

## BEDDING TRENDS

Creative and comfortable onboard berths. **P2**

## ZIPPERS

A distraction for even the most seasoned fabricators. **P12**

## FABRICATION TOOLS

Innovations in handheld marine fabrication tools. **P20**

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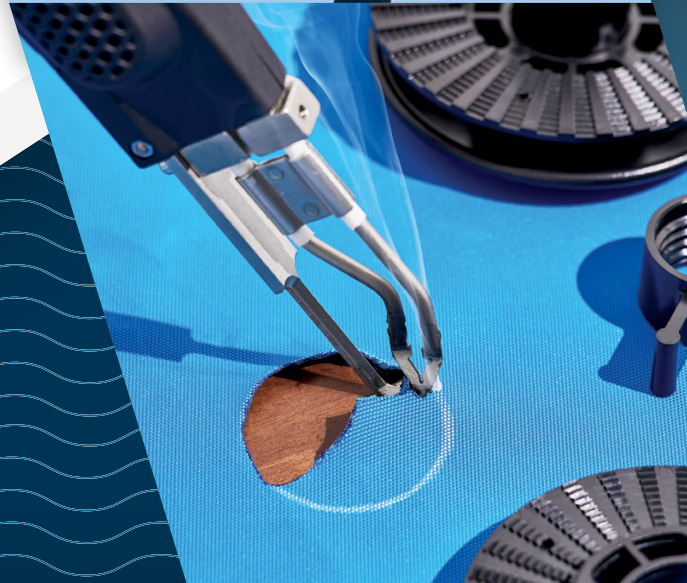
# Marine Fabricator

SPECIAL EDITION



## 2025 TIPS & TRENDS

*A special supplement filled with tips and ideas related to fabrics, hardware and findings, and tools and equipment.*







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# 2025 TIPS & TRENDS Marine Fabricator

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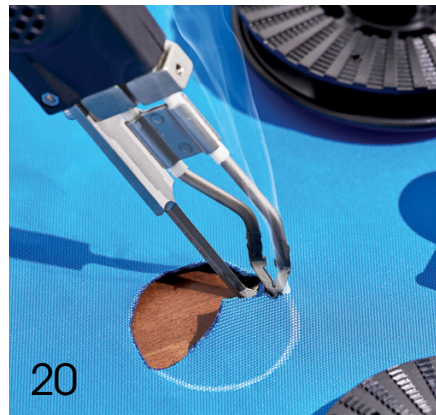
Innovations in handheld marine fabrication tools make tasks easier on the body and improve efficiency.

by Kelly Hartog



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Products that are changing the industry.







## Bedding Trends

✔ > Clients are increasingly interested in large, bold prints—according to Krishna Plauche, who used these coral and nautical rope patterned fabrics for recent Onboard Interiors projects. Photos: Onboard Interiors.



## Bedding buffs know their stuff(ing)

Boat owners want a good night's sleep on the water, and fabricators are responding with creative and comfortable onboard berths.

by Michelle Miron

As consumers increasingly recognize the impact of good sleep on physical and mental health, they're paying more attention to the quality and comfort of their sleep environments. Some fabricators say that demand is spilling over into the marine market, where many clients are seeking custom foam mattresses—and specially tailored custom bedding—that make their onboard berths closer to those they enjoy at home.

### Customizing client mattresses

Many clients renovating their boats want replacement mattresses that offer significant improvements in

comfort. For some, that means firmer support; others prefer the cushioning that can come from products such as memory foam.

To address those varied requests, bedding fabricators need a solid knowledge of which products on the market will produce the best results for their clients. And they often must be skilled in achieving those results by cutting, sandwiching and gluing different grades and thicknesses of foam.

They also need spatial know-how to tailor products around obstacles and odd angles. In some cases, fabricators must know how to hinge mattresses to allow for underside storage or ease of installation.





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## Bedding Trends

“Gray is still trending because it’s so popular in residential design.”

Krisha Plauché, Onboard Interiors & Hood Canvas LLC

To help convey possibilities to clients, Krisha Plauché, owner and principal designer at Onboard Interiors & Hood Canvas LLC in Marblehead, Mass., put together an entire sample bed she can bring to boat shows or vessels. She also asks myriad questions to determine exactly what clients want.

“We ask what they sleep on at home, and if they want to recreate that, we can do the research and get as close as possible,” she explains. “Latex is our ‘princess’ foam if someone wants the crème de la crème.”



➤ Designer of these onboard bedding and seating upholstery projects, Katie Bradford has advised clients to choose patterns that aren’t too large or busy, since they can easily overwhelm small, confined spaces. Photos: Custom Marine Canvas.



Other fabricators have followed similar processes, asking clients to try out various foam samples so they understand the differences.

Katie Bradford, retired owner of Custom Marine Canvas in Groton, Conn., prefers foams with a minimum density of 2.6 pounds and recommends avoiding memory foam because it can harden in cold settings. She often used foam supplier B&M Upholstery Supply LLC of Lebanon, Conn.

Drew Hall, operating partner at Seafarer Canvas & Interiors in Norwalk, Conn., favors memory foam, ultra-mid foam and other varieties, and says it’s important to use the right foam saws, tools, templates and cutting angles during construction.

Using mattress-in-a-box products can be as effective as custom-gluing foam mattresses, according to Jeff Newkirk, MFC, owner of Precision Custom Canvas Inc. in St. Catharines, Ont., Canada.

“For fabricators who don’t have the space or don’t want to get into gluing or laminating, so many mattress-in-a-box companies make 100% foam mattresses at excellent rates,” Newkirk says. “A quick cheat is to buy one that has the height and foam makeup that matches the project, then cut it down and shape it to fit using a foam saw. That allows clients to go to the store and test the product, so they take on the responsibility for selecting the right grade and firmness.”

Newkirk notes that some clients do request residential-style quilted mattresses for their boats, in which case, he subcontracts with other vendors who have special sewing-machine attachments for the job.

### Customizing boat bedding

In many cases, clients already own satisfactory mattresses but want specially tailored sheets, blankets,





▲ Created by Jeff Newkirk for the owners of a Bruckmann Abaco 40 yacht, this bold bedding won an Award of Excellence in the 2024 Marine Fabrication Excellence Awards and an Outstanding Achievement Award in the Advanced Textile Association-sponsored 2024 International Achievement Awards. Photo: Precision Custom Canvas.



◀ Drew Hall designed this custom-fitted project in crisp blues, grays and whites, which he says are trending over more traditional browns, tans and greens in marine projects. Photo: Seafarer Canvas.





**“Boats are small spaces, not massive bedrooms where you can have unique prints and things. It’s not focal point; it’s function.”**

Jeff Newkirk, Precision Custom Canvas Inc.

