

Retro Fitting - Replacing Hatches a Good Way to Increase Value

Acknowledgment: original article written by Mike Rose, independent marine journalist (mrpr@xtra.co.nz), and published in the Boating New Zealand magazine, XXX08.

Replacing damaged or worn-out hatches is becoming an increasingly popular way of refreshing an older boat or adding value to a relatively new one, according to Culē Hatches managing director, Clive Brown.

“Replacing a hatch is a relatively easy job for an owner with basic DIY skills,” he says. “The tools and equipment needed are pretty standard and will be found in most onboard toolboxes. No specialist skills are required, just normal care and attention to detail.”

Brown says the key to successful hatch replacement is to accurately measure the existing hatch so that its replacement can be made to the exact same size. “This eliminates the need to reshape the deck, cut new holes or rebuild existing ones. If we get the correct measurements, we can build a modern replacement hatch that will easily slot into the existing space. “Then all the owner has to do is remove the existing hatch and slot in the new one.”

Brown says there are a number of reasons why people want to replace existing hatches. “Many older Kiwi boats have hatches that are 10, 20 or even more years old. These are obviously getting past their best. They often leak, cannot be locked properly and are difficult to use. “They are not easy to repair as many of the original brands are often no longer in production and parts are almost impossible to find.”

Some older style hatches also do not provide the privacy those in the cabins or heads expect. “This is especially a problem on boats where people like to sunbathe on the foredeck and around the hatches. “We are seeing an increasing number of owners replace otherwise reasonable hatches with ones that have darker glass and therefore give better privacy.”

Brown says appearance is another reason for replacing an older hatch. “The modern look is for low profile hatches, especially those like ours, that are made with top quality European acrylic that is expected to remain in top condition and looking good for 15 years or more.

Replacing an Existing Hatch: a Step by Step Guide:

Guidance by Clive Brown at Culē Hatches

www.culehatches.com

Step 1:

Measure the exact dimensions of the existing hatch and then give these to the specialist custom hatch manufacturer, Culē Hatches (clive@culehatches.com)

Step 2:

Discuss with Culē Hatches technical director, Clive Brown, the type and style of the replacement hatch, any special requirements as to stays, acrylic colour and thickness, hatch colour, shape etc

Step 3:

Once the new replacement hatch has arrived, begin to remove the existing hatch. This is one of the trickiest parts of the job and great care should be taken, especially when removing the lower frame of the existing hatch. Begin by removing the screws securing the existing hatch in place.

Step 4:

Build a wooden “bridge” over the corner of the old hatch frame. Use masking tape around the outside of the existing hatch and put carpet, cardboard or something similar under the feet of the bridge to protect the deck. Place another piece of wood on the inside of the same corner of the hatch. Ensure that it only covers the hatch frame, not any part of the surrounding deck.

Step 5:

Place a G clamp over both the bridge and the piece of wood inside the hatch and slowly tighten. This should start to lift the hatch frame from the surrounding deck.

Step 6:

Once there is a gap of a few millimetres between the hatch frame and the deck, carefully cut through the old sealant with a sharp thin-bladed knife (a Swiss army knife works well).

Step 7:

When the first hatch corner is completely clear of the deck, hold it open with a chisel or two and repeat the process at an adjacent corner until the old hatch can be lifted clear of the deck.

Step 8:

Completely remove the existing sealant and fill the old screw holes.

Step 9:

Ensure the new hatch will fit properly by lowering it into place. Open the hatch and mark the position of the fastening holes through the lower frame. Remove the hatch.

Step 10:

Drill the new holes for attaching the hatch. These will need to accommodate the recommend through-bolts for the hinges and self-tapping screws for the frame.

Step 11:

Generously apply sealant around the areas of the frame that will be in contact with the deck and to both sides of the fastening holes.

Step 12:

Fit the frame to the deck and fasten using the bolts and screws as recommended by the hatch manufacturer. A small amount of sealant should seep out between the hatch frame and the deck. Carefully remove this with a clean cloth.

Tools & equipment required:

- Measuring tape
- Masking tape
- Cardboard or carpet
- Timber
- Thin, sharp knife
- Chisels
- G Clamp
- Suitable sealant & caulking gun
- Cordless drill or screwdriver
- Hammer
- Cloth rags