

# Water: The Next Frontier

For a few million, you can ride out the rising seas in style

By Erik Bojnansky  
BT Senior Writer

A Miami-based company is manufacturing luxury floating homes that can withstand tropical storm systems and operate completely off the grid.

The founders of Arkup LLC claim their “livable yachts” will be able to move at a top speed of ten knots on nothing but solar power. These boxy boats will use rain water collected in cisterns and have windows strong enough to withstand Category 4 hurricane winds. And, the founders add, the yacht’s hydraulic pylons beneath the hull will keep the vessel perfectly still in shallow water, canceling out any sensation of rocking or sea sickness, even in choppy water.

But Arkup’s owners aren’t simply touting the livable yacht as a luxury vessel. They are promoting it as a

next-generation houseboat that can resist the threat of sea level rise. Arkup even hired a Dutch architect who specializes in designing houses, apartments, restaurants, and resorts that float.

The architect, Koen Olthuis, is the founder of Waterstudio and Dutch Docklands. Regular *Biscayne Times* readers may remember him as the man who proposed building a floating island community in the middle of Maule Lake in North Miami Beach. That is, until the City of North Miami Beach, reacting to public outcry from lakefront residents, enacted legislation that made such a floating community illegal.

That legislation is now being challenged in court by Raymond Williams, the owner of Maule Lake. Should Williams emerge victorious, Olthuis says he’s ready to pursue his Amillarah North Miami Beach concept again, and he wouldn’t mind partnering with his Arkup clients to build it.



Photo by Arkup

The Arkup prototype floating at Star Island last month.

“We’re waiting for the next step, and time will tell what kind of license and protocols are allowed,” Olthuis tells the *BT*.

But if Maule Lake is still out of reach, there are plenty of other places

where livable yachts may end up. For example, the owner of a waterfront home, or even a vacant waterfront lot,

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# Signed, Sealed, Delivered

New Buena Vista Post Office has happy customers

By Erik Bojnansky  
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After years of anticipation, it finally happened. The Buena Vista Post Office has moved out of the Design District space it had occupied since 1962.

But those who were accustomed to using the old post office on NE 39th Street won’t have to travel far to buy stamps, mail packages, or open a post office box.

On February 19, the Buena Vista Post Office reopened a half-mile away in a retail building at 3246 N. Miami Ave. That retail building happens to be across the street from Midtown Miami, the 56-acre, mixed-use project with apartments, condos, retail, offices, and hotel rooms that broke ground in 2003 and has been credited with sparking the ongoing economic development of Wynwood, Edgewater, the Design District, and Little Haiti.

Juan Nadal, district marketing manager for the U.S. Postal Service, says that so far, he’s been getting good

feedback from the locals.

“They love the new location,” Nadal tells the *BT*. “They see how clean and bright it is and how big of a difference it is compared to the other location. And we’re excited to be here.”

The new location has 500 new P.O. boxes and 46 parcel lockers within a lobby that will be accessible to customers from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Between 8:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. on weekdays, and 9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. on Saturdays, anywhere from three to five employees will be on hand at three terminals to help with customers’ postal needs. At least ten free parking spaces will also be available in the back during those hours. And if the spaces are filled, there’s curb space available for anyone who has a pay-by-phone account with the Miami Parking Authority.

Nadal says there’s more lobby space for customers at the new N. Miami Avenue location than at the old two-story, 13,000-square-foot building in the Design District. That’s because the current location is focused on retail



BT photo by Margaret Griffiths

The new lobby is open and bright, a big improvement on the old one.

operations, while at the old location, 66 NE 39th St., “we had a carrier operation and our window operation all in the same building,” Nadal explains. The carrier/delivery operations once handled in the Design District site have been moved to the Hagler Miami Post Office at 500 NW 2nd Ave.

The USPS moved out of its previous Design District location after New York-based Thor Equities paid \$43.2 million for the 72-year-old building and its parking areas in December 2015. The

seller was the South Florida chapter of the National Association of Letter Carriers, a union for postal workers. With the proceeds from the sale, the NAFC is building a new headquarters in Miramar.

Thor Equities did not return requests for comment, although a banner hung on the former post office space hints that the current post-World War II building will be replaced with a modern structure. A representative of Thor Equities told the

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could dock a livable yacht by his or her property, says Nicolas Derouin, CEO and co-founder of Arkup LLC. "Potentially any waterfront lot that has seawater length could be a potential location for Arkup, as well as marinas," he explains. Federally owned waters or designated anchorages within Biscayne Bay are also potential locations, he adds, as well as a host of other places outside of Florida.

"Our primary market is the U.S. and Caribbean, but we can extend this to Europe, the Middle East, Southeast Asia," says Derouin.

