

Nwfeature: Sea December NW Section

Canadian Company Specializes in Painting Full Service Fraser Fibreglass Ltd.

By Leslee Jaquette

People often think the attractive young woman featured in [Fraser Fibreglass Ltd's](#) (FFL) magazine advertisements is a model. Not so, said owner Philip O'Donoghue, Ginny Weiler is one of the Vancouver's, British Columbia-based best yacht painters.

"We take as much time as it takes to make our boat repairs perfectly right," said Weiler, who has been a shooter at FFL for four years. "Phil is a perfectionist and so am I. He allows me to spend as much time as necessary to make things beautiful!"

O'Donoghue finds that women, such as Weiler tend to have the patience and desire required to achieve the kind of mirror finish paint jobs on which the company has built its reputation on. After 22-years specializing in fiberglass painting and yacht repair Fraser Fibreglass Ltd. has carved out a niche as one of the top yacht painting and repair companies in the Northwest. In addition to painting, the yard offers a full spectrum of repair services including osmosis blister repairs, collision repair, custom interiors, woodworking as well as a broad range of installations and general shipwrighting.

Love Affair with Paint & Color

While at school at the age of 13, British-born O'Donoghue started a part-time job working with fiberglass, "I worked with some of the best craftsmen in Europe", said O'Donoghue. From the age of 15 to 17 until immigrating to Canada, he worked full-time, using the metal-fiberglass composite method, building architectural products such as bank doors, movie props and luxury shop countertops, After arriving in Toronto, O'Donoghue hitchhiked to Vancouver, where he has lived and worked for the past 28 years.

Once in Vancouver, he discovered that no one was using the more advanced, European fiberglass methods. With only two options in the fibreglass field, industrial work or yacht building / repair, O'Donoghue chose to work on boats for West Coast Fiberglass from 1975 to 1980. Here he honed a number of skills, but admitted the work was frustrating due to the fact that his Canadian employers continued to use old-fashioned resins and materials along with outdated techniques.

As a result in 1980, O'Donoghue initiated Fraser Fibreglass Ltd. "I started using more expensive, higher quality, Canadian and U.S. resins that at the time nobody else was using," said O'Donoghue, who began as a one-man, mobile repair company. "Early on people liked the fact that I had a good eye and could match colours." Which is crucial in the repair business. O'Donoghue explained that matching colours isn't easy. The trouble with fibreglass gelcoat is that the resin fades in one direction and the pigment in the resin fades in another direction, matching gelcoat colour on a boat is very different from auto paint matching, anyone can do that, noted O'Donoghue, who explained that one side of a boat can be "cooked: in the sun and the other side a different colour. "It's a bit of an art, but it's very important to make a patch blend perfectly," said O'Donoghue,

who feels his work as a photographer helps him understand color. “If it’s not the right colour and you can see a patch. Then you have failed.”

Spray Booth & Services

Fraser Fibreglass refuses to fail. The yard is known for its dozen craftspeople, including shipwrights, carpenters, painters and fairing experts, who don’t stop until the repair is invisible.

Facilities include two shops located at Lynwood Marina under the Second Narrows Bridge. A 2,400 square foot spray booth, which can accommodate yachts up to 120-feet, is the largest of its type in British Columbia.

Fraser Fibreglass is known for its expertise with AWLGRIP, a coating synonymous with the finest yacht around the world. To keep it wet and even, O’Donoghue always uses two shooters when applying AWLGRIP to large boats, “being in control of the paint and the environment is everything,” says O’Donoghue.

He noted that unlike car paint, which is acrylic urethane that dries fast and doesn’t run, AWLGRIP a polyester urethane is more difficult to apply. “It takes a longer drying time, it sags easily and you can’t polish out runs, but that longer dry time can give you a mirror finish,” said O’Donoghue. “As a result, it must be professionally applied.”

A second, 10,000 square foot shop is used for every other sort of repair and installation including bow thrusters, propellers, shafts, marine heads, holding tanks and engines. Several recent jobs show the company’s range of expertise. Not long ago, Weiler finished painting the hull of a 52-foot Ocean Alexander with dark blue AWLGRIP while Mike Joyce, Shipwright, repaired and refinished the teak deck, installed new props and made custom changes for the Santa Barbra owner.

The former Premier of Bermuda, David Saul, hired Fraser Fibreglass Ltd. To complete \$230,000.00 worth of work on his 57-foot custom yacht “*Traveler*.” The job included replacing a great deal of rotten wood, new decks, fairing and complete AWLGRIP refurbishing, along with many custom modifications and re-varnishing to the interior.

