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Topic: Restorations - Re-decking on Bonne Amie

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Author

Jonathan
Newbie
☆☆☆☆☆

Joined: 17 December
2006
Location: United States
Online Status: Offline
Posts: 5

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New Canvas Deck Covering Using North Sails Oceanus Sailcloth

As we near completion of Bonne Amie's restoration we thought it would be good to begin passing along some of the techniques we are using to maintain authenticity in our restoration.



Bonne Amie one month earlier, ready for the move back inside after spending the summer in the outdoor work area.

A New Deck

With the new deck beams and deck complete it was time to find a suitable replacement for the canvas that had covered the deck when Nevins built the boat in 1955/6.

Searching For Matching Material

Our desire has always been to restore Bonne Amie precisely to the original drawings using the exact techniques employed by Nevins in her construction. In cases where we have changed materials we have chosen to replace like for like. The deck covering material was however, proving to be difficult.

The original deck was covered in #10 Cotton Canvas bedded in white lead painted with enamel. This was the best material for the job in 1955 but in time proved to be prone to rot, suffered damage easily when winch handles were dropped on it, and has a number of other problems we wished to avoid.

In early November we discovered [North Sails Oceanus Sailcloth](#) and began making inquiries with North regarding availability of large lengths in widths up to 70 inches. The Oceanus is available in a number of weights and we found the #16 to be a nearly perfect match for the #10 Cotton. The gray stock is available in 66 inch widths. If you see the cotton canvas side by side with the #16 Oceanus you almost can't see the difference.

We over ordered to be safe and had almost 30 feet of excess. The entire cost was less than \$700 including enough to cover to cabin top and deck in full length pieces leaving just one seam along the centerline. Dealing with the folks at North was very easy and they were exceptionally helpful.

Preparing The New Deck

The deck was faired and prepared by covering with glass mat and a coat of epoxy resin which was squeegeed out to limit the amount of resin and save weight. This was sanded smooth and de-blushed in preparation for the final covering with Oceanus.



The prepared deck can be seen here with the toe rails fit into the original Nevins hardware.

Nevins took great care to flush fit much of the hardware. Each of the flushed pieces of hardware was carefully pre fit and fastener pilot holes drilled.

The cloth was test fit and hardware was checked where it was flushed into the deck.



Shipwright Dave Grizwold test fitting the hardware into the cloth in preparation for final laying of the material

Final Laying of the Cloth or... You Only Get One Shot At This

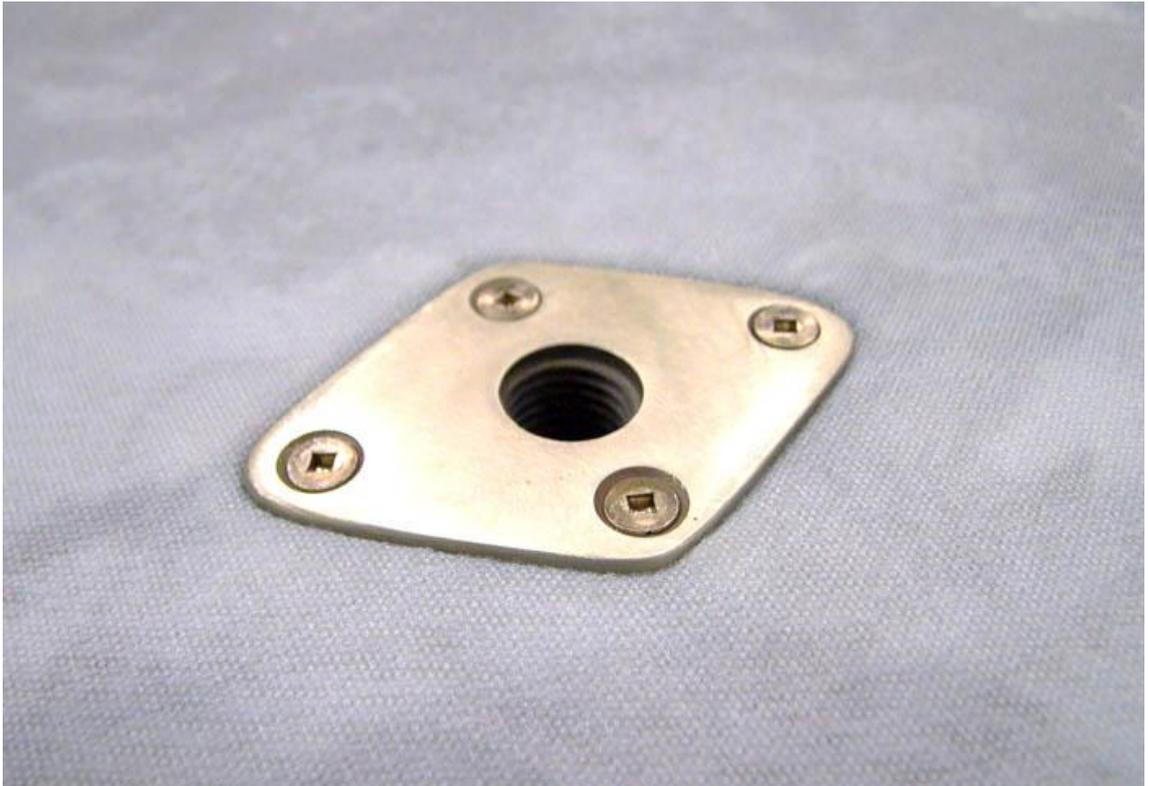
With the deck prepared an afternoon was set aside and six people scheduled to assist in laying the mammoth one piece cloth deck.