### PRO BEDDING TECHNIQUES

Katie Bradford, retired owner of Custom Marine Canvas in Groton, Conn., suggests the following:

- For sheets, add enough seam allowance at the corners to make true French seams. For inside corners, try inserting triangular gussets. The top of the triangle never looks nice, so make a true boxing for that area. Make 6-inch hook-and-loop straps and sew them to the bottoms of cushions to hold inside corners taut.
- Elastic breaks down before sheets, so rather than serging elastic on, put it in a casing so it can be replaced. For casing, use a 1/2-inch double turn for 3/8-inch elastic. If you fold the casing over the elastic, you’ll catch it while sewing. Custom Marine Canvas sews a hard cord in there so they feel it and don’t catch it. Sew the elastic to the cord and use the cord to messenger the elastic through the casing.
- For mattress pads, remove boxing first. Pin the mattress pad out flat and trace the cushion on it. Sew the outline of the cushion, then add a second row of stitching about an inch outside that. Cut between the two rows. Sew the boxing back into the mattress pad and bind the seam allowance.
- Have nice labels made (Bradford used Dutch Label Co.) showing which berth the bedding goes to.
- Household sewing machines can work better than industrial machines to prevent bedding fabrics from bunching.

Jeff Newkirk, MFC, owner of Precision Custom Canvas Inc. in St. Catharines, Ont., Canada, recommends, “When tailoring store-bought sheets, don’t try to reuse the elastic. Cut it away, make adjustments then sew new elastic in.”

Drew Hall, operating partner at Seafarer Canvas & Interiors in Norwalk, Conn., says, “Always over-measure, over-take pictures and over-try things out to see what works for you. Albany Foam and Supply Inc. has a zillion different foam options for mattresses and can walk you through things.”

Krishna Plauché, owner and principal designer at Onboard Interiors & Hood Canvas LLC in Marblehead, Mass., suggests fabricators “use a right angle to give you the bevel. We do that even for sheets to account for the way they’ll fit.”

comforters, pillows and/or bedspreads for their berths. All can be custom-made from scratch, but many fabricators say the best method is often to start with a store-bought bedding set.

“We’ll go through a couple questions in terms of what they want, thread counts and color specs, then I’ll either go purchase a set or send them out to purchase one,” says Newkirk. “I’ll essentially tailor them to fit the bunks.”

Bradford notes that many of her customers approached her with a clear idea of what they wanted, and her job was to finesse the details and make their visions reality. For example, some wanted their bed cushions covered together for comfort, while others wanted them covered separately for ease of below-bed storage.

“We allowed customers to choose any fabric they like, so their personal style can be expressed,” she says. “We steered them to cotton/polyester blends, since cotton will get clammy in a damp environment and all polyester will be sweaty. And we steered them away from large or busy patterns that don’t work well in a closed environment.”

Hall says his tricks of the trade include creating paper templates of mattresses to help with the adjustment of store-bought sheets and adding elastic under-mattress bungees to fitted sheets for improved stability.

### Bedding challenges

Even for analytically inclined fabricators, customizing marine bedding can be challenging. Odd angles and inconvenient bulkheads represent some of the most obvious problems.

Plauché says projects are harder when she and her team can’t board a boat to take measurements. She points to V-berths as particularly challenging “because of the insert pieces and how to handle the inside corners. Do I tuck in or overhang the fiddle? Make the



insert look like a cushion to match the bedspread or give it its own piece? Those need to be thought out [depending on] how the customer uses the boat.”

Making patterns match up for all products regardless of size can call for advanced skills, long work hours and higher price tags. “If you don’t account on the pattern for any bulkheads, side tables or height changes in trim,” says Plauché, “then the bedspread drops won’t fit correctly or nicely.”

Hall agrees. “Cushions on boats are never 90 degrees straight. We’re always trying to get them to line up.”

Requests for custom quilting can be another challenge. Plauché notes that the necessary quilting machines can be hard to find. Bradford has subcontracted quilting work to specialists who haven’t always followed directions.



**A** Drew Hall often starts with store-bought sheet sets and tailors them to fit exactly via mattress templates and under-mattress cords. Photo: Seafarer Canvas.

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## Bedding Trends

**“We steer them to cotton/polyester blends, since cotton will get clammy in a damp environment and all polyester will be sweaty.”**

**Katie Bradford, (ret.)  
Custom Marine Canvas**

### **Prevailing trends: cooler colors, coral prints**

When it comes to trends in marine bedding, Hall sees many clients replacing outdated browns, tans and greens with blues, grays and whites. Solids, stripes and prints—including prints with images of coral—have been popular.

Newkirk says most of his customers choose basic solid colors instead of prints. “Boats are small spaces, not massive bedrooms where you can have unique prints and things. It’s not focal point; it’s function. And the client base I work with is just looking for high-grade cotton, not anything

different or special. Sometimes we’ll use one of the main upholstery fabrics being used in the rest of the boat to make day covers for bedding.”

Conversely, Plauché says her clients seem to be warming up to larger, bolder patterns. “Gray is still trending because it’s so popular in residential design. And many people aren’t using poly batting or quilting; they just have two pieces of fabric as a minimalistic look.”

### **Fun with design**

Despite the challenges of creating marine bedding, Plauché and Bradford say it’s among their favorite project types because it presents creative opportunities.

Plauché remembers one of her especially innovative designs on a Baltic yacht christened “Not All Who Wander Are Lost” after *The Lord of the Rings* series. “I took inspiration from the book and used lots of nature-inspired fabrics; Kravet fabrics had a great selection at the time,” she says. “In the bunk room for the owners’ young boys, I used a birch-tree-inspired fabric for the bedspread, and on the accent pillows, I designed pillows with glow-in-the-dark thread, monogrammed with sentences deciphered by lining up the pillows. For the primary stateroom bedspread, I selected a deep-brown-toned textured fabric from Perennials Fabrics and designed a dragon tail monogrammed in black metallic on the top and side so it would look like a dragon was sleeping under the bed. The customer went crazy happy over it.”

