

Refit

by Eric Ogden

Photos : J. Bannenberg, E. Øino, R. Jourdon

Why & how

This word is commonly used in the yachting industry for any improvement or refurbishment carried out on board a yacht. Oftentimes, new owners wish to update the interior accommodation, repaint the hull or upgrade the equipment of an older yacht as a means of customizing it to their liking. It is also common for seasoned owners to revamp the non-structural and structural aspects of their yachts to better suit their usage or cruising agendas. Alterations may include redecorating the interior, installing new engines, or extending the length of the hull.

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Moreover, since the British government will soon introduce new safety regulations for megayachts, many of these will have to undergo refits in order to comply with the new codes. The Code of Practice for Large Commercial Sailing and Motor Vessels may require substantial modifications or improvements on existing yachts such as fitting watertight and fire resistant bulkheads and doors, raising the height of the bulwarks and guard rails, replacing combustible with non-combustible material, improving to bilge pumps, fire alarms, and fire extinguishing systems, etc... It is essential that all refit work be undertaken by knowledgeable yards that have an understanding of the various parameters involved and employ skilled workers or subcontractors. Choosing the right yard is generally as easy as returning to the original builder or finding a builder that specializes in yachts of comparable size. Today, however, several yards actually are specialized in yacht refit. Among them, Marsic, Campanella and Amico in Italy; Pendennis and DML in England;

Refit projects often require replacing old...



The Honey Money refit, following a fire onboard a neighboring boat in the port of Cannes.

Astilleros de Majorca in Spain; Riviera Yacht Services and IMS in France; Merrill-Stevens in Miami, Palmer Johnson in Savannah, Bradford in Ft. Lauderdale, Rybovich Spencer in West Palm Beach, and South Bay Boat Yard in Chula Vista. It seems that more and more these days yacht owners are opting to lengthen their existing yachts instead of building new. In the last twenty-four months, for instance, yachts such as Tacanuya, Pari, and Southern Cross III have undergone complicated hull extensions. The increasing demand for alteration and repair work has transformed this business into an independent sector of the industry.

A major refit can affect many of the existing parameters of a yacht's architecture and design, and subsequently these can in fact limit the extent of the work to be done. The replacement of a teak deck, refurbishment of interior fittings, installation of new air conditioning systems, fitting new stabilizers, or replacement of main engines is not managed in the same manner as the alteration of the superstructures or even the extension of an existing hull and transom.

...plumbing with new.



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The most complex refit is the complete transformation of a commercial boat such as a tug, patrol boat, or supply vessel into a luxury yacht. A good example is "Simpson S", one of the world's largest tugs which has been converted into a luxury yacht equipped with various different "toys" and tenders such as a pilot boat, sailboat, trimaran, seaplane, and helicopter, among others.

Whatever the nature of the work to be carried out, a refit project must always be approached with the same methodical planning and research to avoid, as is too often the case, becoming the source of headache for everyone involved. Since these kinds of projects generally involve many different parties, strict supervision and management is paramount. Some of the parties involved may underestimate the importance of the task and the technical implications of the work to be done, which can affect compliance with the various applicable rules and regulations. Large yachts, both old and new, are complex creations; they are comprised of systems and components that cannot be modified without affecting the fragile balance that is a seaworthy vessel.

The management departments of large international brokers such as Fraser Yachts and Camper & Nicholson now employ professional managers whose task is the planning and monitoring of the work on board the yachts they manage. The successful completion of a refit



The yacht Pari before her stern was modified and her hull painted.

largely depends on its planning, organization, and supervision. Failing to deliver the yacht on time can have serious consequences on the entire operation and on the profitability of the refit, especially for charter yachts.

A refit project must follow a precise timetable and be managed by an experienced professional. It will be his responsibility to schedule and monitor the progress of the work, and prioritize the jobs for the various contractors. This key man is the project manager. Although this job is often held by the captain, it is sometimes better to hire an independent professional surveyor or consultant, who works independently of all the concerned parties. Many

Pari after a refit designed by Espen Oino.



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captains have lost their jobs because they had failed to successfully manage a lengthy and complicated refit.

