

ALL DECKED OUT

Mike Wills talks to the decking companies and investigates how they have overcome supply chain and logistic issues over the past three years, and asks about the various hardwood decking options and alternative materials that have recently come to light

Globally, the covid pandemic is now firmly in the 'rear view' mirror, the world's breathing a sigh of relief from the human consequences however, its after-effects created a 'long tail' for businesses across the world which were badly hit principally with logistics headaches and getting finished goods to end users, coupled with managing volatile prices with crude oil based raw materials.

For most countries, the recovery was not a simple bounce back but slower than expected and with many countries further thwarted by the Russian/Ukrainian conflict in Europe, many industries found themselves thrust into another type of global chaos.

Other than those companies negatively affected by sanctions imposed on Russian yacht ownership, the marine and superyacht industry has remained buoyant and insulated throughout, with most manufacturers and suppliers reporting rising profits.

I have been talking to key players in deck fabrication, to see how they have fared since the last report in ONBOARD magazine in 2019 and just how they have managed the past four years of 'head winds' together with a view of how they view the way ahead. This business is intrinsically international and relies heavily on imports of hard wood and resins for composite products often transported by container ships.

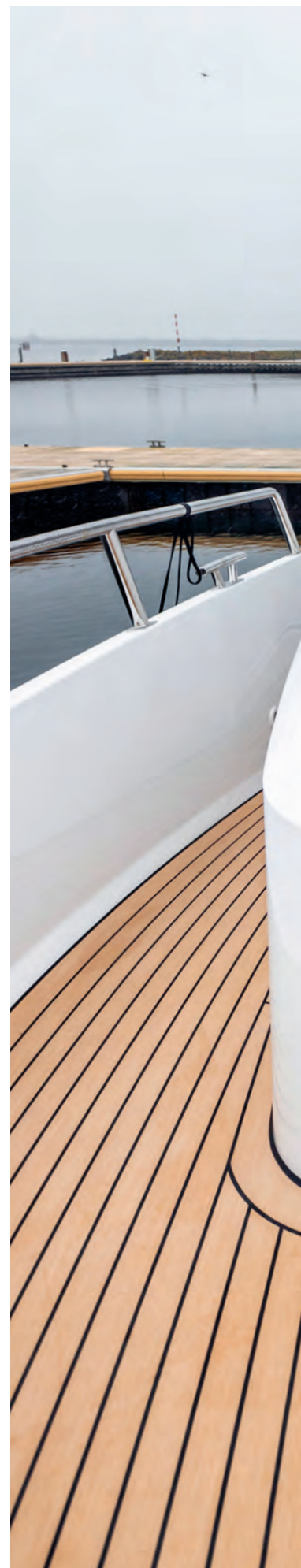
Back in 2021, for example the price of a container had drastically risen from \$5,000 to \$30,000. Labour shortages also hampered the supply of resin supplies with many incumbents quoting delivery times ten times slower than the previous year. Ever changing costs and unpredictable delivery times are the antithesis of trusted customer service and best practice in any industry.

There has since been another unfortunate problem because those decking companies that supply age matured teak, had a 'double whammy' as Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, had unfortunately, slipped back into questionable provenance and a lack of due diligence.

On 16th May 2023, The Environmental Investigation Agency reported that 12 American timber firms had imported high quality natural teak under the guise of purchasing existing stockpiles prior to sanctions being imposed in April 2021.

With wood for yacht decking being identified as one of the end beneficiaries, this market deteriorated further with the emergence of another military Junta in early 2021.

The current notion that the business yields 'blood money' for the Junta, has subsequently been aired in national press in the UK and no doubt beyond, further stigmatising anything imported from this country.





ECODECK

EcoDeck B.V. is a Dutch company which has a longstanding experience with teak for the superyacht industry. Led by the need and wish for alternative materials for teak, they developed EcoDeck®. The nautical decking satisfies the highest standards in the superyacht and leisure yacht industry, while reducing the impact on the environment. It guarantees a unique and high quality look and feel, fully designed for your vessel. Eco-friendly, fully recyclable, and created with the utmost precision. Emotion and luxury of a different kind.

