

# *Super Yacht*

i n d u s t r y

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# Nomen Folding Cleat

## A Premium Product Is Born

According to Hoppenhaus, a good design features many aspects. "In yacht design, high quality, functionality and beauty are main design criteria. Good design should be singular and unmistakable. A creative designer is guided by the concrete needs and wishes of potential customers. There are designers who deliver poor or mediocre designs with the argument that the customer does not notice the subtleties anyway. That is an attitude that I absolutely reject. A good designer should be single-minded in following through on his own high demands and taste."

### Emphasising Design

"Boat design has a very long tradition. In former times, the look of a boat was largely decided by the boat builder. The designer basically only supplied raw data, such as a sail plan. The way a hatch was built, how the drainage worked or the design of a

fastener; it all depended on the shipyard's common standards. However, since a few years there is an unmistakable trend towards emphasising design. I am convinced that Wally was actually the real pioneer. Modern boat production is much more industrial than it used to be, which is not surprising. Today it is design, alongside price and sailing qualities, that decides the success."

### Industrial Designer

Hoppenhaus was originally a boat builder. He developed his skills and learnt his trade working for Dübbel & Jesse. He would never have been taken seriously in the trade without experience in boat building. There were only a very few industrial designers who designed boats in the early Nineties. When the young designer started at Dehler, he was a solitary case. His first job was, however, to design a motor caravan. Later he went to Judel/Vroljik in Bremerhaven. "Here I was able to collaborate in the design of yachts, which I found very exciting." Nevertheless, he was still not satisfied with his career as a designer. "I had the feeling that I was unable to get anything off the ground. My designs were frequently not implemented in accordance to what I had created on the drawing board. This was very frustrating. I soon decided it was time to do something on my own. I wanted to be my own master, to dip into my own pocket and invest. Of course it could not be a yacht right away, as this was way above my budget. But an improved cleat would surely be possible. A project in which I could reveal what I knew about design."

### Kalashnikovs

The production of the cleat did not run smoothly right away. "It took six long years before I launched it on the market. There was no end of hitches. I have since learnt to greatly admire people who set up a shipyard and manage all of the required logistics. When I started out, I made all the mistakes that could possibly be made and, above all, I placed my bets on the wrong horses; suppliers that were full of enthusiasm, but who could not meet my quality specifications. Instead of solving



Photo credit: Tom Krber / Sailing Journal

*Everybody in the boating industry knows who Axel Hoppenhaus is. The designer of the innovative Nomen folding cleat has a sharp eye for detail, especially for creative designs. "A yacht must be eye-catching and markedly different from its competitors. My folding cleat, it seems, is one of these value-added features and, of course, I am very pleased about this."*

problems, they repeatedly brought projects to the edge of failure. For instance, a foundry made some miscalculations and passed the project on, unbeknown to me, to subcontractors in Poland, because they were cheaper. The Polish subcontractors were left to finish the project, but they were unable to cope. When things came to a complete halt, all was confessed to me, but by then nothing could be done anymore. I had to cancel the order and travel to Poland myself to try and get hold of the casting moulds that had already been produced. But the Polish partners had never seen any money and refused to hand them over. They wanted me to pay for everything again, which, of course, I did not want to do. To top it all, the moulds were located in a military security tract, protected by soldiers with Kalashnikovs at the ready. I just kept my cool and returned home."

## Making a Name

All worked out well in the end, when the manager of a Hamburg based metalworking firm called the designer and offered to mill the cleat completely. This had not been possible before due to the costs involved, but meanwhile a lot of advances had been made in CNC technology. All of a sudden, it was possible to produce the cleat economically. Hoppenhaus did not leave the distribution to a big fitting manufacturer, as he wanted to stay independent. "I wanted to make a name for myself, which is nearly impossible when acting on the background. That is why I placed my hopes on direct distribution quite early on. Direct feedback is of great significance, as only direct contact with customers will enable a smooth cooperation. Right at the start, Lewmar came to me and offered to take on the worldwide marketing strategy. I was flattered and reckoned they might as well make an offer! Thereupon they performed a market study with the finding that the market was actually too small for them, and then they distanced themselves again. Perhaps they regret this decision today. Nevertheless, at this point the matter was already settled for me."



Photo credit: Anselm Gaupp



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## Sharp Profile

Today, Nomen distributes to thirty countries worldwide, including all the major sailing nations. "It is very easy to ship goods nowadays. There are no problems anymore, especially in Europe. Overseas, there is still a bit of work regarding customs and the costs are higher too.

I was quite angry when the first imitations of my cleat appeared, but with time I noticed that my sales continued to rise nonetheless. It is now clear that my patents are very







important, because there has not yet been an exact copy. The competition tries to approximate the original, but the premium product is still the Nomen cleat. The most important thing is the further development of the product. I began with three sizes made of aluminium, and later added a fourth size. I intend to launch a 500 mm cleat for large superyachts over 30 m in length this year. The first ones are going to Perini Navi in Italy. Work is still continuing on the long announced stainless steel version. Each cleat size is like a new product that comes with different investments in production and storage. New packaging and new brochures are needed as well, as is an effective marketing strategy. All of these aspects are a lot of fun."

## Awards

Success is the proof that Hoppenhaus is right. "Very deliberately, I proceed slowly and goal-oriented. You only have to look at the results of the Awards for the European Yachts of the Year. This year, three ships equipped with Nomen cleats won awards: the Dehler 44 and the X-55, both as standard, and the Elan 340 as an optional extra. With this product, I have an extremely sharp profile. At some point we will launch a completely new product, but I can not yet reveal what this will be, nor when it will be introduced on the market. But it will surely be spectacular!"

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