

Water: The Next Frontier

Written by Erik Bojnansky, BT Senior Writer
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For a few million, you can ride out the rising seas in style

A



Miami-based company is manufacturing luxury floating homes that can withstand tropical storm systems and operate completely off the grid.

The founders of Arkup LLC claim their “livable yachts” will be able to move at a top speed of ten knots on nothing but solar power. These boxy boats will use rain water collected in cisterns and have windows strong enough to withstand Category 4 hurricane winds. And, the founders add, the yacht’s hydraulic pylons beneath the hull will keep the vessel perfectly still in shallow water, canceling out any sensation of rocking or sea sickness, even in choppy water.

But Arkup’s owners aren’t simply touting the livable yacht as a luxury vessel. They are promoting it as a next-generation houseboat that can resist the threat of sea level rise. Arkup even hired a Dutch architect who specializes in designing houses, apartments, restaurants, and resorts that float.

The architect, Koen Olthuis, is the founder of Waterstudio and Dutch Docklands. Regular *Biscayne Times* readers may remember him as the man who proposed building a floating island community in the middle of Maule Lake in North Miami Beach. That is, until the City of North Miami Beach, reacting to public outcry from lakefront residents, enacted legislation that made such a floating community illegal.

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That legislation is now being challenged in court by Raymond Williams, the owner of Maule Lake. Should Williams emerge victorious, Olthuis says he's ready to pursue his Amillarah North Miami Beach concept again, and he wouldn't mind partnering with his Arkup clients to build it.

"We're waiting for the next step, and time will tell what kind of license and protocols are allowed," Olthuis tells the *BT*.



But if Maule Lake is still out of reach, there are plenty of other places where livable yachts may end up. For example, the owner of a waterfront home, or even a vacant waterfront lot, could dock a livable yacht by his or her property, says Nicolas Derouin, CEO and co-founder of Arkup LLC. "Potentially any waterfront lot that has seawater length could be a potential location for Arkup, as well as marinas," he explains. Federally owned waters or designated anchorages within Biscayne Bay are also potential locations, he adds, as well as a host of other places outside of Florida.

"Our primary market is the U.S. and Caribbean, but we can extend this to Europe, the Middle East, Southeast Asia," says Derouin.

So far, Arkup LLC has finished building just one livable yacht. Well, substantially finished anyway. As of press time, the yacht-houseboat hybrid was 98 percent complete. Nevertheless,

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the project has already received significant publicity from local media outlets. The bulk of this press attention came during the February 14-18 Miami International Boat Show, when the prototype Arkup vessel was docked beside a vacant Star Island property and shown off to journalists and potential buyers.

The 4350-square-foot, two-floor model has four bedrooms, four and a half bathrooms, and retractable balconies. It's being listed for sale at \$5.5 million, but it's also available for charter.

"We have potential buyers who are interested in these livable yachts," Derouin says. "They're looking to try it out. They want to see it. They want to touch it. They want to experience it."



Arkup already has an order to build a second livable yacht, which will be docked at an undisclosed location in the Bahamas, says Antoine Vernholes, an Arkup investor in charge of international sales. Negotiations for two additional yachts are ongoing, he adds.

Those livable yachts will be constructed at the same place the prototype was built, the RMK Merrill-Stevens shipyard at 881 NW 13th St. on the Miami River. The Merrill-Stevens shipyard is also where Arkup's offices are located. "About 25 to 30 people worked on the [prototype] on a full-time basis," Derouin says. According to Vernholes, the first livable yacht took a year and a half to build, and the investor is confident that Arkup will crank out the next vessels in less time.

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“The next thing we’re going to do is work on the engineering to build it better, faster, and with more sustainable products,” Vernholes tells the *BT*.

The idea of building solar-powered, livable yachts in Miami was conceived by Arnaud Luguët, a citizen of France and the Netherlands who has worked on renewable-energy projects for the past 20 years. For the past decade Luguët has lived in Miami, developing plans for windfarm, when he started thinking about his mother’s homeland, the Netherlands, where houseboats can often be found in canals and on lakes.

“Arnaud thought he could develop a floating home concept but take it to the next level, which also means making it self-sustaining and stable,” recounts Derouin, who has been friends with Luguët since they met in Paris 25 years ago.

Derouin also trained as an engineer but specialized in logistics and incorporating startups. After working in South America for 20 years, he says he began traveling the world with his wife, and they spent a good deal of time in Southeast Asia.

“I saw how it’s a challenge for big cities in Southeast Asia to grow because they’re growing very fast, but without any urban planning,” Derouin says. That lack of planning caused noticeable negative effects on the environment. “You can see the pristine beaches spoiled with plastic, and the coral reef impacts.”



So when Luguët invited Derouin to help him with his livable yachts venture, the logistics

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manager was literally onboard. Derouin has been living in Miami ever since.

Derouin says it was only natural that Olthuis was recruited to design the vessels. “He’s been working on floating projects for the past 10 or 15 years, from very traditional floating homes in northern Europe to private islands for Florida and the Middle East,” he explains.

Indeed, Olthuis has been designing floating houses, apartment buildings, restaurants, and resorts since 2005 via his Netherlands-based Waterstudio architecture firm. Olthuis has patents for floating foundations that can hold entire neighborhoods, roadways, cars, parks, sports stadiums, and cruise ship terminals. And, through his Dutch Docklands company, Olthuis is still pursuing plans to build a floating island community in the Indian Ocean near Maldives, called “Amillarah,” which is Maldivian for “private island.”

In August 2013, Dutch Docklands announced its intent to build a floating-home community somewhere in Miami-Dade County. Less than a year later, Maule Lake was revealed to be the site where Olthuis wished to tow 30 artificial islands of his design (which have yet to be built) into the middle of the 179-acre lake and tether them to the bottom using telescopic moorings.

Twenty-nine of those islands, each 6500 square feet, were each to have a four-bedroom villa, a garden, a pool, and a couple of boat slips. The 30th island would be the “amenity island” with a restaurant. The islands were to be equipped with solar panels, rainwater collectors, and “hydrogen-powered collectors,” while waste would be collected by a vendor (see “[In the Market for a Hyper-Luxurious Floating Island?](#)” July 2014).

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letters@biscaynetimes.com