

The Story of Jan

A Traditional Norwegian Sjelte



A. MASON DESIGN

Anita C. Mason

20281
ANZA DRIVE
SALINAS, CA
93908-1202

VOICE:
831-455-2554

FAX:
831-455-2415

E-MAIL:
amason@
a-mason-na.com

WEBSITE:
[http://www.
a-mason-na.com](http://www.a-mason-na.com)

Introduction

The story of Jan is also the story of City Island, New York, in its heyday; Norwegian shipbuilding emigrants at the Henry B. Nevins, Inc. shipyard; and the effects of the Great Depression.

Karsten N. Ausland became the father-in-law of naval architect Al Mason and the thus the maternal grandfather of the author.

Of the many dozens of designs created and built by Karsten G. Ausland, only the drawings and a variety of photographs of *Jan* exist.

For the family of naval architect Al Mason, Jan was a very special little boat. Up until 2002 there was only one sjekte built this design.



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DESIGNED AND BUILT BY KARSTEN NORMAN AUSLAND

Jan — An 18-foot Sjekte

Karsten Norman Ausland was born in 1895, the third of five children. He had one older brother, one older sister, and two younger sisters. They were the children of Ole Gundersen and Karen (Kaja) Nilsdatter. Karsten and his siblings grew up on their mother's ancestral farm—Ausland—outside of Risør, Norway. They were the tenth generation to have been born on the farm.

At the time of Karsten's birth, Norway used the patronymic naming system. It was not until the early 1900s that Norwegians were required by law to adopt a surname. Kaja and Ole were identified by their respective father's names. The use of the farm name was simply to identify where they are living. Karsten's generation decided collectively to permanently adopt the name of the farm as their official surname.

Karsten's father, Ole, was a sea captain for most of his life. He was half-owner of *Larus*, a two-masted cargo schooner. Many of Karsten's relatives were also involved in the maritime industry. Some owned shipyards, while others harvested timber on Ausland for sailing ships, being built in the Risør area. In fact, the farm was saved from being foreclosed in the mid-1800s due to the prime shipping timber located on the land. For many years thereafter, timber harvesting was more important than farming on the land.

Karsten Ausland was one of many Norwegian shipbuilders who emigrated to New York in the early 1920s in search of a better future. Karsten first arrived in 1922 to explore the employment possibilities. His first wife had just died and he had two businesses to sustain in Norway. His wife, Clara, had owned a grocery store at Bosvik and Karsten had been a naval architect at his brother's shipyard in Moen, Norway.

With three young children to support, Karsten decided to visit America to see if his future would be better in America. He returned to Norway, remarried, sold his late wife's store, packed up the family and emigrated permanently to New York city, settling on City Island.



An oil painting of *Larus*, a two-masted merchant schooner. Karsten's father, Ole Gundersen, spent six months of every year carrying cargoes throughout the world. When Ole returned home every fall, he brought a wide variety of exotic gifts for the family, from coffee beans to a monkey.



The family farm, Ausland, was originally purchase din 1540 and has been the ancestral home of over twelve generations of Auslands.

Karsten quickly found employment with Henry B. Nevins, Inc., the premier yacht building yard on the Island. During the 1920s, the majority of Nevins work was the construction of large sailing yachts for wealthy yachtsmen. Many of these yachts became well-known as champion racers both in America and in Europe.

Less than two years after Karsten's arrival, the New York Stock Market crashed. The effects of the crash were not immediately felt, but by 1933, the shipbuilding industry had been hit so hard that the Nevins yard took out full page ads to promote their services.

The Nevins yard was well known for their quality construction, but what was less well known was Henry Nevins' personal concern for his employees. Many of his employees worked for him their entire careers. When the yard closed in 1952, many of the employees had been with Nevins for 20, 25, 30, and even 35 years. When Nevins himself died in 1950, he left each of his long time employees a legacy of \$1,000, quite a sum in those days.

The Great Depression took a heavy toll on all of Nevins' employees. Karsten, witha wife and five children to support, supplemented his Nevins' income by renting out his bedrooms to single Norwegian co-workers for a modest room and board. His children were relegated to sleeping in the living room in order to provide private accommodations for the boarders.

Karsten also undertook free lance work designing and building small craft in his basement at 51 Pell Street during his evenings and weekends. In addition, Karsten's eldest child quit regular school to learn a trade to help ensure her siblings would be able to complete high school.

