

The Whole is Greater Than the Sum of the Parts

Getting a yacht from first vision to launch day is a complex process involving countless contributors, materials, man hours and very careful coordination. In this mix, suppliers play a crucial role. Contributing products of all sizes, from air conditioning units to engines, stabilisers, custom interiors, artisan decor, carpet, lighting and more, suppliers are responsible for a wealth of elements on board a yacht and their contribution is invaluable. Together, they help create something special; when it comes to a superyacht the whole truly is greater than the sum of its parts. Here, SuperYacht Times takes a look at the role suppliers play in a yacht build or refit, including challenges, yard/supplier relationships and the many benefits of working with suppliers.

BY ELLIE BRADY

It is inevitable that every shipyard will have some interaction with suppliers during the course of a build or refit project. "The nature of custom-built yachts is that owners have dreams they want to see fulfilled," says Marco Struik of custom interior design specialist Struik and Hamerslag. "Designers are specialists in translating dreams into plans and designs and we, the suppliers together with our shipyard colleagues, are the specialists who can actually build those dreams and at the same time assure it is fit for use in yachts. The installation on board really is a process of fitting the giant puzzle piece by piece into a perfect masterpiece."

WORKING WITH SUPPLIERS

There are many benefits to working with suppliers, not least because it allows yards to partner with experts in their field. "It would not be possible for a yard to have all the knowledge and complex expertise desired by interior designers in-house," says Xavier Bonnamy of Tai Ping, specialists in custom carpets. "There is no substitute for using creative artisans who bring many years of specialist knowledge and craftsmanship, and the background knowledge these specialists bring is invaluable in 'adding value', in helping to guide, develop and make a design work to best effect in the chosen medium," agrees Howard Sansome, Managing Director of Aryma, creators of bespoke marquetry.

Use of a specialist supplier has clear benefits both in terms of product quality and financial savings. "We do what we do every day; while a yard may build two systems a year we're building 50 systems a year so our breadth of knowledge about one key area is vast," says Ned Wood of Manson Anchors. "The yard can usually make significant savings by bringing us in early to optimise their design, offer alternatives and work on this area."

Specialist marine suppliers also have invaluable insight into the constraints of a yachting platform and how their own contribution fits into the wider puzzle, tailoring their design accordingly. "Yachts are moving objects and this should be considered with every part of the design," says Steve Struik. "Although we are interior specialists the integration of technical installations is an extremely important part of the building process and makes the puzzle even more complex. Space is always limited, even in the largest yachts, and the challenge to find ways to integrate it all and make it work perfectly is a task that requires the perfect cooperation of many disciplines."

Consulting with expert suppliers may also have the added benefit of improving the original concept. "Suppliers have the ability to educate owners and crew members on a given product or service," says Katie Ross, Business Developer Manager at Quantum Stabilisers. "Through their knowledge, they can recommend the absolute best solution on a given yacht based on size, requirements and expectations."



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Careful creations at Struik, The Tai Ping Parcour rug by Jean-Pierre on board Stella Maris, The Tai Ping rug from André Fu on board Stella Maris, Lift Emotion's custom elevator project in-build and final product, Cooling Engineer at Heinen & Hopman working on custom-built Provision Cooling Plan

Bonnamy agrees: "Sometimes people think we are 'just' suppliers but in fact, our input is more than that and we are deeply involved in intricate technical aspects, too."

In recent years demands for increasingly complex systems and yachts has also reinforced the importance of the supply chain. "Due to the accelerated pace of technological advancement and digital content/application of products and services, it would be extremely difficult for shipyards and owners to acquire and maintain the expertise in every product or service supplied to a new yacht construction project," says Lee Kaddatz of Atlas Marine Systems, providers of shore power converters and marine electrical systems. Similarly, the irregularity of yacht projects means that many yards would struggle to maintain a full-time specialist workforce in certain fields. For example, "the production of interiors during the lead time of building a yacht is actually done in a limited time frame and for a yard to do all interior work in-house it requires several yachts in different stages to create continuity, and not many yards are able to do this," says Struik.

