



To be or not to be...

Situated within spitting distance from Helsingør's Kronborg Castle, it is almost like Hamlet is looking over the shoulders of the Knud E Hansen co-workers as they get on with their tasks at the company's new premises. And the question is whether or not to emphasise Knud E Hansen's traditions. After all, the company was established already in 1937 – with a DFDS ferry as the first reference.

TEXT AND PHOTOS KLAS BROGREN

Still, Finn Wollesen, the company's CEO, stresses that the traditions in some ways have been a burden during recent years. Companies sometimes have to move away from traditions. So, the firm underwent a radical change and the old wisdom "this is the way that we have always done it" is now simply ... old! Still, the company still gets clients who specifically want that very special Knud E Hansen A/S touch to the exterior design. After all, the company is known to produce very aesthetical profiles. The connoisseurs of the naval architecture industry, so to say.

The Government of Newfoundland & Labrador is the latest client to opt for such a handsome profile, the ship being intended for the Fogo island service. It will be a replacement for the CAPT. EARL W WINDSOR. Although the vessel has not been ordered yet, it already bears a distinct Knud E Hansen A/S look.

A year ago, Knud E Hansen A/S moved back to its origins after being headquartered in Copenhagen for decades. "We simply got fed up with traffic jams and parking problems in Copenhagen", says Finn Wollesen. Now the company resides in Lundegaarden, in a house that has been bought by the company. It is totally revamped, featuring light colour shades and open areas. The rooms are rather like alcoves, and can be described as "project rooms": depending on the assignment, people move from one room to the other.

As a reflection of Knud E Hansen's history, the wide corridors and rooms are well equipped with quite interesting illustrations and ship models. Knut Kloster's brainchild PHOENIX project, in particular, catches the attention of any visitor with a keen interest in passenger ships. Lundegaarden was originally built as a military hospital for French soldiers in the Napoleon wars, so there are a lot of contrasts between past and current time. Almost like Knud E Hansen A/S itself.

Under the current tenure, the house hosts a staff of 50 – representing 15 nations. But Knud E Hansen A/S has also opened affiliate offices in London, Piraeus, Rostock, Saint Nazaire and Odense. Perth will be the next step, and the company is also about to inaugurate an office on the North American continent. "We want to be in that business climate", Finn comments. Indirectly, he is suggesting that the company wants to avoid some continents as they are home to a bunch of protectionists.

Positive effect of the credit crunch

When the recession hit in 2008, Knud E Hansen A/S paradoxically experienced a surge of orders. Some very



well known ship-owners are on the list of clients – all of which are quite used to having a few designs up their sleeves in order to be ready to order if and when newbuilding prices fall. So, in the midst of the worst recession in a very long time, the company was heavily involved in three very complex projects. But when uncertainty about that multimillion-dollar-question "when are we at the bottom?" spread, 2009 turned a bit more tranquil. However, in the office, there is a project team which for years will work on a naval project for a new British aircraft carrier.

In Knud E Hansen A/S's opinion, ro-pax prices have now fallen by some 25 per cent or so from their peak. Roro vessel prices have fallen by even more. In fact, China now offers roro vessels at half the cost of what was offered in Spain only recently. But while these declines hit shipbuilding itself, Knud E Hansen is not experiencing pressure on fees. Know how is always worth a lot. In fact, it is rather a prerequisite of many orders. While the design cost may represent anything between 2 – 8 per cent of the total cost, a small reduction of the design fee is just marginal – and it can be fatal to the revenue

if plans have been drawn up by an inexperienced staff.

Due to the current environmental debate, Knud E Hansen A/S also finds itself involved in various projects with owners who wish to analyse energy consumption and environmental impact aspects of their operations.

"We have a better position now," says Finn, referring to the fact that many of the competitors have been acquired by conglomerates, yards and machinery makers. "Together with Deltamarin, we are the biggest independent naval architects", he says. And he definitely doesn't see Deltamarin as a competitor, but rather as a colleague and competitor. In fact, the intention was that this interview should have rather been a "round table" discussion with both companies, but to find a date that would be convenient for all parties proved to be impossible.

The new Stockholm Agreement

Discussing the matter of the EEDI design index, Finn sees the introduction of it as a new stimulus for consulting works – much like the A/AMAX and Stockholm Agreement were. Although clearly seeing the impossibility to compare a deep sea PCTC with an island ferry, he believes that there will eventually be segments of the index. This would make it possible to also compare short sea ferries with each other.

"There will be creative solutions", he says. "Just look at the shelter deckers of the past". New ferry designs will continue to meet current and future regulations.

