

# Le refit

*La vie est belle for Superyacht Refit & Repair in France with a positive increase in business*  
 Words: Fances and Michael Howorth

Looking at the Mediterranean and comparing the refit yard availability offered by each country the shirt and trousers must be worn by Spain and Italy with Greece coming third wearing the socks and shoes. Until recently France had little of great importance to offer and could be said to be the pants. True France offered a myriad of small independent contractors and if you wanted a quick carpentry job by a qualified expert there was no better place to be. Painters, technicians mechanics and, of course, electronics specialists abound in ports all over the French Riviera. Captains seeking a major refitting yard in France were left with little choice that came in the form of the failing ITM or Monaco Marine a company that has grown from strength to strength through the slow and steady acquisition of competitors.

Operating a total surface area of over 95,200 m<sup>2</sup> spread across six shipyards at La Ciotat (45,000 m<sup>2</sup>), Golfe de St Tropez (28,000 m<sup>2</sup>), Antibes (8,000 m<sup>2</sup>), St Laurent du Var (5,500 m<sup>2</sup>), Beaulieu sur Mer (6,000 m<sup>2</sup>) and Monaco (2,700 m<sup>2</sup>) the company is able to offer standard work such as underwater painting, wintering, as well as undertake specific and large scale projects. In the past they have completed extensions, complete interior decoration, and full paint jobs. They are the go to guys when it comes to special operations such as: the preparation of new sailing boats including rigging and class certification visits. Michel Ducros founded the company in Monaco during 1995 intent on developing a network of small service sites able to offer customers quality refit and maintenance facilities. In 2007 the company became the big boy on the block opening in La Ciotat, a site of 45 000 m<sup>2</sup> where 13 yachts from 40 to 200m can be hauled out at any one time using a 2000 ton Yachtlift. This site also features a 90m paint shed offering optimal work conditions. Expansion followed two years later with the acquisition of a 300 ton travelift. Most recently the company continued its expansion on the Côte d'Azur by establishing a base in Antibes through the acquisition of the Antibes Marine

Shipyards in 2012. The company employs 200 and can call upon a sub contracted workforce of 600. Servicing 3,000 units a year, mostly sub 24 metres, the company posts an operating turnover of 50 million Euros each year.

The IMS shipyard was founded in 1987 and during its early years, concentrated solely on the construction of aluminium ferries and work boats. It began repair and refit work in 1992 again concentrating on work boats and French Navy work. Being so close to the huge complex operated by France's Navy there was not shortage of that. Little did they anticipate back then that they would themselves occupy what was then the Navy's Seaplane base. But in 2014 that's what IMS did and in doing so moved from being an also ran into what is almost certainly the largest yacht repair shipyard in the Mediterranean. When added to the original site the 12,000 m<sup>2</sup> IMS 300 the addition of 60,000 m<sup>2</sup> at IMS 700 makes the company one of the most important superyacht refitters in France if not the entire Mediterranean. In one single step IMS has moved the French Superyacht refit and repair business from Zero to Hero and that means France must without doubt now be able to throw off the underpants image.

Owned by the French holding company Nepteam since 2011 it has been under the direct hands on, day to day, management of Denis Pelligrino who has, over the past years, not only overseen the growth of IMS 300 but has at the same time kept a watch brief on the construction of IMS 700. The numbers of the two sites differentiate the tonnage that they can safely lift and store ashore. IMS 300 has a Travellift capable of handling yachts to 300 tons while at the larger site an all new 670 travel lift has been installed together with a purpose built lifting dock.

Creating a brand new, state of the art superyacht shipyard out of a disused and somewhat abused French Navy seaplane base has been no mean feat. 2,700 m<sup>2</sup> of earth has been removed

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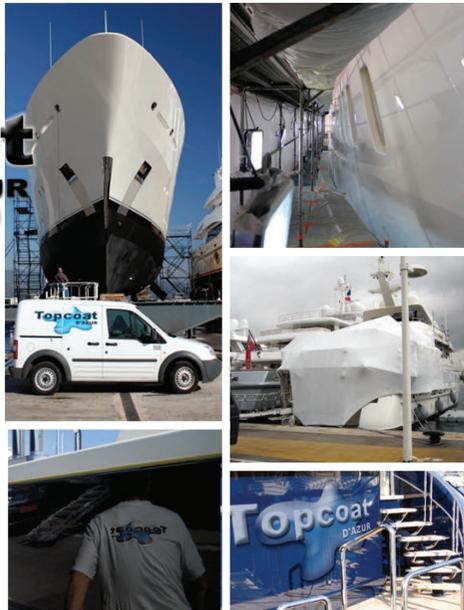
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Le refit

and reused, over 6,000 tonnes of asphalt has been laid, 2,000 tonnes of piles for supporting the construction in the lifting dock, breakwater and yacht pontoons, 4,500 m<sup>2</sup> of paint applied, 80 members of staff working full time, putting in over 20,000 hours of work are just some of the figures that illustrate the sheer size of this colossal project. 143 forty metre tall piles weighing over 2,000 tons have been sunk into the basin.