*Michelle Miron is a freelance writer based in Hugo, Minn.*

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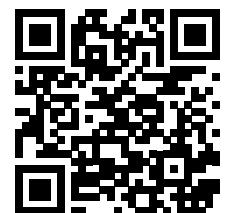


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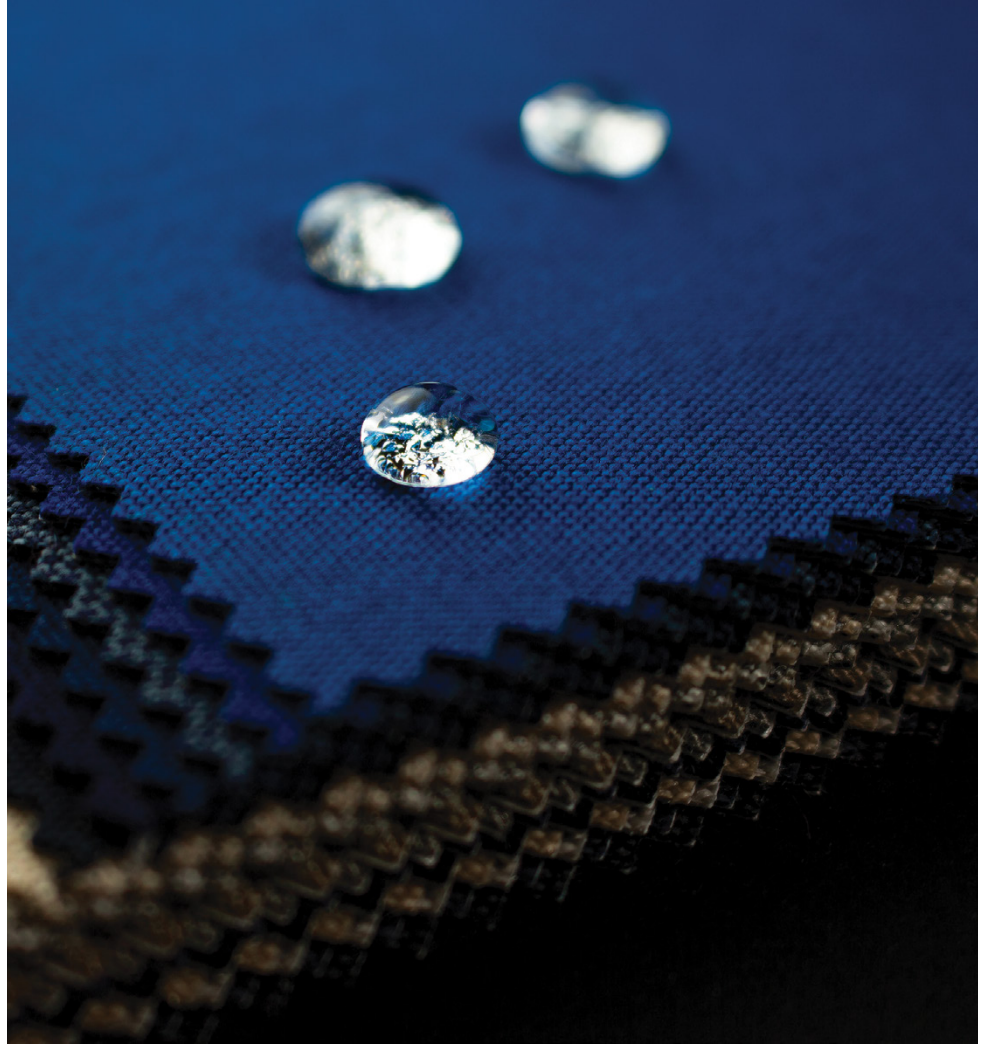
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“When you’re buying Sunbrella®, you’re buying the best,” says Charles Withers, director of sales for the marine and shade team at Glen Raven, Inc., the company that makes Sunbrella products.

**S**unbrella is Glen Raven’s flagship fabric and features impressive qualities that support this claim. Sunbrella products are easy to clean, and, because of a specialized manufacturing process, its colors endure after repeated cleaning and exposure to the sun, salt, and chlorine. In addition, the Skin Cancer Foundation endorses using some Sunbrella fabrics in shading products.

Additionally, Sunbrella is manufactured without using PFAS, also known as “forever chemicals.” Withers notes that some states will no longer allow sales of products with PFAS in 2025. Sunbrella has been a leader in developing products free of PFAS.

Sunbrella products are diverse, including Sunbrella Plus® and Sunbrella SeaMark®. Both provide shade and water resistance, but they are designed for different conditions. “It all depends on the application,” Withers says.

### **Sunbrella Plus**

Sunbrella Plus features a polyurethane and acrylic undercoating for outstanding water resistance, protecting against moderate rain. “Sunbrella Plus is where the customer wants a little bit higher water repellency,” Withers says. “It is still breathable, but it has a higher water repellency.”



Sunbrella Plus is perfect for boat tops, but its applications aren't limited to the water. It can also be used in awnings and convertible tops—generally in any structure that may need to be moved frequently. The number of colors available for Sunbrella Plus has increased from seven to 17.

### Sunbrella SeaMark

Sunbrella SeaMark is your fabric when you need protection that is 100% waterproof in extreme weather. Consequently, the fabric is used in boat tops, but it also serves well in “anything over your head that needs to be completely waterproof,” Withers says.

And just as Sunbrella Plus is ideal for structures that might need to be moved often, Sunbrella SeaMark is better suited for those applications that customers rarely move, such as boat tops or a permanent awning. “It’s something you’re not interacting with that often. It’s set it and forget it,” Withers says.

### The Sunbrella advantage

Rest assured that Sunbrella’s products are backed by Glen Raven’s outstanding customer service. “We’re there to support well after the sale,” says Withers, marketing manager for marine and shade products at Glen Raven. For example, the company is quick to provide answers about cleaning. Bleach can be used to wash all Sunbrella products, and it doesn’t degrade the color of the fabrics, which comes as a surprise to many customers. And Sunbrella Plus and Sunbrella SeaMark are covered by a 5-year warranty.

So, whether Sunbrella is protecting you against ultraviolet rays or torrential rain, with fabric free of PFAS, it has you covered.



### Charlie Withers

Charlie Withers is the Shade and Marine Sales Director for Glen Raven, bringing a wealth of experience in the marine industry from a 20 year career with Taylor Made Fabrics. Charlie has worn many hats throughout his career, including pattern maker, director of engineering and production manager. When he’s not working, Charlie enjoys spending time with family, saltwater fishing, archery and staying busy – whether learning something new or tinkering with his latest project.



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## Keeping it zipped

Zippers sometimes drive even the most experienced fabricators to distraction.

by Pamela Mills-Senn

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“Zippers can feel like a wild beast that can never be tamed.”

Mike Boatman,  
Boatman Marine Canvas

“Zippers can feel like a wild beast that can never be tamed,” says Mike Boatman, owner of Boatman Marine Canvas in Oklahoma City, Okla. “When you start working with zippers for the first time, you find out really quick that it’s not as simple as sewing the zipper onto a piece of material.”

Although Boatman has been dealing with the “wild beast” for decades, working on zippers have taught him there’s always more to learn. Part of this is because when the modern zipper was first introduced in the early 1900s, it was intended to be installed in a straight line and designed for that purpose, he explains. But since marine fabricators often encounter a lot of curves in their work, it’s a “whole new level of fun to figure out,” says Boatman.

