

# LEADERS IN LUXURY VESSEL CONSTRUCTION

Shipyards de Hoop's assets comprise two facilities in The Netherlands, specialising in offshore ships, river cruise vessels and technologically advanced watercraft. The company's talent for innovation has attracted an international client base, as divulged by Shipyards de Hoop's Technical Director, Mr Fré Drenth. Tony White reports.

**Operating Lobith Yard** and Foxhol Yard in The Netherlands, the flexibility demonstrated by Shipyards de Hoop has allowed the business to construct ships for a number of specialised sectors, including river cruise ships, offshore vessels, and diesel-electric hybrid vessels. The company is well versed in a wide range of technical capabilities that include Dynamic Positioning, diving systems, cable lay, heavy lifting, well testing, well stimulation, and accommodation standard from basic to high-end. Complementing its new builds with a roster of professional ship repair, engineering and consultancy services has positioned Shipyards de Hoop favourably,

strengthening a positive reputation that has grown consistently since the yard's establishment as a Dutch-built facility in 1889.

Lobith Yard was acquired fully by Shipyards de Hoop's CEO in 2007, and Foxhol Yard swiftly followed due to high activity in the market. The oldest of the company's facilities, the site at Lobith, was reconstructed following its destruction during the Second World War to become a specialised fabricator of inland and seafaring vessels, as well as manufacturing a series of diving support vessels during the 1980s. The company is also the European market leader in river cruise vessels – indeed, Shipyards de Hoop continues to operate as a provider of specialised

maritime solutions, as explained by the company's Technical Director, Mr Fré Drenth. "We have a constant investment programme in place, which allows us to continue implementing incremental improvements across our facilities as we move forward," informs Mr Drenth, who holds a PhD in Naval Architecture, and has worked with Shipyards de Hoop since 1991, facilitating the engineering and design of the vessels that the company produces.

#### **Vessels of innovation**

Catering to a diverse client base, Shipyards de Hoop innovates in vessel assembly, although not at the expense of efficiency

– the company takes pride in sustaining swift project completion times, and has not delivered any project late for over a decade. A single shareholder wholly owns the company's facilities, and Shipyards de Hoop operates with strong financial backing. The company's leading position within the river cruise sector also denotes that the growth of the business is amply assured. "The river cruise market is very visibly growing," Mr Drenth observes. "We continue to receive enquiries regarding our capabilities in creating these vessels. Currently, we are building three such river cruise vessels, which will be completed by March 2014, ready for delivery to our client. River cruise vessels

operate as part of a seasonal business, and the period in which these ships will enter operation begins in March."

That its clients entrust the construction of ships required within very stringent timeframes is certainly indicative of Shipyards de Hoop's expertise, and this notion is also reflected in the more recent projects undertaken by the company. Delta Logistics of Trinidad represents one of Shipyards de Hoop's most recent new build clients, for example – it was announced in October that a Platform Supply Vessel (PSV) is under construction, and will enter operation in the Caribbean Sea close to Trinidad & Tobago in the third quarter of 2014. The vessel under construction



utilises a design unique to Shipyard de Hoop, which was previously demonstrated in a similar PSV built for Mexico's petrochemical giant Pemex.

Shipyard de Hoop's river cruise vessel proficiencies are renowned internationally, even beyond Europe – for example, the Emerald Sky, a 135 metre luxury river cruise ship, was recently commissioned for construction by Australia's Emerald Waterways. Replete with a cinema facility, swimming pool and several prestigious suites, the Emerald Sky will be complete in the first quarter of 2014. "The seasonal aspect of the river cruise sector attracts a great deal of repeat business for the company," Mr Drenth remarks. "We have long-term relationships in place with numerous of our prestigious clients, contractors, co-makers and suppliers. For example, we have celebrated over 10 years of shipbuilding for Oceanografia, and have constructed over a kilometre of ships for Austrian shipping company Lueftner Cruises.

Globally speaking, only 10 per cent of Shipyard de Hoop's vessels are delivered to clients from The Netherlands, with international clients comprising the balance of the company's broadly reaching business. "Our priority is the satisfaction of our clients, delivering a swift solution with innovations in design that differentiate our vessels from those constructed by our peers in the market," Mr Drenth continues. "We believe that performing in this way is a key aspect of our opera-

tions, which contributes to the repeat business demonstrated by our client base." Shipyard de Hoop has delivered ships to clients such as Shell, Exxon-Mobil, Vantage Travel, Bourbon, Lueftner Cruises, Uniworld, Spido, Socatra and Hanzevast Capital, among others – a spectrum of major maritime players from throughout the world.

#### Operational strategies

Lobith Yard, which employs 140 permanent staff, has two slipways – the largest of which is 200 by 60 metres. Foxhol Yard bolsters Shipyard de Hoop's capabilities with a further 65 permanently employed shipbuilding staff, and a 135 by 16 metre slipway – and both facilities source additional personnel from trusted sources when such needs arise.

