

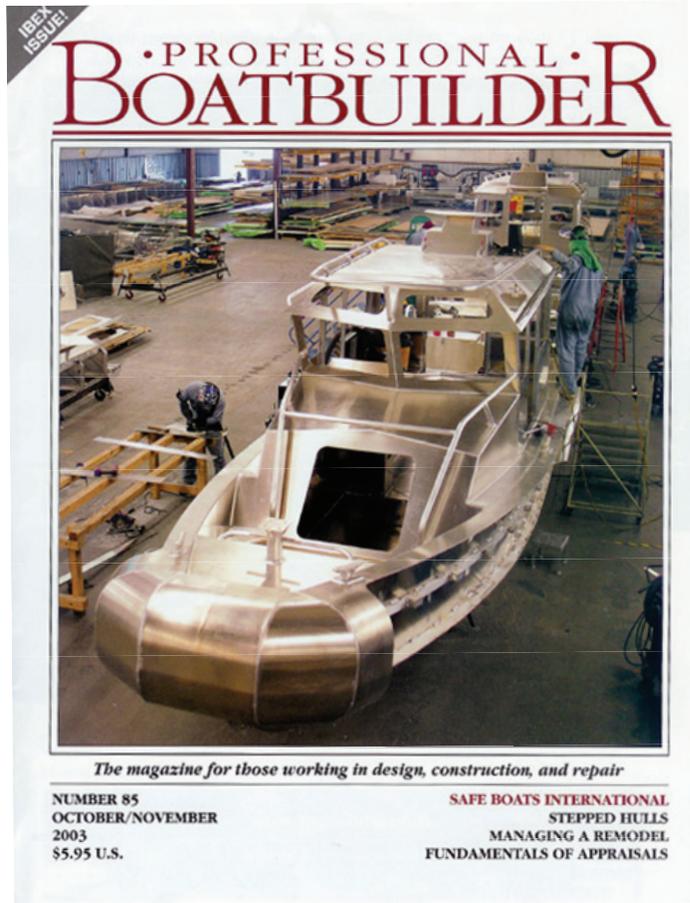
# ALEXIS refit

Sylvia Bolton (Sylvia Bolton Design Inc., Seattle) was retained to restyle the boat's interior, focusing on the aft deck, saloon, and master stateroom. "Projects like this are highly custom," she says. "In new construction everything starts from scratch, while in a refit project, issues of layout, different spaces, traffic patterns, and so forth have already been decided, so you have to work within those constraints. A refit also required more hands-on management and more flexibility to come up with creative but sensible solutions."

.....Based on her knowledge of the owner's personal tastes and planned use of the boat, Bolton developed a concept that significantly upgraded the appearance, quality and functionality of the interior, in keeping with the fairly formal character of the boat. The existing dining table and settee were removed from the saloon, and a new dining area was created on the previously enclosed but informally finished aft deck. It features seating for eight at a large custom-built mahogany table fitted with a compass-inlay, wenge and teak; plus a new overhead, valances, window blinds, teak wall surfaces and trim and carpeting.

The Saloon became a more open entertainment areas, with a sofa and end tables, a small wet bar was positioned in the aft starboard corner.

In the master stateroom, Bolton chose to eliminate the original oval shape, as well as the yellow finish color of the cabinets walls and trim the side walls were squared off a



## Managing a Remodel

You can rely on an economic recession to bring in refit and repair business. But it's no small trick for any yard to ensure that the project, especially on a large yacht, stays under control.

by Charles B. Summers

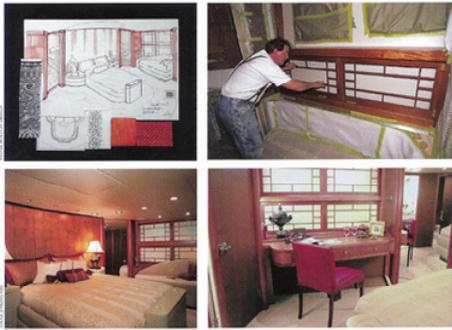
The economic boom of the 1990s produced many personal fortunes and was accompanied by a surge in yacht sales to people willing to spend some of that new money. Although the yacht market has since turned soft, especially for new construction, substantial savings are available to those who find what they want among swelling brokerage inventories of pre-owned boats. Furthermore, many boat owners who might have considered investing in either a new custom or production boat a few years ago have decided to keep what they have and settle for a less costly remodeling project.

"There are a lot of big boats out there," observes David King, CEO of Townsend Ray Marine (Port Townsend, Washington). "And as the number grows, there are increasing opportunities for major refits as these boats change hands. Also, it's very hard to make just one improvement to an interior space such as a master stateroom because the new is often so different from the old. As a result, the owner eventually commits to a larger refit in order to make sure everything matches. I don't know how many of us are chasing that market, but there are far more players and providers than there used to be."