Even relatively straightforward tasks can prove maddening.

“You can sew on one side of the zipper then sew on the other side, and you can be 1 inch off on one side compared to the other,” Boatman says. “Now the zipper doesn’t line up and because of that, your material will not lay as smooth as it should. Now you have to take the seams out of one side, and you stretch, pull and hold the mouth just right and hope the zipper will line up better on the second try.”

There is a lot to learn about zippers, agrees Mike Charlton, co-owner with wife Rachel of Charlton’s Marine Canvas in Yorktown, Va. Zippers are extremely complicated, he says, with a lot of learning taking place through trial and error. For example, one of



**A >** The Seamstick Taper, shown at top, allows users to add adhesive tape to both sides of the zipper at once, saving time and money. At right, Boatman Marine Canvas used a #10 zipper, sewing half of the zipper onto WeatherMax 80 3D material. The other side of the zipper is sewn to the boat’s bimini top, constructed of Sunbrella® fabric. Photos: Boatman Marine Canvas.







Boatman Marine Canvas built the custom side panel on this electric cart for an oil company, using a #10 curved zipper cut into the flexible glass. Photo: Boatman Marine Canvas.





## Zippers

**V** ➤ Shown below is an example of a horizontal zipper installed on a craft by Charlton's Marine Canvas. At right, an example of a U-zipper that Charlton's installed in an enclosure panel to allow for airflow. Photos: Charlton's Marine Canvas.



**A** The majority of zippers used in the marine environment are comprised of plastic teeth with metal sliders and handles/pulls. Fabric tape runs alongside the zipper. Photo: Charlton's Marine Canvas.

the most common mistakes Charlton sees is installing “the box or the pin on the wrong side or the wrong direction,” something he attributes to not fully grasping how different ways of installing zippers can make them easier or harder to use—or cause them not to work properly at all.

Take fast powerboats for example.

“One of the ways people make mistakes [on these boats] is, on horizontal zippers, you want to install them starting from the front of the panel and ending in the back of the panel,” he says. “The reason for this is so the zipper will naturally stay closed. If you install the zipper in the opposite direction, the wind can push the panel and open the zipper all by itself.”

### Tips, tricks and hacks

Charlton says a good way for marine fabricators to get a better handle on zippers is to join the Marine Fabricators Association (MFA), a move Boatman also recommends.

“If you are learning, you should show up at [as many of] the MFA conferences and regional workshops as possible so you can learn from the experts who have figured out all these tips and tricks,” Boatman says. “They will be willing to help you master the art of zippers.”

The main zippers Boatman relies on are the YKK® #8 and #10 tooth. However, he uses other types, depending on the job. For example, one sailboat needed a 243-inch separating



zipper, requiring him to search the internet to find the right solution. It's not about the brand; it's about delivering the best possible outcome for the customer, Boatman says.

He usually uses zippers with plastic teeth and metal pulls. "I'll only use a plastic pull if it is an odd size and that is the only thing I can get it in," he says. On boat covers, bimini tops and enclosures, he uses chain zippers, saving coil zippers for cushions when it's a "non-separating zipper situation."

Taking the same approach is Southern Stitch Canvas & Upholstery LLC owner and operator Steven Wayne. His Gulfport, Miss. canvas and upholstery shop services the marine, auto and commercial industries. He

## ZIPPER SPEAK

Zippers are the sum of their parts. Steven Wayne, owner/operator of Southern Stitch Canvas & Upholstery LLC in Gulfport, Miss., explains zippers are comprised of:

- A slider: This is the mechanism that opens and closes/joins the zipper. Attached to the slider is the pull tab or pull, the handle-like part that is grasped to move the slider up or down the zipper. Both slider and pull tab typically are made of metal rather than plastic, since metal tends to be hardier.
- Teeth: These can be plastic or metal, although plastic is the overwhelming preference. Metal teeth are used rarely and only in certain (typically non-marine) applications.
- Fabric tape: Running along both sides of the zipper, its edges are sewn to the surrounding material, securing the zipper.



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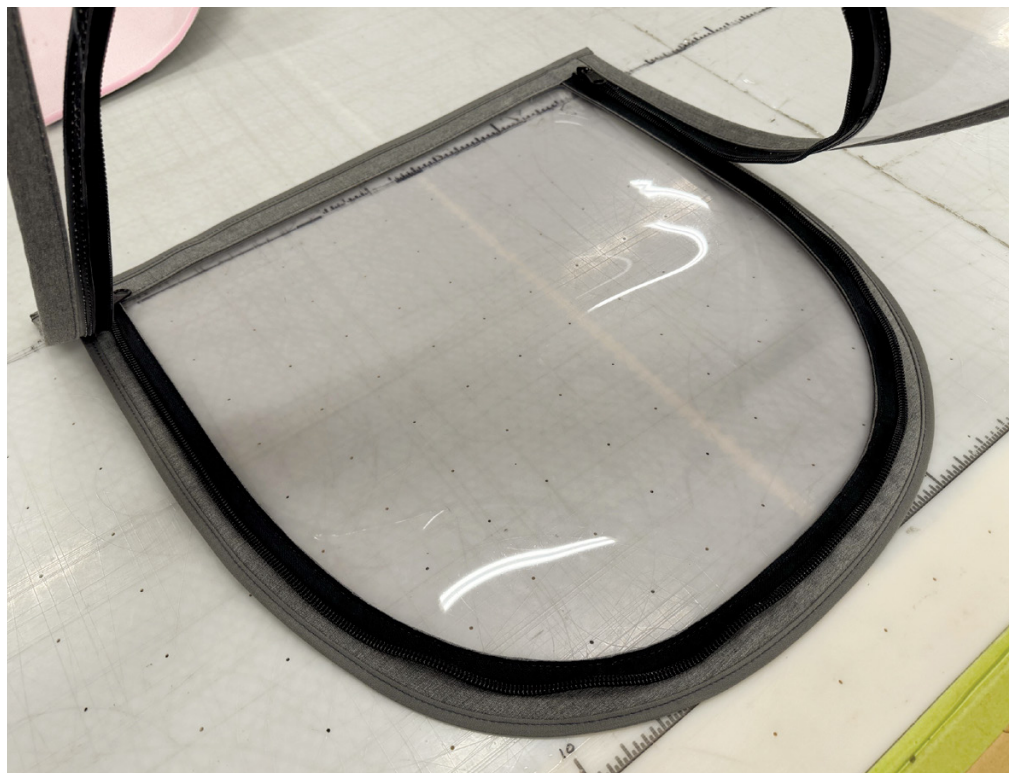
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## Zippers

**V** Using a metal slider on a zipper, as shown below, has the potential to damage surrounding upholstery. Southern Stitch Canvas & Upholstery has integrated a pocket into this cushion to prevent that from happening. At right, the company used a coil-style zipper to go around the radius of this U-zip window without crinkling. Photos: Southern Stitch Canvas & Upholstery LLC.



