

WATERLINES



Very little is written about or credit given to the elaborate relationships between American yacht builders and their Asian partners and their shipyards. Beautiful yachts have been coming from Taiwan for many years, but were it not for the ultra-talented Taiwanese artisans and engineers, and the collaborative efforts with their U.S. partners, Taiwanese boatbuilding would not be what it is today. The industry has come a long way since the 1970s with the introduction of high-tech building techniques, superior quality materials and equipment, plus joint management efforts with their U.S. counterparts.

As U.S. boatbuilders and their Asian shipyards are now competing very aggressively in an expanding global market, the need for more customization in their yachts requires that the builder and the Asian shipyard be nimble and react quickly to an ever-changing market. It was unheard of as little as 10 years ago for a Taiwanese or Chinese shipyard to make elaborate changes and modifications on a per-yacht basis.

One builder in particular that has capitalized on this flexible business model is Outer Reef Yachts of Fort Lauderdale. Together with their partner shipyard, Tania Yacht Co. LTD, located on Chi-Chin Island in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, they have built a prospering relationship based on mutual goals and this noted flexibility in their build and design process. The president and CEO of Outer Reef, Jeff Drupek, comes from a background of ultra-custom

Yin And Yang

home building in one of the most affluent communities in the world, the Hamptons, on New York's Long Island. Having been through the peaks and valleys of the high-end real estate industry, he saw the need to cater to the client's demands and offer more than the competition, in quality, amenities, and most of all, flexibility.

Drupek saw the necessity to offer customization in his multi-million dollar yachts in the same light as his custom home building business. During the time of his shipyard search, the norm in the Taiwanese yacht building industry was to build production yachts with very little customization.

When Drupek first met Karl Lin, the general manager of the Tania shipyard, he saw in Lin a kindred passion and determination. In Tania, a family owned and managed shipyard, he saw a talented work force that all strived for perfection without compromise. An immediate relationship was forged and they were off to the races. In the many years since the inception of this collaborative relationship, Tania's factory has gone through a major expansion to keep up with the volume of production.

A second expansion is also in the planning for the production of larger yachts over 100 feet. Their engineering staff, headed by chief engineer Chaucer Chen, has grown tenfold and is highly regarded. Every yacht is drawn from a blank sheet of paper (actually AutoCAD computer screen), as each one is different. You can imagine the engineering demands that are required in such a business model. There is no such thing as a standard set of construction plans for any

Outer Reef yacht.

"The sense of pride, work ethic, and the willingness to please from the staff at Tania is absolutely fabulous and is what has been a major part of Outer Reef's success," Drupek told me.

Most recently, Outer Reef teamed up with Ken Freivokh, renowned European designer of the famed Maltese Falcon, to offer a more transitional interior to its European client base. This was a major departure from their more traditional interior. Lin and the entire Tania staff embraced this new design and tackled it head on. The result was a spectacular new interior, exquisitely done and masterfully executed. Outer Reef and Tania have seen an increase in orders from a demographic they would not have garnered otherwise.

This nimble-footedness combined with a team that works as a single unit seems to be the formula for success in these trying economic times. It has also contributed to a general increase in market share in a very competitive marketplace. Outer Reef and Tania seem to have successfully figured out that formula together.

I plan to make another trip to the Far East this year, and I will be on the lookout for more examples of the the "customization, service, passion, and pride" that Drupek holds up as the cornerstones of his relationship with Tania.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John W.", with a large, stylized loop at the end.

John Wooldridge
Editor-In-Chief