So far, Arkup LLC has finished building just one livable yacht. Well, substantially finished anyway. As of press time, the yacht-houseboat hybrid was 98 percent complete. Nevertheless, the project has already received significant publicity from local media outlets. The bulk of this press attention came during the February 14-18 Miami International Boat Show, when the prototype Arkup vessel was docked beside a vacant Star Island property and shown off to journalists and potential buyers.

The 4350-square-foot, two-floor model has four bedrooms, four and a half bathrooms, and retractable balconies. It's being listed for sale at \$5.5 million, but it's also available for charter.

"We have potential buyers who are interested in these livable yachts," Derouin says. "They're looking to try it out. They want to see it. They want to touch it. They want to experience it."

Arkup already has an order to build a second livable yacht, which will be docked at an undisclosed location in the Bahamas, says Antoine Vernholes, an Arkup investor in charge of international sales. Negotiations for two additional yachts are ongoing, he adds.

Those livable yachts will be constructed at the same place the prototype was built, the RMK Merrill-Stevens shipyard at 881 NW 13th St. on the Miami River. The Merrill-Stevens shipyard is also where Arkup's offices are located. "About 25 to 30 people worked on the [prototype] on a full-time basis," Derouin says. According to Vernholes, the first livable yacht took a year and a half to build, and the investor is confident that Arkup will crank out the next vessels in less time.

"The next thing we're going to do is work on the engineering to build it better, faster, and with more sustainable products," Vernholes tells the *BT*.



Living room with view of Miami Beach.



Rendering of Arkup community overlooking New York City.

The idea of building solar-powered, livable yachts in Miami was conceived by Arnaud Luguet, a citizen of France and the Netherlands who has worked on renewable-energy projects for the past 20 years. For the past decade Luguet has lived in Miami, developing plans for a windfarm, when he started thinking about his mother's homeland, the Netherlands, where houseboats can often be found in canals and on lakes.

"Arnaud thought he could develop a floating home concept but take it to the next level, which also means making it self-sustaining and stable," recounts Derouin, who has been friends with Luguet since they met in Paris 25 years ago.

Derouin also trained as an engineer but specialized in logistics and incorporating startups. After working in South America for 20 years, he says he began traveling the world with his wife, and they spent a good deal of time in Southeast Asia.

"I saw how it's a challenge for big cities in Southeast Asia to grow because they're growing very fast, but without any urban planning," Derouin says. That lack of planning caused noticeable negative effects on the environment. "You can see the pristine beaches spoiled with plastic, and the coral reef impacts."

So when Luguet invited Derouin to help him with his livable yachts venture, the logistics manager was literally onboard. Derouin has been living in Miami ever since.

Derouin says it was only natural that Olthuis was recruited to design the vessels. "He's been working on floating projects for the past 10 or 15 years, from very traditional floating homes in northern Europe to private islands for Florida and the Middle East," he explains.

Indeed, Olthuis has been designing floating houses, apartment buildings, restaurants, and resorts since 2005 via his Netherlands-based Waterstudio architecture firm. Olthuis has patents for

floating foundations that can hold entire neighborhoods, roadways, cars, parks, sports stadiums, and cruise ship terminals. And, through his Dutch Docklands company, Olthuis is still pursuing plans to build a floating island community in the Indian Ocean near Maldives, called "Amillarrah," which is Maldivian for "private island."

In August 2013, Dutch Docklands announced its intent to build a floating-home community somewhere in Miami-Dade County. Less than a year later, Maule Lake was revealed to be the site where Olthuis wished to tow 30 artificial islands of his design (which have yet to be built) into the middle of the 179-acre lake and tether them to the bottom using telescopic moorings.

Twenty-nine of those islands, each 6500 square feet, were each to have a four-bedroom villa, a garden, a pool, and a couple of boat slips. The 30th island would be the "amenity island" with a restaurant. The islands were to be equipped with solar panels, rainwater collectors, and "hydrogen-powered collectors," while waste would be collected by a vendor (see "In the Market for a Hyper-Luxurious Floating Island?" July 2014).

To create that floating island community, Olthuis entered into a contract to buy Maule Lake from Raymond Williams at an undisclosed price. Williams is an heir of E. L. Maule, who ran a rock quarry (Maule Rock Mining Company), at what would eventually become Maule Lake, during the first half of the 20th century. Dutch Docklands also sought zoning that would permit such a community.

Instead, residents of nearby Eastern Shores and Western Eastern Shores feared that the islands would harm the lake's environment, restrict public access to the water, and attract gawkers and rowdy visitors. In response, in October 2015, the North Miami Beach City Commission classified the lake as a "conservation zone," prohibiting residential and commercial activities and allowing only fishing, boating, sailing, and wildlife activities.

Nearly three years later, in June 2018, Williams filed a "Burt J. Harris action" against the City of North Miami Beach, claiming that the zoning action was an unconstitutional taking of his property rights. In response, the city filed a motion to dismiss Williams's case two months later, which argued there was never any expectation that the lake could be used for residential purposes. The case is pending.

