

Seattle's Ballard Neighborhood

A WELL KEPT MARINE INDUSTRY SECRET

By Steve D'Antonio



Granite countertops, cherry joinerwork, stainless steel appliances, a big screen TV, a 750hp Cummins QSK 19, bulbous bow, and bow thruster; she sleeps six and cruises at 8.5 knots.

You might mistake this for a description of a custom-built expedition yacht; that is, until you read the rest of the specifications, which include titanium refrigeration chillers, 65 and 150 kW generators, lots of stainless steel hydraulic plumbing, and an 18,000 lb. capacity, one of a kind, deck crane.

This vessel is in fact a fishing trawler, recently commissioned in Ballard, Washington. I spent about an hour aboard her while dockside, going through her myriad systems, and speaking with her owner, John Barry, and his commissioning contractor, George Hooper, of Hooper Marine. The builder laid up the hull, decks and cabin, painted it and then handed it over to Barry and Hooper, and they, along with their hired contractors, finished out the systems.

I stood on the dock after my tour and looked at *Optimus*, her flawlessly painted gleaming white hull and blue trim, tugging at her lines as the Lake Washington Ship Canal water swirled around her bulbous bow. I marveled at what's involved in

choreographing the systems, seaworthiness, aesthetics, form and function that make up a vessel of this sort. Much of the work was carried out by local contractors, and herein lies the origin of this story.

An Eclectic Mix

Located in northwestern Seattle, bordered by the Lake Washington Ship Canal (often referred to as the Ballard Ship Canal), Shilshole Bay, Puget Sound and Salmon Bay, the Ballard area possesses a rich history and a variety of landmarks, the most notable of which are the Ship Canal and its Hiram M. Chittenden Locks, often referred to simply as the Ballard Locks. Built in 1911, the locks isolate and protect the Canal and Lake Union's fresh water from Puget Sound, providing an ideal environment for storage and repair of a wide range of craft, from small fiberglass and wood pleasure craft, to steel and aluminum commercial vessels.

Over dinner, Don and Sharry Stabbert, both accomplished

The "showroom" at Ballard Hardware, where commercial accounts as well as walk-ins have been welcomed for over 50 years.



passagemakers, waxed poetic about the wide array of services and capabilities ensconced in Ballard's cozy, four-square-mile footprint. Don is the principal of Salmon Bay Marine Center, located directly on the Ship Canal, and he has his finger on the pulse of the neighborhood and its many businesses. He knows just about every shop's owner and top technician in the area. Sharry was born and raised in Ballard, and they've recently completed a nine-month refit on their yacht, *Starr*.

What's so special about Ballard?

"Ballard is different, and unlike any other waterfront area," Don said. The difference, he explained, is that its marine industry is deeply rooted in the construction and repair of fishing vessels, an undeniably harsh and unforgiving environment. Lives depend on the work carried out by Ballard's craftsmen and women.

In addition, Ballard and Seattle are rife with commercial vessel operations, ferries, the logging industry and tug boat operators. This foundation means that the individual folks working in the marine industry are skilled, experienced and committed. From a logistics perspective, almost anything marine can be obtained within a one-mile radius of any shop or dock, thereby reducing delays and shipping costs. Often, there's more than one supplier or service shop for a given product, affording those relying on these services the benefit of healthy competition.

