

THE EVEN KEEL

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INTERVIEW: TIM HODGDON and HODGDON YACHTS

180 YEARS of QUALITY and TRADITION

We interviewed Tim Hodgdon about Hodgdon Yachts' history, technology and their current 124' Sloop project for The Even Keel.

***TEK:** Please give us a quick history lesson on your company.*

T.H.: We're fifth generation boat builders. We believe that we first started building boats in 1818. Recently, a local historian wrote a book about our company and her research found that our first boat was actually constructed in 1816.

***TEK:** What type of boats did you build then compared to now?*

T.H.: Well we've built over 400 vessels. We first built coastal pinkies and schooners. At the turn of the century, we were building fairly large boats, up to 165'. In the 20's we built a 127' boat called the ZODIAK and she is still on the West Coast and designated by the National Registry of Historic Places. We built an Artic Explorer designed by hand, for Admiral Donald MacMillian, that was frozen in the pack ice. We have a long record of building wooden boats by many famous designers. We built mine-sweepers for World War I and II, and for the Korean war. We built our last mine-sweeper in the mid 50's. Today, we're building custom private yachts like the 124' Sloop with the MarsKeel.

***TEK:** Many of your boats have been wooden. How has advancing technology changed how you build?*

T.H.: Well in the 60's, with the advance of fiberglass it was pretty rough building traditional vessels. We had another problem making the transition from the Navy contracts of 50's to building private yachts. We recognized that our customers wanted traditional looks with modern technology. By the early 80's we landed a contract for an 85' Motor Yacht that was very state of the art. That contract set the tone for the 90's.

***TEK:** What is the technology today and how is it applied to the 124' Sloop you are building?*

T.H.: In the early 90's we focused on the state of the art materials and their applications. With the integration of honeycomb, carbon fiber, cold moulding and vacuum bagging, coupled with the craftsmanship of joiner work, our company is famous for, we have a technically superior product that is traditional in appearance.

***TEK:** You have stayed away then from using fiberglass?*

T.H.: No. The way this hull is built is a cold moulded process, vacuum bagged. Laminated structural pieces with multiple layers of wood are bonded with epoxy and vacuum bagged for the saturation process. We use fiberglass in conjunction with epoxies. On this project the center board case is fiberglass with epoxy and the hull is sheathed in fiberglass. Carbon fiber is used in the hull construction and in the head stay fitting. There the carbon fiber is sandwiched down into the laminated wood. Our technology features wood as the main structural material using other components where it is necessary, to provide reinforcement.

TEK: *What is the level of skill required for the craftsman?*

T.H. This area is famous for the talent of the people available to us. We draw trades people from all over this area to provide the necessary skills for a project of this size. The ability to work on the hull and the complex interior finishing requires years of experience spent working with the materials, to learn the necessary expertise. The interior of the boat is extraordinary. The design is based upon ellipses and the woodwork flows and wraps around the cabin features. There are custom bronze fender castings around a marble fireplace and a pipe organ fitted into the ornamental cherry woodwork, that appears to be one continuous piece. The jointing of the interior woodwork will be seamless and matched.

TEK: *Bruce King designed this boat. Who decides the 'what and how' of the materials used?*

T.H.: Bruce King brings to the process a tremendous amount of knowledge of processes and techniques. Our company has experience in applying those techniques. On a project of this size, the designer and builder work cooperatively together to make the end result very satisfactory.

TEK: *Why did you choose a MarsKeel?*

T.H.: We researched keel manufacturers in conjunction with the owners representative. We found Mars to be the company with the expertise and track record to complete a project of this size. Mars had the ability to build the pattern and do the pour, and do a damn fine job of it.

TEK: *How long will this boat last?*

T.H.: We have boats built in 1905 still in the water. Of course these boats have seen regular refurbishing. This boat, with the technology used in her design, has an indefinite life span, provided that she sees proper maintenance.

TEK: *Is this your life's work?*

T.H.: I went the yard with my father as a boy, worked here in high school and I've been here since.

TEK: *You get epoxy under your nails, it must be pretty tough to get it out?*

T.H.: It's even tougher when it's in your blood.