



# IF I HAD A BOAT

BY  
LUCY  
LEA  
TUCKER



# IF I HAD A BOAT

**NEVER TURN DOWN A SPONTANEOUS ROAD TRIP, PLANE RIDE, OR BOAT OUTING—RULES TO LIVE BY IN MY PLAYBOOK. SO, WHEN FRIENDS INVITE ME TO JOIN THEM ON A DRIFT BOAT DOWN THE ROARING FORK RIVER WITH ONE OF THE BEST FLY FISHING GUIDES IN THE VALLEY—YOU CAN BET THAT I SAY “YES.” AFTER A BUSY WORK WEEK, A SPUR-OF-THE-MOMENT OUTDOOR ADVENTURE WAS THE EXACT ESCAPE I NEEDED. BEFORE HITTING THE RIVER, WE PICK UP OUR GUIDE, BRANDON, AT THE BOULDER BOAT WORKS WAREHOUSE IN CARBONDALE, WHERE HIS BOAT WAS CUSTOM DESIGNED TO SPEC, A STONE’S THROW FROM THE ‘PUT IN’ ON THE FORK.**



PHOTOGRAPHY: JORDAN CURET



**C**hecking out the clean lines and nice aesthetic feel of the sand shade hulls in the warehouse, I ask, “What’s so special about these boats?” Boat builder, Matt Clemente, grins as he gazes over the fleet of handcrafted, custom designed vessels, and replies, “These are the Ferraris of drift boats, with Amish-like craftsmanship.”

Brandon concurs, “This is the ultimate guide boat. While it is more of

an investment than other boats, the value is in the timeless look and feel, as well as its durability. It’s a hand-up from rafts, fiberglass, and aluminum drift boats. It’s easy to row and it’s the lightest, safest, best-handling drift boat on the water. It’s class.”

Brandon guides up to 230 days of the year, so this craft is his business. No other boat offers year-round access to rivers. He explains, “Other drift boats simply cannot navigate the

shallow waters. With Boulder Boats, you don’t have to work hard to slow down on the river, to hold clients in sweet spots, or to fish favored stretches.”

As it turns out, boat-making is an intricate art form. The guys who started Boulder Boat Works are master craftsmen—and forward-thinking. Inspired by classic lines in traditional McKenzie wooden dories, they built their first model entirely out of wood. While romantic and beauti-

OPPOSITE: Writer and fly girl, Lucy Lea Tucker fishes from a Boulder Boat Works drift boat with fly fishing guide, Brandon Soucie, on Colorado’s Roaring Fork river. ABOVE: Master craftsman, Ham Wallace of Boulder Boat Works, using his expertise and the tools of the trade in the BBW warehouse.



ful, this was a painstakingly long building process for a boat bound to get knocked around. After a lot of discussions and many more prototypes, they decided that if kayaks were being made from plastic, then why couldn't the same material be used for full-size boats? Using ¼-inch sheets of a unique product called VHMW-PE, which stands for Very High Molecular Weight Polyethylene (or “really tough plastic,” in layman’s terms), they created a virtually indestructible boat. It was slicker and more resilient, with classic lines from the original wooden dory boat integrated with custom wood accents to make this stealth craft the perfect combination of beauty and strength.

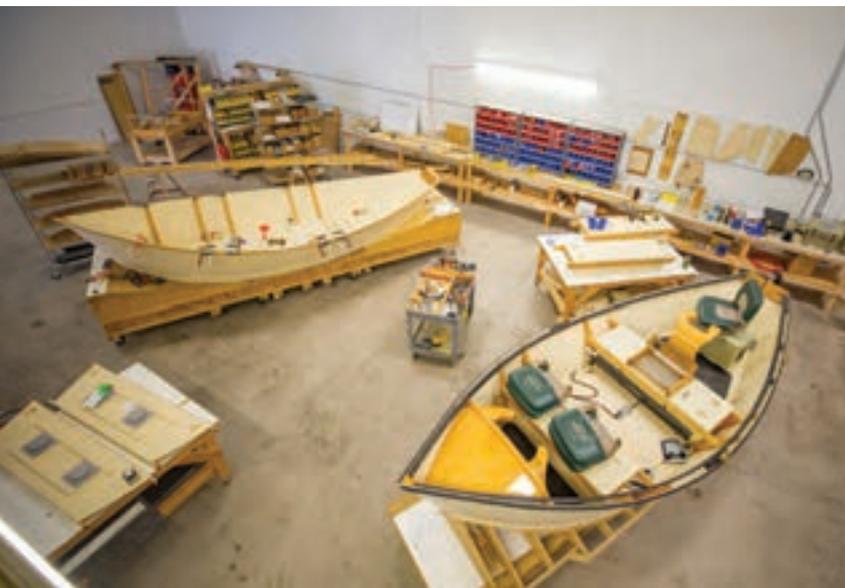
After seeing the craftsmanship and dedication that goes into these boats, I was eager to experience this beautiful, quiet, smooth ride firsthand—on what was turning into a perfect, bluebird Colorado summer day. I had never really spent much time pondering boats—or given much thought to how a boat is made.