One of Karsten's regular clients for his small watercraft was Henry H. Shufeldt, the New York brokerage agent for John G. Alden of Boston. A native of England, Shufeldt had a special partiality for traditional Norwegian designs.

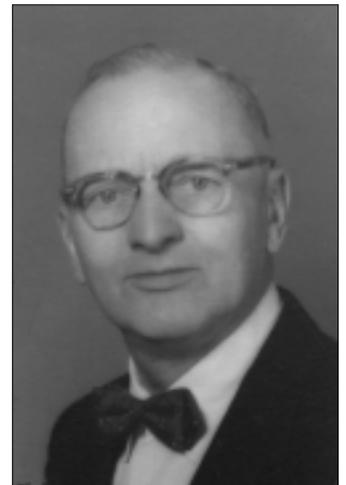
A couple of years earlier Shufeldt had befriended a young Webb Institute freshman by the name of Al Mason. Shufeldt became Al's mentors, and Al tagged along with Shufeldt whenever opportunity allowed. Shufeldt familiarity with the East Coast yachting world was a godsend for the native Californian.



City Island, located off the northern side of the Bronx Borough of New York City on Pelham Bay, looking from the north to the south. The main shipyards, including Nevins, were located in the upper left center of the photo. Pell Street where Karsten and his family lived, was located in the treed area in the upper right.



ABOVE: Karsten's three eldest children [l. to r.] Olanda, Christine, and Karl.



AT RIGHT: Karsten Norman Ausland.



The Ausland family dressed in their Sunday finest for the celebration of the completion of Jan in their backyard on City Island. [left to right] Karsten, Doris, Miriam, Karl, Christine, and Olanda.



ABOVE: John G. Alden's dapper New York yacht broker Henry H. Shufeldt, at left, and his young assistant, Al Mason, sailing off City Island, New York.

In 1934, Shufeldt commissioned Karsten to design and build an 18-foot camp cruiser. Al had always admired the double-end sjekte style and took full advantage of the commission. For months, Al would stop by Karsten's house to check on the progress of the sjekte and in the process met most of Karsten's family.

Al usually visited Karsten on Saturdays and thus got to know Karsten's son Karl and daughter Olanda quite well, as well as their younger step-sisters Miriam and Doris. For an unknown reason, Al stopped by on a Sunday instead of the usual Saturday, and was met at the door by Karsten's oldest daughter, Christine, whom he had not yet met.

The attraction was immediate and from that point on, Al always checked on the boat's progress on a Sunday so he could also visit with Christine.

When the boat was finished, Al continued to date Christine. It is unknown whether Al purchased the boat from Shufeldt, or whether Shufeldt gave the boat to Al in lieu of wages. Either way, the boat became Al's. Upon taking delivery of the boat, Shufeldt named her *Jan*, and Al kept the name when he took over ownership of the boat.

For the next five years, Al went sailing aboard *Jan* at every opportunity. Six months after graduation from Webb in 1936, Al achieved his goal of a full-time job with the renowned yacht design firm of John B. Alden in Boston and took *Jan* with him. For the next two years Al regularly raced *Jan* on the waters off Marblehead

BUILD OR REPAIR YOUR YACHT NOW

Wages are low, men out of work. Sacrifices in profits will be made to provide employment. The time and place to build a good boat at a reduced price. It's real economy to deal with Nevins because they know "what to do and how to do it"

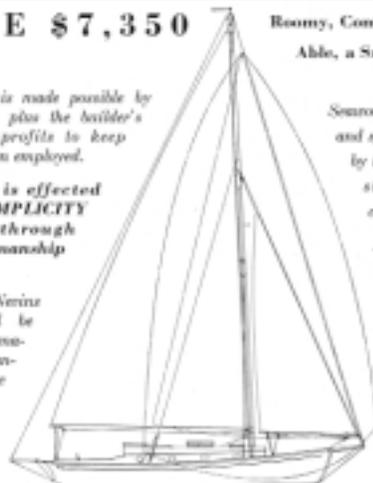
PRICE \$7,350

Roomy, Comfortable, Dry,
Able, a Smart Sailer

The low cost is made possible by lowered wages plus the builder's sacrifice in profits to keep skilled workmen employed.

ECONOMY is effected through **SIMPLICITY** and not through cheap workmanship or material.

The highest Nevins standard will be maintained in materials, workmanship, hardware and fittings.