That said, employee satisfaction would certainly seem a key aspect of the company's success, and is a high priority of the business. "Our facilities are located some distance from the central region of The Netherlands," Mr Drenth informs. "We are also not particularly situated in what could be referred to as the traditional shipbuilding region of the country. As such, there is not a great deal of information, neither the capacity for education, in shipbuilding skills present – which is why we have handled all such matters ourselves for our staff." This in-house training programme is made all the more expedient by the communities surrounding Shipyard de Hoop's facilities, from which



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the majority of staff are sourced – and where the majority of them continue to live, assuring the company long-term employee retention that often leads into a multi-generational workforce. “By ensuring the motivation, fulfilment and vocational satisfaction of our employees, we have discovered that most of our staff will remain with the company for the entirety of their working lives,” Mr Drenth says. “We see fathers working alongside their sons, and nephews working alongside their uncles. We delegate to our workforce as much as possible, fostering their intercommunication of skills and talents in the process. As such, they do not require an exhaustive amount of information to conduct their

work, as they are acutely familiar with the practices of the industry, and the culture of differentiation that we encourage in our operations. The end result is the reduction of engineering requirements across the board, which is a key ingredient in our rapid project realisation strategy.” And while the two main De Hoop sites have a combined quay length of 450 metres, the shipyards have an additional 200m quay at their disposal in the Rotterdam harbour area on the Oostdijk. This location is mainly used to outfit those vessels built in Lobith or Foxhol. “This site is the ideal location for performing the last finishing touches is our and home base for sea trails,” Mr Drenth remarks.

#### **Dynamically different**

The mantra of differentiation and unique solution development certainly forms a prominent element in the corporate character of Shipyard de Hoop. “We have been designing and building vessels for a very long time – we have had ample time in which to hone our craft, and learn from our mistakes,” Mr Drenth comments. “The cost of a ship is constituted of many smaller aspects and complexities, which is why communication is crucial to us – production personnel are in direct connection with engineering staff, and if any issues are encountered during a build, they can thereby be discussed and resolved quite rapidly. Consequently, the issue itself will be recognised as a strategy or

procedure to be refined. There is a constant learning curve in place throughout every discipline in our production cycle. However, because we produce the designs as well as building the vessel, we feel that this differentiates us greatly from many other shipyards.” Coupled with this is Shipyard de Hoop’s unwavering focus on the needs of the client. “Our priority is not on internal cost reduction,” Mr Drenth assures. “Instead, our main focus during vessel construction is the maximisation of the ship’s earning potential for the client.”

The reputation and niche that Shipyard de Hoop has established has allowed the company to operate relatively independently of many of the challenges that have affected the maritime marketplace – although the outlook of the company reflects a business comfortable in its position, and aware of its capabilities.

“We operate in an area with comparatively high labour costs, meaning that the labour input in our vessels is often less than 35 per cent – the majority of such undertakings are provided for by our equipment. When developing and producing the vessels, there should be a good balance between the steel production of the vessel on the one hand, and all the other hours necessary to develop the vessel on the other hand,” Mr Drenth imparts. “Our target market therefore remains the production of vessels with high technological content and many integrated systems.”

#### **Technologically triumphant**

An example of this combination of minimal labour and maximal technology is evidenced in a supply ship that Shipyard de Hoop is in the process of developing for a Mexican oil company. “We believe

that this particular vessel is the first diesel-electric hybrid of its kind,” Mr Drenth imparts. “Consequently, it functions with a very low degree of fuel consumption. We foresee that these hybrid propulsion concepts will continue to grow in demand throughout the marine market going forward.” Shipyard de Hoop has been adept in the creation of diesel-electric ships since 1981, and they represent another core specialisation of the company. “In fact, all of our current vessel projects utilise diesel-electric technology, with the exception of our river cruise vessels,” Mr Drenth clarifies.

However, the vision of the future for Shipyard de Hoop is apparent – there is a clear intention of continuing to leverage the advantages of the hybrid diesel-electric engines for which the company is known, transferring the technology to new applications. “We plan to implement these hybrid drive systems not only in the fast crew boats that we build, but also in the river cruise vessels in which we specialise,” Mr Drenth projects. “There is a great deal of activity present in the offshore support vessels sector, which

will also continue to keep us engaged. We also specialise in the development of fast sailing ships – we feel the market has need of such vessels once again for an increasing range of industries and applications, and with the increased complexity afforded by modern technology. We are able to construct such vessels at a low cost.”

By understanding its own strengths and demonstrating selectiveness in its active markets, Shipyard de Hoop has positioned itself as a maritime business with longevity that seems certain to continue. Specialising in a suite of niche solutions, these two yards have fostered a strong global following, and as technology and ingenuity combine, the company’s talent for devising new strategies and solutions seems set to ensure that clients will continue to return, entrusting their needs to Shipyard de Hoop’s expertise. “Innovation is, in our opinion, the way to survive,” Mr Drenth finalises – and in so doing, encapsulates the ethos that has seen the company thrive for generations, and shall for generations still. □