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**Boat Ramp**

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a jury ruled in her favor in 2014, awarding her nearly \$54,000 in damages.

In a telephone interview, the woman, who is an Upper Eastside resident but requests anonymity, tells the *BT*: "There was a section missing from the dock. I couldn't see it because of the way the sun was hitting the dock. I'm not surprised the city hasn't fixed it. That's how the city works."

Pocasangre would not comment on why it has taken the city so long to replace the dock and reopen the ramp. She does say that the city can't move forward until DERM recommends



BT photo by Margaret Griffis

An intrepid paddler slips past the fencing to launch her kayak.

approval of the permit to the Miami-Dade County Commission, which will make the final decision.

Mathisen claims that city representatives have run out of excuses, and that's why they're now blaming DERM. Nine months ago, he says, they told a gathering of residents at a community meeting in Legion Park the same thing.

"At that time we were also told about plans for bringing back the use of the boat ramp, dock, and waterfront access facility," he says. "Fast forward to today, and nothing has happened."

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Thanks to his partnership with Arkup, Olthuis believes the Greater Miami area may be a step closer to having a modern floating community. And Olthuis is still interested in using Maule Lake as the home of this floating community.

"Mr. Williams has the ground, and Dutch Docklands will buy the ground if he gets his protocol," he says. By protocol, Olthuis means the regulations that will allow a Maule Lake aquatic community which, the architect adds, might already exist. After all, Arkup's livable yachts aren't artificial islands or even houseboats, but vessels. "I think today boats are allowed. This is a boat. So I think you can just take and bring it there," he says.

Actually, in recent years, boats rarely spend more than a couple of days anchored at Maule Lake, says Claudia Gallegos, a resident of Western Eastern Shores. A vocal critic of Dutch Dockland's floating community proposal, Gallegos says a cluster of livable yachts at Maule Lake won't attract full time residents, and will likely become a nuisance. "I think they're going to be used for party houses," Gallegos says. "Would you want to live there the whole year?"

Gallegos questions the push for such floating homes, too. She points out that houseboats, once numerous prior to the 1970s, have completely disappeared from Miami-Dade County. "Nobody wanted to dock them," she says. "Why is it different this time?"

Indeed, a series of municipal ordinances over the years have virtually banned houseboats from Miami-Dade. The City of Miami, for example, has banned houseboats from the Miami River and other waterways. Miami Beach has also based laws limiting where vessels can anchor. And many marinas have also stopped accepting houseboats and vessels used as residences. (See "A Future Afloat," March 2017.)

Meanwhile, Derouin says Arkup has been communicating with officials from Miami-Dade County and the City of Miami Beach about the possibility of allowing a "pilot project where we can create a small floating community."

Derouin is also confident that Arkup can help create an environmentally safe, 21st-century water community somewhere.

"We want to be part of floating communities and floating resorts and other projects," he says. "That might be here in Miami. That might be in New York or the Caribbean. We are working on different projects."

Olthuis says it would make sense if South Florida embraced floating communities. After all, current research shows that large chunks of Miami-Dade are likely to be submerged by rising seas in the coming decades.

"It's an answer for Miami to work with the water, instead of fighting the water," he says. "Fighting the water, you will lose. It's not possible, like in Holland, to make one dyke, one levy, all around Miami. You have to accept that water is here and it'll move up and down."

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**Post Office**

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*BT* three years ago that the company intended to demolish the old building and replace it with a 120,000-square-foot complex with retail on the ground floor and residences or hotel rooms above (see "Stamped Out," February 2016).

Tony Arellano, managing partner of DWNTWN Realty Advisors, says it makes sense for Thor Equities to build anew. For one thing, the zoning allows a mixed-use, 12-story building. For another, the property is situated in what has become one of the most popular luxury shopping destinations in the United States, where retail leases for between \$100 and \$300 a square foot and land trades for well over \$2000 a square foot. "It's really gentrified," Arellano says.



BT photo by Margaret Griffis

The old boxes with combination locks had charm, but these are bigger.

But it wasn't just the Design District that's gentrified. Rents throughout the Biscayne Corridor have climbed, and

that made it challenging for the USPS to find a new home for the Buena Vista Post Office. At one point, the postal service

asked for, and received, an extension from Thor Equities when it couldn't leave by October 2017 (see "No Forwarding Address," May 2018).

Eventually the USPS zeroed in on a one-story retail building constructed in 1935 at the corner of NW 33rd Street and N. Miami Avenue. The USPS declined to say what sort of rent the federal agency is paying. Arellano, however, notes that rents in the N. Miami Avenue corridor tend to be around \$50 per square foot triple net.

Alex Martinez manages a Mattress Kings store next door to the new Buena Vista Post Office and says he uses the post office all the time for company purposes. "We don't have to drive into the middle of the Design District anymore," he says with a smile.

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