



Do-it-yourself Boatyards

Galesville Harbor Yacht Yard off Chesapeake Bay is one of the dwindling number of boatyards that allow boat owners to do all or some of their haulout work on their own. Liability issues have prompted many yards to require boat owners to secure their own scaffolding for use. This is something to check for if you plan on power-buffing your hull.

DIY yards are critical to affordable boating, but they are a dying breed.

The cost of buying, owning, and maintaining a sailboat has spiraled to an all-time high. The ranks of entry-level sailors, starting out in smaller boats, are thinning, and if both the industry and the consumer aren't careful, mid-sized keelboat sailing will once again become an activity relegated to those of means.

Just stroll through any boat show and hear how easily six-digit boat prices roll off the tongues of today's production-boat dealers. Such pricing was pioneered by Hinckley, Morris Yachts, Swan, and other high-end builders, but now it's trickled down to more mainstream sailboats at the same time marina slip fees, boatyard labor rates, insurance prices, and the cost of a quart of varnish have gone through the roof.

For many sailors, survival at sea has become a cash flow issue rather than a test of seamanship, and through do-it-yourself efforts, they have managed to keep the dream alive. There's a three-fold approach to cost-effective boating: Buy a sound but older boat, keep it on a

mooring rather than in a costly marina, and find a boatyard that's user friendly to the "do-it-yourselfer."

Across the country, this third step is becoming less of an option. Do-it-yourself boatyards are an endangered species, and those of us who use them need to become more proactive about ensuring their survival.

As boat owners contend with more and more boatyard restrictions on what projects an owner can do, yard owners are facing pricing pressures that are exacerbated by escalating taxes, labor costs, and insurance premiums. These hardships have caused many a yard owner to throw in the towel and sell off to developers who have no intention of recapitalizing a boatyard—or even using the property in a "water dependent" context.

This restructure of the waterfront to non-water-dependent use is a land management failure that is happening in most every coastal community across the nation. Boat owners—particularly those of the DIY variety—should urge

their local governments to draft waterfront redevelopment plans that are sensitive to boatyards and other "water dependent" operations like marinas and sailing clubs. It pays off when boaters make themselves heard at planning and zoning hearings. When a boatyard succumbs to real-estate pressure and is replaced by shops selling plastic oysters, T-shirts, and ice cream cones, the local recreational boater is the biggest loser.

THE BUSINESS SIDE

It's important to keep in mind that boatyards are a for-profit business and a nautical rendition of fair trade should include good service for a reasonable fee. It's not unreasonable to expect the yard's staff to have a well-maintained Travelift, Brownell trailer, railway, or crane to haul your boat. The operator should be skilled and by reflex should be able to get the slings properly positioned and your boat safely blocked.

However, if you deliver the boat with a genoa rolled up on a headsail furling system, don't be surprised if you're



A skilled Travelift operator, like this one at Galesville boatyard (above), will be able to instinctively arrange rigging and place the slings, no matter the hull shape.

charged extra for its removal. In fact, how a boat owner and their boatyard of choice treat a furling headsail says a lot about all involved. Insurance claims show that a significant amount of vessel damage has been caused by partially unfurled headsails capsizing blocked-up sailboats. All it takes is a volatile summer thunderstorm to lay waste to a vessel hauled with a furling headsail tied off to an upper shroud. In short, competent boat storage is a two-way street with both the owner and the boatyard steering the outcome.

Before hauling, make sure all the cards are on the table. Most yards have an information sheet, perhaps even a website, that lists the yard's do's and don'ts, and spells out the scope of work that an owner can do on his own. Be sure to learn the rules regarding subcontracted work, a gray area that can cause serious dissension between yard staff and a boat owner.

Boatyards are in the business of selling labor, and their profitability revolves around keeping craftsmen busy. A yard that's willing to allow boat owners to do their own work is in some ways constricting its profitability, and the owner who tries to sneak in a subcontractor is "biting the hand that feeds." Most yards have a service charge that applies to subcontracted work—some even encour-

age it—but whatever the case, owners that attempt to fly under the radar with owner-hired, incognito subcontractors have led many yards to clamp down on the DIY option and mandate that all work is handled through the yard.

The win-win strategy that will help maintain boat owners' ability to do their own work is developing a good working relationship with the yard staff. The guy who comes into the shop asking to use tools and wondering where the "scrap" teak and stainless steel are kept does little to evoke a favored customer relationship. The DIYer who hires the yard to handle repairs and installations beyond his own skill and ability and develops a friendly relationship with the crew becomes a goodwill ambassador for all self-reliant sailors.

PICKING THE RIGHT BOATYARD

We looked for a good example of a small boatyard operation that was representative of yards around the country and set out to field test a simple boatyard ranking system, one that you can use to evaluate the facilities in your own backyard. (See "Reader Survey," page 10.)