O’Donoghue readily admitted that Fraser Fibreglass Ltd. Is more high-end than most of its competitors. “We don’t do budget work and we don’t compromise,” explained O’Donoghue. “Still, we are a bargain, especially for Americans due to the strong U.S. dollar.”

Cross the Border Savings

Beyond its reputation for excellence, Fraser Fibreglass Ltd., attracts flocks of American boaters from all over the West Coast due to across the border savings. Given the Canadian dollar is worth just over .54 US, American boat owners get a whale of a deal. In addition, U.S. citizens are not required to pay either the 7.5 percent the Provincial Sales Tax (PST) or the 7 percent Goods & Services Tax (GST).

Another factor that makes Fraser Fibreglass Ltd. attractive to Americans is that some other top end companies in the Northwest are much more expensive, even dollarfor-

dollar. O’Donoghue observed that an expanding list of U.S. environmental restrictions and Government regulations makes U.S. yards’ more costly.

The Future is Now

Although O'Donoghue continues to "shoot" on a daily basis, some of his favorite projects that have come to Fraser Fibreglass Ltd. as a result of collisions and fires. He recalled one scenario that involved a 48-foot Bowman sailboat moored alongside an iceberg in Alaska. A huge chunk of ice fell off and crushed the cabin and nearly killed the owners. By making moulds off the deck, the Fraser Fibreglass Ltd. crew was able to reproduce the cabin of this near new Bowman 48 English Sloop; along with its original nonskid pattern. The owner was a perfectionist; everything had to be repaired "as original" we even shipped in the original gelcoat from England to keep the boat "stock" as required.

As Fraser Fibreglass Ltd. moves into its third decade as a full service boat repair, renovation and installation facility, O'Donoghue said he sees no big changes in his crystal ball. His goals remain to keep the company small and maintain high quality work. "My greatest joy is painting a dark, blue hull and making it look like a mirror," said O'Donoghue. "My continuing joy is to walk down to the marina and look at jobs we did years ago and see that the boats are still looking good." There's no better advertising than that.

I've been offered painting contracts in some of the best mega yacht yards in Europe but there's no way I'm leaving beautiful British Columbia. This Country and Province is a blessing to my family and I every day.

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Fiberglass Maintenance Tips

By Leslee Jaquette

With more than three decades of experience working with fiberglass painting and repairs, Fraser Fibreglass Ltd. Owner Philip P. O'Donoghue offered these maintenance tips:

- **Keep toilet bowl cleaner in the toilet bowl.**

This may sound funny, but many boaters are under the impression that toilet bowl cleaner is a good product to clean the stripes on their boats. NOT! According to O'Donoghue, years ago "some idiot" wrote an article to that effect and since then Fraser Fibreglass Ltd. has repaired around 100 boats with blisters on the bootline and sheer stripes due to that misinformation.

- **Keep synthetic rags away from Pinesol cleaner.**

O'Donoghue warned that when synthetic rags (e.g., J-Cloth) and Pinesol cleaner are mixed, they can spontaneously combust. The result is a fire in the middle of the night!

- **Have a professional apply an epoxy barrier to the bottom of new boats.**

Whether your new boat has been guaranteed or not, have a professional apply and epoxy barrier on the bottom *before* it goes into the water. According to *Practical Sailor* statistics, 30 percent of all boats will blister. However, if the barrier bottom coat is applied prior to launch; you maximize your chances of preventing osmosis blisters.

Recently, the owner of a two-year-old, 41-foot Bayliner paid Fraser Fibreglass Ltd. \$20,000 Canadian to fix the blisters on his boat. “If he had applied a preventative barrier when it was new, it would have only cost \$2,500 Canadian,” said O’Donoghue.

- **Read your boat insurance policy very carefully.**

Under the topic of “collisions,” be aware of a patch clause. O’Donoghue noted that with a patch clause, some companies would only pay for repairs to a small percentage of the damaged area. With AWLGRIP, he explained, you often need to paint the entire half of the boat that is damaged. Some insurance companies consider one side of a hull as a “patch” while others may only pay for a couple of square feet of repaired surface to 50’ hull repaint job.

- **Research your insurance.**

Talk to other boaters who have made claims. Ask them what kind of treatment they received from the marine insurer’s surveyors and adjusters. O’Donoghue underscored the fact that your friendly, marine insurance broker who sold you your policy will *not* be there to hold your hand when it comes “claims” time. You may be dealing with individual

surveyors and adjusters with their own bias for the way they think your boat should be repaired. Remember, they act in their company’s best interest, not yours.

Some Canadian adjusters even demand that you take your boat to only one repair company that they deal with exclusively! This is wrong. The policy owner is the one who makes the choice of which company should work on their boat and more importantly which company should not work on their boat.

<http://www.fraserfibre.bc.ca>