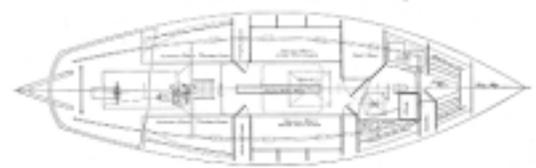


Dimensions (L x B): 33' (L x 3.27' 2") x 1.5 beam 19 1/2" deck with counterboard 3", with keel 2"; sail area 665 sq. ft.

Seaworthiness, strength and speed are assured by the excellent design and strong construction.

A dangerous contender in long distance races for cruisers.

Center Board or Keel optional.



Full six foot beam under the cabin. Comfortable seating accommodations for four people are provided.

HENRY B. NEVINS, INC.
CITY ISLAND, NEW YORK CITY

A competent designing staff headed by George F. Crouch is at the service of individuals for designs, or for the carrying out of designs of any naval architect.

1933 was one of the rare times when Nevins ever advertised their services. The copy in the ad clearly explains how loyal Nevins was to devoted his work force.

In the various local Boston and Marblehead newspaper clippings of summer race results, Al and Jan regularly placed higher in the results than L. Francis Herreshoff and his under 21-foot saiboat *Suicide*, most likely a boat of his own design built at his Marblehead boatyard.

Al also suffered his only captize at Marblehead with *Jan*. Exactly what happened is unknown, Al refused to ever discuss the matter. The family supposition is that Al had a novice sailor aboard who made a wrong move at the wrong time.

[Aug. 22, 1937 Marblehead Matters] Along the Waterfront ... Upset of the 18-foot double end sloop, Jan ... While attempting to hoist the spinnaker on the double ender, Jan, the gear fouled and before Alvin Mason of Marblehead, its owner, could clear away the tangle the yacht rolled over on her side, filled and went to the bottom of the Eastern, Sunday morning.



The only known photograph of *Jan* under construction in Karsten's basement on City Island in 1934.

1937 & 1938 Summer Marblehead Race Results

Handicap B, Under 21-foot Class

| SPONSOR | RACE LENGTH | PLACEMENT | ELAPSED. TIME | CORRECTED TIME |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|-----------|---------------|----------------|
| Boston Yacht Club Regatta | 2/1/2 mi. | Seventh | 0:46:10 | 0:39:24 |
| Boston Yacht Club Race | 4-5/8 mi. | Second | 1:42:45 | 1:23:43 |
| Corinthian Y.C. 2nd Midsummer Resail | 2-1/2 mi. | Second | 1:24:36 | 1:05:33 |
| Eastern Y.C. 1st Midsummer Series | 2-3/4 mi. | Fifth | 1:30:53 | 1:23:22 |
| Eastern Y.C. 3rd Midsummer Series | 5 mi. | Third | 1:15:18 | 1:09:26 |

Look at all that gently shaped volume resting just above her forefoot and slippery run. Waves, no matter how tall and steep, will not easily bury this hull. Easy lines and rather great mass (which, when combined with velocity, provides considerable momentum) will help us punch through harbor chop and powerboat wakes. With all that rake and flare above the waterline, Jan has the look of an extraordinary dry boat. ...

The tall, fractional sloop rig was typical of sjekte-derived yachts of the time. Working in concert, with the large (bronze-plate!) centerboard, the rig will give a good account of itself to windward. In ghosting conditions, the big masthead drifter will lift us through the lee of many a contemporary boat. ...



AT LEFT: Christine Ausland was Al's guest at his graduation from Webb Institute in June 1936. On Al's first date with Christine, he informed her he was not getting married until he was 30-years-old. Ten weeks after he turned 30 in 1941, Al and Christine were married.





UPPER LEFT: Al, Olanda, and Christine inspect the interior of Jan as she sits on her trailer.

ABOVE: Al leans into the task of watching the sail on Jan as he takes her for a sail in Long Lisnad Sound.

LEFT: The finished Jan shows off her form while sitting on her trailer in Karsten's backyard just before delivery to Henry H. Shufeldt.

Ausland built the lower portions of Jan's sternpost dead straight. This configuration allows us to swing her rudder gudgeons on a bronze rod so that the whole contraption will lift when she takes the ground. ...

In 1939 Al found a new sailboat love—a Swedish-built five meter. On the other hand, the love affair with Karsten's daughter remained strong. On one of Al's first dates with Christine, he informed her that he was not going to get married until he was 30 years old. She was unconcerned since he was not the only man she was dating and his 30th birthday was seven years away.

