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A Homebuilt Hard Dodger For New Zealand Sailboat "Mai Tai"

John Published Jun 20, 2008

17 comments

After reading about our [hard dodger](#), very experienced live aboard voyagers Lane and Kay Finley sent along a detailed description of their hard dodger, complete with photographs. The advantage of theirs over ours is that it is all hard with glass windows; much stronger and pretty much maintenance free. On the other hand, I like the larger expanse of window, fewer blind spots and curved shape of ours. Just goes to show that everything on a boat is a compromise.

Many thanks to the Finleys for sharing the information below:

“ In the end, we designed and built our own hard top, using foam-cored fiberglass construction to achieve strength and lightness. The finished project is strong, safe to stand on, gives excellent visibility through GLASS, doesn't ruin the lines of the boat and provides amazing protection from the weather.



“ Our navigation electronics now live under the hard top where they are protected from the elements and much more user friendly. We have also noticed that we get less 'salt air' inside the cabin.

Before undertaking this project, we took pictures of dozens of hard tops on boats that we saw sailing in New Zealand waters. The New Zealanders are well aware of the benefits of hard tops and you can see all sorts of creative designs in every port.

Since we consider our Annapolis 44 to have fairly elegant lines we were very cautious to adhere to a complementary design. After many drafts, we finally drew the final design to scale and then lofted the plans on our garage floor. We built the mould out of MDF plywood with inserts for the windows so that the 10mm safety glass would end up being set-in against a solid fiberglass lip and be flush with the exterior surface of the hard top.



“ This was a 'female' mould, so the interior surface was sanded smooth and then waxed to prevent the fiberglass resins from sticking to the mould. We laid up the required layers of fiberglass cloth and resin in the mould, and then placed the foam core (30mm medium density) over the fiberglass layers. At this point we laid up more fiberglass to the design specifications and 'sandwiched' the foam in place.



“ High Modulus, a composite engineering company in Auckland, made some recommendations for the engineering specifications.

The finished product, which also includes a dome light and reading lights in the ceiling, was fibreglassed in place and we re-painted the deck to finish it off. It has proven to be an excellent addition to the boat and cost approximately US\$3000 in materials to build. Of course that does not count our labour. However, it was an interesting winter project and one that we are very proud of.

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Meet the Author

John

John was born and brought up in Bermuda and started sailing as a child, racing locally and offshore before turning to cruising. He has sailed over 100,000 miles, most of it on his *McCurdy & Rhodes 56*, *Morgan's Cloud*, including eight ocean races to Bermuda, culminating in winning his class twice in the Newport Bermuda Race. He has skippered a *series of voyages in the North Atlantic*, the majority of which have been to the high latitudes. John has been helping others go voyaging by sharing his experience for twenty years, *first in yachting magazines* and, for the last 12 years, as co-editor/publisher of AAC.

17 comments... add one

darrell May 23, 2012, 2:46 am

We are venturing out on our first cruise at the end of this year. San Diego to Annapolis VIA Panama Canal BVI. I am considering a hard dodger, but am probably going to do the work myself due to quality craftsmanship, and design. Any pics and instructions explaining your process would be a real help. I truly believe there is a growing interest in hard dodger design and home fabrication. You'd surely get internet traffic if you posted your process. Thanks in advance, Darrell



John May 23, 2012, 7:56 am

Hi Darrell,

I guess I feel like Lane and Kaye have already given some pretty good information on how to build a dodger in this post. That is probably about as far as we or them can go for free. (Internet traffic does not put food on the table.)

I would recommend that if you want a detailed design as well as specification for the materials that you contact [Ed Joy](#). Not only will you learn how to build the dodger from him, you will also get a dodger that fits the lines of your boat and enhances her resale value.



Bill Robinson Aug 17, 2013, 8:02 pm

I built a hard dodger for Jenain, my steel Ebbtide 36, a few years ago. I used commercial Hexacor g.r.p panels, which are cored with pvc honey comb, 10mm tempered glass for the fixed windows and 12mm polycarbonate for the opening window. I built it using the stitch and glue technique and West Epoxy. In my case, it has to be removable as I could otherwise not remove the engine. This was an easy project, finished in two weeks, and very strong, good looking and practical. Off course in hind sight, it could be improved on, by moulding in wire conduits for example, but overall I am very happy with it. It provides great protection, is light, and compliments the boat's lines. I have a lot of photos if anyone is interested.

John Aug 18, 2013, 8:08 pm

Hi Bill,

That sounds like a great way to build a hard dodger and much easier than building a mold. Thanks for sharing your experience. Also, really good point about the importance of being able to remove the dodger to get the engine out of most sailboats.

I know what you mean about hindsight improvements, I made exactly the same omission!

jonathan miller Dec 6, 2013, 9:28 pm

hey bill i would be interested in some pictures of your dodger. i have a goderich 37' steel hull (libro vent), and i need to get her ready for travel.

thanks

jonathan miller

jonathan miller Dec 6, 2013, 9:33 pm

hey bill i would like to see some pictures of your dodger. i have a 37' steel hull (libro vent). i need to get her ready for travel.

thanks

jonathan

Denis Feb 18, 2014, 1:21 pm

If it ever stops snowing, I am going to replace my Sunbrella covered dodger and bimini with something rigid. I would love to see some detail pics of your stitch and glue technique with the Hexicore also how you deal with the edges. Sounds like the best way to go.

Bill Robinson Dec 6, 2013, 9:42 pm

Hi Jonothan, send me your email address, and I will send you the photos. My email address is jenain1999@yahoo.com.

Bill Robinson.

Clay Langland May 16, 2014, 2:21 pm

I too would appreciate pictures. Here in Alaska my Formosa 46 could use a hard cover for snow and cold protection. If available, please send pics to:

betaclay@mac.com

Thanks, Clay

Dennis Gildea Oct 23, 2014, 4:55 am

Would you send me some picture address? I'd like to make one for my pocket cruiser S2 9.2c sounds like a good way to go.

Captain Den

Bill Robinson Oct 23, 2014, 9:39 pm

If I had your email address, I could send you the info!

Bill Attwood Oct 23, 2014, 11:09 am

Hi Bill.

Would you be kind enough to send me some pictures of your hard dodger.

My email is: sy.kinsa@gmail.com

With thanks in advance,

Bill Attwood

Craig Dec 13, 2014, 12:07 am

Bill, please send pics of your dodger. Thank you.

Edwin Rudetsky Feb 3, 2015, 11:20 pm

Hi Bill,

Please send pics of your dodger

Thank you,

Ed Rudetsky

Clive Arnold Oct 8, 2016, 8:08 am

Hello bill,

Could you please send me your dodger pictures?

Clive @ earrame.net

Thanks in advance.

Barry Zajdlk Oct 17, 2016, 10:04 pm

Hello Bill,

Another request for dodger pictures! Would love to build one for my Niagara 35.

Thanks in advance for sharing the photos.

Regards,

Barry

John Oct 18, 2016, 7:48 am

Hi Barry,

This is a very old post and thread. Also since this is not a forum, but rather comments to post in Wordpress, Bill is not being informed of your request, so I don't think this is going to work for you.

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