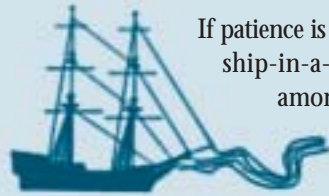


The Ancient Art of Building Ships in Bottles By Arden Miller, CZM



If patience is a virtue, then the early ship-in-a-bottle builders are among the most virtuous citizens in recorded history. The average opening in a glass bottle is less than an inch, a circumference that is far too small for much of anything to fit into, let alone a fully constructed model ship. So how do those ships get into bottles? Do they build the bottle around the ship? Is there a special way to make the bottom come off so that a ship can be put into the bottle and then the bottle can be re-sealed?



While it's difficult to imagine in an age of instant coffee and instant messaging, people used to—and in some cases still do—spend long hours carefully constructing pieces of miniature ships that were small enough to fit through a bottle's opening. Once inside the bottle, these partial minis were very carefully fitted together, usually with the type of tweezer-like tools that a surgeon would use in a delicate operation. The mini masts and sails would be created using cloth and rigging in much the same way their life-sized counterparts would. Those parts were painstakingly attached inside the bottle and then the fun part—the lilliputian ship's captain gets to pull a strategically placed string and raise the sails. Because of all this very exacting work, these creations are also known as “patience bottles” and can literally take hundreds of hours to complete.



With origins believed to date back to the 1700s—the earliest dated ship-in-a-bottle was created in Sweden in 1781—examples of original, hand-crafted bottles can be found in museums, including the Smithsonian in Washington, DC, the South Street Seaport Museum in New York City, and the Mariners' Museum in Newport News, Virginia. Most often, they were made by people, such as lighthouse keepers, sailors, prisoners, insane asylum inmates, and people in religious orders who had the time and required patience for such endeavors.

There are still some patient people who construct ships-in-a-bottle in the same manner that they were made 200 years ago. Hobby clubs devoted to this art can be found in most states. If you are interested in spending some serious time creating this form of folk art, you might want to start by getting some tips from someone who's been through the process already or buy a book on the subject. But, if you're more interested in having a ship in a bottle constructed from pre-made parts that come with specific instructions than building one from scratch, you can buy a kit at a hobby store or online. Please refer to the following sites for more information:

BOOKS

www.aquabooks.com/aquabooks/boating/shipmodeling.shtml

EXAMPLES OF PROFESSIONALLY BUILT SHIPS IN BOTTLES

www.shipbottle.by.ru/english/gallery/

TIPS FOR PEOPLE BUILDING SHIPS FROM SCRATCH

<http://hometown.aol.com/mrx3010/bottled.html>

LOCATIONS OF HOBBY CLUBS

<http://home.att.net/~ShipModelFAQ/smf-q100.html>

BUILDING KITS FOR SALE

<http://shop.store.yahoo.com/marinersmuseum/amshipinbotk.html>