Al's mother, Daisy, had been the one to advise him to postpone marriage until he had gotten his career established. A second piece of advice she gave him which he also followed was that if he wanted both a boat and a wife, buy the boat first, then get married. If he did it the other way round, he probably would never get the boat.

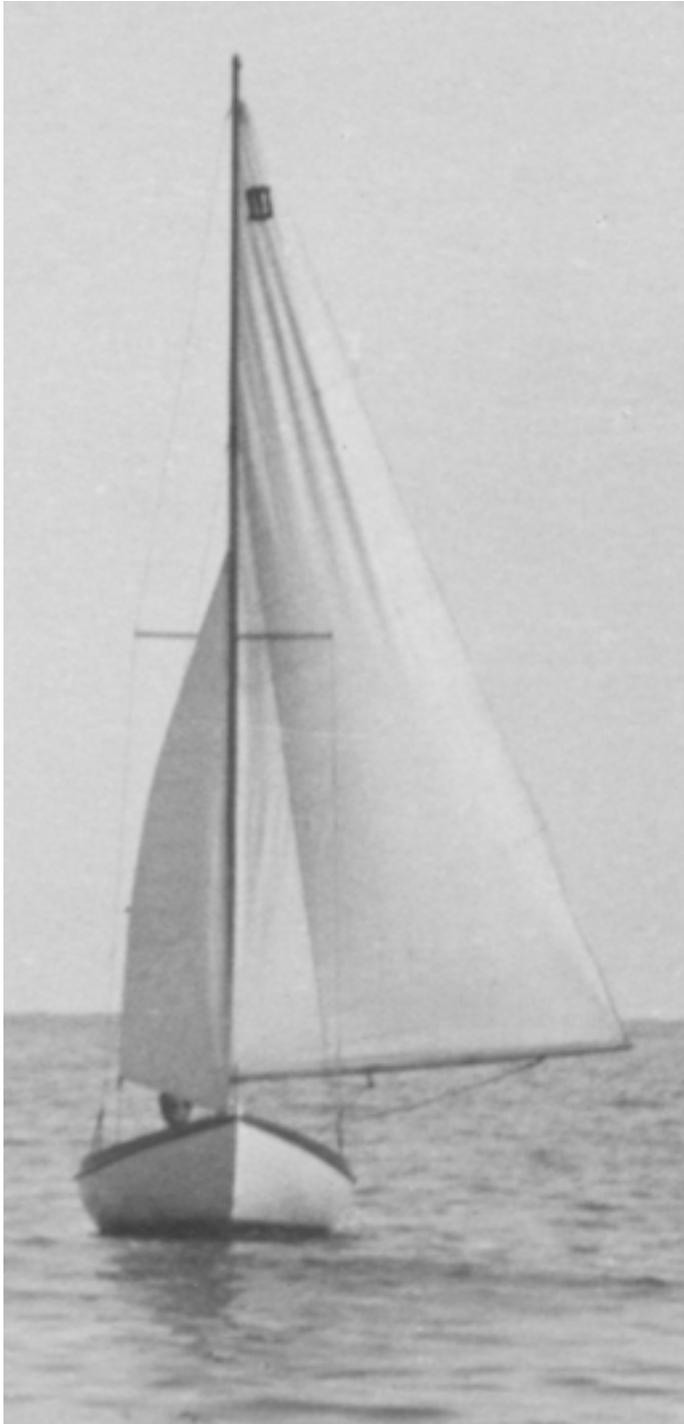
Christine was not the only woman Al dated after college, but was actually one of at least five young women Al was courting. When Al's mother, Daisy, came East for the 1939 World's Fair, Al introduced her to each of his girl friends, separately of course. Afterwards, Al asked his mother which one she thought would make a good wife. Daisy would have no part in the decision, advising Al that he was the one who would have to live with the



ABOVE: Christine carefully paints the trim on *Jan*, note the white high heels.

BELOW: Al takes a close-up look at the finished *Jan* prior to her name being painted on her stern and then being loaded on her trailer.





FOR SALE
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Centerboard sloop on Norwegian skiff model, built 1935. All stainless steel rigging, bronze hardware and fastenings. Ideal for day sailing and small handicap racing at less than half replacement value. Address: Box No. 807, care YACHTING, 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y.