The first task of the project manager is to precisely define with the owner the nature and extent of the work to be done. It is of the utmost importance that, at the end of the discussions, a full set of specifications be prepared and approved by the owner. This fundamental document will enable the project manager to outline the duties of the other professionals involved, first checking the technical feasibility, then drafting a bid and reviewing the contract specifications.



Yacht Jezebel, before her refit in 1990.

an aggregate of systems, whose technical balance cannot be modified without consequences to its performance, stability or appearance. The project manager must submit the list of modifications to a technical consultant, such as a naval architect, to ensure continued stability, then to a classification society to ensure compliance to regulation. These professionals may offer advice on the feasibility and limitations of the work to be done. Moreover, they may recommend further analysis or research to prepare the preliminary designs and specifications to be sent out to various yards. The bid package must obviously specify the nature of the work to be carried out, the detailed specifications of the various equipment, as well as the contractual delivery date and work guarantee of



The original anchor windlasses were preserved onboard Altair.

the bidding yard. The project manager will ask the owner's solicitor to draft and approve these required contractual obligations.

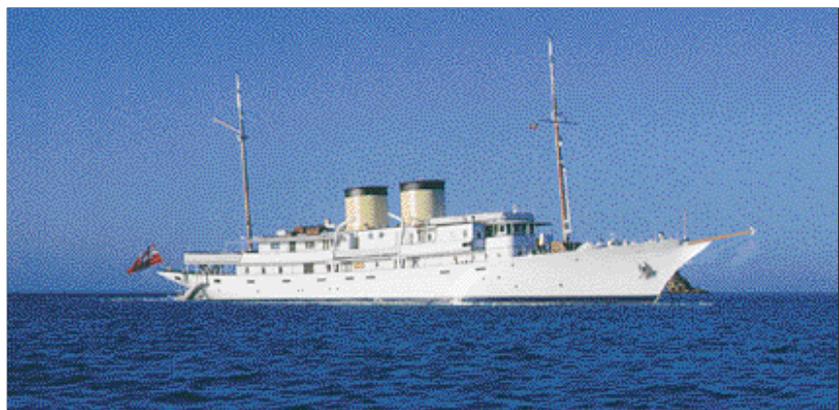
It generally takes about three to four weeks for the yards to prepare the proposal packages. Upon revision, the

number of potential yards must be limited to three or four to simplify the negotiations and the selection process.

After receiving the bids, the yards will normally wish to meet with the person in charge of the project, visit the yacht to evaluate its general condition, and estimate the complexity of the project. The project manager and the owner (or representative) should make themselves available to answer questions and provide additional information so that the yard manager may prepare and submit his proposal.

It can often take four to six weeks to negotiate with the bidding yards, become familiar with their operations, and select the suitable facility for the job. Cost should not be the determining factor when choosing the right yard. As in most fields, yards in difficult financial situations may make very attractive offers to secure a contract and temporarily stem their cash flow problems. Many yacht owners have made the