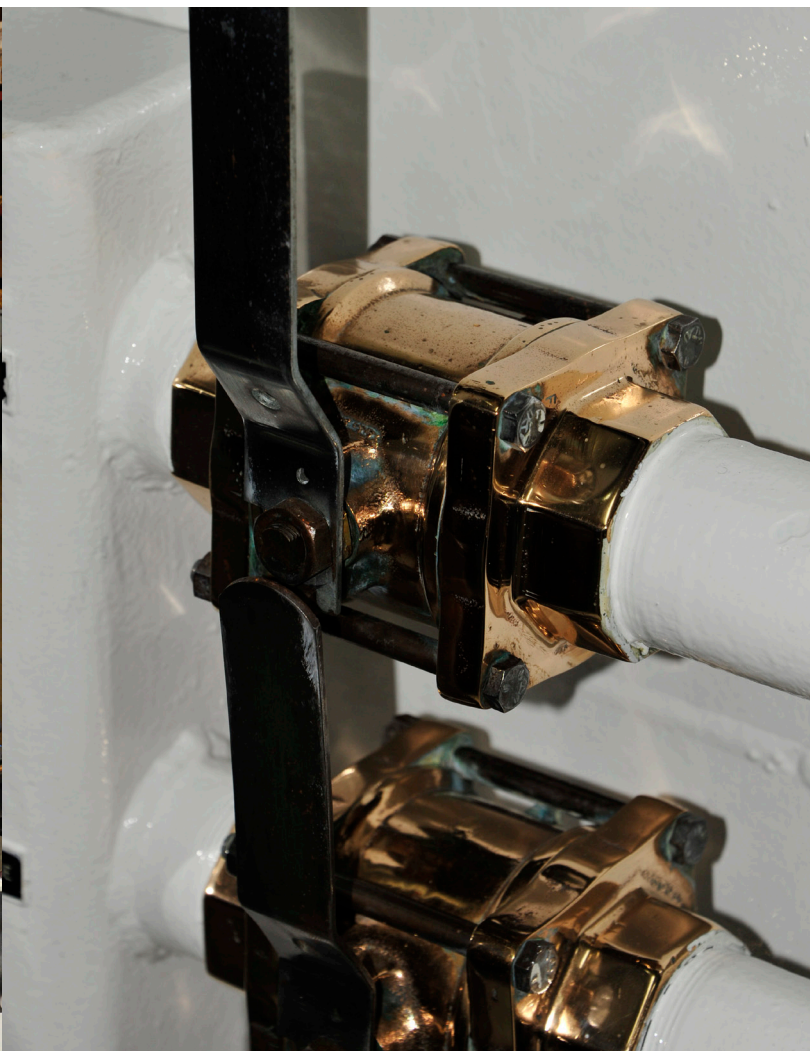
"Heck," Don said, "these guys [business owners and foremen] all know each other. They go to breakfast and lunch together, they are used to cooperating with each other on large projects and when someone, or something isn't right, word travels fast".

Furthermore, the highly seasonal nature of this industry often creates the proverbial feast or famine environment. When the fishing fleet heads to Alaska, the back log quickly shrinks, creating a perfect storm of sorts for maintaining, repairing and refitting recreational vessels.

During dinner, we hatched a plan. Don would be my shepherd and timekeeper, on a whirlwind tour of some marine businesses. I could spend no more than half an hour at each stop (I ran long), and we managed to cover approximately 20. Each location provided a delight for any gearhead's senses. I encountered expert joiner work; cold-molding (wood and epoxy); electrical, electronic, metal fabrication, hydraulics of every sort; engine installation, repair and rebuilding; machine shop work; propeller repair; paint application and just about every other specialty imaginable.

The stops we made were by no means comprehensive, and given the choice I would have gladly crisscrossed Ballard's maze of streets, docks and railroad tracks, visiting each and every one, getting to know the owners, managers and shop

Left: Craig Hatton of Hatton Marine spends a good part of his day on the shop floor and in the field with his crew. Right: Attention to detail reigns supreme aboard Western Towboat vessels. These and all bronze valves are polished to a high luster.



floor personnel. Alas, that would have required a week or more, and simply was not possible. Here are some highlights of my tour.

Hatton Engine and Generator Systems

This fully equipped shop is capable of just about anything engine related, including fuel-injection systems; virtually every brand of turbocharger rebuild; full engine rebuilds (in the shop and aboard); stationary power system sales, and service; pre-purchase surveys; freshwater and seawater pump rebuilding; magna-flux service (reveals even the minutest crack in metal parts); custom exhaust; and a hose shop that can supply and make up virtually any type of hose, using stainless steel, bronze and brass fittings and valves. Hatton is a distributor for GE, Mitsubishi and Scania engines, and a dealer for Deere, Yanmar, Kubota, Lugger/Northern Lights, Onan and Kohler, to name a few.

