

Refit & repair

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Hodgdon Yacht's new interiors factory now accounts for 25 per cent of its US\$30m annual turnover

The Maine attraction

IT MIGHT BE THE USA'S OLDEST SUPERYACHT BUILDER, BUT HODGDEN YACHTS IS FOCUSING ON THE FUTURE — WITH ADVANCED COMPOSITES AND DIVERSIFICATION AT THE HEART OF ITS NEW BUSINESS PLAN

FRANCES & MICHAEL HOWORTH REPORT

SIX YEARS AGO, Hodgdon Yachts (the USA's oldest superyacht builder, based in Maine) formed Hodgdon Defense Composites, an offshoot designed to expand on the knowledge gained building advanced superyachts for the military market. The yard entered into a joint venture with the University of Maine's Advanced Engineered Wood Composites Centre, and *Mako*, — a 25m (82ft) US Navy fast patrol boat — is the result of their efforts.

"We wanted to produce a boat that could operate at speeds of around 60kt in rough seas, while minimising the vertical acceleration, or slamming felt by crew when

the boat hits a wave," says the company's president, Tim Hodgdon. "The hull and deck are made from impact-absorbent composite materials specially engineered and extensively tested at the university's composites laboratory.

"As a result, we have created a hull that gives a more stable ride, with the potential for fewer injuries to troops. The US Navy continues to conduct extensive field-testing to confirm the laboratory tests — but they are happy with the results so far."

However, secretive superyacht work for the US Navy isn't enough for Tim Hodgdon's. Since taking over the firm he has expanded his team and diversified into

superyacht tender fabrication and superyacht interiors for yachts built elsewhere.

"We bring the meticulous detail that goes into a custom superyacht into our custom tender range," he explains.

"I asked Michael Peters Yacht Design to draw up some tender designs for our portfolio. He came up with three concepts that are sexy, fast, fun and extremely good looking."

The world got its first look at the company's newly launched 10m (34ft) limousine tender at this year's Monaco Boat Show, where Oceanco's 86m (282ft) *Seven Seas* — owned by film director Stephen Spielberg — was one of the boat shows main attractions.

"People who own that type of yacht are chauffeured in limousines ashore so we figured they would enjoy being chauffeured afloat — and that's the thinking behind the innovative ideas we have built into this boat."

Costs for this type of superyacht tender varies with size and specification but the company aims to design a 12m (39ft) tender at the top end of the US\$1.8m price range.

Interiors contracting

Hodgdon Yachts has always built its own yacht interiors. When the owner of a yacht being built in Florida expressed an interest in his interior replicating that of the 38m

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(125ft) *Antonisia*, Tim Hodgdon quickly realised he could add another string to the yard's diversification bow.

He immediately invested in a new purpose built factory called Hodgdon Interiors.

Currently, the division is delivering the furniture, mouldings, casings, and passage doors for a 45m (148ft) expedition motoryacht under construction in Florida. More than 150,000 work-hours have been logged creating the full interior.

Contracts such as these have allowed the company to add new employees to their growing joinery workforce of 54 in recent months.

"The growth potential for our joinery division is tremendous," comments Hodgdon. "Before we started Hodgdon Interiors, we were continually turning down contracts due to lack of capacity, but now we keep this factory busy all the time, and I anticipate doing so for the foreseeable future."

The division now accounts for 25 per cent of the group's annual US\$30m turnover. It does everything from the original design to final fitting.

The design team has five employees, but that can increase to nine in busy times.

A typical interior for a 50m (164ft) superyacht can generate over 750 drawings with more than 30 separate areas modelled in 3D renderings. Each of those produces at least four fully detailed colour pictures for the client to sign off on.

"We recently had a saloon bar that went through 27 different client revisions, each of which produced four drawings — which, in themselves, are a week's work for one designer," says Bruce Russell design.

"Our target contract term for yacht building and large



Tim Hodgdon is president of US yard Hodgdon Yachts

interiors is 'cost-plus', where we charge a fixed hourly rate, bill materials at cost, and fix a 15 per cent builder's fee,"

says Tim Hodgdon. "It avoids the incentive traditionally associated with 'time and materials' contract terms."

Wood and traditional joinery go hand in hand but Hodgdon offers some surprises. Fast yachts need light interiors, and despite the fact that it looks like wood, much of the lightweight cabinetry uses honeycomb sandwich construction with a real wood veneer fixed on top.

The complete set of all of the interior panels for a recent 25m (82ft) ultra light-weight, high speed motoryacht weighed less than 365kg.

In another part of the complex, workers are crafting

a fireplace, which will form a central feature aboard a yacht. Workers have perfected their skills using a fireproof material called Thermax, which has a 3mm veneer to make it look as if it were made of solid wood.

To enable regular inspection, the classification society has demanded the chimney be fitted with a guillotine damper for emergency use, and the fireplace has been designed so that crew can disassemble it for regular servicing. While it is certainly modern and high-tech you only have to pull out the drawers to find that they're built in a traditional way method using dovetail jointing.

Building wooden staircases for superyachts is another skill that has been cracked with great effect at Hodgdon Yachts to the point that there is a very good chance that the sub group that make them inside the complex could well be spun off to become a separate successful trading identity.

"We don't undertake a great deal of refit work," explains

KEY FACTS

Hodgdon Yachts

- ▶ **Size of yard:** 5,100m²
- ▶ **Number of employees:** 160
- ▶ **Maximum build length:** 60m
- ▶ **Largest yacht built so far:** 50m
- ▶ **Web:** hodgdonyachts.com

COO, Andy Wright. "But when we do, we do it well. It's just that in recent times we haven't actively sought out that kind of extra work.

"The last refit our yard completed was *Black Knight*, a beautiful 24m (79ft) wooden boat built by us in 1967."

Wright is enthusiastic about the yard's expansion plans which include the acquisition of a marina, additional haul-out facilities and more sheds.

"Discussions are still at an early stage," he says, "but we have high hopes of bringing this to fruition, as well." **SB**

AMERICA'S OLDEST SUPERYACHT YARD

THE HODGDON FAMILY

completed their first yacht (a 42ft schooner) in 1816 — but boatbuilding has been a family tradition since 1760.

"My Dad taught me how to build fine wooden boats," explains the company's current president, Tim Hodgdon. "It's something we still do, but we've also come a long way since then.

"I'm proud of our yard's heritage, but six years ago I made a commitment to diversify — and I think we've done pretty well.

"When I joined the family business it had six employees, and annual sales of less than US\$250,000. My Dad may have been stubborn, but even he would agree that we have made a quantum leap from



Ten per cent of Hodgdon's work consists of military projects

plank-on-frame to high tech composites without sacrificing our standards."

Hodgdon Shipyards' East Boothbay facility has three building halls covering a site of 5,100m² (54,900ft²).

The main hall includes 1,800m² (19,400ft²) of production space with a 300t marine railway which allows yachts to be hauled or launched

directly into the adjacent Damariscotta River.

Military work accounts for 10 per cent of turnover at East Boothbay, and the company has an R&D unit which is used to develop parts for the US Navy — then test them to destruction — as part of on-going research into the suitability of composites as boatbuilding material.