While demand for refits is gaining, along with the list of yards trying to get a share of the business, some companies are finding it more difficult than it might first appear. "We see

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# ALEXIS refit



Bottom's materials and design study for the master stateroom, and the finished product. A key element in this remodeling space is the shoji screen, shown during installation, and completed. Shoji screens, one of several Oriental touches to the remodel (Alexis' owner does business in Asia), helped Bolton "square off" oval spaces back aft—without removing walls.

then we indicate that to the owners and make them aware the budget we presented is only our best guess."

#### Refit Customer Relations

It's working through those uncertain tasks that is the real challenge for the yard doing a refit, because the project must be managed in a way that gets the job done right and keeps the customer happy, despite the increased costs. Negotiating a contract that is as specific as possible, while retaining necessary flexibility, can help to avoid problems. However, when problems inevitably do arise, maintaining close communication with the owner is absolutely critical.

"You've got to have constant communication throughout the project," states Linnabary. "The minute you don't, you have trouble. People figure if they're giving your company \$50,000 a week—or whatever the

number—they deserve some attention. I spend a lot of time in this company doing that. What with meetings, walk-throughs, Webcams, e-mails, digital photography, and cell phones, it's constant communication."

As long as owners are kept in the loop, understood why any additional work is required, and see they are getting good value for their money, an experienced boat owner usually doesn't have a problem with justifiable increases in cost. For example, Townsend Bay had a classic problem with a motor cabin top on a wood boat—but didn't know just how bad it would be until they got into it, and whether it could be repaired or would have to be replaced.

"He indicated that to the owner," recalls King. "Gave him updates every few days, sent him digital photos of what we found, and kept him informed about how far we had to

go. But I had another situation where we went ahead and fixed some deficiencies that we'd discovered, and those repairs increased the project cost. Even though what we did was in compliance with the contract, the customer was still not happy because we did not adequately inform him in advance about the change in the scope of work. We eventually sorted it all out, but it's much better to be proactive before it gets to that point."

If an older boat was purchased primarily to save money, the owners will be very concerned about preserving that financial advantage by carefully controlling the cost of any work being done, especially if they are sensitive to resale value.

"When the market is soft like it is now," says LeClerc's Ford, "you can get a pretty good deal on a used boat. But this is definitely not a market where someone can buy a used boat

bit by putting in shoji screens, a gold leaf screen behind the bed and a carpet border – based on design from Tibet – around the bed, the wood is mahogany on the cabinets, doors door facings, and trim.

The master bath was also completely gutted and finished in a combination of Italian marbles and antiqued Venetian plaster.

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large-yacht work. Such jobs call for a systematic project approach so as to meet deadlines, stay within budget, keep the customer happy, and, not incidentally, not lose money in the process. The plans on the wall by Linnabary are for the remodel discussed in this article: a half-million-dollar chopwater to living spaces aboard a Hargrave-designed 93-footer (27.7m), which, at 26 years of age, has achieved "classic" status. **Facing page:** Two members of the Purpura crew and a newly made shelving unit that was purpose-built for audio equipment in the boat's extensively revamped salon. **Left:** Alexis Bolton Design, a Seattle-based firm specializing in yacht interiors, was retained by the boat owner to be the creative force on this job. Like others in her profession, Bolton presents ideas using mood-media fabric swatches, drawings, and photographs of specific furnishings. Here we see her preliminary vision for the salon, as fully realized by the yard.



Their combined experience reveals key issues that any prospective competitor would do well to consider before claiming to be refit qualified. In particular, they caution that refit differs considerably from new construction, and that there are important implications for bids, contracts, and customer relations.

#### Defining the Terms

The term "refit" in this context corresponds to what is usually called a "remodel" project in the housing industry. A refit often includes "repair" (fixing what is damaged, worn, or inoperable), "upgrades" (installing new, larger-capacity equipment or system components), and "renovation" (returning something to its original condition). The overriding purpose, however, is to materially change the appearance, structure, and/or functionality of the vessel to better fit the practical needs and aesthetic preferences of the owner. Such projects can range from refinishing cabinets and trim, to changing uphol-

drains trying to make it by undoing established yards," says Bruce Ford, general manager of LeClerc's Marine Construction (Seattle). "They then get into trouble because they don't have the experience. Anyone can take a boat apart, but it's knowing what you're doing during the process—what is salvageable, what has to be replaced, and when to stop, as well as how to put it back together."

"Also, unlike remodeling a house, there are no 'rules,' there is no universal permit-and-inspection routine, and no regulatory approval required at the completion of each phase in a marine

refit, unless you're working to specific classification-society criteria. Some customers don't understand that and look only for the lowest bid, assuming they'll be assured of the same quality and minimum standards regardless of the yard."

Townsend Bay and LeClerc, along with Purpura Marine (Port Angeles) and Delta Marine (Seattle), are among the Pacific Northwest yards that do yacht refits in addition to new construction. All have reputations for quality work in replacing interior, redesign, structural modifications, and high-end refinish work on yachts.