

Real benefits from 'virtual' boatbuilding

Karen Phelps

Diverse Projects is the first company in New Zealand offering a 'virtual boatbuilding' service, according to directors John Vitali and Lars Bjorklund.

The Auckland-based company doesn't have a shipyard or its own boatbuilding staff. Rather it leases a location and subcontractors for each project and co-ordinates the entire job.

Vitali says the benefits for clients are "immense":

"Typically a client would commission a shipyard to build the project, then possibly not see or have anything to do with their boat until it is finished. The owner, in traditional single contract practices, has limited flexibility once they have commissioned their boat - the yard has full control," he says.

"Our process gives the owner the best of both worlds by truly putting them in control of their own job, as well as having it expertly project managed by Diverse Projects.

"Our process means the client can have their boat built at a location suitable for them anywhere in New Zealand, have the best contractors for their particular project and be involved as much or as little as they like in their project."

Bjorklund says it is a "transparent" way of boat building. The client only pays as each step of the project is completed to their satisfaction.

Vitali says the client is essentially approaching the suppliers direct through Diverse Projects, eliminating any added margin. The company installs webcams in the shipyard, so the client can log on and see their boat being built whenever they wish.

Vitali says the process could mark a new beginning for the boat building industry in New Zealand.



• To page 18 Best of boat worlds: The virtual boatbuilding process puts clients in control of the job, while the project is 'expertly' managed by Diverse Projects.

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‘New beginning’ for NZ boatbuilding

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“Some comment has been that New Zealand is too far away from the main boat building markets such as Europe. But by subcontract boat building this argument disappears.

“Our philosophy is that the build should be completely transparent and the owner should feel in full control. With technology today we can eliminate the feeling that the owner is miles away. We think this process marks a potential boundary change which can enhance New Zealand’s ability to secure elevated boat building orders.”

So how exactly does the virtual boat building process work?

When a client approaches Diverse Project with an idea for a yacht, Vitali and Bjorklund sit down with a designer and work out the design and materials required.

The pair then obtain quotes and estimates from sub-contractors and arrive at a total estimate. Vitali says the process differs from normal boat building practices as it is the client subcontracting the work rather than Diverse Projects.

Diverse Projects charges a fixed project management fee, which the client pays on a monthly basis till the job is completed

Bjorklund says an added benefit is that there is no risk of a shipyard defaulting and the client losing their money.

Both Vitali and Bjorklund have more than 30 years yachting experience. Vitali previously ran a yacht management and refit business and has crewed for professional yacht racing teams.

Bjorklund entered the industry as a charter captain on sailing yachts, then worked as a broker/manager for his own company in the South of France, BCR Yachts, before moving to New Zealand in 2007. Vitali says their combined talents allow Diverse Projects to cover the client for the life of the boat from build and refits to charter and brokerage services, if desired.

“We can work with a client from day one when they think about building to if they eventually want to sell the boat. Our international industry network is extensive after 30 years.

“I guess our company is boutique in a sense, catering to the upper end of the market and offering clients a complete package,” says Bjorklund.



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Vitali adds: "Our clients know they are dealing with someone they can trust who can work across all facets of the industry."

"It's a very relationship-based industry. In some cases we have worked with our clients over decades."

An example of the virtual shipyard process in action is Black Pearl, a 31.5 metre range displacement motor yacht.

After a selection process for designers, materials and subcontractors, boat construction began at Profab Central Engineering Ltd in Palmerston North. Interior, paintwork and finishing details were then done in Whangarei

"The hull was successfully rolled over in October 2009, trucked overland to Napier for launch and towed to Whangarei for final fitout," says Vitali.

The boat was designed by Auckland's LoMocean Design with interior by Chris Connell Design of Melbourne.

Black Pearl was commissioned by an overseas buyer who plans to charter out the boat through Diverse Projects charter service.

Prior to Black Pearl the company completed a smaller long range displacement motoryacht called Adagio using the virtual process.

"These two boats demonstrate the virtual process really works and there is an opportunity for people to build their boat in a different way."



Boutique boats: John Vitali says Diverse Projects offers clients 'a complete package', from boat builds and refits to charter and brokerage services.

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