Craig Hatton met us in the shop, where he, accompanied

by his shaggy dog, Harry, quickly volunteered to give us a full tour of the facilities and buildings. In the shop, engines were being set up for test runs, turbos being rebuilt and cylinder heads undergoing magnaflux analysis.

Opening in 1999, with Craig as the lead mechanic and his wife, Ellen, running the front office, Hatton Engine and Generator now employs 55 technicians. Although Ballard is their home, these folks travel all over the world completing engine-related projects. Craig is still the lead mechanic, while Ellen is now the Chief Operating Officer.

Ballard Hardware and Supply

If Ballard Hardware doesn't have what you think you need, it probably doesn't exist, or you need something else, which they no doubt have in stock.

Ballard Hardware has been serving the needs of Seattle's marine and other industries, as well as walk-ins, since 1952.

Ballard Neighborhood continues on page 104

BUSINESSES VISITED

Hatton Engine and Generator and Engine Systems. 4735 Shilshole Ave NW, Seattle, WA 98107; www.hattonmarine.com.

Ballard Hardware. 4749 Ballard Ave NW, Seattle, WA 98107; www.ballardhardware.com.

Lunde Marine Electric. 5415 - 24th Ave NW Seattle, WA 98107; 206-789-3011; www.lundeinc.net.

Canvas Supply Company. 4711 Ballard Ave. N.W. Seattle, WA 98107; 206-784-0711 www.canvassupply.net.

Gardico (Custom gasket and rubber manufacturing); 4912 - 14th Ave. N.W., Seattle, WA 98107; 206-283-5850; www.gardico.com.

Western Towboat. 617 NW 40th St, Seattle, WA 98107; 206-789-9000; www.westerntowboat.com.

Fisheries Supply; 1900 N Northlake Way, Seattle, WA 98103; 800-426-6930; www.fisheriessupply.com.

S3 Maritime (Stabilizers, water makers HVAC, systems); 2296 W. Commodore Way, Suite 100, Seattle, WA 98199; 206-491-1595; www.s3maritime.com.

Maximum Performance Hydraulics (Hydraulic cranes and components, repair); 4220 22nd Ave. W. Seattle, WA 98199; 206-352-6869; www.mphyd.com.

Eltech Electric (Electrical and control systems); 2123 West Elmore St. Seattle, WA 98199; 206-213-0048; www.eltech.us.

Elmore Electric (Electrical and control systems); 2300 W. Elmore St. Seattle, WA 98199; 206-213-0111; www.uselmore.com.

Harris Electric 4020 - 23rd Ave. W. Seattle, WA 98199; 206-282-8080; www.harriselectricinc.com.

Marine Safety Service (Liferaft and safety gear service and inspections); 4022 - 23rd Ave. W. Seattle, WA 98199; 206-782-3302; www.marinesafetyseattle.com.

JK Fabrication (Commercial and yacht winches); 3101 West Commodore Way #3, Seattle, WA 98199; 206-297-7400; www.jkfabrication.com.

Kruger & Sons Propeller (Propeller and shaft repair); 4463 - 26th Ave. W., Seattle, WA 98199; 206-283-7707; www.krugerpropeller.com.

MER Equipment (Custom diesel generator and propulsion systems); 338 W. Nickerson St. Seattle, WA 98199; 800-777-0714; www.merequipment.com.

West Coast Insulation (Custom made thermal and acoustic insulation); 2426 West Commodore Way, Seattle, WA 98199; 206-466-1252; www.wc-waterjet.com.

RDI (MAN Diesel engine dealer, full service rebuild and repair); 2225 West Commodore Way, Seattle, WA 98199; 206-286-1230; www.manengines.com.