My first recollection of being on a boat was when I was around six or seven years old at the helm of my father’s aluminum pond fishing boat, steering us to his favorite fishing holes on a small lake in the hill country of Texas. We fished with a spinning rod and reel and finally, at the end of the day, I landed a whopper catfish—seven pounds! I remember the

excitement of playing tug of war with the thrashing, whiskered wild being as I reeled him into the small boat. With help from my dad, I removed the hook and proudly released the slippery creature back into the water. Not only was that the first boat I remember being in—it was also the first fish I remember catching. As I sat at the bow of Brandon’s boat, I felt pretty sure that my dad would approve—and might even want to upgrade his metal dinghy.

Every summer solstice, around my dad’s birthday, I head up north to Lake Michigan. Oftentimes, we would celebrate by chasing the notorious hex hatch (*Hexagenia limbata*, the largest mayflies in North America) on warm

summer nights during twilight hours on the Au Sable River. The area is considered one of the best brown trout fisheries east of the Rockies, and we fished this elusive fly from a hand-crafted, wooden Au Sable boat pushed by a pole. Reminiscent of Boulder Boat Works’ styling, the historic boat dates back to the 1870s. Lightweight and made from cedar and white pine, the Au Sable is perfect for slow-moving water. Allegedly, when you hit the hex hatch, the air is blanketed with mayflies and monster trout, who hide in the shade of the banks and under logs during the daylight. The river comes alive with the hatch at twilight. More memorable than catching trout (which we rarely did),



PHOTOGRAPHY: JORDAN CURET

were the little things, like our guide reprimanding us to, “neaten your lines!” This was his way of telling us to make better casts. Before dusk he would pull off to the side of the river and grill dinner right on his wooden Au Sable boat as we waited for the light to fade and the hex to appear. We sat in complete darkness with only the light of the moon. After many attempts to hit this “hoax hatch,” as we later coined it, my dad and I ventured on to more promising waters in

faraway spots near Lake Taupo in New Zealand and in Patagonia.

Boating can become a way of life, if you’ve been introduced to the right sort of boats. Add fishing in the right sort of boat to the mix, and you’ve got yourself a full-blown obsession.

