

River innovation

As the popularity of river cruises continues to gain momentum, shipbuilders are looking to differentiate themselves through new and innovative inland vessel designs. Patrick Janssens, CEO of **Shipyards De Hoop**, reveals how his company has set the standard on waterways through a unique combination of market experience and technical know-how.

The number of river cruise passengers taking to Europe's waterways has more than doubled over the last decade. This statistic makes particularly pleasant reading for continental ship designers and builders looking to capitalise on the lucrative market trend.

Based in the Netherlands, and with over 120 years of shipbuilding experience, Shipyards De Hoop is no exception. The group operate from two shipyards – the main yard, De Hoop Lobith, is located in the east of the country and employs over 130 members of staff, while the second, De Hoop Foxhol, added in 2007, houses 65 shop-floor personnel.

"While the majority of engineering, purchasing and administration is done from our headquarters in Lobith, both locations are suitable for building bespoke vessels," says CEO Patrick Janssens. "In recent years, most of these vessels have been inland cruise ships, but we have also constructed small sea-going and coastal cruise vessels."

As a result, Shipyards De Hoop finds itself in demand from a number of notable clients. This year, it completed the construction of the first of three ships to be built as part of its River Discovery II series, which was commissioned by Boston-based tour operator Vantage Deluxe World Travel. Measuring 135m, the vessel also carries the notable distinction of having three decks, a novelty for most river cruise ships.

"We have been building vessels for Vantage for the last ten years or so," says Janssens. "River Discovery II is a follow-up to a previous fleet, and meets today's standards in comfort and green technology."

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Inland challenges

When designing an inland cruise vessel, there are the usual size and depth constraints such as shallow waters, locks and bridges that need to be taken into consideration. How does Shipyards De Hoop go about circumventing these hurdles while ensuring that clients can provide the optimum passenger experience and satisfaction?

"From a constructional point of view, there are some obvious challenges," explains Janssens. "Sometimes vessels operate in rivers that are shallow, which means the ship needs sufficient power and speed in order to stick to the trip schedule. Therefore, you need to pay a lot of attention to the design of the propellers.



Shipyards De Hoop has over 120 years' experience in shipbuilding.

"That's just from the perspective of the actual ship. For the client, there are also certain comfort norms that need to be adhered to, such as less noise and vibration, which in turn has a huge impact on our design."

Customer value proposition

In light of its impressive and established know-how, Shipyards De Hoop's customer value proposition also extends beyond shipbuilding. With a modular database comprising hundreds of basic ship designs, which can be tailored to a client's specific requirements, the group is able to offer concept design and engineering services to third parties.

"Concept engineering is something we do occasionally," explains Janssens. "We also create designs for parties that are in consideration for a shipbuilding project. Sometimes, they use us as a kind of sparring partner to contemplate different concepts and initial designs."

Dynamic outlook

Despite question marks concerning potential over-saturation as cruises become more attractive to travellers, Shipyards de Hoop is unquestionably well positioned to infiltrate a fertile market, which has recently seen the initiation of cruises beyond Europe on the likes of the Amazon and Mekong.

"In general, the possibilities look great," says Janssens. "Over the years, we have built more than 60 of these vessels ourselves and have spent a lot of time talking with ship owners. And while rivers are getting fuller, it is even more important that we remain dynamic in order to meet greater demands. It will certainly be interesting to see what happens next in the river cruise sector." ■

Further information

Shipyards De Hoop
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