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Following its complete refurbishment and transformation to accommodate superyachts, the large drydock at La Ciotat was formally declared open for business on Monday 3 April. Originally 335 metres in length by 60 in width, the facility

was commissioned in 1969 to build large ships. In 1988, shipbuilder Normed closed the drydock and yard marking the end of a long history in shipbuilding. In 2000, the yard reopened to service large yachts. Interest in the precinct's potential revived, except that it was too big for even the biggest superyachts. To meet market needs and be economically viable, the only option was to shorten the drydock. This was achieved by adding a new slot for the floating gate at the 200m mark, without modifying either the width or the maximum water depth which remain at 60m and 8.5m, respectively.

A shorter drydock also means more berths for quayside maintenance. The refurbishment included the modernisation of the pumping station. With four pumps instead of two, it now offers a maximum flow rate of 6 m³/s so that the drydock can be filled or drained in 7 to 8 hours. The refurbished power distribution network has two 1000-kVA transformers on the port side and three 630-kVA transformers on the starboard side supplying 13 terminals rated from 400 to 1,250 A and tailored to the needs of the biggest superyachts.



(© Patrice Coppée)

After a year's work, the refurbishment was completed in October 2016 at an overall cost of €15.8 million. Two-thirds of the funding was provided by regional and local government bodies, and the remainder one-third by semi-public body Semidep, the operator of the La Ciotat Shipyards.

With a refurbished drydock and a 2000-tonne shiplift, La Ciotat is well equipped to accommodate superyachts in the 80m-and-over category. In March 2016, Semidep issued a call for tenders for a drydock operator for the coming 35 months. The contract went to German company Blohm+Voss. In November 2016, following Lürssen's acquisition of Blohm+Voss, the parent company set up Blohm+Voss La Ciotat SAS with Spanish operator Marina Barcelona 92. Lürssen and Marina Barcelona 92 are regular partners in the Mediterranean.



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Blohm+Voss La Ciotat SAS shares the shipyard precinct with 35 other companies, including Monaco Marine, Composite Works and H2X. In 2016, over 100 vessels in the 50m-and-over category docked for maintenance, repairs or modernisation work, contributing around €120 million to the local economy and representing some 700 direct jobs.

Thirty years after the closure of the former Normed yard, the La Ciotat shipyard precinct is well on the way to a remarkable turnaround and to playing a leading role in the Mediterranean market for superyacht refits and services. With half of the 35-hectare site still available for lease, the precinct offers good potential for further growth. Recall, finally, that La Ciotat is strategically located half way between Marseille and Toulon on France's Mediterranean coast.