A thick putty like paste of epoxy and filler was troweled along the deck where the single seam would fall and along the recessed areas of the deck where hardware would be fit.

The deck was first coated in a thin coat of epoxy and the cloth carefully laid from the bow aft in three very tense and stress filled hours.

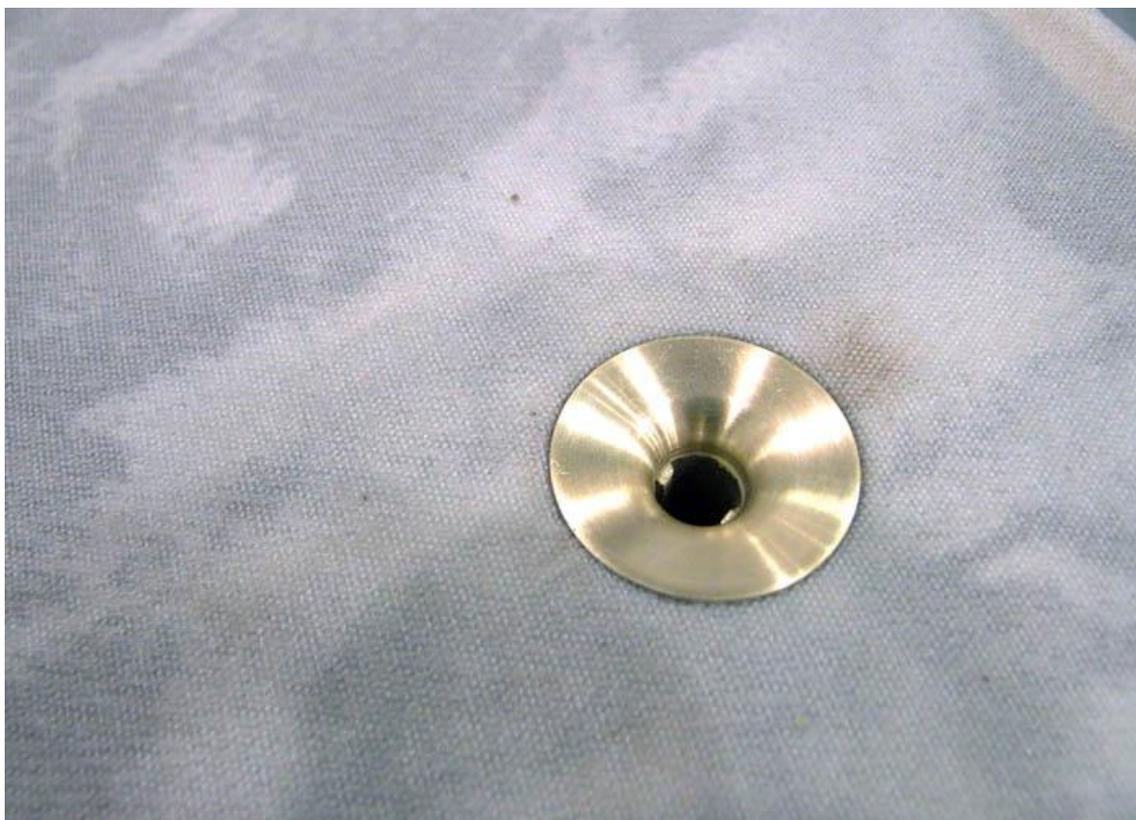
Once the cloth was down it took all six workers until early in the evening to insure smooth complete adhesion of the cloth, working slowly and carefully with squeegees until the cloth had every drop of spare resin squeegeed out of the weave all the while making sure the weave was not stretched or distorted.