Galesville Harbor Yacht Yard on Maryland's western shore of Chesapeake Bay is more casual than corporate. There's a feeling that the owner and manager are as caught up in boating as

we are, and it's definitely the kind of operation where the staff makes a sailor feel at home. This sense of compatibility between a yard and a boat owner is important, especially if you like to work on your boat. There's tangible value in having an enjoyable place to add the TLC your boat deserves, particularly when you're likely to be spending a fair amount of time there.

The trend toward establishing boatyards on the least desirable parcels of land has caught on, and many are packed like a sardine and smell worse thanks to adjacent sewage-treatment facilities. Finding a nice place to work, with friendly folks to share a break with, is a luxury indeed.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Every skipper should go through a "what-if" scenario when considering a specific place to haul. These "what-ifs" include the potential impact of gale or storm-force winds, a significant tidal rise, and torrential rain.

Low-lying facilities exposed to the most volatile wind direction can spell trouble, as can a yard that's notorious for catching rain water runoff that turns a hard pan surface into soupy muck—destabilizing the jack-stands that support the blocked up boats.

Our sample yard, Galesville Harbor Yacht Yard is nestled in an estuary protected from the Chesapeake Bay as well as the ocean. During Hurricane Isabel in 2003, tidal rise presented the biggest concern there, but it was the vessels in the marina rather than those blocked up on land that suffered most. In other parts of the bay, more-exposed boatyards suffered from the extreme tide and the debris that swept through the hauled-out fleet, toppling jack-stands and the boats on them. Volatile winter storms can pack the punch of a tropical storm, so whether afloat or on dry land, a vessel needs to be able to endure the onslaught.

EQUIPMENT & OPERATOR SKILL

Frayed lifting slings, deteriorated pilings, and rusty machinery may still work, but more often than not, they are signs of the overall quality of workmanship that a boatyard has to offer. Those

seeking lowest-cost options need to be especially aware of how their boat will be hauled and handled. When all is said and done, it's hard to beat a new or well-maintained Travelift or hydraulic trailer. Equally important is the dock or ramp it operates on. But no matter how good the gear, the skill of the operator is the most important variable of all.

With sailboats, sling placement is crucial, and the geometry of the hull shape in conjunction with the cable lead adjustability on the lift will determine how equal the sling loading will be. Also critical is the cable angle, a factor that can lead to sling slippage, and in extreme cases, a vessel being dropped. A skilled operator will know how to handle various hull shapes and what rigging must be undone to fit a vessel into the confines of a Travelift's web.

One bit of boatyard wisdom worth remembering: "Being told that yours is the biggest vessel ever hauled by the facility should not be confused with words of encouragement."

Cranes up the ante for concern, and their operation requires extreme care, especially if they are used to transport a vessel once it is hoisted from the water. Bulkhead collapse, tire failure, and changing ground angles can set the stage for disaster. Hauling via a Travelift, hydraulic trailer, and even the venerable marine railway are usually better options. Above all, if your boat is being hauled by a crane, be sure the operator uses "spreader bars," a cage that keeps the sling load from compressing the hull.

The crew from Galesville favors a conventional Travelift that runs out onto a well-supported lift pier. Their setup is well protected from wind and sea. Eddie, the consummate lift operator, with decades of experience, knows both the capacity of his lift and the challenges of any given vessel.

When it came time to haul *PS* test boat *Wind Shadow* (an Ericson 41 sloop), Eddie had owner and *PS* Technical Editor Ralph Naranjo turn the boat around, release the back stay, and with runners



Once a boat has been shored and blocked, it's a good idea to layer tarps or plastic sheeting beneath it. That keeps cleaners, paint, paint removers, and other chemicals from contaminating the ground. Layering the tarps means you can remove a soiled one and have a clean surface to kneel or stand on.

set, he hauled the boat stern first. This was easier than removing a headstay and inner forestay, and allowed for better sling spacing. The efficient haul was followed by a thorough high-pressure washdown that removed all soft marine growth, leaving behind only a few tenacious barnacles at the bottom.

BLOCKING AND SHORING

Standing up a vessel that's designed to float can be quite a challenge. In many cases, the hull skin is too thin to take the heavy point loading associated with too few blocks under a keel or near over-extended pads or jack stands.

Properly executed, the blocking and shoring process is a means of spreading contact loads and rigidly supporting a vessel in a vertical position. Sailboats with external ballast easily endure the pressure imposed by keel blocks but may be troubled by the hull weight pressing down and flexing the keel/hull joint. Many lightly built race boats are fitted to special

cradles that spread loads to numerous large contact points and allow the keel to hang.