YARD/SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIPS

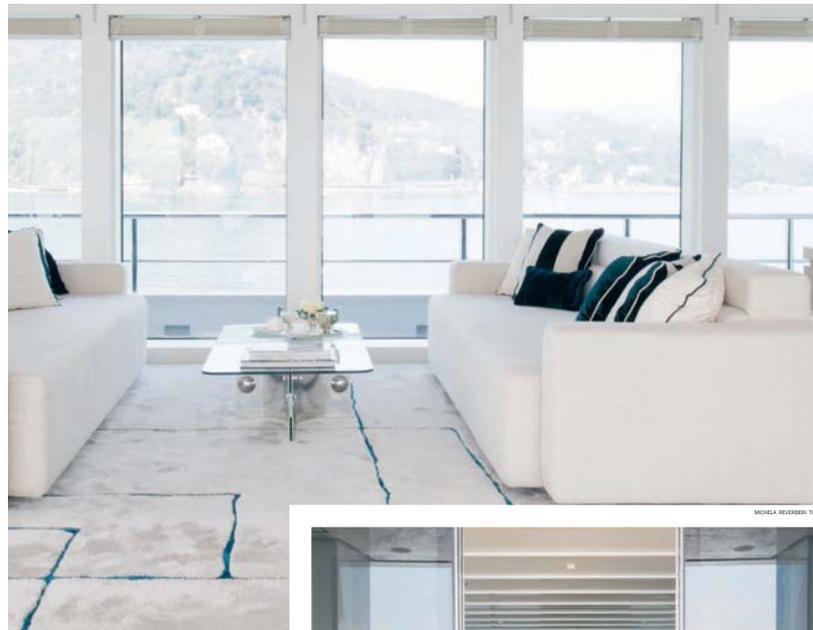
At the heart of most successful yard-supplier interactions are symbiotic relationships built on trust, many of which are decades old. "The relationship with a shipyard or owner's representative is often that of co-maker rather than supplier," says Eric van



Dijk of Heinen & Hopman, suppliers of HVAC and refrigeration systems. "Working together in an efficient way is the key to success."

Every supplier interviewed for this article was unanimous in their opinion that the earlier their involvement in a project, the better the end result. The sooner the product is integrated into the whole, the less it will feel like an afterthought and potentially suffer as a consequence. "Our components are a key to the design of the hull because there is always a juggle of key equipment and space has become an absolute premium, so ideally we work with the client early to offer different solutions to spatial optimisation," says Wood. "The best contracts we have had are when we are fully integrated into the design process with the yard, working side by side, and the closer we work together the better the outcome."

While some companies directly supply a piece of standard equipment, many suppliers will interact closely with owners/owners reps to tailor the end result. "We are mostly involved in work that requires some or significant design development in order to create the end product," says Sansome. "To give an example, I was approached by an end client whose brief was very simple: 'I want to look up at the domed ceiling and see the flora and fauna from my garden'. We bring a balanced, considered approach with our expertise in marquetry to give



proper shape to an idea that is in the client's mind's eye, to bring it to life to best effect."

In many cases products/services are always customised from project to project. "We always custom design our elevators from the base up so we never replicate past projects," says Mike Brandt of bespoke elevator manufacturers Lift Emotion. "This means all our elevators are unique in looks and design and this requires a huge involvement from the engineers, project managers and the shipyard for a total integration, but this makes the process so nice to do." In this way a fully personal service is able to be offered. "These systems simply aren't off the shelf installs, and if they are treated that way, or the expectations of the yard are for that, generally there are more issues after the launch or the system won't live up to expectation," says Wood. "Each project is a unique combination of improvisation and routine," says van Dijk. "There is only one thing that all our projects have in common: the main processing, all the way from initial inquiry to after-sales care as we believe in being a one-stop shop from design and engineering to commissioning, training and maintenance."

