

THE CHANGING FACE OF MARINAS

All marinas have them. They are the very essence of a marina. However not all pontoons are created equal. We talk to Inland and Coastal Marina Systems about how pontoons can literally change the visible look and feel of a marina.

Pontoons are an essential, but often overlooked aspect of marinas. Here they are seen at Cameron House Marina, Loch Lomond, Scotland.



Marinas are constantly developing, moving with the times and looking for ways to attract new customers, improve sustainability and adapt to ever-changing lifestyle trends. Often overlooked in this process are the marina pontoons themselves and their ability to impact on the attractiveness of a marina as well as customer experience.

Safety, sustainability and aesthetics

Traditionally, marina pontoon decking has been made of wood, more specifically hardwood. Although well suited to the task, offering an attractive finish, wood can be very slippery when wet and thus rots, significantly increasing maintenance costs while decreasing the longevity of the marina system.

Inland and Coastal Marina Systems' GRC (glassfibre reinforced concrete) decking not only does not rot but has anti-slip properties. The colour and texture of the decking can be altered too, offering the classic hardwood timber yacht marina aesthetic or a lighter, brighter continental look. Concrete is also much denser, increasing pontoon weight and providing a safer, more stable platform.

"Combining the strength of concrete with the slenderness of timber, our timber effect GRC decking is the future for creating modern, sustainable marinas," says Oliver Shortall, MD at Inland and Coastal.

"As part of our sustainability effort, we always endeavour to work with the existing infrastructure as much as possible as well, making the most efficient use of time and resources. As we manufacture our own GRC, our pontoons, with a design life of 30 years, offer the lowest lifetime cost of any marina decking on the market."

Customer comfort

It is impossible to ignore that new boats are getting bigger and more voluminous. This increase in size results in an increase in the vessel's freeboard height (the distance between the deck and the waterline). In some marinas this means either having to berth stern in or navigating a large step down off the boat. But it does not have to be this way.

With the ability to produce pontoon floats to any dimensions, Inland and Coastal can produce marina pontoons with variable freeboard heights, ensuring customers have the most comfortable experience in the marina, with easy access and egress from their boats.

Scott Ferguson, the harbourmaster at Berwick Upon Tweed where a new timber effect GRC pontoon with 1m freeboard was recently installed, has received praise for visiting yachts and leisure craft owners: "The majority of yachtsmen say that it is one of the best pontoons they have ever moored on; stable, non-slip and a high freeboard so they do not have to jump down from their yachts on to the pontoon deck."

Cameron House Marina at Loch Lomond has terracotta GRC pontoons



These are light grey stipple effect GRC pontoons at Fowey



Timber effect GRC pontoon decking

Diversification

However, changes in participation in boating and watersports also bring about the need for lower freeboard pontoons too. Marinas are continually trying to diversify to attract more people on-site to use their tenants' services and facilities. This is the year for staycations, and with SUP and kayak sales going through the roof marinas have a unique opportunity to take advantage of this, creating 'marine leisure hubs', by providing participants with safe access to the water.

Inland and Coastal has years of experience designing and building durable, low freeboard, high residual buoyancy water access systems. Ideal for all forms of paddle sports, these stable pontoons have a watersports specific decking that offers anti-slip properties, perfect for inexperienced users.

This is especially important if the marina or its tenants are operating as a 'pay and play' facility, welcoming newcomers of all ages to the water where safety and building confidence are key.

Fit for the future

Arguably the most important component of marinas, a pontoon is really only noticed by those using it when it is not fit for purpose. To ensure its valuable on water facilities are fit for purpose now and in the future, a marina will need to evaluate many different external factors. The right pontoon system and configuration for an individual marina will vary depending on location, type of resident, visiting craft and predominant activities.

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