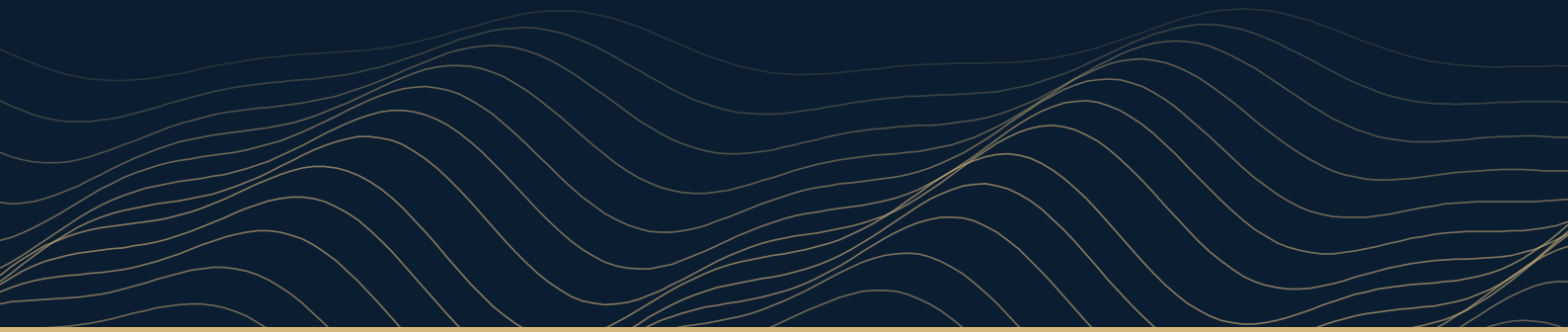


When a Region Decides to *Build Boats*

The story of how the UAE built something it was never supposed to inherit.





GULF CRAFT SHIPYARD

Before the first boat leaves a shipyard, there is usually very little to see.

A workshop is opening. Tools are being laid out. Engineers are checking drawings. Composite work continues somewhere behind a closed door. A supplier is delivering components. Someone is testing a system that will eventually disappear beneath a deck.

None of it looks particularly remarkable.

The finished vessel will be different.

Painted. Polished. Quietly expensive. Designed to make all the work that produced it almost invisible.

But a yacht is never only a yacht.

Behind the finished object sits an accumulation of skills, suppliers, engineering knowledge, manufacturing processes, specialist trades, logistics and relationships. Some of these can be purchased. Others have to be learned. Many take years to become reliable.

This is why boatbuilding has always had a geography.

The Mediterranean. Northern Europe. The great shipyards of Asia.

Certain places became associated with certain kinds of vessels because the knowledge required to build them had accumulated there over generations.

The interesting question, then, is not simply how a new region builds a boat.

It is how a new region builds the capability to build boats.

And that distinction changes the story.

01

The sea was already there

The UAE did not begin without a maritime culture.

Long before modern shipyards, there were dhows, fishing boats, pearling vessels and coastal traders. Navigation across the Gulf and the Indian Ocean was part of everyday economic life.

There was knowledge of the sea.

There was knowledge of boats.

But modern yacht manufacturing asks different questions.

01 *How do you work with advanced composites?*

02 *How do you integrate propulsion, electrical, hydraulic and navigation systems?*

03 *Where do specialist components come from?*

04 *Who installs them?*

05 *Who tests them?*

06 *Who understands the tolerances?*

07 *Who can repair them when they fail?*

08 *Who knows how the builder works?*

Traditional maritime knowledge provides a foundation.

Industrial boatbuilding requires an architecture.

The UAE had the first. *The second had to be built.*

02

The first boats are rarely the real beginning

1982



In 1982, Gulf Craft began manufacturing boats in the UAE.

The early products were modest compared with what would come later.

Industrial capability rarely arrives fully formed. It accumulates through repetition.

That is normal.

- A production decision becomes experience.
- Experience becomes process.
- Process becomes confidence.
- Confidence allows the next product to become more ambitious.
- *Then the next one.*

Over time, the scale changes. The engineering becomes more sophisticated. Markets expand beyond the domestic customer.

The manufacturer stops being a company learning how to build boats and starts becoming part of an international industry.

Something else changes too.

That transition is difficult to see while it is happening.

There is rarely a single morning when an industry announces that it has arrived. There are simply more capable people than there were before.

More suppliers.

More knowledge.

More ambitious projects.

More reasons to believe the next one is possible.



MAJESTY 175 · GULF CRAFT

03

Eventually, ambition needs a physical object

56.4_m
COMPOSITE SUPERYACHT

The Majesty 175 provided one.