Challenges & Misconceptions

Inevitably, even with the best relationships, there are still challenges faced by the supply chain. Primarily, these centre around a desire for early involvement to allow

proper planning, proper lead times, realistic expectations around cost vs product quality, and communication. "In terms of new yacht construction, one of the biggest challenges is inconsistent order volume and resistance to sharing schedule delays or disruptions with customer acceptance due to shipyard concerns about market perceptions," says Kaddatz. "Also obtaining accurate project information for yachts under construction such as delivery commitment dates when shipyard will make final payment and accept shipments." Challenges also arise when lead times are not properly considered. "Clients understanding lead time is key," says Ross. "There is some time involved in providing a quote, but beyond the quote the lead time to build the entire system is often underestimated, it is never off-the-shelf in the larger vessels."

It is often true that you get what you pay for. "Most buyers do not place enough weight on performance history or differentiate between large and small companies," says Kaddatz. "If you think the products are all the same and you don't take the time to understand the differentiating features, including the available additional options to enhance the application of the equipment, you are not utilising the expertise of your suppliers and you are guaranteed the highest cost/benefit. If a company is offering you the lowest price, they don't have the expertise to provide the lowest total cost of ownership."

Inevitably many supply decisions will be based on money. "One of the biggest challenges at Quantum, is educating the owners, engineers and captains on the costs associated in designing, engineering, manufacturing, testing, crating and shipping a complete stabiliser system, sometimes with fins over 20-square-metres," says Ross. The level of sophistication and engineering to ensure optimal performance is often misunderstood or undervalued."

A final challenge faced by many companies, as is the case with so many niche artisan trades, is preserving their skills for the future and finding the talent for the next generation. "From our perspective, craftsmanship is scarce and the trade of yacht interiors requires the top talents in the interior production," says Struik. "The biggest challenge is to educate and train new talents and for this we (as do many others) maintain an apprenticeship for young people to learn the trade and become the top talents of the future."

It is clear that there is passion and a dedication to craft throughout the supply chain. "We, like so many other suppliers, are dedicated to this industry and are passionate about delivering on our client's desire for equipment that has been engineered, produced, installed and maintained with always the highest standards in mind," concludes Brandt. A shared sentiment, undoubtedly. ♦

PROUDEST PROJECTS

TAI PING
"All of them! Definitely all of our projects are unique, from the tenders for *Eclipse*, to *Dilbar* and *Sailing Yacht A*... the list goes on."

MANSON ANCHORS

"In response to customer demand we designed, extensively prototype tested then successfully brought to market the underwater anchoring system and numerous yachts have installed this system. Providing new solutions in response to the market's request is what we take great pride in doing."

QUANTUM STABILIZERS

"In 2005, Quantum built MAGNUM stabilisers for the largest yacht in the world at that time. That, along with our upgrade program for the US Navy, is what makes Quantum proud to be a leader in the industry."

HEINEN & HOPMAN

"Every yacht is an iconic piece in itself, but every time I see Royal Huisman's sailing yacht *Athena* my sailing heart beats more intensely. More recently, Lürssen's *Dilbar* and Oceanco's *Jubilee* are exemplary projects of Heinen & Hopman."

STRUIK & HAMERSLAG YACHT INTERIORS

"We have delivered over 150 yacht interiors over the years and it is not fair to mention a specific yacht, as they are all special. What makes me proud is when owners really enjoy their yacht, as this is the best proof that their dreams came through."

ATLAS MARINE SYSTEMS

"Atlas is most proud of the fact that every existing shipyard in the industry has purchased Atlas equipment for their projects and Atlas Marine Systems has a reputation for manufacturing the most advanced system available in the industry today."

LIFT EMOTION

"On yachts there are many projects that we are proud of. One of the biggest projects we ever completed was the realisation of the Apple Steve Jobs Theatre where my concept of a spiral elevator was realised with the Foster & Partners team and many other partners."