

Definitely different



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Boat interiors provide hours of intense bar discussion, but there are often common themes – this month we've taken a look at a boat whose fit-out is certainly out of the ordinary

Wood divides opinion. For some people the inside of a narrowboat should be wood: they like the colour, the texture and the feel of it. But we've also met others who aren't so keen. We've reviewed some of their boats, too. They talk about not wanting to live in a wooden box. Some have even allowed the word 'coffin' to pass their lips.

The usual way of reducing the amount of wood in a boat is to paint the cabin sides and ceiling, and lay some kind of non-wood floor covering. But often the trim, such as the window and porthole surrounds are still visibly wooden.

But even that was too much for Glynis Smith, who wanted a boat built for herself and her husband, Michael. She'd had a wooden kitchen at home and taken against the colour of the wood as it aged. "I didn't want what I call yellow wood," she says. "Whether it's oak or ash, it all changes colour, and I don't like it!"

So, in collaboration with her boat builders, Aqua, Glynis came up with a scheme. Although the interior actually contains a lot of wood, there's no natural colour to be seen because every piece has been painted or stained. The result, combined with a modern design, is a strikingly different finish.

EXTERIOR

Dolly Blue is a 60-footer based on a Colecraft shell. And it's recognisably a Colecraft thanks to its bow. There are finger-grips down the handrails and detailing such as scrolls on the cants. As you'd expect from such a well known and highly regarded builder, the steelwork looks excellent.

This is a semi-cruiser, where the cruiser stern deck is partially enclosed by lockers. It's both practical and attractive, providing plenty of space for crew, lots of storage, and a bit more protection than you'd get on a full cruiser stern.

One of the lockers on the stern deck contains the gas bottles, which makes it far easier to lift them in and out compared with a locker in the nose where you have to stand on the bow. In this boat, the bow locker is purely for storage and there's access from the well deck. The well deck itself also has built in lockers for storage and has somewhere to sit.

The trim is all chrome finish. The Wesley windows are double glazed and have a built-in thermal break in the aluminium frame. This means they should be much less liable to have condensation forming on the frames.

All Aqua boats are sandblasted before painting to provide a really good smooth finish, then they're sprayed with two-pack epoxy paint. It's no surprise that *Dolly Blue* is blue – and quite a traditional dark blue at that. But there are indications of the contemporary look you'll find inside: the coach lines and roof are a non-traditional and rather bright powder blue (one of Glynis's favourite colours) and the bow flashes have a modern striking design.

LAYOUT AND FIT-OUT

This is a reverse layout boat so the galley is at the stern, followed by a versatile dinette and then the saloon. A walk-through shower room is further forward, with the cabin at the bow.

It's the fit-out where this boat departs from the norm. There isn't an inch of

PHOTO: Courtesy of Aqua Narrowboats

Dolly Blue

Circa £150,000

LENGTH:	60ft
STYLE:	Semi-cruiser
BERTHS:	4
LAYOUT:	Reverse
POWER:	Beta 43hp

THE BOAT TEST

◀ wood colour showing anywhere – and yet there's still lots of attractive wood texture.

The ash panels above the gunwales are painted in an eggshell finish, while those below are stained. The colour is very similar, yet subtly different; in both cases the grain of the wood shows through. All the oak trim is stained in a soft and attractive grey, again allowing the wood grain to show through. Multiple test sheets were needed to find exactly the right level of coverage.

Justin Hudson-Oldroyd from Aqua Narrowboats says this finish added a great deal of time to the build.

'The interior design is contemporary, verging on minimalist but also very comfortable and appealing, and the colours work well'



"Normally, we'd paint the panels, fit the trim, then varnish it, he says. "But we couldn't risk the grey stain bleeding into the white. So all the trim was made and fitted, then taken back out of the boat to be stained before being refitted when they were dry." It means each piece of trim has been fitted at least twice.

The floor is an engineered and treated oak by Kahrs. The colour matches

beautifully and the wide boards provide a sense of space.

The interior design is all the work of Glynis – and she's done a great job. The colours all work well together and the boat is lifted by a mixture of textures and surfaces. It's contemporary, verging on the minimalist, but also very comfortable and appealing.