**“On horizontal zippers, you want to install them starting from the front of the panel and ending in the back of the panel, so the zipper will naturally stay closed.”**

**Mike Charlton,  
Charlton’s Marine Canvas**

says that 95% of the time, he uses metal sliders and pull tabs. For smaller upholstery jobs, he typically uses a YKK #5 or #8, preferring coil rather than chain tooth for these projects.

For larger canvas jobs such as an enclosure, Wayne likes to use a YKK #10 coil on the U-zip roll-up windows, since coil bends better around the radius compared to chain tooth. However, he’ll use a #10 chain tooth for the joining zipper for the adjoining panels.

Although he prefers metal sliders and pull tabs since those made from plastic are likelier to break, metal does require some design adjustments. For example, when used on cushions, metal sliders and pulls have the potential to damage surrounding surfaces. Wayne addresses this concern by integrating a pocket into the cushion to prevent such contact.

Another issue is that metal sliders and their pulls, particularly those installed for exterior applications, are subject to corrosion—something boat

owners need to address with proper maintenance. Additionally, metal can result in unwanted tingling or rattling, which, if there are multiple zippers, could become irritating. Wayne often gets around this by removing the metal pull tab from the slider and using a little rope as a pull instead.

Charlton does this as well, saying lanyards make a zipper “much easier to use, and customers love them.”

Another of his favorite hacks is used when sewing a zipper to a keder welt. “Sew it in the middle of the keder tape,” Charlton advises. “This will allow you to easily tighten or loosen the zipper if your canvas ends up being too tight or too loose.”

Boatman relies on Seamstick/Hi-Tack adhesive tape, applying this double-sided tape to the zipper, sticking it to the section of the material the zipper is to be sewn on. This allows him to adjust as needed, aligning everything so he only has to sew it once.



He also recommends the Trivantage Seamstick Taper. This tool lets him add adhesive tape to both sides of the zipper at once. Additionally, it has attachments for #8 and #10 tooth zippers as well as #5 and #10 coil zippers.

### Innovations and new solutions

One innovation Wayne appreciates is that zipper tapes are now available in different fabrics, creating a more aesthetically pleasing overall look. At the same time, he wishes manufacturers could devise a zipper tape with greater colorfastness, since these tend to fade sooner than the surrounding fabric.

SunZip™ zippers from IDEAL Fastener Corporation may offer a

### TRIAL, ERROR, SUCCESS

Sewing two dissimilar materials to one zipper “is always a challenge,” says Mike Boatman, owner of Oklahoma City-based Boatman Marine Canvas. He says lining up both sides so they end up together at the top of the zipper is difficult. As an example, he mentions one project he did for a 2005 Sea Ray® Sundeck 240.

“We reskinned the bimini top with Charcoal Gray Sunbrella®,” Boatman recalls. “We installed two zippers on the front edge of the bimini. Then we had to add a 12-foot sail shade to the bow of the boat using WeatherMAX 80 3D. Two totally different materials with absolutely two different stretch factors.”

It took some trial and error, he continues. They ended up adding Sunbrella binding to the edge of the WeatherMAX material, relying on hash marks and adhesive tape to place the zipper exactly where it needed to go. “The shade sail turned out great,” Boatman says.



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## Zippers



**A** The SunZip™ zippers, manufactured by the IDEAL Fastener Corporation, are made with Sunbrella® yarn and also incorporate marine-grade, UV-resistant Delrin teeth and components, resulting in a zipper designed to withstand prolonged sun exposure and tape that is fade-resistant, water-resistant and stain-resistant. Photo: IDEAL Fastener Corporation.

### ZIPPER RESOURCES

(As listed in the 2025 *Marine Fabricator Buyer's Guide*)

**Action Upholstery Supply Inc.**  
actionup.com

**Alberta Tent & Awning Co. Ltd.**  
albertatentandawning.ca

**American Plastics**  
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**Ideal Fastener Corp.**  
idealfastener.com

**Innovative Industrial Solutions Inc.**  
iisfla.com

**J. N. Zippers & Supplies Corporation**  
jnzipper.com

**Keyston Bros.**  
keystonbros.com

**Lenzip Mfg. Corp.**  
lenzip.com

**Manart Hirsch Co. Inc.**  
manart-hirsch.com

**The Miami Corporation**  
miamicorp.com

**Paskal PK Zippers & Fasteners**  
paskalPK.com

**The Quality Thread & Notions Company**  
qualitythread.com

**Rex Pegg Fabrics Inc.**  
rexpeggfabrics.com

**Rochford Supply**  
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**Sailrite® DBA JustWholesale.**  
justwholesale.com

**Trivantage LLC**  
trivantage.com

**TRU® Zip**  
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**Vicar International**  
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**YKK® (U.S.A.) Inc. – Tape Craft Corp.**  
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solution. Headquartered in Oxford, N.C., the company is the “second largest zipper manufacturer in the world,” says Jeffrey Gut, co-president, adding that IDEAL is the “only American-owned, completely vertical zipper manufacturer.”

SunZip incorporates Sunbrella® yarn for the zipper tape, Gut explains, with the teeth and other components constructed from marine-grade, UV-resistant Delrin (plastic). The result is a zipper that is well-positioned to withstand prolonged sun exposure, with tape that is fade-resistant, water-resistant and stain-resistant.

Another zipper that recently hit the market comes from Lenzip Manufacturing Corporation, a Rolling Meadows, Ill.-based zipper manufacturer providing custom solutions for industries including marine, automotive, RV, mattress, furniture and footwear.

One of its flagship products is the #10 molded tooth separating zipper, says general manager Rene Vargas. Used for a variety of projects, including curtains and enclosure panels, the #10 features a smooth-gliding slider over the zipper chain, resulting in fast and efficient installation, he says.

Wanting to bridge the gap between its #10 and its larger #15 and #20 options, Lenzip launched the #12 molded tooth zipper. Designed for high-stress marine applications, the #12 features a “more robust slider,” says Vargas, with options such as a “jewelry-quality, stainless steel slider,” and wider tape edges for added reinforcement during sewing.

“[It’s] particularly suitable for large yacht enclosures and sail packs on sailboats, where the sheer pressure and frequent handling can cause smaller zippers to wear down over time,” Vargas says.