For more details visit www.m-ecodeck.com



TIMBERLUX

A company specialised in importing the best quality teak from all over the world, during the past years, has started the importation of JST®. JST® is the result of several years of sourcing, researching and testing that Timberlux srl has conducted in the countries of origin with the aim of offering to the market a valid alternative to Burmese teak, that allows you to operate ethically and legally. It is the highest quality teak best suited for marine use: 100% natural teak - *Tectona Grandis* - known universally as the "King of Hardwoods". Thanks to its durability, strength and low weight, it is especially prized amongst boatbuilders and it has become a benchmark to define a fine quality yacht. It has a strong and consistent gold colour, and it does not require chemical or heat treatment to give its characteristics. It is comfortable underfoot in a huge range of temperatures and provides a sure footing on a pitching and rolling deck in either wet or dry conditions. JST® is a sustainable product, traceable and legal, as it comes from plantations well managed from government organisations since 1800. JST® is FLEGT certified and complies with all European regulations (EUTR and UKTR), while FSC® certification can be supplied on request. Rina certification is under the process of being approved. For more details visit www.timberluxsrl.com

I donned my investigative hat and asked identical questions to key players who have revealed how they fascinatingly operate and continually innovate, from completely different perspectives in the same market place. My findings were intriguing and inevitably diverse.

Stefan Paust, Managing Director of Tikal, experts in teak levelling and bonding but not a supplier of decking, set the scene perfectly when asked how they have fared in the last four years.

"Sure, we were affected by the pandemic suffering several delays from raw materials to getting supplies of label stickers something so basic, that simply held up despatch of our products."

When asked about new pricing policy, he added, "Prices have had to rise but delivery times, in the worst case scenario are now only 2 to 3 weeks as opposed to the 6-8 weeks we endured throughout the pandemic. Logistics have substantially improved."

Innovation and differentiation from competition remains core to his business and remains robust, with the recent launch of Tikal Tef Gel, an odourless sea water resistant lubricant to add together with a new activator for synthetic teak (PVC). In the latter case and this is important to note, he has to balance the odds because he thinks that the market for traditional teak decking will shrink and synthetic teak PVC, will increase in the future.

Meanwhile, Timberlux Srl remains steadfast and a complete advocate of teak. The company offers, it claims, an ethical alternative to Burmese teak because it imports from the best plantations all over the world and confirms that its sources have been fully sustainable and replenishable for two centuries.

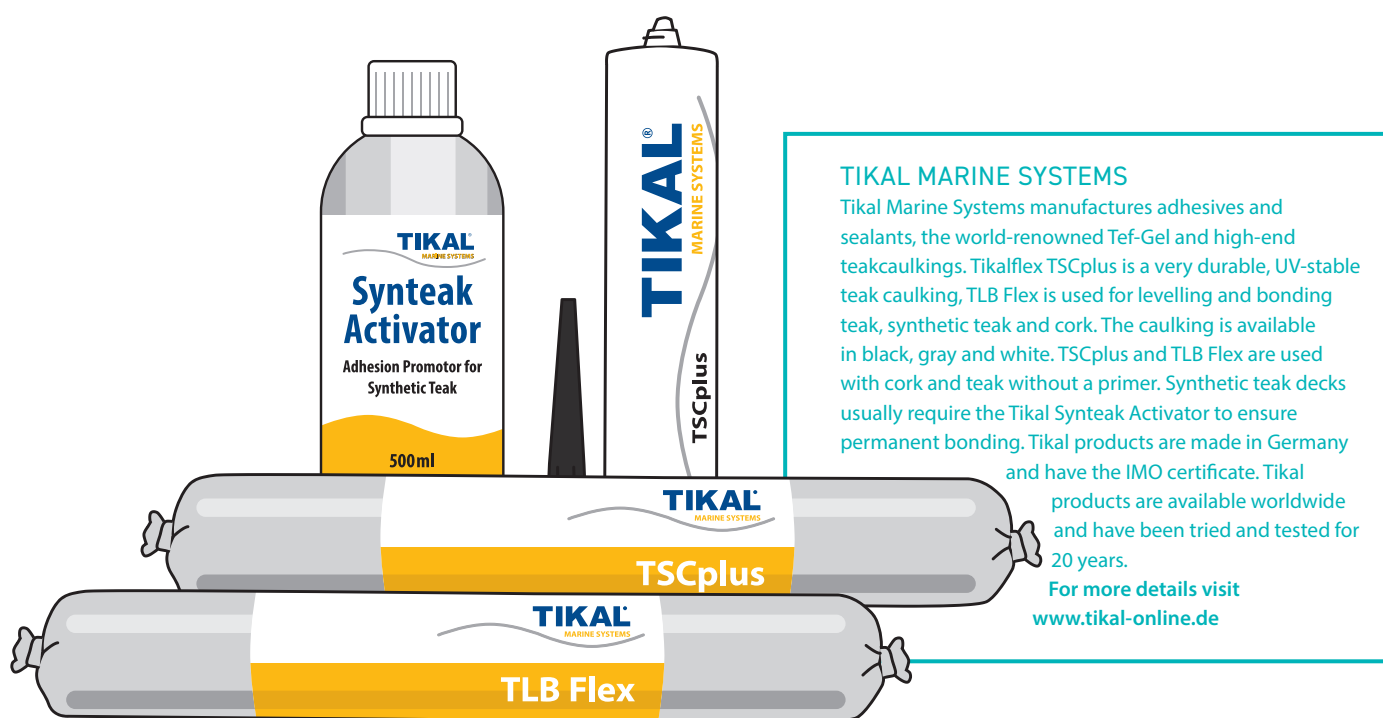
Compliant with European and other international regulations, Timberlux makes the point, by possessing a registered trade mark JST® which is designed to reassure its customer base, that sources are entirely secure, especially where yacht decking, their major market, is concerned.