In gale-force conditions, some race boats stowed in such a fashion, especially those stored with their masts still stepped, have been known to develop a pendulum-like keel motion that can capsize the cradle-supported boat. Wedging the keel bulb to prevent such



Many DIY yards will let boat owners rent or borrow specialized tools like prop pullers or oversized wrenches.

Rate Your Favorite DIY Yard in *PS's* Online Survey

In *Practical Sailor's* ongoing effort to keep cruising affordable to everyone, we're conducting a survey to identify outstanding do-it-yourself boatyards across the U.S. We began with a sample boatyard, Galesville Harbor Yacht Yard in Maryland, and developed a simple rating system to allow readers to grade their own DIY yard. (See Galesville's report card on the facing page.)

We've already heard from some readers about their favorite DIY boatyard—check out the reader-recommended yards listed below. But if we've missed your top pick or you've yet to fill out the survey, let us hear from you. Visit www.practical-sailor.com and take the reader survey about your DIY haulout haven.

READER PICKS:

Berkeley Marine Center, Berkeley, Calif. — This yard allows and encourages do-it-yourselfers to handle their work, but the knowledgeable and friendly staff headed by Cree Partridge and Karl, his yard manager, are available for consultation or pulling the proverbial horse out of the ditch when you have bitten off more than you can chew. — *John T. Sutton; Toronto, Ontario*

Dutch Wharf Boatyard, Branford, Conn. — This moderate-sized, family-owned yard specializes in wooden boats but is absolutely competent in all things mechanical, electrical, and fiberglass. Dutch Wharf also has an exceptional paint shop. I have used this yard for over 30 years and highly recommend it, its people, and its quality. — *James M. Malkin; New York City, N.Y.*

Napa Valley Marina, Napa, Calif. — Located up the Napa River from San Francisco and San Pablo bays, this marina is a friendly, family-owned place. Very helpful people, complete facilities, and the ability to haul any kind of boat. I've had my

boat hauled there several times and always went away happy and full of admiration for their talent and character. — *Bruce Sinclair; Pretty Penny; Vallejo Yacht Club, Vallejo, Calif.*

Jensen's Shipyard, San Juan Islands, Wash. — Jensen's Shipyard in Friday Harbor is a great place to work on your own boat. — *G. Booth, via e-mail*

Schroeder Yacht Systems, Deltaville, Va. — This DIY yard staffs friendly, congenial people, who do very competent work. Their labor charges are reasonable, and monthly storage is inexpensive. — *Jack Berkey, via e-mail*

Bob Walton's boatyard, Delta Marina, Rio Vista, Calif. — This yard's prices are low, and their willingness to help is astounding. This boatyard is within a day's cruise of San Francisco (50 nautical miles from Bay Bridge) and is a little-known bargain in a high-priced region. — *Larry Smith; S/V Pleamar, 1983 Aloha 32; Vallejo, Calif.*

Seal Cove Boatyard, Cape Rosier, Maine — These guys are pros, willing to assist and help with the smallest problem—real or imagined. — *Aaron Glazer; Adagio, Albin 27 trawler; Cape Rosier, Maine*

Catawba Moorings, Port Clinton, Ohio — *Bob James, via e-mail*

Knight & Carver, National City, Calif. — I've been taking my boat here every three years for bottom paint. The yard caters to megayachts, but smaller-boat sailors like us are welcome, too. The people are most professional and helpful, never measuring you by the length and value of your boat. — *Jack Grenard; Islander 36; San Diego, Calif.*

an oscillation makes sense.

The GHYY yard crew used plenty of timber blocks for keel support and cross chained screw-jack poppets to provide both athwartship and fore and aft stability for *Wind Shadow*.

There is a subtle but significant difference between these three-legged stands. The ones with a narrower base are less stable and harder to use effectively. When supporting a sailboat with tripod like jack-stands, the idea is to extend an imaginary right-angle line from the hull skin to the ground at every pad point, and make the jack-stand's centerline axis coincide with this line. The more

it diverges, the more there's a tendency to "kick out" a stand if the vessel starts oscillating in high winds. Chaining the stands together lessens this likelihood.

SERVICES

Once your boat is high and dry, a last check should be made to reduce windage, and the rigging that was loosened or disconnected for hauling should be reattached. Then it's time to get on with the maintenance routine.

Well ahead of time a boat owner should work out with the yard manager what projects he wants the staff to shoulder and which ones he will be

doing himself. Despite good intentions and prearrangements, most refits, even modest ones, lead to new discoveries and more work. Seldom does one find less to fix than originally planned. This is where the DIYer can make or break a relationship with a boatyard and the art of spending refit dollars efficiently is truly tested.