The dinette's attractive (note the curved table corners) and it's cleverer than it looks

Galley has a fresh sleek look and there's a great deal built into it



GALLEY

'Sleek' would be a good word to describe this galley. It's glossy and sensuously curvy, but still practical. For a start, the steps which lead down from the rear deck all have lifting treads for storage and there are cupboards either side. One is full height and heated, while the other contains the electrics.

In the galley proper, there's so much going on it's hard to know where to look first, so let's start at the top and work down. There are single high-level cupboards either side, with lights above and coloured glass doors, made bespoke

to fit. One houses a microwave. The sparkly black granite worktops catch the eye, and the sink doesn't detract from them because it's black and so it virtually disappears. It's made from a composite material by Franke. On the opposite side, there's a linear, frameless black glass four-burner hob by CDA.

The cupboard doors have a gloss finish and a gentle pale blue colour. Glynis was keen on the sleek look, so there are no door handles; instead, there's a finger-grip along the top of each door. Behind the doors, there's plenty of storage, but also a full-size 240-volt fridge

on one side, and a full-size freezer on the other. The oven is also a full-size Belling.

The L-shaped run of units has curves rather than sharp corners. Glynis is a keen cook, so the big corner cupboard has been provided with shelves which offer a huge amount of storage for ingredients. On the other side of the boat, curved open shelves match the shape of the tapering worktop above.

There are LED lights in the kickboards, and there's a wine store set into the floor. With its lid being made from a piece of glass and little LED lights inside, it adds a touch of glamour.

THE OWNERS

GLYNIS AND MICHAEL SMITH have contrasting boating histories. Michael used to be a surgeon, and then joined the Royal Navy as a doctor, serving for six years, which included spells at sea. Before the big ships, he had a river cruiser. Glynis, by contrast, had no boating experience at all. She had a career as a hospital theatre sister, before working for a pharmaceutical company.

The couple retired the first time around some 20 years ago and converted a barn to live in.

Some of the finance came from a legacy from Michael's Aunt Dolly, so they called it Dolly Barn. Together they transformed the land around the barn from a couple of acres of scrub into spectacular gardens which were opened to the public under the National Garden Scheme.

When the couple retired again and moved from the barn, they called their new home Dolly House. So it was only natural that their boat should also have Dolly in the name, so *Dolly Blue* it is.

DINETTE

We're used to dinettes that convert into a guest bed, but this one is even more versatile than most. The benches each house a pull-out box which, with the addition of a cushion, provide additional seating. And under the table there's a set of runners that pull out and support an extra section (stored in the plinth).

Together they mean this table can comfortably seat six, and that's important when you like entertaining as much as Glynis and Michael do. And when the table is dropped down to convert to a bed, the pull-out sections



Everything's hidden away in the saloon

SHOWER ROOM

The sleek, stylish look continues in the shower room where there's a 900mm quadrant shower lined with acrylic. This has a slight sparkliness to it, although Glynis now thinks it could afford to be a little less subtle.

A smart oval basin sits on a granite worktop, with storage underneath. Again, there are no door handles on the cupboards, just a finger-grip along the top edge. The soft grey colour continues.

The toilet is a macerating unit by Jabsco, with the holding tank under the bed in the cabin.

CABIN

The bed is set across the boat, with the simplest form of infill: a flip-down hinged board. It means it's very easy to make up, without the need to push or pull. Either side of the bed there are large, spacious wardrobes with bronze mirrored doors. Again there are no handles sticking out, just little recesses.

The side of each wardrobe has a large, spacious cubby hole at the head of the bed for a book or glass. Above, there are a couple of high-level cupboards with reading lights underneath.

Additional storage includes a corner cupboard and the space under the broad steps up to the well deck. The treads lift, to reveal a large space. There's another stainless steel radiator in this room, too.



TECHNICAL

Technically, this boat is fairly straightforward. It's powered by a Beta 43 which is fitted with a hospital silencer. There's also a 75kgf Vetus electric bow thruster.

Electrical power comes from four 110Ah domestic batteries (and there's one for the engine). There's a Victron 3kW Multiplus inverter charger and a shoreline point at both the bow and stern.

Heating (in addition to the diesel stove) is from a Webasto diesel boiler. ▶

can also be used to make it into a super king size. What's more, if you need extra seating in the saloon, the backrest from the dinette can be removed.