Stabbert Yacht and Ship (Yacht and shipyard repair, refit); 2629 NW 54th St, Seattle, WA 98107; 206-204-4144; www.stabbertmaritime.com.

Salmon Bay Marine Center (Moorage and waterfront shops and offices); 100 - 2284 W Commodore Way, Seattle, WA 98199; 206-450-9100; www.sbmcc.com.

HJorth Consulting Inc. (All metal, specializing in stainless steel engineering and fabrication); 4601 Leary Way NW, Seattle, WA 98107; 206-783-5200

Puget Sound Hydraulics (Hydraulic installation, service and repair); 4400 23rd Ave. W., Seattle, WA 98199; 206-283-0966; www.pugetsoundhydraulics.com.

Pacific Fisherman Shipyard (Yacht repair up to 300 feet); 5351 - 24th Ave NW, Seattle, WA 98107; 206-784-2562; www.pacificfishermen.com.

The founders, Lyle Hartje and Jim Freyberg, bought the business and property of Bohon's Second Hand Store from the original proprietor's widow. After more than 60 years, Jim still comes in and remains active in the business. His son Doug and Lyle's son Greg now manage the day-to-day operation.

Outgrowing its previous floor space, Ballard Hardware moved in 1990 to its present site, a brick and timber former icehouse built in the 1930s. While it wins no awards for exterior aesthetics, the interior's fixtures and beams and the extensive stock of steel, stainless steel, and bronze hardware of every size and shape, may take away your breath. Greg showed us every one of the five floors, as well as the basement, I could have easily spent an entire day here. Ballard Hardware owns the building outright, and their staff of 50 doesn't work on Saturdays and Sundays.

Canvas Supply Company

The motto of this firm, which has been owned by the same family since 1882, is "Anything Made of Canvas." Originally called Sunde & d'Evers Company when it opened for business 132 years ago, and located in the old Seattle Ferry Terminal, Canvas Supply does very much the same thing now that it's been doing since the beginning: make and repair virtually anything associated with a boat's canvas or fabric. Canvas Supply's staff of 32, which includes an interior decorator, is described as the cream of the crop when it comes to their specialties. The company claims to employ the top five upholstery crafts people in the world, they travel worldwide to work carpet, enclosures, awnings, biminis, bedding, window and wall treatments, hinged mattresses. The minimum amount of experience for craftsmen and women is fifteen years.

Fisheries Supply Company

The Fisheries Supply Company first opened its doors in 1928 in a building at Pier 55 on Elliot Bay in Seattle. In the early days, it provided parts and materials for the Pacific Northwest's fishing fleets and canneries. Later on, they expanded to include



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Don Stabbert, proprietor of Salmon Bay Marine Center, and Captain John Barry, stand aboard the latter's new fishing vessel. Meticulously installed stainless steel hydraulic plumbing for the vessel's crane, a sample of the Ballard marine industry's handiwork, is visible in the background.

Here, kitchen staff at the award-winning “The Walrus and the Carpenter” restaurant shuck freshly caught oysters for patrons.

wholesale and retail customers. Today, Fisheries Supply’s retail store and 36,000 square foot warehouse comprise the Pacific Northwest’s largest distributor of marine products. John Rothermel, VP of sales, walked me through every nook and cranny and explained that the company’s customers now include individual pleasure and commercial boat owners, dealers, boat yards and builders, as well as other chandleries. The storefront and warehouse rely on a sophisticated inventory control system—both were neat and clean.

Harris Electric

Scandinavian heritage plays a strong part in the Ballard Area’s marine industry. Many of the region’s original fishermen were immigrants from Norway, Sweden and other Scandinavian countries, and this heritage shows in the many Norse surnames. With the exception of the company’s actual name, Harris Electric is no exception. Jack Harris established the business in 1928, performing electrical work ashore and afloat. A year later, Arvid Ohman (in Old Norse, Arvid means forest of eagles) joined the company as a partner. During the depression, Ohman bought out Jack’s share, becoming sole owner. He toyed with the idea of changing the company name; however, doing so would have meant discarding about



\$75 worth of stationary, a lot of money in those days, which just didn’t square with his thrifty nature, so the name remained.