At 56.4 metres, the composite superyacht represented a very different proposition from the boats produced in the UAE's earlier years.

Its significance was not simply its size.

It demonstrated that a yacht of international superyacht scale could be built in the UAE and offered to a global market.

The question was no longer theoretical.

A UAE shipyard was no longer asking whether it could build a large yacht.

The world could see the answer.

But there is a problem with using a yacht as evidence of an industry.

A yacht is unusually good at hiding the industry that produced it.

04

The invisible boat

Look closely at any sophisticated vessel and the visible object begins to dissolve into systems.

01 Composite structures.	02 Metals.	03 Propulsion.	04 Electrical systems.
05 Navigation.	06 Automation.	07 Hydraulics.	08 Climate control.
09 Glass.	10 Paint.	11 Joinery.	12 Upholstery.

Hundreds of specialist decisions.

Many made by different companies, different trades and different people.

The owner sees a finished yacht.

The shipyard sees an enormous coordination problem.

That difference matters.

Because the difficult part of industrial capability is not necessarily learning to manufacture one extraordinary object.

It is creating enough surrounding capability that extraordinary objects can be manufactured repeatedly.

That requires suppliers. And suppliers require demand.
Which brings the story somewhere more interesting.

05

An industry begins next door

The pattern is familiar.

None of these steps is particularly dramatic.

That is precisely why industrial ecosystems are so easy to misunderstand.

From outside, they appear to have always existed.

Inside, they are being assembled one relationship at a time.



At some point, the builder discovers something has changed.

It no longer needs to import every answer.

The answer is beginning to exist next door.

That is when geography starts becoming industrial capability.

06

Look beyond the yacht



ADSB SHIPYARD

The UAE's maritime development cannot be understood through superyachts alone.

ADSB
ABU DHABI SHIP BUILDING

EDGE
إيدج

ADSB, now part of EDGE, developed naval and commercial shipbuilding capability at a very different level of industrial complexity.

ASM Al Seer
Marine

Al Seer Marine expanded into advanced composites, boatbuilding and unmanned maritime systems.

ASM
AL SUWAIDI MARINE

Al Suwaidi Marine developed vessels across fishing, leisure and passenger applications.

The markets differ.

The technologies differ.

The customers differ.

Yet each contributes something to the same underlying body of knowledge: designing, manufacturing, integrating, operating and supporting vessels in the region.

A country does not develop maritime competence by building only one kind of boat.

It develops competence through exposure to many kinds of problems.

07

The companies that rarely appear in the photograph

There is another part of the industry that tends to disappear when the finished yacht is photographed.

The specialists.



Companies such as Exalto Emirates and AMIT operate within the broader network of propulsion, navigation, electronics, hydraulics, safety, automation, HVAC, coatings, interiors, engineering and technical services.

These companies are rarely the reason a yacht appears on the cover of a magazine.

They are part of the reason it works.

This is one of the peculiarities of industrial ecosystems.

The closer you get to the finished product, the less visible the network becomes.

Yet the network is where much of the capability resides.



A yacht owner sees one vessel.



A mature maritime industry sees hundreds of relationships.



280+

REGISTERED BUSINESSES

249

HECTARE MARITIME ZONE

DUBAI MARITIME CITY

08

Then geography starts to matter

Capability eventually needs somewhere to gather.

Dubai Maritime City is part of that evolution.

Shipyards sit alongside repair facilities, workshops, warehouses, marine services and technical businesses.

More than 280 registered businesses operate across its 249-hectare maritime zone.



The number is useful.

The proximity is more important.

When suppliers, engineers, workshops and operators are physically close to one another, knowledge travels differently.

A question can be answered
without a flight.

A problem can be examined
in person.

A component can be
modified.

A supplier can understand a builder's requirement more precisely because they have seen it before.

Industrial clusters are often described through their companies.
Their real value may lie in the distance between those companies.

09

Then something subtle changed



SUNREEF YACHTS · A LAUNCH

 **Sunreef Yachts**
LUXURY CATAMARAN MANUFACTURER

For years, the Gulf was principally a destination for European-built boats.

The direction of travel was familiar.

Boats were designed and manufactured elsewhere.

The Gulf bought them.

Then European manufacturers began looking at the region differently.

Sunreef Yachts established a major manufacturing facility in Ras Al Khaimah.

That decision carries significance beyond the facility itself.

An established manufacturer choosing to place production capacity in a new geography is making a judgement about the geography.

