

My time, Jorgensen's Boatyard apprenticeship 1985-1990.



My first memories of Jorgensen's boatyard were of my father, Fred Greig getting my P Class wooden mast repaired. Dad commented on how quick and good the job was.

Later he took me to see Pop's new yacht "Stormbird", nearly finished having recently come out of the shed ready for launch. That was in 1981.

Little did I know that in 4 years I would be starting at Jorgensen's as an apprentice boatbuilder.

August school holidays were three weeks and for two of them I got a job at Jorgensen's as a gofer/cleaner.

Those two weeks I must have worked very hard because when I got back from a climbing trip Finn called to offer me an apprenticeship.

I had just turned 16, and was in 5th form at Queen Charlotte College about to sit School Certificate exams so leaving school appealed.

It was August 1985 and I started an apprenticeship as a Ship Yacht and Boatbuilder.

Apprenticeship's in those days were time based, you were locked into an employer and the employer was locked to having you.

My apprenticeship was 9000 hours about 5 years long but because Jorgensen's worked a 9 hour day it worked out to be around 4.5 years.

I had very little knowledge for what I was getting into. My experience around boats was limited to through Queen Charlotte Yacht Club and sailing centre boarders, P Class, Laser, windsurfer and Crewing on Sunbursts and later with Simon Manning on his 470.

I could sail but knew nothing about building boats, I did not even know what antifouling was.

One of the first jobs was on the fishing boat Arapawa 3, I believe this one had masts and sails, Finn's thinking it would be more economic. I don't think the sails lasted long.

This was being built by Phillip Burton and Walter Savage, Walter, who was into his 3rd year as an apprentice. My job was to paint and putty the seams with white lead putty after Phillip and Walter caulked the seams with cotton. Often, I had a hand from Pop who would come down to see what was happening in the yard.

Other jobs Walter and Phillip introduced me to were fitting of the bulwarks and cutting out the scuppers, fitting of the windows and beadings around them. Shaping and sanding in the crew quarters preparing for painting.

One job late on a Friday I had was painting deep down the anchor locker.

I had to go down head first and have someone hold my legs so I would not fall in. The paint was very strong either PA-10 or Everdure something with lots of fumes. I came out of the anchor locker very high. Being last thing on Friday and the end of the week we all went up to the smoko room for beer or two which did not help.

The end of the week was looked forward to with the Friday shouts. Always several crates of beer, mostly Lion Red, and a bottle of rum or whiskey supplied by thankful clients to help start your weekend.

Walter was very good at his job and I looked up to him as an adult apprentice about to come out of his time. On one occasion when Phillip got sick of me he told me to go to town and get a packet of glass head nails. This confused me and after a bit of time John Landale told me to go to the paddock next door and fill a bucket with horse shit and give it to Philip.

Jorgensen's was one of the better places to learn an apprenticeship as it catered for almost everything, slipping boats, engineering on site, marine electrics with the Owen Brothers and resident painter Geoff Manning, refuelling at the end of the wharf, marina pickup and delivery using Troll, on the occasion Roger Harris would go further down the Sounds to get a boat. It was a good size company where you gained knowledge in many things.

Just how good the variety and extent of learning at Jorgensen's was evident during your block course in Auckland and meeting up with the other apprentices, you found out not all have that variety.

The one thing missing at Jorgensen's was the composite work in exotic materials but I picked that up later with a move to Auckland. It was much nicer not having to do composite work with the health issues in those days.

Being a more traditional yard some of the composite techniques were not known like when a yacht with osmosis needed repairing and we were not sure if we could use epoxy or it had to be polyester to repair. There was little polyester resin at Jorgensen's as most gluing or glassing jobs needed epoxy resin as it was either timber gluing or GOP, (Glass Over Plywood).

Jorgensen vehicles were always a laugh. There were the old Morris Minors, two vans and a flat deck for the engineers. Every now and then the axle would fall off and you would end up going down the road on three wheels. They had a hard life, were fun and amazingly lasted. There was a blue tractor with a crane hook at the end very handy for lifting small boats or engines.

Troll, the legendary work boat. Always reliable with the odd work pumping the bilge to keep her afloat. Often it would be used to help pull out the main slip cradle or get a boat from Waikawa marina. Amazing how it kept running with the abuse and weather it received.

Finn also had his blue Toyota Corolla wagon which we also used. Once Neville Gander and I used it to do a rigging check at Waikawa. I went up the rig and when I was at the top of the mast the car keys I had in my pocket fell out and plopped into the tide. A long walk back to the yard and the embarrassment of having to explain ourselves. Incredibly the keys were easily found by using a big magnet from work on the end of a long line.

There were the odd hijinks with the cars like dead animals tied around exhausts or hidden in wheel wells or tin can tied underneath so when you left you would go down the road making a big noise. Or you would have Keith Henson ride his trail bike up the stairs and around the smoko room.

Of the three slips - one went into the main shed. The middle slip went in between the main and engineers shed and the third slip went into another shed midway up the section.