We're highly confident about importing teak and we've largely unchanged the pricing policy in supplying natural wood

I put my questions to Matteo Rossi, director, for Timberlux, who stated, "Yes we were affected like everyone else. Timberlux and specifically our product JST®. We kept stock levels high and were able to satisfy orders throughout. This has continued post pandemic. But there was a risk in our strategy because there was so much uncertainty in predicting our customers' needs, especially when trying to anticipate when boat builders restarted production and started buying our decking. Fortunately it paid off as we remained ready when the market required us to be."

When asked whether any new processes have been implemented, he added, "No new processes were adopted, but long term precision planning have helped a swift recovery."

And despite everything, pricing policy has not changed either, he added, "We didn't increase standard prices if the orders were in line with our normal modus operandi. However urgent or special requests could require a premium if it required special



management measures. We are able to communicate any price fluctuation with our customers to ensure a mutually beneficial result."

Timberlux remains highly confident about importing teak and despite the challenges, is largely unchanged with pricing policy in supplying natural wood to the yachting industry.

Ecodeck B.V., meanwhile, had a longstanding 25 year experience with supplying teak decking to the yachting industry but in the last ten years, took a different view. It sold the entire stock of the precious hardwood, in pursuit of what they say, was a feasible and sustainable alternative. Nothing other than a complete change of direction!

The material now used is recyclable and branded Ecodeck®. It is a two component polyurethane system and is produced with renewed and solvent free resins. In accordance with SOLAS (Safety of Life at Sea regulations) and IMO (International Maritime Organisation) regulations, it has also been green tag verified therefore recognised internationally as a globally eco friendly product.

Niels Bruinse, Sales Manager of EcoDeck B.V., explains what happened, "We converted our entire production process and became fully focused on eco friendly materials which can be recycled after long term use on board, as yacht decking.

"For 25 years Herculan Marine became an established supplier to the cruise liner, military and commercial markets and now the leisure marine market. With their technology, and also being based in the Netherlands, both companies became partners. What it meant for us, that importing teak from anywhere in the world, for yacht decking, was no longer necessary.

"Last year in 2022, EcoDeck B.V. made a huge investment in time and money and with it, a significant transition and new

strategy. We have built a completely new production facility, the complete re-education of the organisation and the same with our contractors."

As far as pricing policy is concerned, Niels added, "With the investment we can produce decking extremely efficiently by allowing us to shorten lead times which favourably affects the price to the end user. Our ambition is to become a leading global brand, by investing in various partnerships worldwide and we have started with Germany, Italy, Sweden and Australia. We have expanded in a short time. The high quality and the level of finish in fabricating a yacht deck, is amongst the most prestigious in the industry."