- | About infrastructure.
- | About labour.
- | About suppliers.
- | About logistics.
- | About whether complex products can be built reliably.

The arrival of international manufacturing is therefore not the beginning of the UAE's maritime story. It is a sign that earlier chapters have begun to matter.

10

The obvious answer is not the whole answer

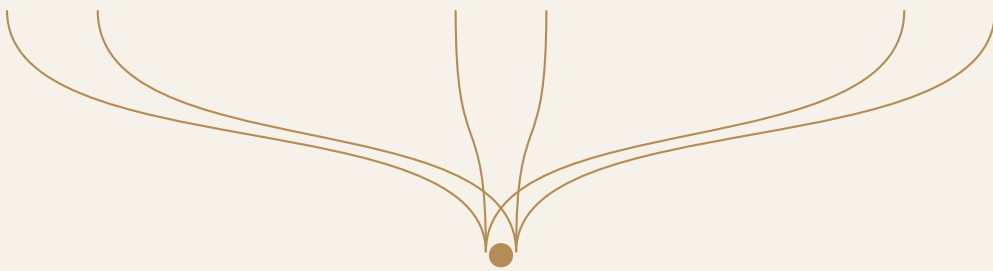
Ask why manufacturing is moving into the UAE and the first answer is often cost.

Cost matters.

But it does not explain enough.

A more useful word is convergence.

-
- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| 01
Industrial infrastructure. | 02
Global logistics. | 03
Access to capital. |
| 04
International connectivity. | 05
A diverse technical workforce. | 06
Proximity to growing maritime markets. |
-



And a willingness to build industrial capacity before every piece of future demand has already arrived.

None of these factors is unique. *Together, they become something different.*

Competitive advantage is sometimes less about possessing one extraordinary capability than about making many ordinary capabilities work together.

*That is harder to see.
It is also harder to reproduce.*

11

Now the policy has a name



The industrial ambition surrounding the UAE's manufacturing development is increasingly expressed through Make it in the Emirates.

By 2026, Ship & Maritime Manufacturing was among the strategic sectors represented at its fifth edition.

More than

146,000

visitors attended.

More than

1,200

exhibitors participated.

Cumulative industrial offtake opportunities
announced through the platform reached

AED 180 billion.

The numbers are substantial.

But the more interesting point is what sits underneath them.

Industrial policy becomes meaningful when it reinforces capabilities that companies can actually use.

In maritime manufacturing, the policy arrives after years of private-sector accumulation: builders, suppliers, engineers, workers, infrastructure and international investment.

It is not the beginning of the story. *It is becoming part of the framework around it.*

The direction is increasingly clear: create more of the value here rather than simply consuming the finished product here.

12

A company is visible.
An ecosystem is not.

Gulf Craft is a story.



ADSB is a story.



Al Seer Marine is a story.



Al Suwaidi Marine is a story.



Sunreef's investment is a story.



Exalto Emirates and AMIT are stories.



But the larger story sits between them.

A builder creates demand for a supplier.

A supplier creates a reason for a specialist to establish locally.

A specialist brings knowledge.

Knowledge attracts another investment.

Infrastructure makes the relationship easier.

International companies introduce new requirements and standards.

Industrial policy changes the economics of another decision.

Then another company arrives.
And another.

Eventually, the individual decisions begin to reinforce one another.

That is the moment when a collection of companies starts behaving like an ecosystem.

13

The most important change may be invisible

There was a time when the natural question was:

Can a sophisticated boat really be built in the UAE?

The existence of the question was understandable.

The UAE had maritime history, but modern yachtbuilding had to be constructed around it.

Today, the more interesting question is different.

Not whether the capability exists.

But what becomes possible when capability begins to compound.

-
- When the supplier already understands the builder.
 - When the engineer has seen the problem before.
 - When the specialist is nearby.
 - When the workforce has experience.
 - When infrastructure has density.
 - When international manufacturers are willing to invest.
 - When industrial policy begins reinforcing the direction in which companies are already moving.
-

At that point, the geography changes character.

It is no longer simply a market.

It becomes a place from which things can be made.

And in maritime manufacturing, that distinction is considerable.

The UAE is becoming a place where boats can be conceived, engineered, built, supported and exported.

The pioneers built the proof.
The ecosystem followed.
The world began to notice.

The next question is not how the UAE caught up.
It is what an ecosystem built from scratch chooses to build next.

Sometimes the clearest sign that an industry has arrived is that nobody needs to explain why it can exist there anymore.

COMPANIES, ENTITIES AND PLATFORMS IN THIS STORY

