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ISSUE 306



# How Dorota launched her own houseboat adventure

A chat with a friend who makes full-size boats in Hamburg, Germany, led this miniaturist to wanting to take on the challenge of making one in miniature

BY DEB WEISSER

A friend of ours works for a company that produces boats and yachts," Dorota Mateusiak explains. "When we spoke with him some time ago he told us about their new line of houseboats. That's when I realised it would be a great idea to make one in miniature. It's a house and a boat, all in one! How clever!"

Not only could they build a miniature boat but a fully equipped miniature house, complete with working lamps, furniture, and outfitted kitchen. Ecomarine-inspired sleek European styling would create design and construction challenges since every part of its construction was made by hand without ready-made hardware and components, but Dorota was up to the challenge.

Made from wood, polystyrene, Plexiglas, and aluminium, the houseboat measures almost three and a quarter feet long and weighs twenty-six pounds (11.7 kilos)! From stern to bow, and with the help of her husband, it took three months to complete.

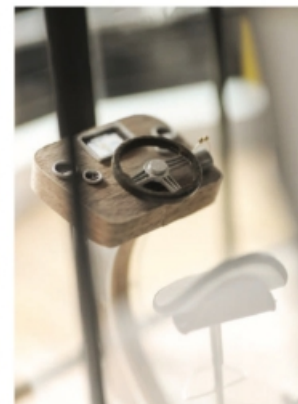
In order to build this custom structure, Dorota began by designing her Sea Lodge using CorelDraw software. The wooden superstructure was cut from three sheets of 10mm plywood in which holes were drilled for electrical wiring in the floor, walls, and roof. Then the plywood pieces were carefully glued together. Once the superstructure pieces dried, Dorota could begin detailing the exterior and interior.

She created rich wood paneling using 9mm wide planks and applied wood stain and varnish. The window frames were crafted from polystyrene sheets. After sanding them smooth, Dorota used an airbrush to paint the frames with primer and graphite paint.

The floor and ceiling were made from 2mm wood veneer. Areas she chose not to panel were painted bright

white, which would reflect her carefully placed lighting beautifully.

To egress the interior, Dorota added sliding doors at the stern that leads out onto the stern deck and twin bi-fold doors on the bow that lead out onto a large sun deck enclosed with railing. "I made the doors from polystyrene, and the tiny hinges for the bi-fold doors were made from brass sheeting and



**Left:** A front view of the houseboat showing the interior.

**Top:** A side view of the houseboat showcasing the beautiful wood paneling and shiny railings.

**Above:** The sliding doors open enough to look inside the cabin. Inside there is enough room to comfortably entertain guests and stairs that lead down to the bedroom.

**Above right:** A peek inside showing the captain's seat and the boat controls.

wire," she points out. "The door tracks were also made of polystyrene. In the rear of the boat, I used wood and polystyrene to build a set of stairs up onto the roof."

Topside serves as an observation and sun deck, and as a place to mount the lodge's solar panels. The railings were made from 5mm diameter aluminium tubes and micro stainless steel wires.

Because the Sea Lodge is powered by the sun, Dorota cut miniature screens from black polystyrene sheets in two sizes and installed them behind the railings. White master head lights on the bow and stern and red port and green starboard lights lend the Sea Lodge an authentic look in the dark.

Dorota also installed lighting over the kitchen counter, two wall lamps over the bed, and recessed ceiling



## HOUSE (BOAT) PROUD



**Top:** The topside of the houseboat is equipped with solar panels and also serves as an observation deck.

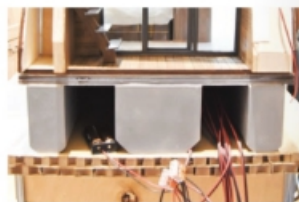
**Top right:** The underside of the boat was the most difficult for Dorota to complete.

**Above:** Inside is a handmade glass table with four chairs for fine dining on the water and a modern style white leather couch that Dorota made from a purse.

**Left:** Making the black kitchen cabinets with a heat gun was no easy task, but Dorota managed to execute them with precision.

**Bottom left:** The beginning of the build showing the houseboat framing being assembled.

**Above right:** All of the electrical wires were strategically hidden throughout the boat so this beauty is just as remarkable in the day as it is in the night.



lights strategically placed throughout the living space.

Of course no Sea Lodge is complete without furnishings. In the bedroom Dorota built a wooden wardrobe and wooden bed, complete with custom linens. A simple black and white seascape photo hangs over the bed. The living room is furnished with a white faux leather couch made from a handbag, and a wood and glass table with four chairs will seat guests comfortably whether in or out of port.

The galley contains black cabinets fashioned from polystyrene, and Dorota used a heat gun to give it a rounded front. The butcher block-style countertop is handmade from wood.

The most difficult part of the pro-



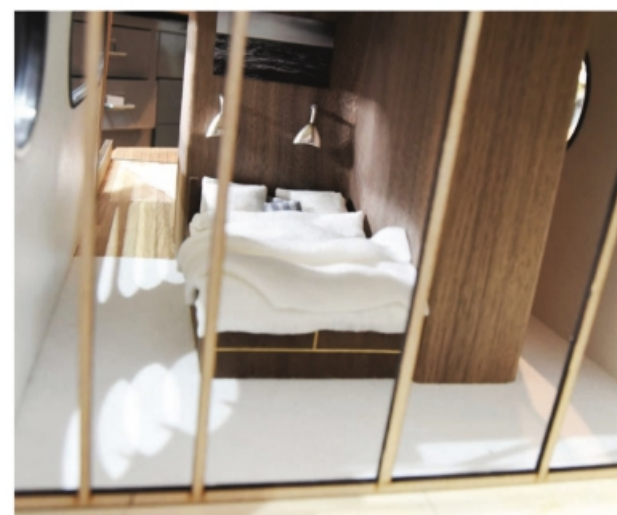
**Above and right:** The name of the vessel is etched in glass on the door. The bedroom has wood panelling and working lights.

ject was constructing the three floats on which the Sea Lodge would float. "I made them from wood and polystyrene sheets, which took an entire week to make," Dorota recalls. There are two side floats and a centre float. I had to putty and sand them hundreds of times to create the perfect finish one would expect to see on the real thing. Then I used an airbrush to prime and paint them with graphite paint. The front and side spoilers, because of their awkward shapes, took me almost three weeks to make. By this time I was really beginning to hate this model," Dorota laughs.

"I painted the spoilers with grey primer and paint in the dead of winter, at night in zero degrees, out on our balcony. Because it was also snowing, we fastened plastic film from floor to ceiling to keep the model dry. We had to drag out our photo light stands and all our desk lamps to have enough light to work by. I'm sure we looked very suspicious from the outside! It was miserable, but we laugh about it now!"

With winter passed and spring in the air, it's time to stock the galley with food before weighing anchor. So what

## HOUSE (BOAT) PROUD



if the weather acts up, if you misread the charts, the anchor drags, or the depth finder's on the blink? You're safely onboard Dorota's Sea Lodge and all is well, safely ashore.

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