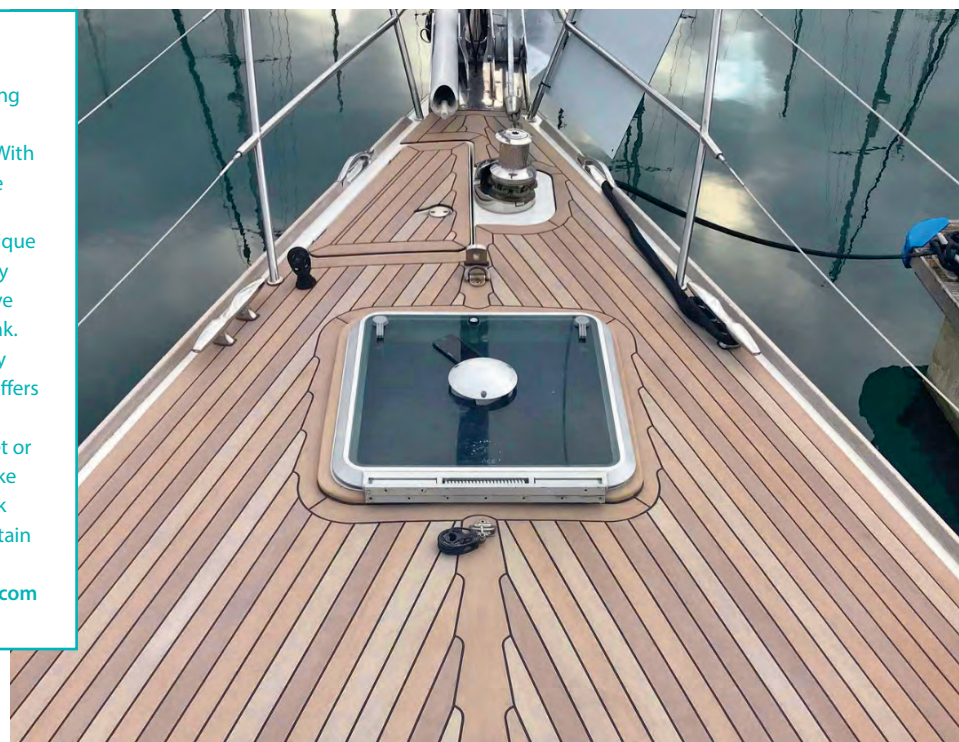
Another deck fabricator had an equally robust set of answers to add to the debate. With its roots in faux teak it was clear that their expertise had become confident over its 15 years of existence in composite decking and when asked what their composites were made out of, the reply was, "We produce UV stabilised, outdoor grade, virgin PVC." Worth noting and worth further examination but virgin PVC remains incomprehensible to my mind!

The fabricator in question is Permateek: With a vast array of vessels that they have supplied decking to from fitting out 60m superyachts down to much smaller production sail or power cruisers, Permateek is well integrated into the marine fraternity and Vince Coda, Managing Director, smoothly shrugged off the pandemic and the restless markets that have transpired.

"During the pandemic, business was unaffected and our turnover increased in line with previous years. We did experience some shortages of raw materials, but fortunately, we held sufficient stock levels that our production line was able to keep on running. Since then, we have doubled our production capacity, appointed many more distributors world wide and exceeded sales targets in the process.

PERMATEEK

Permateek's quality synthetic teak flooring is highly resilient against the elements, UV-stable and looks just like real wood. With a range of 15 stunning colours and three different caulking lines, boat fitters can personalise decks with more than 45 unique options to suit any style. In addition, they have 2 ranges of multi-colours which give the natural multi-colour effect of real teak. Permateek is an environmentally friendly faux teak composite boat flooring that offers the qualities and good looks of teak but with none of the hassle. It is non-slip, wet or dry; offers low maintenance and looks like new teak season after season. Permateek teak flooring for boats is cost effective, stain resistant and simple to keep clean. For more details visit www.permateek.com



"We haven't adopted any new processes but expanded our production capacity in line with increased demand though Permateek's versatility which, we think, is a major part of our success which lies in the fact that it can be cut, routed, and heat-formed to create curves, steps, or other intricate designs. This is important especially with smaller boats between 10- 15 metres.

When probed on pricing policy, Vince Coda commented, "There has been a slight price increase due to increases in our raw materials. But, fortunately, we have been able to keep this down to the very minimum."

This was a sample of the top major players in the field of yacht decking that were candid about how they fared throughout the difficulties of the past three turbulent years. All have shown a robust approach to stocking levels despite the uncertainty of demand and whilst there still remains an untouched prestige of a natural hard wood decking system, the alternatives now offer something very similar.

Versatility is a major part of our success. The fact that it can be cut, routed, and heat-formed to create curves, steps, or other intricate designs

In their conversations with me and heavily depicted on their websites, all claim to be 'green', however one stands out, with EcoDeck® becoming green tag verified. Internationally recognised in the Asia- Pacific rim and additionally with 70 other countries around the world, it relates to products or services that have a lesser or reduced effect on human health and the environment when compared with competing products or services that serve the same purpose. Awarded only to those that are prepared to

be rigorously tested. This, Ecodeck B.V. believes, is an important USP and already features prominently in their marketing material.