Lenzip also offers coil zippers. Although Vargas says molded tooth





◀ ✓ Lenzip fully stocks over 30 colors at its manufacturing facility outside of Chicago, enabling the company to ensure it can fill orders in under two weeks. Below, a Lenzip employee is shown using a plastic injection molding machine to construct a zipper. Photos: Lenzip.



zippers are the preferred choice for most marine applications, coil zippers provide more flexibility for curved openings. However, he adds, because their coils are sewn to the tape, “which can become the weakest point over time,” they can be at risk from prolonged sun exposure.

“Selecting the right zipper for a project is critical in marine fabrication, where conditions like sun exposure, saltwater and wear and tear can shorten the lifespan of materials,” says Vargas. “Ensuring the longevity of both zipper types requires careful consideration of the materials, proper protection and choosing the right product for the specific application.

“To make the selection process easier,” he continues, “we recommend that fabricators evaluate their project’s scale. For example, single items versus bulk production; the functional requirements of the zipper such as open or closed ends, continuous or finished; and any aesthetic or durability needs.” ⚓



▲ To bridge the gap between its #10 and larger #15 and #20 zippers, Lenzip recently introduced the #12 molded tooth zipper, shown here with a stainless-steel slider and UV-protected tape. Designed for high-stress marine applications like boat covers, enclosures, cushion, and more, the zipper features a very robust slider. Photo: Lenzip.

*Pamela Mills-Senn is a freelance writer based in Seal Beach, Calif.*





## Smarter, faster, safer

Innovations in handheld marine fabrication tools make tasks easier on the body and improve efficiency.

by Kelly Hartog

**M**arine fabricators are always looking for ways to make their jobs simpler, safer and more efficient and cost-effective.

Precise, compact handheld tools and equipment, including snap-fastener installers, hot knives, foam cutters and upholstery tools, are integral parts of a marine fabricator's day-to-day work.

*Marine Fabricator* spoke with several companies working to enhance these myriad tools in ways that will not only boost fabricators' productivity but also ensure their safety.

### Common tools that make a difference

David Segal, president of Edward Segal Inc., in Thomaston, Conn., says his company offers powered solutions to install snap fasteners and grommets, small pneumatic presses and larger machines with feeders than can be used in shops.

When it comes to improved, innovative products, Segal says the company hopes to offer a unique enhancement to two impact drivers that fabricators can use in the shop or on a boat. These

▶ Edward Segal Inc. offers small pneumatic presses like the 3P6 Portable Pneumatic Press on the left, and larger machines like the 4KGW, a fully automatic grommet machine. Products like the 4KGW are geared more toward higher-volume production, and are used by many awning shops and digital printers, as well as fabricators of tarps, tents and flags. Photos: Edward Segal Inc.







▲ Eastman cardinal with an operator. The Auto Track Falcon cuts through carpet with precision and efficiency.



▲ Eastman Machine Company President Trevor Stevenson demonstrates the power and precision of the Blue Streak Straight Knife cutting through multiple layers of textile fabric.



▲ Eastman's South Central Sales Manager Amy Denning operates the Buzzair on fiberglass.

items appear on the company's website; however, Segal says neither is currently available "because the manufacturer of the impact driver made changes that precluded the integration of the C-frame head to the driver." The plan, he says, is to "reintroduce the impact driver installation tool when a compatible driver can be identified." Right now, Segal says, there's a waiting list of more than 100 people interested in these products.

Eastman Machine Company in Buffalo, N.Y., also provides a variety of handheld tools for marine fabrication, including rotary shears, larger round-knife cutting machines and straight-knife cutting machines.

"These machines can cut through the easiest of interior fabrics to some of the toughest fiberglass and composite materials," says Trevor Stevenson, president, adding the company also offers end cutters for larger panel-type straight cutting as well as small flatbed CNC cutters—which, he notes, "dramatically increase efficiency and accuracy."

Sailrite® DBA JustWholesale in Columbia City, Ind., offers cordless hot knives with precision cutting blades

among its products. "Having a cordless hot knife is really a great tool for cutting synthetic fabric and sealing the cut edge at the same time," says Matt Grant, vice president. "For marine canvas work, most material is synthetic."

He says the company's Edge Hotknife with a precision cutting blade includes a foot that allows fabricators to cut on any surface without damaging it. "It is smaller and more precise," Grant explains, "so cutting circles and slits is much easier. And zipper openings can easily be cut since the foot fits perfectly between the zipper stitch lines."

JustWholesale also offers drill cutters "where you use a mallet to pound the cutter through the fabric into a rubber block," says Grant. This technique, he explains, keeps the tools from becoming damaged. The company also provides zipper pliers, which, Grant says "are essential for efficient installation of top and bottom zipper stops for molded tooth and metal zipper chains. They spring open, which makes use far better than common pliers."

HooVer Products in San Jacinto, Calif., is also focusing on upgraded



▲ The Cardinal Round Knife slices through 1- to 2-inch thick foam. Photos: Eastman Marine Company.





## Fabrication tools

“Automatic grommet or snap fastener tools provide resources so your best employees can get more done every day without experiencing fatigue or pain.”

David Segal,  
Edward Segal Inc.

equipment. “We offer the Pres-N-Snap® tool for installing snaps and grommets into canvas and vinyl,” says company sales rep Laura Hoover. The company also offers a C-4 punch, L-6 punch and AT10M punch for cutting holes in various brands of directional fasteners. “These machines and punches are critical in the marine fabrication industry for setting the most common type fasteners,” Hoover says.

### Designing with fabricators in mind

All four companies are continuously looking to find ways to upgrade their tools to enhance ergonomics and productivity.

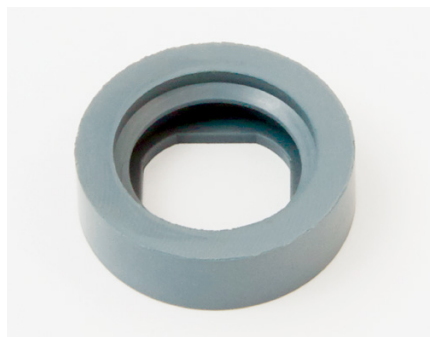
“Many marine fabricators operate small shops,” says Segal, “and do most of their snap installation on the boats themselves.” It’s why, he says, his company’s impact driver is such an alluring proposition. “The right installation tools can reduce the time it

takes to put in a snap fastener and leave more time for those operations that really produce revenue,” he says.

“In today’s environment,” says Segal, “it’s critical for businesses to try to maximize the productivity of employees. Automatic grommet or snap fastener tools provide resources so your best employees can get more done every day without experiencing fatigue or pain.”