However, asked whether the design index will prohibit ferries from making more than 25 knots in the future, there is a long pause of consideration. The reply, eventually, is: "No. There will always be some specific needs of speeds like that".

The company feels it has been connected with passenger ships for too long. Today, Knud E Hansen is very much into the offshore industry as well. The aircraft carrier has already been mentioned. In fact, the ferry, cruise and ro-ro industries currently only represent some 25-30 per cent of the company's work. But there are some similarities in the offshore industry: accommodation, safety and escape systems in particular. In fact, Knud E Hansen A/S has been involved in virtually everything but nuclear submarines.

The Asian competition

Asked the same controversial question as his colleague/competitor of Deltamarin about the export of know how to South East Asia, Finn Wollesen says blame should rather be put where blame is due: with the ship-owners. They often require tender documents to be sent to a range of shipyards, often including Asian yards. The intention is to put pressure on prices. And, of course, the shipyards there are able to pick up some ideas even if they don't obtain the orders.

While admitting that some yards will disappear, both in Europe and Asia, Finn believes that it will still take plenty of time before Asia has a real market shares in the passenger ship segment. After all, so much of the cost derives from supplies and interior fittings. However, there could be a break through

if cruise ships are ordered specifically for the Asian market. This would enable the building up of an infrastructure that may eventually cover also Western-style ships. Samsung is mentioned among the front-runners, as that company is so determined when it comes to learning the process.

With Korean salaries almost equalling European wages, there is no real advantage though. And Finn mentions the words "a ticking bomb" when describing the Chinese yard situation, elaborating on the current population structure. With just one kid in each family, so much pressure is put on them to reach a significant position. "A blue collar yard work does not represent anything close to such a thing", he says. Especially in the coastal regions, people are starting to get spoiled and demand the same lifestyle standard as in the West. "So then you have to recruit people from inland China, but that is like teaching stone-agers build high-tech..."

Another continent recently coming into focus for Knud E Hansen A/S is Africa, where the company is now deeply involved in the development of a passenger catamaran project for a lake in Rwanda. Those involved in the project are very enthusiastic indeed – not only about the ship project itself, but also about the country's ambitions.

Meeting the future

Extensive investments have been done in software and education. When recruiting young people, focus is put on business orientation more than design orientation. A new philosophy is spreading thanks to the new generation – and thanks to the different origins of the staff. Even so, the Knud E Hansen brand is still highly valuable thanks to the long history of the company.

Talking about LNG as a possible way forward, Finn is definitely among the believers. It will require some substantial logistical solutions also ashore, however there is no hesitation about the LNG propulsion future. Fuel cells may soon be used, too, however rather for other means than for propulsion power, he speculates.

"Ship owners are definitely becoming more environmental concerned", he continues. But then it is also a matter of whoever dares to be "first". There are seemingly many conservative ship owners, even if some are very progressive. Proven technology is always preferred. "There is nothing such as a new Kloster and a new PHOENIX today", he says with some regret. He also comments that too much is production- and budget driven. If there are any creative ideas appearing, they are rather rejected in order to avoid risk.

Knud E Hansen A/S has developed a catamaran project with asymmetric hulls. This design would in many ways be much more efficient than a monohull container vessel. Although it can clearly be demonstrated that there are advantages, no one dares to be the "first". ▶

Finn Wollesen followed in his father's footsteps and went to sea. However, quite soon, he rather decided to join the supply industry and worked for several years within HVAC, when he got in touch with several cruise projects. During the time his father worked as an officer on the NELLY DAN, a ship that served Antarctica. After him, the Wollesen Islands are named.



theme

- For a naval architect, the ordinary process is that there is a client contacting them to develop a project. However, Knud E Hansen A/S wants to apply an internal think-tank every now and then. The company was stunned by the fact that the only two oil recovery units in Denmark were positioned in a port that could be 24 hours from a site with an oil spill. And even when reaching the position of the accident, the oil recovery units cannot come close to shore. And when oil has reached the beach, one ton of oil will be removed together with 14 tons of sand, to be treated for 20 years... So, the company initiated the SWORC project, short for Shallow Water Oil Recovery Catamaran. The size of a container, one of

these units can be transported by road and reach any part of the Danish coast within four hours – if located strategically.

The next think-tank project will involve a cruise ship. Judging by what is being whispered in the corridors, it is a very promising project already with some new and unique design features. In a house decorated with so many ships of the past, the staff members in the project-rooms create the ships of the future. ■

Hull design.

