

# DENIS PARASKEVATOS

## Master Craftsman of Wooden Replica Model and Scratch Model Ships



Master craftsmen in the area of marine replica building of wooden ships involving model replica kits and (scratch) models – (based solely on historical research, without the use of kits), are only a handful globally nowadays.

The few remaining builders who are dedicated to preserving and promoting history, persist in bringing us closer to the skills and the techniques of marine building, whose knowledge, experience and undying passion for this hobby, has without a doubt, secured the maintenance of this intellectual and intriguing activity. Amongst this very short list of master craftsmen, is the name of a builder whose work reflects his true spiritual and emotional character, that has been moulded within the context of years of marine engineering historical research, and the thirst for the exploration and disclosure of the past.

Synonymous with marine engineering construction of wooden replica model ships and (scratch) models of museum quality, is the name of Denis Paraskevatos, who has been a nautical artist for the past thirty five years, born in Athens, Greece, in 1939; and whose dream it was ever since he was a young boy, to become a naval engineer, achieving his goal upon his graduation from the Technical College in Athens, which enabled him to commence work on vessels, as he advanced himself gradually to the position of naval engineer in the navy.

In spite of the challenges and stress though that he had to content with naval work, he was appeased intellectually by the fact that he was bringing this vast world closer together, through the use of naval contact and exchange within the sphere of trade and interaction, where the naval ships had more or less become a positive stepping stone in the exposure to cross-cultural understandings and co-existences.

Such intense was his passion about cultural exploration that it was never missing from his naval agenda. In fact, at every opportunity of naval free time that would arise, he would be seeking to educate himself, by observing the diverse cultures that enrich and create a uniqueness about the global community, that had overwhelmingly impacted his self-being from an intellectual perspective, as he was compelled via the construction of the replica wooden model and (scratch) model ships, to articulate history.

His impeccable vessels both structurally and historically, constructed of the varieties of wood of mahogany, mukali, sapeli, African walnut, ramin, western cedar, cherry tree, oak and others which have been painstakingly glued and hammered together by countless of nails, narrow strip by strip for a seamless result, along with the intricate interwoven rigging that conjures images in one's mind of an alluring spider web, are reflective of the thousands of hours of meticulous work that has been dedicated to

presenting the bygone marine epochs, that have shaped our naval modern identities in the fields of defence and trade.

Interestingly, Denis Paraskevatos was not only engrossed in the hobby of constructing replica wooden kit and (scratch) model ships, but also engaged in other social frameworks as well, which were too, fundamental in promoting and maintaining multiculturalism, such as his volunteer project of radio broadcaster for the two Greek community radio programmes, 3CR and 3ZZZ, as well as participating in socio-political schemes that enabled reforms to transpire for the Australian community in varied social arenas. Importantly, he has also been occupied vocationally with the Victorian Railways for a number of years since his migration to Australia in 1976.

As a senior citizen currently away from the realm of vocation, he continues to exhibit his active nature, by still engaging in hobby marine projects which have yielded for him positive results, such as the exhibition conducted in the Parliament of Victoria in Queens Hall in 2002 when he was recognised for his outstanding ability as an artist upon the conferment to him of the Commonwealth Centenary Medal *“for service to the arts as an artist reconstructing ancient sea vessels and service to the community”*, and when he also held upon the request of SAE, (The World Council of Hellenes Abroad) in 2004 the exhibition in the City of Melbourne to commemorate the Olympic Games in Greece, as well as when he additionally conducted an exhibition in La Trobe University (National Centre for Hellenic Studies and Research), to inspire university students and academics alike into the mindset of the importance of ancient marine construction. Noteworthy is also the fact that, Denis was the only artist in Australian history to ever conduct a nautical exhibition of constructed replica wooden model and (scratch) model ships in the Victorian Parliament back in March 2002, where his works emitted an international character of historical naval engineering, for which he was recognised.

Denis’ current permanent exhibition is located in his residence in Epping, Victoria, where it continues to enthrall audiences of all walks of life who visit it, such as politicians, academics, artists, architects, lawyers, musicians and others, because of its high standard of meticulousness and precise representation of marine history, that enables individuals to transport themselves spiritually into the bygone era of masterful seamanship.

Sadly, this valuable and historically imperative hobby of dissemination and maintenance of marine knowledge and skills for subsequent generations, has disappeared, because such artistry is no longer regarded a fundamental component of the education system; attributable to the few remaining experts who perhaps are not willing to teach it, or curtailed by the establishment’s very limited and sparse instructional programmes, as well as to the secondary and tertiary students who are indifferent to learn about past naval techniques, that have impacted positively, upon current engineering structures.

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