Meanwhile, Timberlux maintains its vigilance in ensuring that its products strictly adhere to its criteria and with its own kitemark emphasises its credence in offering teak, a natural and durable wood that still retains the prestige and panache that befits many yachts.

On the other hand, Permateek, maintains that the composites that it uses, means it is harder wearing than many of its rivals and therefore once installed, costs less to maintain and in turn retains its appealing appearance for up to two decades, which it claims, therefore lasts longer than many alternatives.

With thirty million leisure boats in the world and counting at a healthy rate of increase, each boat needs a decking solution, whether fitting out new yachts, through the OEM route or alternatively, engaging the burgeoning refurbishment and refit market when used craft need that 'make-over'. The leisure market from superyachts to production cruisers to RIBs, has become vast with huge future potential for deck fabricators of all types.

In my conversations with the key players, I was taken aback, by the diversity of products, ranging from DIY kits to full customisation services for a superyacht deck.

Remarkably, the business carried high stock levels throughout, to ensure that orders from any boat builders, once they recovered, would be fulfilled as swiftly as possible.

And finally the technology in decking also continues apace and whatever lies underfoot, think for a minute, when walking barefoot to the helm or hospitality areas, how comfortable, secure and cool it feels and looks. There's an army of 'back room' personnel and technicians that made that happen for you, your crew and guests!

HEALTHY FORESTS, HEALTHY PEOPLE

Tijmen Hennekes from the Forest Stewardship Council™ shows how shipbuilders can strengthen their contribution to forest conservation

If you aren't sure yet: teak from Myanmar is out of the game. Whereas this is still a big issue for the industry, this article is intended to tell another side of the story. Shipyards and suppliers have many good alternatives at hand, with a documented positive impact on forests. They must only take that next step.

FROM NATURAL FORESTS TO THE OCEANS

One example of a company that is committed to responsible forest management is Precious Woods 'Compagnie Equatoriale des Bois' (CEB) in Gabon. Since taking over CEB in 2007, Precious Woods has been using FSC standards for responsible management to run operations on close to 600,000 hectares of certified forest management concessions in Bambidié, Lelama, and Okondja in the Haut Ogooue and Ogooue – Lolo provinces situated in eastern Gabon.

The company's unique approach to forest management includes social development, community engagement, biodiversity protection, and responsible harvesting and processing. They employ approximately 2,750 people who benefit from stable and rather prestigious jobs. At its Bambidié site, it has set up a health clinic and helped build a school, equipped with a playground and toilets, where about 800 children from different villages come to learn.

"The company only harvests two mature trees out of 380 per hectare every 25 years," says David Zakamdi, Director of Sustainable Development at Precious Woods Gabon. Beyond its commitment to protect 10% of its forest set by national legislation, an additional 25% of its forest concessions are set as high value conservation areas. Precious Woods also produce species like Iroko as a viable alternative to teak. Iroko has similar physical and aesthetical characteristics to teak but comes with a label that ensures the species

will not get overharvested. Iroko is also known for strength, durability, and resistance to rot – it is one of the few out of 70,000 tree species on the planet documented fit for ship decks - that is why it's also called African teak.

FROM PLANTATION FORESTS TO THE OCEANS

Although plantation teak has built up a reputation for not having the same quality as Myanmar teak, plantations grow older every year and we see top quality teak coming in from various plantations over the world. Forest plantations are an essential part of the solution to deforestation. FSC plantations prioritise the conservation of biodiversity and the protection of ecosystems. They use responsible practices such as limited pesticide and herbicide use, reduced soil erosion, and increased forest regeneration to ensure that the forest remains healthy and productive.

Also, FSC certified plantations ensure fair labour practices and support of communities who are dependent on the forests. They provide employment opportunities, safety training programmes and fair wages for local people, and they prioritise the rights of indigenous peoples and other forest-dependent communities.

Forests play a key role in the combat against climate change, therefore, the shipbuilding industry must abolish deforestation from their supply chains and choose wood from responsibly managed forests– by choosing FSC certified timber. Ships include much more forest products than just teak for decking. Construction timber, interior panelling and cabinetry, floors, veneers, natural rubbers, and cork for insulations (or decking), are all materials that can potentially come from a well-managed forest.

Find out more and get involved: www.yachtingforforests.com

