



Mr Patrick Janssens, CEO, elaborates on the shipyard's history. "The yard is in the east of Holland which isn't a logical place to build seagoing vessels because you cannot be further from the sea than we are in Holland, but in those days it was founded because of the steel price in Germany and then the shipyard grew into an independent shipyard building all kinds of vessels. Over the years this yard has always focused on sea-going vessels as well as inland vessels. Labour productivity in this part of Holland is a little bit higher than in the western part of Holland where there are more shipyards. Our employees have worked in

our shipyards for a very long time, often for generations. In 2007 we took over a second shipyard in Foxhol which is in the north of the Netherlands, it's a smaller shipyard than the one here in Lobith and it's a subsidiary for Lobith. In 2007 I myself took over both shipyards from the previous owner."

Uniquely positioned

As a medium-sized shipyard Shipyard De Hoop Lobith is uniquely positioned for flexibility compared to larger yards. "We can build ships in very short production times on the one hand whilst on the other hand keeping the quality at a very high level," says Mr Janssens. "We build custom

ships so each time a client comes with a request we start with a clean sheet of paper and take it from there using a database of over 3,000 designs nowadays to help us to engineer a new vessel each time and that means that each time we can develop and build exactly what the client wants. This even includes the finish of the interior design – we can deliver it and the curtains are there and the teacups are there – so it's a turnkey project."

But there's no point in having change for the sake of it. "The technologies in general haven't changed in shipbuilding over the last ten or twenty years," says Mr Janssens, "but of course we also



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work more than we used to do with some automated welding machines and with plasma steel cutting machines, and on the engineering side we of course use autocut and various 3-D programmes to do our engineering but the core disciplines of ship building remain the same as they were even a hundred years ago. We still do quite a lot of things manually in our yard which is because we focus on custom-building and because we find it very important to make exactly what the client wishes."

The company's design engineering and production departments (steel piping, engineering, steel pre-manufacturing, piping and machinery, carpentry and outfitting) are manned with a highly skilled and certified staff but Shipyard De Hoop has had to be proactive in getting this highly skilled workforce and now has an in-house school in both shipyards. "We find that people who have done shipbuilding courses which are available in the Netherlands or shipbuilding education when they leave school, their quality and their level of education is not sufficient for what we incorporate in our process so we basically take them on after school and they work two days a week and for three days a week they will be in training in our

yard." After a two year training course, their level of ability and education should be sufficient for them to work in the shipyard. De Hoop looks for the best quality candidates who can not only follow instructions but also use their initiative. "The training procedure is also effectively a selection procedure," Mr Janssens explains, "some people do not pass – they do not have sufficient insight and also the right attitude, which is very important for us."

Full order book

The company has weathered the storm of the recent economic uncertainty and has a full order book.

"Strangely enough when times were a little bit better at the beginning of the 2000s a lot of shipyards were busy and this shipyard had some difficult times and now a lot of shipyards have nothing to do and we've got a completely full order book. On order at the moment are two diving support vessels of 105 metres long; one survey vessel of 67metres long; five supply vessels; one accommodation barge for 440 people for the Caspian sea and two luxury river cruise vessels which for us in total is a fuller order book than we ever had and that basically keeps us busy until the beginning of 2012."

Shipyard De Hoop always approaches a new project with the intention of achieving a ten per cent to fifteen per cent better solution each time. "Otherwise why bother and why not copy what has been done before?" says Mr Janssens. "This is also our reason to exist because otherwise we would not be able to compete with lower-waged countries where a lot of vessels are built which are being built before. So we are always trying to innovate and trying to improve what's already there. There are quite a lot of changes nowadays, mostly to do with safety and the environment. You see that those issues are becoming more and more important and they are also the reason why a lot of existing vessels will have to be replaced in the near future because they do not comply with the rules and conditions that today's market expects."

What of the future?

At Shipyard de Hoop, the focus is on building custom-made vessels, which over the last few years has mainly been for the off-shore industry but there is also a growing market for river cruise vessels. Once seen as the domain of older people, younger people are turning to these cruises in increasing numbers. Both offer the shipyard a glowing future. ■