By noting in advance the skills of the craftsmen in the boatyard, you know whether or not appropriate expertise is available. However, fitting in more work can be a problem, especially during the spring rush. That's why scheduling a haulout date after the fleet has

PS Technical Editor Ralph Naranjo rated Galesville Harbor Yacht Yard in Maryland after a recent haulout of his Ericson 41 sloop and PS test boat, Wind Shadow.

Pleasure Cove Marina, Pasadena, Md. — Pleasure Cove is located on protected Main Creek off Chesapeake Bay at the mouth of the Patapsco River. Baltimore is close by, and Annapolis is a nice half-day’s sail away. This yard is also one of a few on the Chesapeake that can haul wide boats. They have mechanics, a parts store, a fuel dock, and a very friendly staff. Ask for Don. — *Jess Berndt, via e-mail*

Swantown Marina and Boatyard, Olympia, Wash. — Swantown will let you do your own work, and they have all the amenities (air, electricity, disposal facilities), and some pretty good contractors for when your job gets too big or too technical. — *George Lukacs; 31-foot Hallberg-Rassy*

Nelson’s Boatyard, Bon Secour, Ala. — This yard is located on the southeast corner of Mobile Bay, about ¾-mile off the Intracoastal Waterway. The depths are good. It’s a small yard with tons of experience. The Nelsons have been here for generations. I’ve often thought that snowbirds should store their boats at Nelson’s and fly home out of Pensacola, Fla., or Mobile, Ala. — *Bob McDonald; Windy City, Island Packet 35; Gulf Shores, Ala.*

Mattapoissett Boatyard, Buzzard’s Bay, Mass. — This is a wonderful yard, very friendly and helpful employees, and they encourage DIY work. They have installed numerous electrical outlets and water nozzles around the yard for this purpose. David Kaiser, the general manager, is very knowledgeable and very willing to provide all types of information to help you do the job. Lastly, they have a well-stocked parts department that’s been a life saver. — *Rick McCowan; S/V Breezes; Mattapoissett, Mass.*

been launched makes good sense. Also keep in mind that pestering a pro is—in a boatyard context—being a very “bad neighbor,” and just like asking where the “grab-bag” of scrap teak is kept, overbearing persistence hurts all do-it-yourselfers in the long run.

THE HEART OF THE YARD

As with any business, the office is the central nervous system of a boatyard, a place where work orders are developed, time cards tallied, and bills are spawned. It’s also where the “time is money” rule prevails, and during busy periods, distractions from boat owners looking for

a casual chat are least appreciated. The dividing line between a friendly conversation and an unwelcome distraction is ill defined, but when DIYers are viewed by the yard staff as an annoyance, it isn’t long before the yard transitions into a “no owner work allowed” facility. Something to keep in mind when you seek out a work break in the AC.

On the other hand, the haul, store, and launch service holds the highest profit margin in the boatyard business, and quite a few smaller yards still hold to a business plan featuring a small staff and a willingness to allow owner-done maintenance.

REPORT CARD

NAME: **GALESVILLE HARBOR YACHT YARD**

CRITERIA	GRADE	COMMENTS
All-weather protection	A	Nearly landlocked
Hauling equipment	B	Older but functional Travelift
Operator skill	A	True veteran
Blocking	B	Some narrow-based poppets
DIY restrictions	A	Minimal (no DIY spray painting)
Shop capability	A	Machining, welding, paint spraying
Office	A	Efficient, small operation
Security	A	Low-risk residential area
Ambiance	A	Small yacht harbor, friendly locals

Frank Hall Boatyard, Westerly, R.I. — An excellent family-run boatyard on the Pawcatuck River. We’ve been customers since 1991. This yard has made keeping our boat possible, as we did everything we could ourselves. It also has high-quality services in all areas. — *Rick Gleason; Nell, 1981 Bristol 32*

Cove Springs Marina, Green Cove Springs, Fla. — This is a yard that any DIY boater would love. They have very fair rates, can lift most boats, and put them on the hard without mast removal. You can stay on your boat while it is on the hard, and they have showers and restrooms. — *Sandbagg’n Sam, via e-mail*

Sailing Associates Inc., Georgetown, Md. — This DIY yard is on the Sassafras River, which flows into the upper Chesapeake Bay. — *Sidney Axinn, via e-mail*

Unfortunately, escalating costs are causing many to seek additional profit centers, and hiring a staff to handle mechanical, electrical, and paint work requires significant labor sales in order to offset the costs. Eliminating owner-done maintenance may initially keep technicians busier, but in the long run, many clients will look for alternate yards.

Working with boatyards that allow the do-it-yourselfer to thrive is a two-way street, and sailors need to do their part by making sure these boatyards remain a part of the ever-changing waterfront. ▲