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Compositeworks has completed an extensive refit of the Ulysses, a 107-metre exploration motor yacht that has been in the main La Rochelle drydock since March. This summer, the drydock will be transformed into a covered superyacht

refit facility as part of a project that symbolises the Atlantic port's commitment to refits, repairs and rebuilds for superyachts, megayachts and the like.

In 2014, the La Rochelle port authority appointed Atlantic Refit Center, set up in 2006, to develop the port's infrastructure and resources for yacht refitting. In September 2016, the port and Atlantic Refit Center signed an agreement with Compositeworks to take the project a step further. Compositeworks, a major player in this sector, was founded in the Mediterranean port of La Ciotat in 1988. "La Rochelle will complement our La Ciotat facility nicely. We decided to come here for several reasons. The first is the drydock, shortly to be covered and upgraded, and the associated facilities. The second is the network of high-quality subcontractors based here on France's Atlantic coast. Third, thinking about our client's crews, there's the charm of La Rochelle and its environs. All reports suggest that the Ulysses crew thoroughly enjoyed the time they spent here," says Christophe Moulhierac, CEO of Compositeworks, adding that the decision to invest in La Rochelle was unrelated to his company's failure to win the contract to manage the La Ciotat drydock ([see La Ciotat superyacht drydock open for business](#)). "The two projects are quite independent. We planned to come to La Rochelle even if we had won the La Ciotat contract. Demand is so strong that we need the space."



Ulysses, 'cocooned' in the main La Rochelle drydock, ready for her refit (© La Rochelle Port Atlantique)

For Moulierac, La Rochelle's location is also important, one reason being that it is not that far off the route between the Mediterranean and the Caribbean that many superyachts take twice a year. "The relative proximity to the Mediterranean-Caribbean route is a factor, but it should also be recalled that we are targeting large vessels that are at sea all year round and can readily go wherever they need to. For a refit lasting several months, it is not a problem to sail from the Mediterranean to La Rochelle. It's not that far and they can even stop off in Gibraltar for tax-free fuel."



Artist's impression of the drydock shed (© Compositeworks)

Compositeworks Atlantique specialises in very large yachts, which is to say vessels that are at least 80, or even 100 metres, in length. To meet the demand in this sector, the La Rochelle facility will be refurbished and upgraded. The biggest task is to build a shed over the 176-by-22-metre drydock. This will enable all work to be performed under shelter while overcoming the need to build a 'cocoon' around each boat, as has been the case to date.



The drydock shed as seen from the car park (© Compositeworks)

The shed will be 191m long by 45m wide with a clearance of 36m. It will feature a natural ventilation system with panels

controlling air flow and heat recovery to cool the interior in summer and warm it in winter.

Naturally, work on the shed cannot begin until the drydock is vacant. Construction was scheduled to begin earlier, but the Ulysses refit came up unexpectedly and was negotiated in just a few days. Understandably, Compositeworks jumped at the opportunity not only to do the refit, but also to promote its work on this prestigious vessel. In the end, the building permits were delayed which meant that the shed construction and refit schedules fitted together nicely. While waiting for the Ulysses to vacate the drydock, the shed construction team began preparatory work, including sounding the foundations for the roof pillars.

Shed construction proper is now expected to begin in late June or early July and to be completed in the first quarter of 2018 at an overall cost of €14 million, including €10 million for the shed. The cost of the shed will be met by CBCW, an entity set up on 17 March by Compositeworks (60%) and the Grand Port Maritime de La Rochelle port authority (40%). Compositeworks will spend a further €4 million on tooling and site works, including the refurbishment of an existing 13,000-square-metre two-storey building to provide offices and crew amenities.



A general view of the La Rochelle drydocks (© La Rochelle Port Atlantique)

Although Compositeworks only has a handful of staff on site to coordinate subcontractors working on the Ulysses, the team will grow the moment the company wins its next contract for a superyacht refit in the covered drydock. “We expect

to create around 70 new full-time positions over the next five years while at the same time assigning far more work to subcontractors. Bear in mind also, that in our line of business, each full-time position typically corresponds to four subcontractor jobs either maintained or created,” says Christophe Moulhierac. The Compositeworks CEO added: “In 2018, we’ll start promoting the advantages of both the new facility and the port of La Rochelle. The work on the 107-metre Ulysses, the covered drydock and the refurbished facilities will, we hope, convince the owners of very large yachts of how much we have to offer.”

With complementary resources at La Rochelle and La Ciotat, Compositeworks will be well placed to respond to the strong demand for superyacht refit and maintenance services. In 2015/2016, Compositeworks La Ciotat and its 120 employees generated revenues of €45 million, an increase of 22% over 2014/2015. “We are receiving plenty of enquiries for work on very large yachts, precisely the sector we are now targeting. Major refits for these vessels typically mean contracts worth between €5 million and €25 million.”

Translated and adapted by Steve Dyson



French naval cruise missile enters service