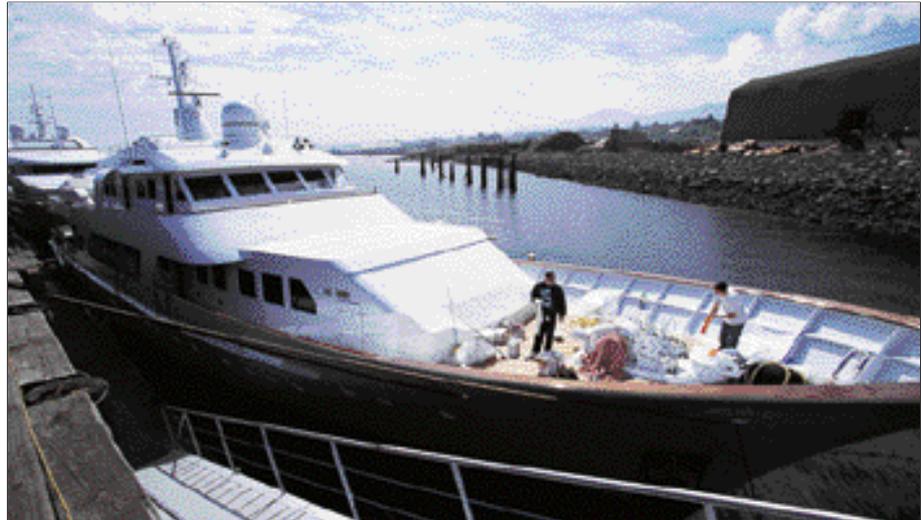
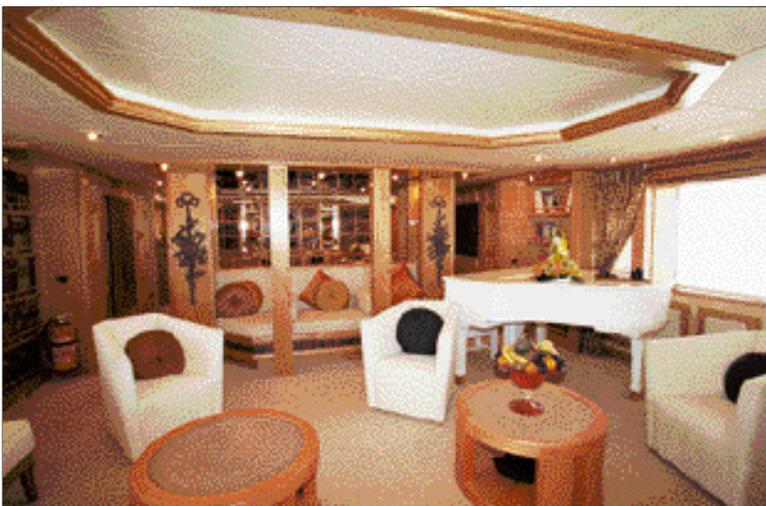
A refit project carried out by the DML Devonport shipyard under the supervision of Jon Bannenberg. The yacht is now known as Talitha G.



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unfortunate mistake of being roped in by low prices only to find themselves hostages of a yard unable to meet its obligations. This may produce delays in the work, or worse yet, the yard may rely on the yacht owner to pay its suppliers who will not give additional credit. The selection of a yard should naturally be based on fair pricing, but more importantly on the experience and quality of the work and respect for the delivery date. The yard's proposal should include a detailed estimate and work schedule as well as an organization chart. The experienced yards generally appoint their own project manager within their staff. He will be the middle man for the owner's project manager and workers to establish efficient lines of communication and decision making for the different parties involved. Nowadays, most of the yards use powerful project management software packages which regularly produce Gantt charts and diagrams showing the various tasks and costs. This gives the project manager a framework of the completion time and the allocated budget. The yard's ability to conduct a yacht refit on schedule and within budget should be the number one determining factor in choosing the facility. After all negotiations have been completed, an agreement should be prepared and signed by both parties. This contract

Oftentimes the interior is entirely restyled, like the 52 meter Destiny Langkawi project redesigned by Donald Starkey.



Sometimes the maintenance required is simply a touch up paint job.

should include the following: a detailed description of all work to be done, a list of materials and equipment, the date of completion with an attached work schedule, the total fixed price to be paid, and a payment schedule. As a rule, the payment schedule will stipulate late payment fees and service warranty, and will call for a final payment of 5 to 10 % to be withheld from the builder until the yacht has been operated to the owner's satisfaction for an agreed period of time. A dispute resolution clause and a termination clause should also be included to protect the owner and project manager in case the yard does not meet its obligations.

It is strongly recommended that this type of contract be prepared and executed when placing an order with a yard or a contractor for any type of work.

Although there is no formula for finding the ideal yard that will complete a refit project perfectly to an owner's specifications, there are some fairly straightforward guidelines to follow when undertaking a costly venture such as this. Like the construction of a new yacht, the most successful refit projects are the result of adequate planning, proficient teamwork, and constant management. Perhaps the most important prerequisite, however, is that all refit work be carried out by experienced professionals.

**Refit (r[Y1]e(fit)) v. -fitted, -fitting, -fits. -tr. To prepare and equip for further or additional use: especially, to modernize and re-equip (a ship, for example). -intr. To be made ready for further use.*