Just before the Second World War, Swedish-American Vic Sandholm came on board. In 1959 Ohman sold the business to Sandholm. The sale coincided with a boom in the tugboat business, which kept Harris Electric busy. Vic’s son Dick joined the business, after receiving a degree in electrical engineering. Erik Sandholm, Vic’s grandson, joined the company in 1995, he now serves as its president.

The Taxman Cometh

If there's one fly in the Ballard Marine Industry ointment, it must be Washington State's archaic, and convoluted tax laws, as they pertain to recreational vessels registered outside the state. Out of state boat owner/operators considering a stop Ballard, or anywhere in Washington State, you must be familiar with these rules to avoid running afoul of the regulations, violation of which could expose you to taxation of up to 9.5 percent of the fair market value of your vessel.

With a cruising permit, non-resident individually owned vessels may remain in Washington waters for 60 days, which may be extended to six months, provided a temporary Washington State Vessel permit is obtained. Also, the rules differ for vessels owned by individuals vs. entities, i.e. corporations, LLCs etc., and differ still more for trusts. There are more rules for vessels being repaired or refit.

Each time I asked about regulations during the rounds of Ballard I received a slightly different answer, which made it abundantly clear that they are anything but clear. A query I posted on the Nordhavn Owners' site elicited several detailed responses, and a few pleas for clarity, from residents and those who had cruised in the area. One of those respondents recommended that those bringing a vessel to Washington for an extended stay consult with an attorney.

Several folks in the Washington State marine industry shared with me their frustration, a common sentiment being, "It's less complex for a boat owner or operator, American and otherwise, to take his boat to Canada for a refit." I believe the hoops that boat owners have to jump through when visiting Washington hinder the marine industry and represent a net loss in tax revenue.

To fully understand the nuances of the laws, I consulted Seattle-based attorney,

Fred Robinson of Carney, Bradley and Spellman, (www.carneylaw.com) for insight. He specializes in working with the marine industry and tax related issues.

All vessels, regardless of ownership; i.e., individuals or entities, may remain in Washington State while under a vessel repair affidavit, without sales or use tax exposure. Thus, out of state yacht owners should have few concerns about bringing their yacht to Washington State for extended refit or repair, and the affidavit is renewable. You can download one at <http://dor.wa.gov/docs/forms/misc/nonresdntoutofstatevsslrpraffdvt.pdf>.

The terms of the repair affidavit, however, are very specific, including an exclusion of use. The owner cannot use his vessel while under the auspices of the affidavit, but he may be aboard to oversee the work. If the vessel is sea trialed, the owner may be aboard, but a representative of the facility carrying out the work named in the affidavit must be in control of the vessel. —SDA

I met Erik during my visit, sitting in his office, which is decorated with antique sextants, nautical instruments and voltmeters. Harris Electric, he explained, specializes in electronics and electrical work, especially control systems that rely on programmable logic controllers or PLCs. Its staff of 50 works on fishing, towing, container, cruise ships, and other commercial vessels, as well as designing, building, installing and repairing switch panels, and everything else electronic

Worth the Trip

One of my final stops on the Ballard marine industry circuit was Stabbert Yacht and Ship or SYS. Based on the

Ship Canal, SYS is a shipyard that handles commercial, scientific and pleasure vessels up to three hundred feet. Its principal, Dan Stabbert, Don's brother, prides himself in the work ethic they've established. He points out that this work ethic is not unique to SYS, it's prevalent throughout Ballard's marine industry, saying, "The Ballard and Seattle maritime culture is one of the most unique in the world, in its integrity, technical ability, and respect for the vessels in its care, and its customers. Outside a few other seafaring communities in Scotland and Norway it's unrivaled. It's a culture of which we are very proud". 