The 670 tonne travelift was delivered to the site unassembled at the beginning of July in and discharged from 17 articulated trucks that had driven it from Italy. The reassembly operation went smoothly, over the summer and is now fully functional having lifted the first yacht in the drying weeks of 2014. The impressive 19 metre-high machine represents an investment of over 2 million Euros for the shipyard owners. Work on the second phase of the 37,000 square metre central area is underway transforming aircraft hangers and attendant buildings into workshops, offices, reception and recreational areas for superyacht crews.

These four enormous sea plane hangers are being converted into boat-sheds for housing three yachts up to 50 metres at the same time. Combined the two shipyards, just a mile or so apart, offer yachts seeking a refit a total work surface area of 130,000 m<sup>2</sup>. This includes 77,000 m<sup>2</sup> ashore, 20,000 m<sup>2</sup> of which is under cover in sheds offering air draughts up to 15 metres. A 50,000 m<sup>2</sup> basin provides berths for yachts seeking work while afloat and 3,000 m<sup>2</sup> has been put aside for offices, workshops and a 500 m<sup>2</sup> area set aside for crew use in a complex that houses a fitness centre, multimedia room, rest area, outdoor terrace and BBQ. 1,000 m<sup>2</sup> has been set aside for yachts to use as a storage area for their tenders, jet skis, and other various pieces of equipment.

Situated in Saint-Mandrier directly across the bay from Toulon the facility is well protected from the swell by a long floating breakwater. The bay itself is well populated with ferry services making it easy for crew to get well earned R&R in a vibrant city that is very much a lively area the whole year round with many activities centred on the young and fun loving visitors who frequent it.

The other big player in the area in years gone by was International Technic Marine better known as ITM. Covering an area of about 12,000 square metres, four large dry docks ranging from 80 up to 126 metres, covered yard of about 95 metres and more than 300 m of quays for afloat repairs the company had been plagued for years but poor management and a reputation for not getting the job done on time. No one was very surprised when the company slipped into administration in the twilight of 2013. What was surprising was that no one really wanted to take up the offer of running a shipyard in Marseilles.

In the end there were two players at the final stages of the Tender, and one of those pulled out at the last minute. Specialist refit and repair company Palumbo was the only one left in the race at the final hurdle and scooped up the yard keeping eight of the yard's former managers and renaming the complex Palumbo Marseille Superyachts ITM. The Italian ship builder who also controls refit yards in Naples and Malta invested heavily in the facility buying new equipment and lifting systems in order to improve and increase the range of services to offer to its clients. It was not very long after reopening that the yard announced the arrival of an 85 metre superyacht drydocking



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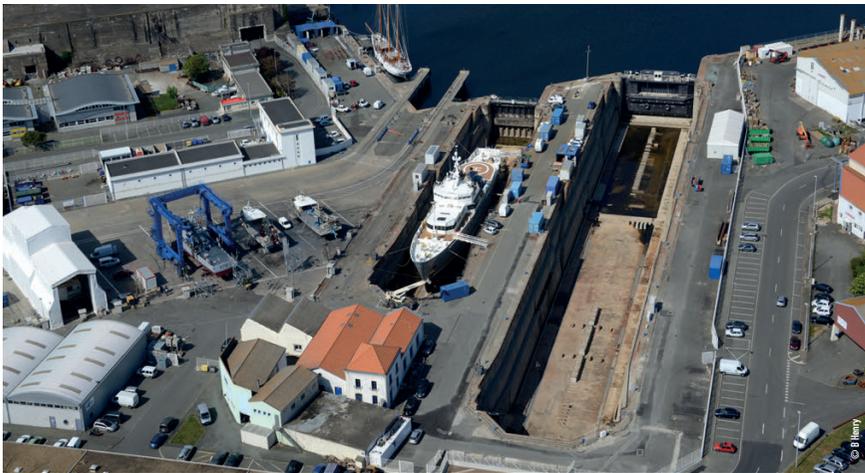
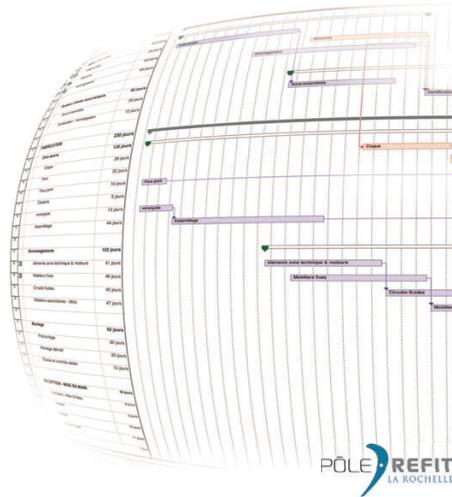
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there for a refit. Despite using photographs of her to promote their work, they rather coyly refuse to name that yacht but we can identify her as Valerie from Lürssen to a design by Espen Øeino that was built in 2011.

