

VIKEN GROUP THE NEW WAVE



IN A POST-COVID MARKET, VIKEN GROUP IS TRANSFORMING THE WAY YACHTS AND CRUISE SHIPS ARE DESIGNED AND BUILT.

THE NEW WAVE

PROJECT MANAGED BY: JOE MAIN

Viken Group is made up of several companies, but the Group's main company is Tillberg Design of Sweden (TDoS). This firm was founded in 1964 by the industry pioneer Robert Tillberg. It became a famous name in interior design, working mainly on cruise ships as well as super yachts and ferries. TDoS thrived in that sector for 50-odd years. Then the pandemic hit, and the cruise lines had close to 0 revenue for more than one year.

“We realised we needed to adjust to a new normal and the future that followed,” says Stefan Nilsson, CEO of Viken Group as a whole. “We also realised we could not do it ourselves. We needed to look at our community within the marine industry.”

Nilsson quickly determined that his clients' priorities were health and safety, but also that they now had limited funds to invest over the years to come.

“They were in survival mode. That is when we started to think about creating a group of

companies,” Nilsson points out. “We founded the Viken Group, of which I am the CEO. Tillberg Design of Sweden became the main brand underneath it, and we looked at how we could strengthen our services while solving problems like health and safety by smart design. We continued adding a company of a technical nature, Thalia Marine based in Trieste, to help with Naval architecture, Surveying and inspections, Project management and the more technical aspects of design.” >>





It was a process that involved rigorous consultation with TDoS's target markets.

"We spoke to a lot of brokers, financial experts, and clients, including current and former executives in the cruise industry. We found almost everyone felt they were in need of someone who could take on the whole design process, particularly for new cruise ships," Nilsson recalls. "Today there are over ten specialist consultancy firms that all have separate scopes of work and contracts. Examples are that the client would have different companies doing interior and exterior design, signage, artwork, lighting design and the galley etcetera. So that is when we picked up the pace, making acquisitions and partnerships in our ambition to solve the problems our current and future clients have. Long-term, we should be able to provide everything between the shipyard and the client, and where we cannot, we have partners who can."

INSIDE AND OUT

By carefully acquiring and combining capabilities, Viken Group has become the only firm capable of providing both naval architecture and interior design for cruise ships and yachts. By acquiring a very well-known Milano-based yacht design company, Hot Lab, Viken Group can do this all the way down to 20-metre yachts. It is unique in being able to provide

that combination in-house, alongside an extensive network of partner companies, including ship management company Columbia Blue.

It has created a powerful tool for navigating the industry in a post-Covid environment, but the pandemic is not the only world crisis affecting the market.

"Nobody knows what will happen with Ukraine. The war there is horrible," Nilsson says. "We had partners directly affected, as Ukrainians and Russians made up a lot of their crew. What we have also seen over the last few months is the energy crisis, which directly affects the fuel crisis for ships. Then the recession comes, and it is difficult to say what to do. In the yacht industry, our target market will stay solvent, but it is difficult going straight from a pandemic into a world with war in Europe. We are riding the storm, so to speak."

At the same time, Viken Group's companies are taking steps to look after its own people who have been affected.

"Within the company, a lot of our staff are hurting on a personal level because they have friends and business partners from Ukraine," Nilsson says.

Human resources have always remained central to Viken Group's strategy. The Group has a strong HR team, with talent management programs spread across the Group's different design studios for cruise ships, yachts, exterior design, and R&D.

"Our managers are very present, and each person gets their own personal development plan, and that can go in very different ways," Nilsson says. "We have the ability to let staff swap company, so one employee can go from working on smaller yachts to bigger yachts and cruise ships. You can learn skills within the group, which is a selling point to employees."

When Nilsson helped to create the Viken Group, he did it with the goal of bringing together companies that could work together for their clients and employees, but he also wanted to do good beyond that. While there is little the company can do directly to drive sustainability, it has made a significant focus on environmental issues. This is why we say we are "Better together."

"We can influence clients and show them ways to be on top of that," Nilsson says. "The recent heat wave demonstrates how urgent it is to innovate and work on that."

Stefan Nilsson, CEO,
Viken Group.



THE TECHNICAL EDGE

Innovation continues to be a watchword for the Viken Group. Building on the plan established in 2020, Viken will continue to focus on the technical side of the industry through its subsidiary, Thalia Marine, with an increased focus on effective technical solutions from a sustainability point of view.

"We are diversifying and seeing that the need in the market is there already," Nilsson tells us. "We are also continuing to diversify through our other subsidiary, Hot Lab, a firm that works mainly on 20 to 80-metre yachts. They are working in a different space from the rest of the Group, but we can share resources and together we have a strong management structure to

support the team, focussing on excellent design and meeting the client's needs."

To help build that future, Nilsson is drawing on the best talent available.

"Besides the best company management in TDoS, Thalia and Hot Lab we also have a brilliant IT manager in the Group, an expert who tells me where to look, speaks to people within the industry and attends technical exhibitions like the one in Dubai," Nilsson says. "My job is to meet as many potential partners as possible, sometimes to say hello, sometimes to make an acquisition. Sometimes we will not talk for two years but then realise there is something we can work together on."

This growth into the technical side of the market is a major

part of Nilsson's plans for the Group's future. As well as the technical services the Group acquired in Italy with Thalia, Nilsson is also excited about making future acquisitions over the next couple of years in the technical field.

"On a longer-term basis we believe the way of designing and working, in general, will move in the direction of digitalisation with AI support," Nilsson says. "Artificial intelligence and augmented reality are becoming more relevant in their field. We are working to understand what we need via acquisition or partnerships. We always improve our way of working continuously. Digitalisation is not just doing CAD drawings. There is so much more in our future." ☺





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