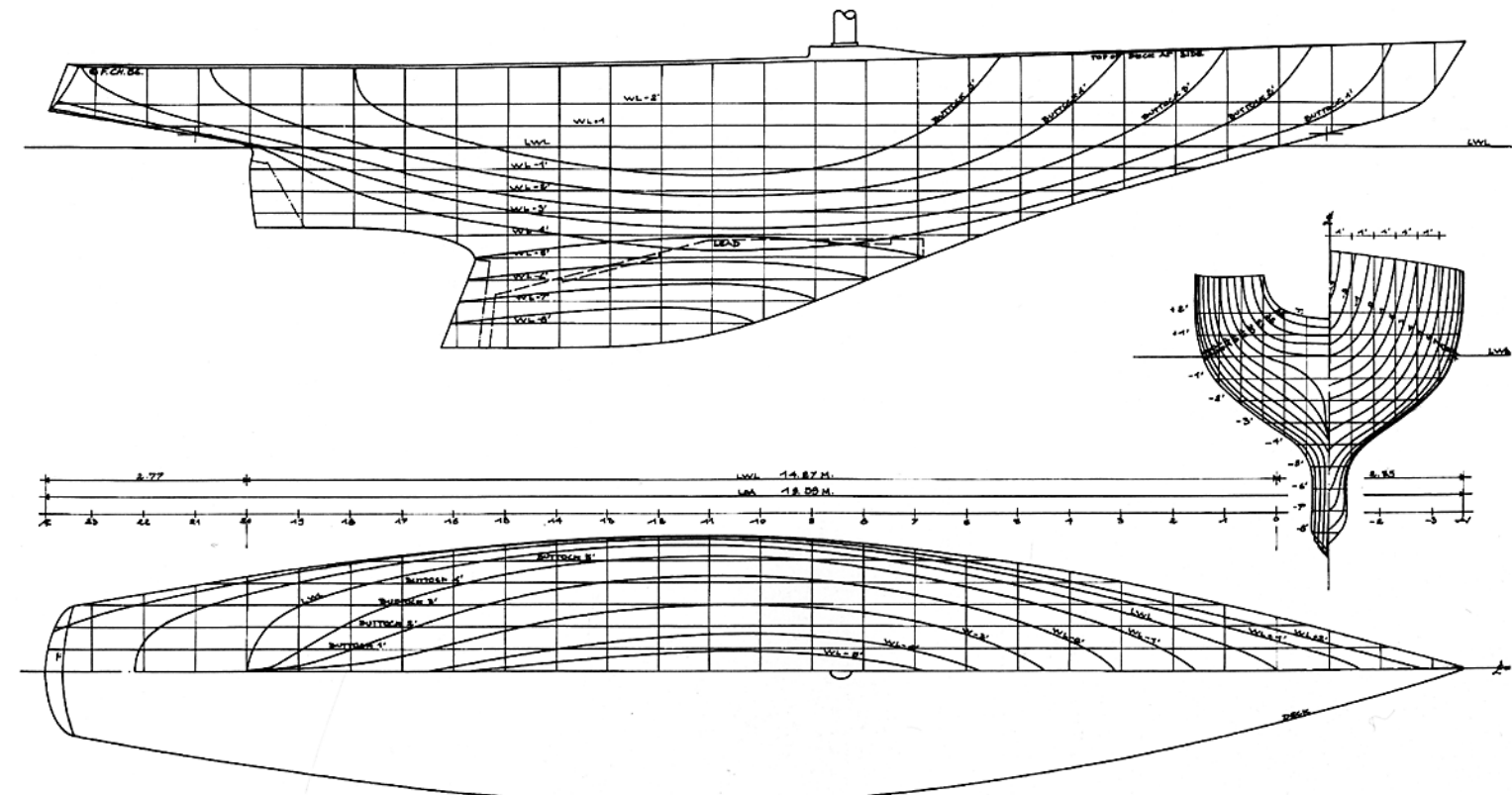
Stephens's on-the-water observations of 6-Meters confirmed the value of that rule of thumb. His first published design, a 6-Meter, appeared in the January 1928 *Yachting* with these comments by the young designer: "In any design the most important factors of speed seem to be long sailing lines and large sail area, with moderate displacement and small wetted surface. Then comes beauty, by which is meant clean, fair, pleasing lines. Though *per se* beauty is not a factor of speed, the easiest boats to look at seem the easiest to drive." To this equation he added stability, owing to considerable external ballast. Worth, like most older designers of offshore boats, placed the lead ballast in the bilge in order to ease the boat's motion through a seaway. Stephens preferred it deep in the keel, where 6-Meters and other modern racing boats had it, in order to provide stability and sail-carrying ability for good upwind performance.

After working as a draftsman for Henry J. Gielow, who specialized in large powerboats, and Philip Rhodes, Stephens in 1929 went into partnership with Drake Sparkman, a successful yacht broker, to form Sparkman and Stephens (S&S). The aggressive Sparkman was the salesman; Stephens, by nature a shy man, ran the design office. Their first project was a 21-foot LOA keelboat for junior sailing on Long Island Sound called the Sound Junior Class, later renamed the Manhasset Bay One-Design (it is still sailing more than seventy years later). Then came a small cruising boat for his father and several 6-Meters, some on referrals from Clinton Crane, an amateur designer who wanted to help the youngster get started on a professional career.



Olin Stephens: Anitra. Anitra was design No. 1358, and at 48-foot 5-inch LOA was the largest yacht derived from the earlier Pilot designs. With bright topsides, this classic doghouse yawl impeccably constructed by Bengt Plym is considered by many one of the best-looking Sparkman and Stephens designs. Showing speed as well as beauty, she won the 1959 Fastnet Race. Drawing courtesy Jay Paris

Olin Stephens: Hestia. Design No. 1478, *Hestia* was a modest 34-footer with winning ways that enhanced Sparkman and Stephens's reputation in the United Kingdom and Europe. The most apparent influence of the RORC Rule on her design is a draft of 6 feet on a 25-foot 6-inch DWL. Drawing courtesy Jay Paris



Olin Stephens: Intrepid. The 1966 *Intrepid*, design No. 1838, was a milestone in 12-Meter development, having a shortened keel with trim tab and a separate rudder faired into a filled-out afterbody. Other details, including below-deck winches, a lowered boom, and a titanium upper mast, contributed to her victories in the 1967 and 1970 America's Cup series. © *Chevalier & Taglang*