There are glazed side hatches on both sides of the dinette, and there are ceiling lights over the table. These were sourced by Glynis, but had to be adapted by Aqua to run on 12 volts, and had to be trimmed to shape, to match the curve of the ceiling. There are also under-gunwale LEDs in the dinette and saloon. These can be controlled by an app on a smartphone. There's also a very stylish stainless steel designer radiator that's almost two metres long.

SALOON

Glynis and Michael like the minimalist look, so it was important not to have too many things on show in the saloon. So

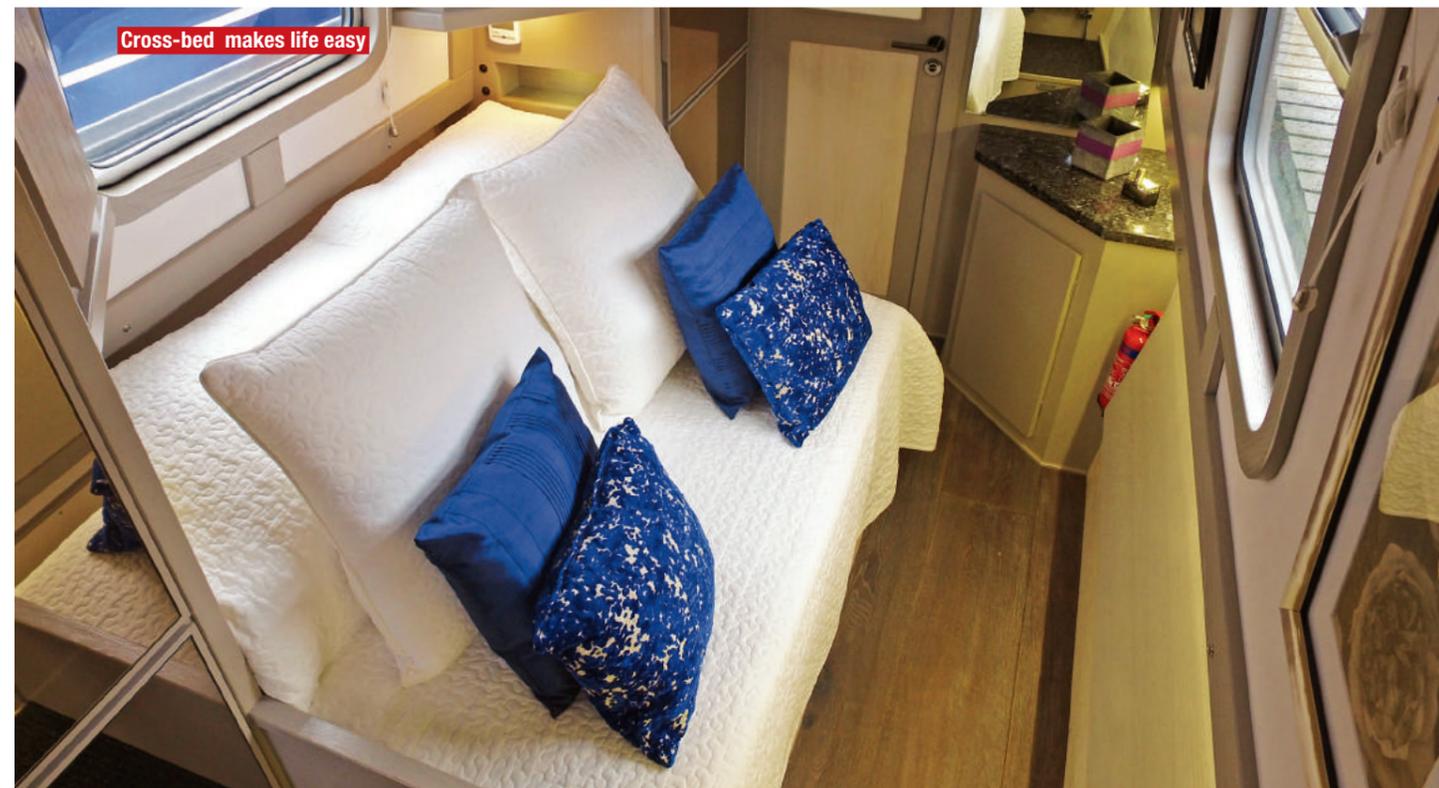


Too subtle? We don't think so

there are two cleverly made cupboard units, one under the gunwale on one side, the other on the bulkhead next to the stove. Their square doors are made of glass in contrasting colours (the darker ones are actually bronze mirror that's been sandblasted). One door hides a small flat screen TV, and one of Aqua's joiners has made a little wooden wedge to stop the door swinging about.

