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The 21st century marina: It takes a village

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Water access, environmental control, planning problems and — most basic of all — a chronic slip shortage, were among the issues explored at the International Marina and Boatyard Conference in Atlanta in January.

“Today’s marina is more than a bait store and coffee shop,” said Ed Modzelewski of Applied Technology Management and Island Global Yachting.

Indeed, marinas used to be boat parking lots or fishing hangouts. Today’s marina is a village regarded as a specialized market with targeted facilities for people of all ages — boaters and nonboaters, alike. The marina should be the focal point of a resort, with a sense of place and personality, integrating it with the upland components of a mixed-use development into a single, inclusive site. Creating a destination point in a development of exclusive residences, amenities and an architectural landscape is now a lifestyle choice. A working waterfront is the final piece.

“Injecting a marina into the plan for a waterfront development has helped to increase the value of the property as well as provide boat slips,” said Carol Fulford, editor of Marina World magazine. “There is a continuing trend to build marina villages and waterside developments that offer properties with private slips. These may not be marina docks, but they are docks all the same.”

There’s no question the worldwide demand for boats exceeds the number of marina berths available. Building more marinas is an obvious answer, but it is not always an option.

If it is not feasible to build a marina or extend a marina, options such as swing moorings, including mobile pontoon versions, are a possibility. There’s also the drystack concept, which is well established in the U.S. and is catching on in Europe. Significant vertical developments at Port Forum in Barcelona and Sant Carles Marina in northeast Spain are in process.

In 2006, the United Kingdom had just two drystacks — both in Poole on the south coast of England. Since then, permission has been granted for Yacht Haven Quay, a 200-slip marina that will be the U.K.’s first purpose-built fully enclosed drystack. A private operation — Southampton Dry Stack — also has opened a 94-boat phase of what ultimately could be a 350-slip marina; and Marina Developments (MDL) has added a second drystack at its Cobb’s Quay marina (one of the two original facilities in Poole) and built two further drystacks in Southampton. It can dry-store a total of 400 boats.

It takes two to four years to get through the planning, approval and public consultation process for the project. Getting planning permission for a new marina or drystack is hurdle.

San Diego’s 94-slip Sun Harbor emphasized the use of recycled, renewable and energy-saving products. The list of achievements is considerable and includes:

Tankless water heaters and low-flow, energy-efficient showers were installed in the slip-holders’ toilet and shower blocks. Benches in the shower area are made from recycled wood and partitions from recycled plastic bottles. Motion taps and soap dispensers are fitted.

The laundry also has tankless water heaters and energy-efficient washers and dryers.

The tenant’s mailroom is built with kirei — a wooden agricultural byproduct of sorghum and bamboo, and every office suite has recycled carpet and/or bamboo flooring.

All rooms are wired to keep the temperature and lighting at a constant level without manual adjustment. All windows have light shelves outside and inside to throw natural light deep into offices and restaurants to reduce the need for artificial lighting.

Door grates outside offices are made from recycled tires and blinds from renewable, fast-growing timber.

Paints and adhesives used throughout the site are among the most environmentally friendly to be found.

LoPreste opted for a concrete pontoon system to avoid using hardwood timber decking, which she believed was less environmentally sound.

Pumpout is free, and one station serves just four boats. No vessel needs to leave its slip for the service. A pumpout for public use also is available. Waste goes directly into the marina sewage system.

Sun Harbor has purchased renewable energy credits from wind farms to offset 100 percent of the electricity used in the three main buildings for two years.

Drystack developments will provide new homes for smaller craft, freeing those wet slips for reconfiguration as megayacht dockage and improving the overall look of the marina.

“We’re seeing greater innovation in drystack, different mooring options and a definite trend for bigger berths especially to accommodate superyachts and megayachts,” Fulford said.

Marinas that are part of resorts — Atlantis in the Bahamas, Royal Phuket Marina in Thailand, the V&A Waterfront in South Africa — benefit from all resort amenities, as do marinas within “marina village” developments. Hotels, restaurants, bars, shops, health and leisure centers are the norm.

“Developments like these are true ‘destination’ marinas,” Fulford says. “If you visit the Victoria & Alfred Waterfront, for example, you’ll wonder what on earth Cape Town ever had to offer before it was developed. And now, although it already attracts more than 22 million visitors a year, it’s scheduled for a \$2 billion dollar improvement and expansion project, which will include a new yacht club and further marina development.”

The 100-berth Soldier’s Point Marina in Port Stephens, New South Wales, is styled to appeal to the luxury five-star markets, with marble-tiled bathrooms, a hot rock sauna, free coffee and newspapers to boats in the mornings, free courtesy cars and free cocktails on the docks in the afternoon.

Stylish marina hardware with greater attention to marina design is emerging. Stainless steel railings at Marsden Cove, New Zealand, striking chrome-oversized bollards at Festival Marina, Dubai, marina buildings of traditional timber with antiqued copper roofs at Marina di Varazze, Italy, and dramatic gate sculpture at Kona Marina in San Diego, have become the norm.

A waterfront community project being developed in Port Wakefield in South Australia will have 1,100 new homes and the same number of full-service marina berths. Port Wakefield will have only a 200-berth marina, but half the 6,000 waterfront homes will also have berths. That’s another 3,000 happy boaters with non-marina-based slips.

Securing boaters, especially at the luxury superyacht level, is high on the agenda in the Bahamas, already an established boating destination with about 70 small marinas. The Bahamas is cashing in on the oversubscribed Florida market, and is eyeing the superyacht sector, in particular.

According to the Bahamas Ministry of Tourism, eight new marina developments have recently been completed and three more are at development stage. All can accommodate yachts of at least 98 feet. Over the last four years, the government has announced more than \$20 billion worth of resort projects that include marinas.

Exclusive lots in upmarket resorts and gated communities such as Chub Cay in the Bahamas, where prime site homes with slips range from \$1.2 million to \$3.5 million are commonplace. Homes with slips start at \$1.9 million and rise to about \$4.5 million.

Being the mayor of the modern marina village does have its drawbacks, as purveyors of the deluxe lifestyle are demanding.

“We actually have the most trouble with our bars and restaurants (on site),” said Mick Bettsworth, development director of Marina Developments. “It can be a problem because the whole marina is frequently judged by [the service and quality] of the restaurant.”