Hoover agrees. “Our Pres-N-Snap tool and punches are all portable,” she says, “which makes them convenient for working on projects on-site.” That way, she adds, “there’s no need to take your whole project back to the shop to set snaps or grommets. They can be set on the fly right there while on the boat or dock.”

In addition to making tools that are more efficient for fabricators, manufacturers say it’s important that these tools are properly used and well-maintained. “It may be an old cliché, but read or view the operator’s manual or



▲ ◀ HooVer’s Pres-N-Snap on a bench with button and socket. “We offer the Pres-N-Snap tool for installing snaps and grommets into canvas and vinyl,” says company sales rep Laura Hoover.

▲ Pres-N-Snap on a bench with a grommet die set. HooVer’s Pres-N-Snap tools and punches are portable, which makes them “convenient for working on projects on-site,” says Hoover.

◀ This newly designed rubber ring can be used to easily insert button/caps or eyelet/posts into the dies. Photos: HooVer Products Inc.



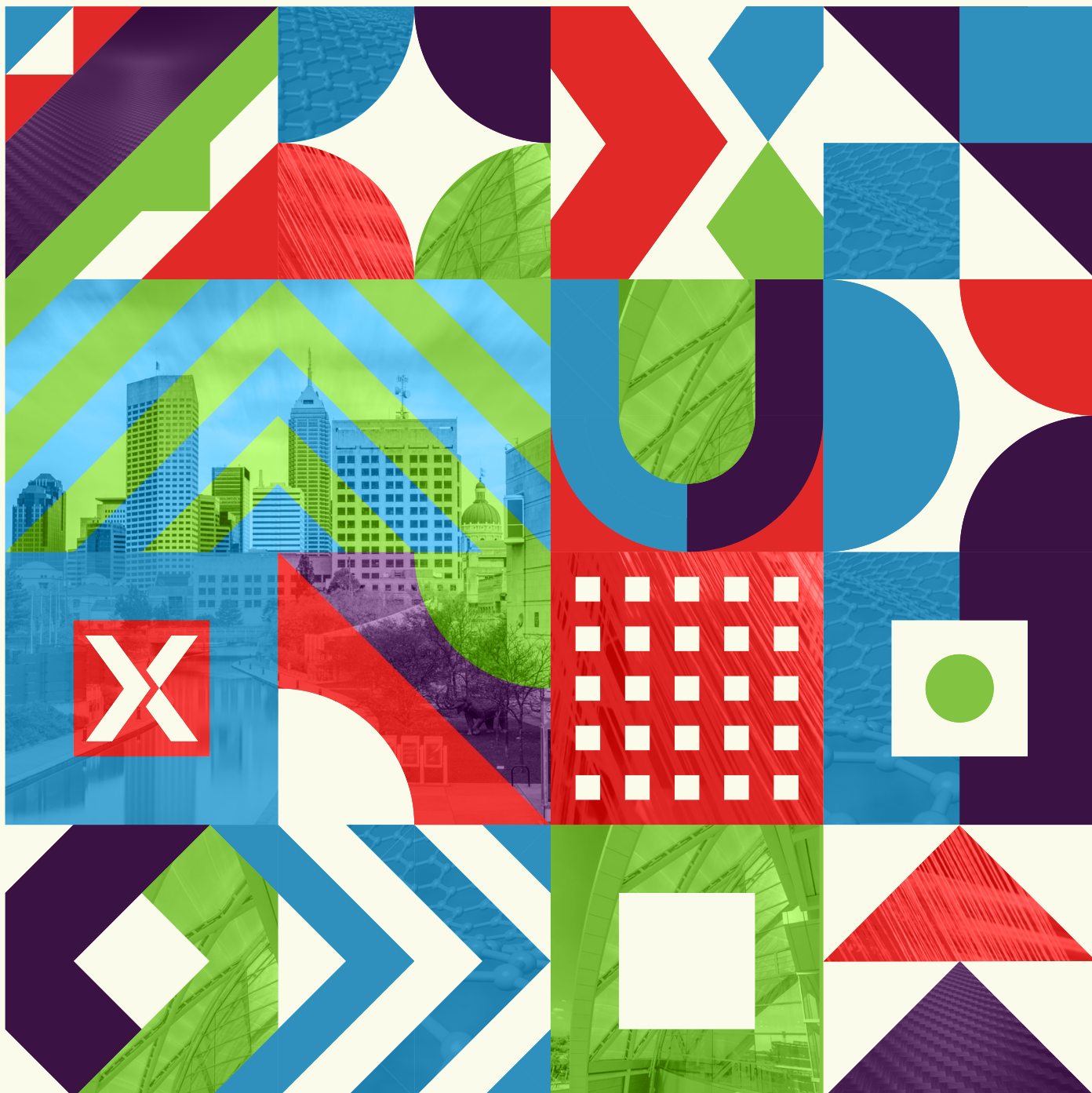
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▲ Sailrite/Just Wholesale's Long Nose Staple Gun is just one of many small tools it offers, along with cordless hot knives and drill cutters, among others. Photo: Sailrite.

instructions, and make sure anyone who might use it is familiar with its operation as well," says Segal. He says it's important to remember that machines always need preventive maintenance.

"Textile-related applications are notorious for spraying fabric residue when holes are punched," he notes. "This residue can work its way into the machine or accumulate on the feeders and interfere with the gravity feed."

Stevenson stresses the importance of always having a sharp knife, and Eastman's knives have built-in sharpeners.

When it comes to the Pres-N-Snap installation tool, Hoover says fabricators can get the most life out of the product by "keeping them clean and oiling them in a few key places

to keep them in smooth working condition." Sometimes, she says, if the tool starts to hang up or get in a bind, "it could be that it just needs a bit of oil on the plunger and inside the frame, or perhaps the handle is a bit worn and needs replacing." Hoover says all parts of the product are replaceable.

### Safety first

Just because many of the tools in the industry are small, it doesn't mean there aren't safety concerns associated with them. Small-tool manufacturers and distributors stress the importance of having built-in guards in place, using sharp blades and wearing safety glasses.

"That's because handheld tools generally don't have any type of safety



device,” says Segal. “Operators [must be] attentive when operating any type of hand tool to protect against injury. It is always easy to be thinking about the next job when involved in a repetitive process.”

Hoover also is an advocate of safety glasses, especially when cutting holes, and she recommends that when making holes with punches, “use a mallet, rather than a hammer. [Use] a rubber mat or the end grain of wood as a backing so as not to damage the punch.”

Grant adds that there are potentially harmful effects from heat-cutting fabric and dust from foam cuttings, but “proper ventilation and use of a respirator [would] mitigate much of the concern.”

