

## Saaremaa Estonia

What was once an expensive hobby for Varno Porovarde has become a going concern. Britmarine, the Estonian businessman's Tallinn-based boatyard, is six years old and has produced six luxury mahogany sport boats, each graceful vessel handcrafted by his small in-house team. "It has been an interesting journey," says Porovarde. "I am lucky to have engineers and woodworkers who put their heart and soul into every boat." His customers come primarily from Germany and Switzerland. "What we offer is unique as there is less and less handcrafting in western Europe," he says.

Estonia might not crop up on lists of the world's biggest boat-building nations but the country's small-scale shipyards and workshops are putting it firmly on the map. It is a nation with more than 3,700km of coastline along the Baltic Sea and 1,520 islands. The largest of these is Saaremaa, bigger than Luxembourg and with a long boat-building tradition; today the island's output accounts for 85 per cent of all boat-building in Estonia.

When Monocle visits, Edgar Kana is resting on the hull of a half-finished fibreglass fishing boat. He runs Lindvart boatyard with his son Kristjan. One of their most notable offerings is Linda 520, an elegant vintage-inspired recreation boat with a fibreglass hull and a smart teak finish. The Linda is a reinterpretation of a design by Artur Vakrom, Saaremaa's eminent pre-war boatmaker, who taught Edgar his craft. "Here on Saaremaa the boatyards are not competing," says Kristjan. "We make each other better because we can help each other with different jobs. That's why boat-building on the island is thriving."

The industry here experienced some bumps during the financial crisis but it weathered the storm and today the shipyards are taking on bigger orders and exploring new markets such as Germany, Spain and Italy. "Even though our sailing boats are made for the colder climate it is easy for us to make modifications," says Peeter Säask, CEO of Saare Paat. Located in Nasva, a small fishing village on Saaremaa, Saare Paat started as a joint venture with a Swedish firm building traditional wooden boats but today offers luxury sailing craft ranging from 38ft to 46ft (11.5 metres to 14 metres).

Elsewhere Saaremaa's newly opened Small Craft Competence Centre is home to a 60-metre-long towing tank and labs that test materials for use in extreme maritime climates. Its services are often used by the island's boatyards. "There has been a renewal of our boat-building traditions," says director Anni Hartikainen. "The centre is a real investment in innovation – and in our future." — *SZ*

- 01 Britmarine founder Varno Porovarde
- 02 Saare Paat boatyard
- 03 Fibreglass hull in the Lindvart boatyard
- 04 Towing tank at the Small Craft Competence Centre
- 05 Edgar Kana in the Lindvart workshop
- 06 Pair of Linda 520s at anchor



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### Estonia's boatyards

Eighty per cent of boats are made for export.

The industry employs about 350 people.

Saaremaa's small-craft production accounts for 90 per cent of the sector's net profit.

Saaremaa's Luksusjaht and Baltic Workboats are the top earners.



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