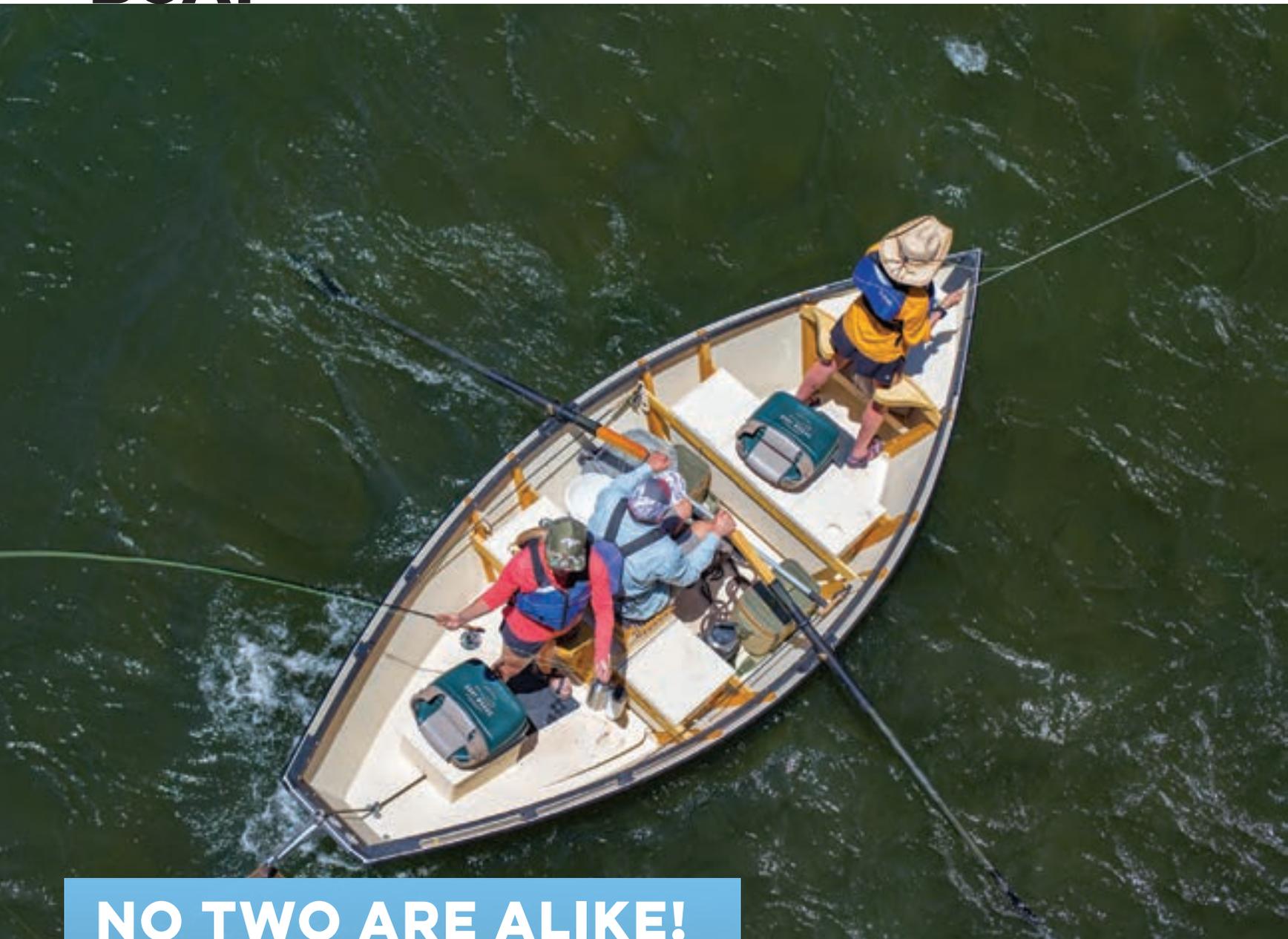
Boulder Boat Works boats are sure to create some die-hards. The lightweight BBW hull sits in only five and one-half inches of water, allowing anglers to slide over rocks without hesitation—exploring water that other drift

boats simply cannot reach. A heavier fiberglass or aluminum boat typically sits (or drafts) much deeper, in 10 inches of water, putting the keel closer to the rock-lined riverbed.

About 20 years ago, I spent a day fishing this same stretch of the Roaring Fork River, on a much different, weightier fishing raft. That was my first summer living in Colorado, when I interned at an Aspen gallery to earn credit for my art history degree. My boss sent me on an errand to deliver a Peter

Max original to a remote house on the outskirts of town in the Woody Creek area. An hour into the half-hour drive, I realized I was headed in the wrong direction (this was before Google Maps), so I made a hasty U-turn in the middle of Upper River Road, which landed me and my non-4WD car in a ditch. One of the first passersby was a man driving a truck, who kindly stopped to see if I needed help. John Wyman was his name, and with a rope tow from his truck’s hitch he got me out of my

OPPOSITE: Beautiful craftsmanship and technologically advanced materials allow BBW to offer a lifetime guarantee on their hulls. ABOVE: Dream boats in varying stages of completion inside the Boulder Boat Works warehouse.