### Products on the horizon

JustWholesale released a product in December 2024 called the HandyPress, which Grant describes as “the next level up from something like a Pres-N-Snap, designed to replace other bench-mounted pressers, cutters and punches.” The product comes with six adapters so it can be used with a variety of dies and accessories from other brands.

Hoover says her company has updated its Pres-N-Snap tool with a new handle design that is more ergonomic and easier to use for those with smaller hands. “Pneumatic machines can be great when doing high volume,” says Hoover, “but manual machines are a shining star, offering more flexibility when installing on-site.”

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“The advantage of being able to innovate is rooted in the fact that most tools used by marine fabricators are small and inexpensive.”

Matt Grant, Sailrite®  
DBA JustWholesale

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## Fabrication tools

**“Pneumatic machines can be great when doing high volume, but manual machines are a shining star, offering more flexibility when installing on-site.”**

Laura Hoover,  
HooVer Products

Segal concurs, noting that while pneumatic machines tend to be more powerful and easier to maintain, running them properly requires a quality compressor and an air dryer system. “If not, the machine likely will not function properly and will experience premature wear,” he says.

When it comes to using manual machines, Hoover says it’s important to stay focused and work methodically. “Take your time and be certain the fasteners are placed exactly where you want them, without making errors and damaging a nearly completed project.”

HooVer, she adds, has improved its M2700 rubber ring and offers the newly designed M2400, which, she says, can be used “to easily insert button/caps or eyelet/posts into the dies.”

All of these companies are working to continually improve handheld marine tools, and they all have plans to continue innovating.

“The advantage of being able to innovate is rooted in the fact that most tools used by marine fabricators are small and inexpensive,” says Grant. “The relatively low cost of entry is part of the reason getting

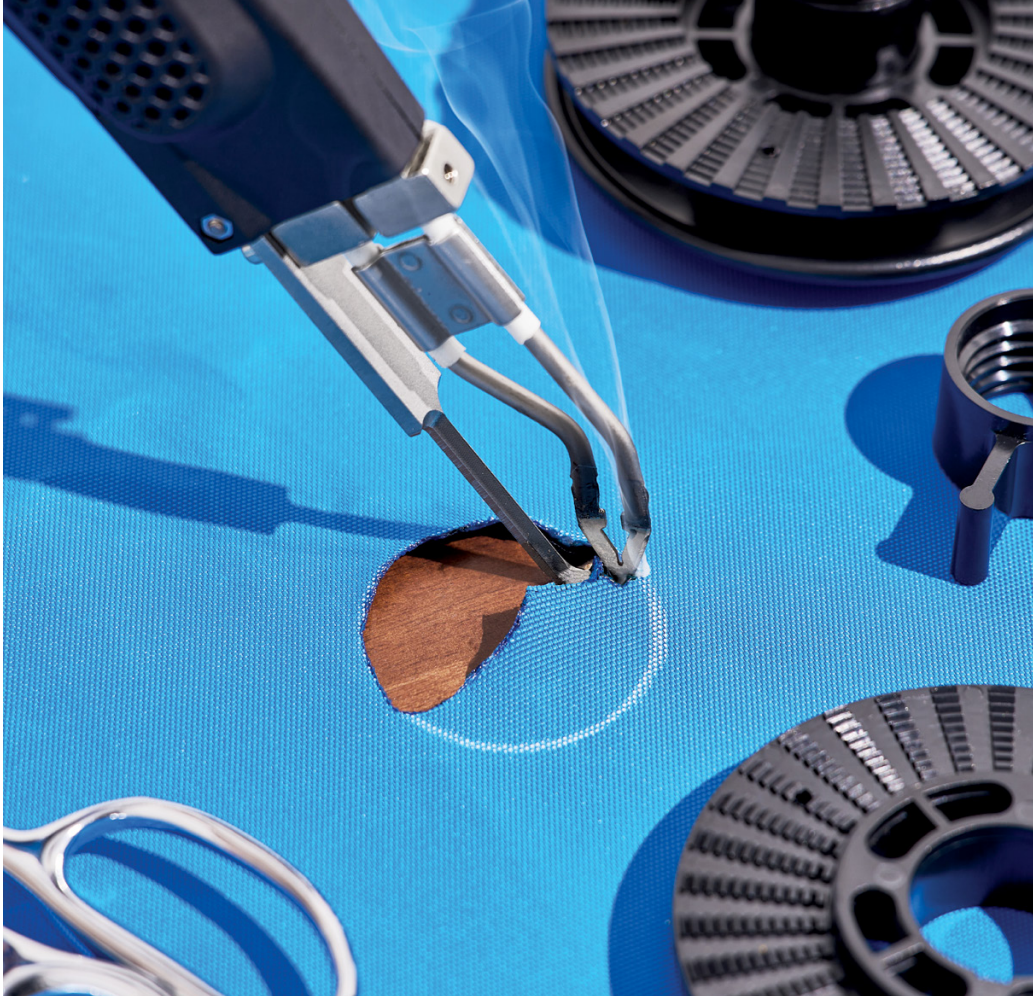


Released in December 2024, the Handypress is “designed to replace other bench-mounted pressers and cutters,” says Sailrite® DBA JustWholesale Vice President Matt Grant.

The company’s drill cutters utilize a mallet to pound the cutter through the fabric into a rubber block.

Sailrite/Just Wholesale’s zipper pliers “are essential for efficient installation of top and bottom zipper stops for molded tooth and metal zipper chains,” says Grant. Photos: Sailrite.





◀ Sailrite/Just Wholesale's Precision Cutting Blade® also includes a foot that allows fabricators to cut on any surface without damaging it. Photo: Sailrite.

into [the marine] business is attractive," he adds, "although learning the skills to create and sew effectively is another matter."

Segal says that despite the size of these tools, it's still a challenge to come up with new products for smaller fabricators. "Innovation requires an investment in research and development, and the result must be a product that is functional, marketable and profitable."

Stevenson, though, believes Eastman can continue to find ways to improve the tools required for the industry. "We have been in business for 136 years. There is not too much we haven't seen to be able to provide a solution for in the cutting room." ⚓

*Kelly Hartog is a freelance journalist in Los Angeles, Calif.*

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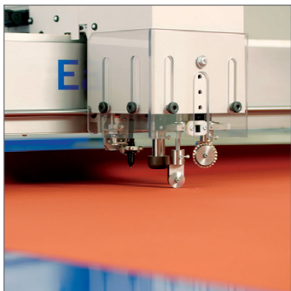
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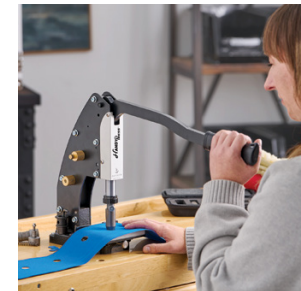
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