The slipway ways were always busy in my early years and quite different to what you have now with the travel lifts. The electric winch always managed to pull the boats up using one of its gears, normally second gear and with the heavy boats the cable was double purchased around the blocks on the big slip to help pulling power.

Occasionally the cradle would not slip all the way out by itself. There would be a heavy rope that the men would have to pull along the wharf so it went out deep enough to float the boat on or off the cradle. Finn would be there directing and when it came time to pull out the cradle he would put one hand on the rope and with the other push on you so you were not only pulling the rope but also had his weight pushing you giving sore stretched arms. We joked about who would be the one pushed by Finn that day. The slip took quite a bit of maintenance, and being at the end of Waikawa Bay it silted up at times.

You had to be on your guard around the slipway with the heavy wire rope big metal blocks to feed it, heavy boats and rail lines for them to



run on. The wire rope always needed greasing and checking.

It's surprising that there were not more injuries. No names, but I do remember a few injuries like falling off scaffolds, hair getting caught in a drill. the odd finger slipping into the buzzer, heavy stern legs falling and damaging limbs. There was the occasional falling off the cradle into the sea but this was mostly done during summer. Twisted ankles and bad backs from lifting heavy blocks were the most common.

As well as the three main sheds where boats were to be worked on and an engineering shed. Geoff Manning had his painting store. There was a storeroom below the smoko room. Another upstairs office was built in the main shed. So it was quite a busy place for a time and had quite few people working there at its busiest year.

From memory, around 1986 Finn called a meeting for all that worked there but not the apprentices. He was selling the business to the workers. I'm not exactly sure of the deal. Then in 1987 the share market crashed and slowly things went a little quieter but we were able to continue with various contracts and work.



You got to work on all types of craft, dinghy's to Interisland Ferries, work boats to pleasure yachts. A lot were traditional craft being constructed of timber mainly carvel construction and then GOP.

One interesting traditional boat we built was the clinker cutters for Outward Bound. Cutting the planks to shape, steam bending the ribs and riveting them in place.

Machining the oars, about 3.5 meters long out of Oregon, Phillip set up a long wood lathe that would

allow two people at a time to be machining the long oars at once to a solid round with a big handle. We would then glue the cheeks for the paddle and shape those.



Jorgensen's had the contract to visit the Interisland ferries and do odd jobs for the hour it was in berth, before it returned back to Wellington with cargo and passengers.

Mostly they were small jobs like repairing door handles, fixing hinges or minor woodwork. Once on a windy Picton day a gust caught the ferry as it came in to dock and pushed it against the wharf splitting the stern port side through the metal hull. Before it could return to Wellington the Marine Surveyor tasked us with boxing the inside and filling it with concrete enough for the return to Wellington for better repairs.

Often, I would go down with Keith Henson, racing down in the Morris Minor van and walking on the railway lines dogging the trains as they loaded. It would be a bit of a rush so we did not get stuck onboard and travel to Wellington.

The work day would start at 0730 starting with small talk by Finn and once Geoff Preece arrived Finn would say "late again" Geoff would reply "Shall I leave early to make up for it?" Finn would then instruct us about the day what was being slipped and jobs were needed for that day. About 0930 was morning smoko and lunch at 1200-1245. We had afternoon smoko at 1500. The end of the day was 1715

During the 45 minutes for lunch an informal cricket match would often be had. This was good training for the indoor cricket that Jorgensen's had a team for each Wednesday night in Picton.

During summer on a hot day a swim at the end of the wharf would be cool and refreshing. Sailing was another activity with some staff having their own yachts or the use of some.

Memories of sailing on Roger Harris's Spencer in a race from Ships Cove to the top of Pelorus Sound / Te Hoiere and back with Roger, James King-Turner was good.

Pop would often do the Saturday race in his Stormbird which was always fun.



I give credit to Finn for taking me on as a young, just turned 16-year-old and the many people who were at Jorgensen's who all had a hand in training me.

I also thank Pop for his support and help with my correspondence particularly the lofting and drawing. Pop's design office in his house was full of his home-made splines, duck weights and straight edges to create the fair curvy lines of the Jorgensen boats. On shelves were the individual handmade miniature wood planes for individual specialised jobs.

I look back at my time at Jorgensen's as being a tough, steep learning curve and I appreciate all those with my training during my time.

I finished in 1990 and later went onto complete my Trade Certificate and Advanced Trade Certificate in Ship Yacht and Boat Building which allowed me to do a Teaching Diploma. Since Jorgensen's I have worked at several boat yards, with the last being Southern Spars to 1998. Jorgensen's has given me exceptional ability and knowledge in my teaching job, teaching materials technology in secondary schools.



I have had several sailing missions over the years with the conclusion being, using my own 12-meter Alan Wright yacht "Megastar" that I used to watch the 2021 Americas Cup in the Hauraki. I sold Megastar at the end of the Cup and now looking for the next yacht. I look back at my careers and credit it to where it started at Jorgensen's



Mark Greig December 2022