## NO TWO ARE ALIKE!

A new feature on [boulderboatworks.com](http://boulderboatworks.com) gives boat buyers the ability to design and build their own dream boat. You can customize unique, one-of-a-kind options for storage, coolers, seating configurations, and type of seats. Pick from elegant and functional custom rope seats, to seats that can fold or even seats that sit upon YETI coolers. Seating can be built for up to four people, but typically the BBW seats three with the guide's seat in the middle for rowing. The boat's gunnels are handcrafted with white ash wood, but you can choose from many different options for the interior, hand-finished wood accents—mahogany, African mahogany, bride eye maple—with a nearly endless amount of veneer options for the rear knee brace and optional front veneered fly deck.

predicament in no time. I felt obliged to buy him a beer at the nearby Woody Creek Tavern to thank him for his speedy and valiant rescue. Plus, he was pretty cute. Over that cold bottle of Budweiser at the funky tavern bar, I learned he was a local fly fishing guide. I took this meeting as a sign to upgrade from my spin rod to a more natural, skilled version of fishing and asked John if he would teach me. Our

next meet-up was on the Roaring Fork River in his 13-foot rubber raft, where I learned the finer points of the roll cast. A multi-sport man, John also taught me to row and roll a kayak.

Around the same time that I was flirting with cute guys in exchange for lessons learned about the great outdoors, Lyle Lovett released an equally quixotic and nostalgic tune. The song brought me back to Texas, where I had

OPPOSITE and ABOVE: Finding the goods on the Roaring Fork in a Boulder Boat Works drift boat.



PHOTOGRAPHY: JORDAN CURET

caught that first fish on Dad's fishing boat. Lovett sang freely, conjuring up visions of whimsy and romance:

***"And if I had a boat  
I'd go out on the ocean  
And if I had a pony  
I'd ride him on my boat"***

*If I Had a Boat* actually arose from a true story. "Lovett claims he once tried to ride a pony across a pond. He wished he'd

had a boat," explains *Rolling Stone* magazine's Keith Harris.

I'm jolted out of my reverie as Brandon patiently reminds me to mend my line. The smooth ride and calm waters had me caught up in wistful memories, not paying much attention to the fish. The repetitive act of casting, mending, and watching the line naturally put me in a quiet, reflective state. A boat is more than

just a vessel to get from point A to point B. A boat is a means to connect with nature—to get away from civilization. A boat is steeped in tradition, craftsmanship, and after giving the subject some serious thought, for me, a boat is a coming of age. And best of all, a boat is laden with adventures and fond memories. **BT**

## BBW FACTS

**HISTORY:** Founded in 2001 in Boulder, a carpenter cum furniture maker and an ER doctor started Boulder Boat Works with the intention to build a boat to float down the Grand Canyon. Over the subsequent 18 years, the ownership and the original design of the boat has evolved and been refined to the current design of today. Truly a labor of love, each Boulder Boat Works drift boat is considered the lightest, most durable, and easiest rowing drift boat on the market.

**BUILD TIME:** Start to finish, one boat takes between 80 to 100 hours to build.

**BOATS BUILT PER YEAR:** The BBW warehouse current yield is between 60 to 90 handcrafted boats per year.

**HULL WEIGHT:** Around 160 pounds.

**BOAT MATERIAL:** BBW is the only drift boat using VHMW-PE, a specialized, unique, durable, light material. It is also the only drift boat that has wooden accents and detailing.

**SUSTAINABILITY:** Working to create a great yield of the specialized VHMW-PE material is key to BBW's operations, as they strive to use the smallest amount of material possible. Any extra material is used for research and discovery, small projects or repairs.

**EXTRAS:** A set of basic Sawyer oars (valued at \$800 a pair) comes with the boat, plus an option to purchase an in-house Black Dog trailer (estimated cost: \$2K).

**RIVER FLOW:** BBW boats can float in up to Class 3 rapids.

**BOATS FOUND:** These boats are made and used in rivers in the Rocky Mountains like the Colorado River, Roaring Fork River and the Snake River in Wyoming. Low-sided drift boats are also made for big, gentle rivers like the Bighorn in Montana. On the East Coast, a number of low-sided BBW boats are run on the Delaware River. Beyond river rowing, there is the option to put on a trolling motor for lake access.

**ROW EASE:** Adjustable seats, foot bed, and oars locks make for easy rowing.

**MADE IN USA:** Handcrafted in Carbondale, CO.

**GUARANTEE:** Lifetime warranty on hull.

**COST:** Boats run from \$10-25K, or higher depending upon the customization. Guide boats typically run from \$18-20K.

**BOULDERBOATWORKS.COM**