

HOTELIER MALDIVES



EVO SURFACES

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ERWIN BAMPS

CEO, Gulf Craft



First and foremost, can you tell us a little bit about Gulf Craft and your role in the company?

In the last three-and-a-half decades, Gulf Craft has witnessed a significant transformation, growing from an industrious builder of fishing boats into one of the world's leading superyacht shipyards with a strong global presence stretching from Europe to Australia.

Gulf Craft operates three shipyards in the UAE and one in the Maldives, offering a wide variety of craft engineered to meet the diverse needs of our client base – from our luxurious Majesty Yachts and long-range Nomad Yachts, to our Silvercraft fishing boats and family cruisers, and our Oryx sport yachts and cruisers.

Born in the Emirates, in the midst of the Arabian desert, Gulf Craft's journey to success was far from easy. However, we were determined to realize our potential through product innovation, quality craftsmanship, and customer service excellence.

As CEO, my contribution is not just operational, but more so, strategic. Today, Gulf Craft is a running machine, making it critical that I keep an eye out for what's coming on the horizon. My growth within the company – from Executive Manager to CEO – enabled me to see and experience how the work is done from the ground up. Today, I look at developments through a bird's eye view, keeping my focus on the long-term goal rather than the immediate opportunity.

I believe our collective devotion as a team, which resonates from the leadership through to those putting hammer to nail, has played an instrumental role in the success that Gulf Craft enjoys today.

How difficult was it to penetrate the traditional Maldivian boat building market and what did you see as your strength bringing Gulf Craft into Maldives?

The Maldives is known for its rich fishing heritage and strong affinity with the sea, and it is this shared passion for the water that inspired us to bring our business to the Republic. The tropical islands are home to beautiful coral reefs, blue lagoons, crystal clear waters, and a bustling fish market – making it a natural decision for us as yacht and boat builders to set up shop in the region.

In addition, the Maldivian market is increasingly beginning to explore the lifestyle aspect of boating, and the islands

serve as one of the world's leading tourist destinations. These holidaymakers are looking to escape the mundane and enter a world of ultimate relaxation and luxury while enjoying the Maldives' moving seascapes, and this is precisely what yachting offers them.

There is a significant difference between boating and yachting. Boating is a means to an end, whether it's taking you to a destination, or a tool for fishing. But yachting is a destination in itself, it's a floating Zen resort, a home-away-from-home, a magical retreat. It could be your next vacation, your honeymoon, a milestone celebration, and I believe the Maldivian market has a genuine appreciation for the on-water living experience.

What's your overview on the boat building Industry in Maldives?

Gulf Craft occupies quite a unique position in the Maldives as the single fully foreign owned and international renowned boat building operation in the region, that also provides service and support to local boat owners as well as visiting yachts. Most of the other industrial players in the Maldives are rather into boat support services, rather than manufacturing, and the industry is rather fragmented as such. We are optimistic though about the prospects of the entire boat building and service industry of the Maldives, while skill set and professionalism of all players is gradually increasing. We also have been investing heavily in expansion and machinery investments to enhance our in-house capabilities to support a growing and more demanding client base.

How has the business evolved since you first started working in Maldives? How is it different from the other branches of Gulf Craft?

Maldives being an island nation in the middle of the Indian Ocean presents its own unique set of logistics and operational challenges. Running a shipyard on an atoll with materials and skill set being imported from overseas, it's not as straight forward. With a strong emphasis on boat transport requirements, reliability and seaworthiness of the craft needed for the region, we had to also develop and customize our craft to suit the region. So both in terms of process and product development, the Gulf Craft Maldives operation has been a

pioneering work. Now 15 years young, the organization is well established to understand and meet the growing boating market and different challenges of the Maldives market looking ahead.

What would you consider as the main selling point which differentiates Gulf Craft from its competitors?

We believe our ability to deliver bespoke experiences without compromising on value or quality truly sets us apart from the rest. In addition, having a local base means that we are able to provide our clients reliable customer service when they need it most so that they spend more time cruising and less time managing their craft. Our yachts and boats also possess exceptional retention value, an important consideration for those who might look to upgrade down the line.

That said, Gulf Craft has cultivated a culture in which we accept that we never stop learning. We realize that success is not about playing catch-up with our competitors, but about staying in-tune with evolving client expectations. We have to learn more, harder, and faster, and we are motivated and humbled every day by the feedback we receive from our customers.

What are the main challenges facing Gulf Craft in terms of catering to the ever changing desires and demands of your customer base?

Today's customers are more value-conscious, better educated, and more informed than ever. They do their research before coming to us. This means that their expectations are higher, but it also means we have an opportunity to achieve greater customer satisfaction because we have a clearer understanding of their requirements.

Maldivians are men of the seas and they pride themselves in their masterful craftsmanship of boat building. Has Gulf Craft adapted any of the traditional techniques or designs of Maldivian marine architecture to cater to the unique Maldivian seas?

Gulf Craft has always had a continuous discussion with seafarers, boat owners and operators in the Maldives to understand the challenges they are facing in open ocean and the multitude of reefs. While not borrowing directly from the

traditional local boat designs, the hull designs out of the Gulf Craft stable have been carefully selected to be optimal for the typical sea conditions of the Maldives to provide the maximum seakeeping performance and comfort possible. With the ever-present risk of boats grounding on a reef, build quality and sturdiness have been top priorities, as it has always been for seafarers in the region.

What do your clients, particularly those from the hospitality industry, look for most when acquiring Gulf Craft products and services?

Our hospitality clients know that we can help them create memorable experiences for their guests, many of whom might be celebrating a special occasion.

Many of the hotels in the Maldives require transport from the Malé capital to the resort by water, and that is essentially where the guest journey begins and when lasting impressions are created.

In addition, most recreational activities in the Maldives take place in water – so whether guests want to sail into the midst of the ocean to do a little bit of snorkeling, travel to a neighboring island for some sightseeing, or simply go for a leisurely cruise along the coast, we not only give our hospitality clients the tools for doing so, but also the means to deliver an unforgettable experience.

How would you describe the future of the boat building Industry in Maldives? Is their space for new businesses or expansion of Gulf Craft products and services in Maldives?

Gulf Craft is very excited about the immediate future of boating in the Maldives. With demand for ever larger and more luxurious craft increasing, luxury yachting becoming more popular, and boat operators and passengers venturing out further into the different lagoons of the Maldives, the boating industry will be going through a rapid transformation. Reliability, long range capabilities and efficient hull design, as well as comfort are even more critical parameters in boat design in this changing landscape. Gulf Craft has been strengthening its local skill set and expanding its workforce with new expansions planned for its shipyard and service yard, expecting another 15 years of growth ahead. ■