Care was taken to insure that the areas where filler was used were thoroughly smoothed to avoid high spots in the deck.



Original Nevins Padeyes Flush mounted into the newly laid deck. These fittings will be chrome plated before final fitting.

With the excess resin squeegeed from the cloth a very effective non-skid (and waterproof) surface remains. The deck will be painted with flattened and thinned Pettit EasyPoxy enamel to complete the process after working the surface with brillo / scotchbrite pads to remove surface imperfections.



Reproductions of the original Nevins cockpit drain fittings are carefully flushed into the deck trapping the cloth.

Reflections On The Process

We learned a great deal during this first ever application of Oceanus Sailcloth as deck covering. The most significant observations include:

- Using Oceanus over dynel or one of the other conventional coverings is by far more difficult and labor intensive. The amount of preparation and care required cannot be under estimated, but the results are more than worth the added effort.
- Test a small area a few days in advance with your crew to be sure everyone is familiar with the process. Once complete, finish out the test board, remove the blush and work the surface with a scotch brite or brillo type pad to remove surface imperfections in the resin coating. Finally paint with the coating of choice. This small test is worth all the effort. You'll have a clear sense of what you're in for and you'll have a nice test to reassure you that you've made a good decision.
- The cloth should be trimmed as near to the exact dimensions as possible prior to being epoxied in place. The cloth does not adhere if bent around tight angles well and we were forced to act quickly to trim away excess in order to get the deck edge to adhere. It wasn't a big problem but it would have been helpful (and a bit less messy) to have done this in advance.
- Have a really high quality hot knife available at all times. Do not cut with a razor knife. Stray threads will appear everywhere if you are not careful. Small bits of cloth and polyester 'boogers' will find their way into the saturated cloth.
- The work area should be extremely clean and free from potential contaminants.
- Make sure you have sufficient resin. Most of what you use will be waste after it is squeegeed from the deck. We used well over 3 gallons. You won't have time to run to the chandlery for more once you start so buy in excess and return what you don't use.
- Wear a respirator or you'll be babbling like a two-year-old by the end of the process. Tyvek overalls are worth their weight in gold as are a large volume of Nitrile gloves.
- Plan ahead and always think two steps ahead when working to avoid potential problems.
- Have a large crew of workers available to assist. Six was a good number for our 40 foot yawl or a yacht up to the size of a New York 32 or similar. Don't under estimate the number of hands you'll need.

I cannot stress this enough.. you only get one shot at this.

Conclusion

If asked if I would do it again I can honestly say, "absolutely, I wouldn't do it any other way." The look of the Oceanus covered deck is identical to cotton canvas and the non-skid is amazing. It's worth every gray hair and every ounce of effort.

I will post more images of the painted deck next week.

Edited by Jonathan on 18 December 2006 at 1:01am

S&S Assoc. North American Secretary
Pacific Northwest

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