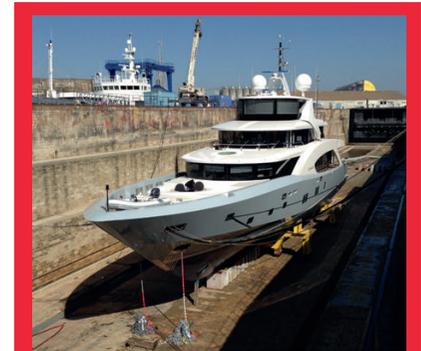
France however has two coastlines, the Mediterranean and the Atlantic and it is on that West coast that the deep water port of La Rochelle stands out as a refit centre. The port offers all the necessary secured facilities and skills to enable superyacht refit management. Two large dry docks are accessible at any state of the tide and can accommodate yachts up to 170 metres. There is a well developed network of highly-specialised contractors, able to cover any type of work many with more than 20 years of experience in superyacht project management and engineering and the city offers accommodation capacity for crews and all associated services, including training.

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The team at Atlantic Refit Center, one of several refit facilities in the city, is led by two experienced professionals from the superyacht industry. Founded by Chris Atkinson and Stéphane Marcelli who both control and manage the entire refit and repair process, the yard came to recent prominence with the refitting of Enigma XK a former British government-owned Fisheries Protection Vessel. Originally she was designed for service in the roughest of North Atlantic waters. Atlantic Refit, working with Philippe Briand and Veerle Battiau converted the ship into a comfortable and capable expedition yacht, which is now enjoying an exciting after life as a charter yacht visiting the very ends of the earth. "It was an extremely challenging project to fit everything you need onboard a superyacht into a former military vessel and keep the original profile of the vessel," says Marcelli. "We are very proud when this stunning vessel received a superyacht industry award."

Another well respected facility, Yacht Concept, was created in 2004 by Laurent Da Rold, who, soon after that was joined by Jean-Philippe Houot. Both founders studied at the Ecole Centrale de Lille, France, and each one of them has a cumulative twenty years of experience in the marine industries, in yacht building, as well as in the yacht equipment sector. Today a total of eight people contribute to the success of each project at this well found facility in La Rochelle.

Both Yacht Concept and Atlantic Refit Centre are members of Pôle Refit La Rochelle an organisation started in 2007 that represents over 20 specialist refit companies as well as the tow La Rochelle Harbours. Founded by Laurent Da Rold of Yacht Concept, Pôle Refit La Rochelle was created as a non-profit organization dedicated to yacht refit. His aim was to unite



**Atlantic Refit Center**

Atlantic Refit Center is specialised in superyacht refit and conversion of vessels into yachts up to 140m including all types of maintenance and re-paint work. Thanks to remarkable facilities based inside the ISPS zone of the La Rochelle Atlantic Port, their commitment is to deliver fully tailored services to their clients, on time and on budget. La Rochelle old town is vibrant all year long and offers an exciting life for crew with lots of varied shops and bars and restaurants, also many cultural activities and beautiful wildlife areas thanks to the vicinity of the islands and their sandy beaches on the Ile de Ré. Atlantic Refit Center is just 5 mins drive from La Rochelle airport (direct flights to London) and 1h30 drive from Nantes and Bordeaux Intl airports.

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yachting professionals, and has the objective of supporting both the economic and commercial development of refit works in La Rochelle and its surrounding area.

Laurent Da Rold, the associations President says, "Pôle Refit La Rochelle stands at the heart of the highest concentration of nautical businesses of the country. A long-term commitment for the city of La Rochelle, with a key ambition: to become an international leader in refit operations. La Rochelle is definitely a credible option compared to shipyards from the French Riviera, from the Nordic Countries, and more generally to European yards. Thus, our missions are to develop the image of our city as the benchmark port of call on the French Atlantic Coast and to unite the domestic marine industry on the refit market."

Talking about the company's Superyacht Refit capabilities, he adds, "We are the only deep sea port of the Atlantic Coast and have one of the leading marinas in Europe. Our facilities are able to welcome boats up to 100 metres into the heart of our city, which is a classified historic heritage site! Our main strength as an organisation is both the diversity and the complementary nature of the trades and crafts available. Refitting yachts in La Rochelle ensures clients receive custom made projects managed by passionate and experienced people, at affordable prices that are delivered within the time limit set."