The stove is diesel fired Lockgate-Refleks, sitting on a granite hearth with glass mosaic tiles behind. On the bulkhead above there's a large mirror, but being bronze, it looks fairly muted and doesn't overpower the room.

There are some neat little cube wall lights by the Italian firm, Quick Marine Lighting, too, and Aqua has adapted them so they, handily, each have their own switch.



Cross-bed makes life easy

AQUA NARROWBOATS

AQUA IS BASED at Mercia Marina in Derbyshire and boat building is just part of the business. They run a successful hire fleet which operated at more than 90 percent occupancy during last season. All of the hire boats are built by Aqua and they're all sponsored. The owner pays for the build, takes a proportion of the rental income for two or three

years and then has the boat for themselves. The company also does a lot of maintenance and servicing work on boats and has Mercia's dry dock on site. Three or four new boats are built each year, which always includes one new hire boat.

Aqua has expanded significantly since Justin Hudson-Oldroyd built the very first hire boat

himself. He now employs two engineers, three joiners and two people (including his wife, Jane) in the office. There's also a team of part-time staff who turn around the hire boats. More developments are on the cards in the shape of an extension to the office to give a proper reception for hire customers, and a meeting room for boat-building clients.

ON THE WATER

Glynis and Michael enjoy having friends on board, so the semi-cruiser stern deck suits their needs very well. Not only is there enough room for several crew, but the lockers give them somewhere to sit.

The Morse control is on a column at the end of one of the lockers so it's reasonably comfortable for the helmsman, although it's a bit lower than it would be in a semi-trad or trad. The engine panel is inside the boat, so the dials aren't immediately visible.

We've always liked the way Colecraft shells handle but, for once, we were hamstrung on the day of the test when one of the innumerable winter storms suddenly swooped in and thoroughly scuppered our test cruise plans (not to mention our external photography...); but Glynis and Michael assure us this boat is no exception to the usual pleasant Colecraft handling.

CONCLUSION

You have to admire owners who have the vision to do something a bit different in their boat – and a builder who is prepared to go along with them and bring it to reality.

The idea of a boat without any wood showing won't be to everyone's taste. But it really works. That's in no small part to the clarity of the colour scheme Glynis has come up with. Everything matches without being the same colour, and there are numerous different textures to appreciate, from wood grain to glass, granite to stainless steel. And while you could say the design is minimalist, it's also welcoming and comfortable.

Of course, all this comes at a price and Justin Hudson-Oldroyd from Aqua says the extra work involved means that if you wanted a boat such as this it would cost around £150,000. But that's not

unreasonable. It's a boat on a good shell and with a high quality fit-out that's been done with real care and attention.

And if you want to see what the wood-free interior looks like in real life, then the Crick Boat Show will be the place to head for because *Dolly Blue* will be on show there. **CB**

Verdict:
'Well made and laid-out, it's good to see something different'

DESIGN AND DECOR

■ Hob: CDA HVG93BL
cda.eu £395

■ Stove: Lockgate-Refleks in stainless steel
lockgate.com
£1,160

■ Wall lights: QB Swivel
quickmarinelighting.com £150

■ Radiator: Aeon Arat aeon.uk.com £1735

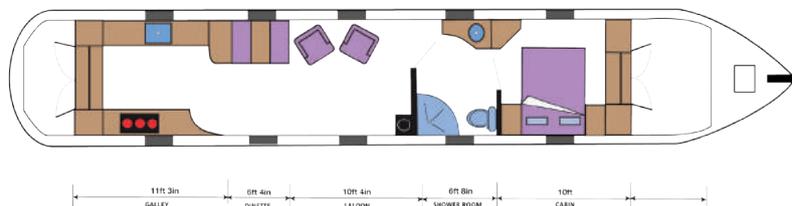
All prices are approximate and may depend on supplier and any discounts obtained



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Dolly Blue 60ft

c£150,000



LENGTH: 60ft
BEAM: 6ft 10in
SHELL: Colecraft
STYLE: Cruiser
LAYOUT: Reverse
FIT-OUT: Painted ash and oak
ENGINE: Beta 43
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betamarine.co.uk



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