

VINDÖ SWEDEN



If you were to ask most sailors to tell to you in one phrase *how* they'd like their fiberglass boats built, they would tell you without hesitation, "Out of wood." Vindö yachts of Sweden has gone and done just that as far as is humanly possible. They have combined the strength and longevity of fiberglass hulls and Cockpits and a partial deck with the beauty of a magnificently crafted varnished mahogany house and teak housetops and teak decks, to create some of the prettiest yachts in the world today.

Vindö started building yachts in 1928 on the Island of Orust on the west coast of Sweden, an Island where boats have been built since the 11th century. Today there are close to three thousand people working in boatbuilding on Orust, including mastmakers and riggers, sailmakers and makers of Volvo diesel engines, but whatever phase of boatbuilding the people are involved in, they have nine hundred years of tradition to fuel their pride. To help continue the tradition, Orust has established a school of boatbuilding which, with its high Standards, is very difficult to get into. Those successful spend their first year in school and the second doing apprentice work in a boatyard.

But those who don't get in don't have to give up the idea of boatbuilding. There are dozens of small yards in the area, some just two-man operations, some very much larger, where there is always room for someone with enthusiasm who wants to learn the age-old secrets of the trade.

The people at Vindö certainly know most of them. Since 1928 there have been close to three thousand Vindös built, of all shapes and sizes. Since the conversion to fiberglass hulls in the early seventies, Vindös have ranged from the little 28 footer, which is without doubt the queen of all small coastal cruisers, to a large 39-foot ketch. As recently as five years ago there were two hundred twenty Vindös being built a year, but then the Vindös' fortune changed. When the big slowdown of the early eighties came, the old family ownership loyally refused to lay off their longtime workers and so kept on building boats when there was no one left to buy them. When the banks finally put a halt to that, Vindö's doors were closed and new owners found.

Sture Björklund, who was manager of a large Swedish shipyard for many years, but whose first love was always sailboats, and Bengt Isaksson are now owners of the scaled down Vindö boatyard with fifteen people working in the shops and sunny sheds just up from the inlet's rocky shores. But of the fifteen who are there, most have been with Vindö over twenty years and the gentleman who builds those magnificent wood houses has been with them now for thirty-five. And that is perhaps the great secret of the Vindös. The quality of boatbuilding that goes on in this yard would be very hard to find anywhere at any price, but here the wood deckhouses have been built this way for decades, it's all down to an art, so much so that Mr. Abrahamsson can fit one of those amazing curved housefronts in just three hours. It's irreplaceable skills such as these, perfected over the years, that keep the prices of the Vindös surprisingly low.

The other secret, I think, is that the boats are so beautiful. Vindö had the same designer from 1928 to 1978. He passed away at the age of ninety, leaving behind a long line of fine yachts. My favorite is the little 29 footer designed eighteen years ago, of which they have built four hundred sixty-two. This kind of classic continuity is impossible to find in the world today; the only other boat I can think of that has survived the years so well is Hinckley's Bermuda 40, which *aficionados* keep ordering year after year regardless of the price and regardless of its age.

But even at this writing, the little Vindö 29 is an endangered species, for many people would prefer to buy a larger boat of much less quality and certainly less beauty, so unless all you lovers of beautiful sailboats rally, these fine little yachts may just pass into history.

But there are two other very pretty Vindös that are going strong: The amazing 34 footer which, in spite of its graceful lines, has a little private cabin aft, and the perhaps even more amazing 39 footer which is one of the prettiest center cockpit boats created, cleverly layed out, with its huge owner's cabin aft.

The interior drawings speak for themselves, but do treat yourself to a close look at the 39 footer with its long fore and aft galley where you can be luxuriously braced against the lockers in a seaway, the spacious head accessible from forward and from aft, the truly regal-sized dinette with another settee across the way, the chart table of dimensions seldom found even on larger boats, and of course the aforementioned aft cabin with the airy berth the size of a football field. The berth in the forward cabin is of similar size and spaciousness, so that all in all, this is the ideal cruiser for two couples who like a beautiful boat to sail during the days and some beautiful berths to sleep in at night.

Now that we've dashed through the interiors, let's go back out and look at the hulls. As I said, the hull of the 29 footer is an eighteen-year-old design, whereas the other two are only four years old. The newer ones have stayed with the long keels but the forefoot, especially of the 34 footer, has been well cut back to reduce the wetted surface and to increase her ability to maneuver in close quarters. The rudders on the newer boats are also fuller for quicker response. The entries of all three boats are moderate and the buttocks rather full for good power.

The waterlines are long on all the boats with modest overhangs, and the shear is much the same on all three - gentle with a little spring.

On deck the Vindös all stand out, not just because of the beauty of their houses but also because of the spaciousness and comfort of their cockpits. The varnished cockpit coamings are high for comfort and security, and are well rounded in the aft corners for the helmsman to snuggle into. The footwells are narrow enough to brace yourself with your feet, on any angle of heel.

The side decks are of modest width on all the boats but certainly sufficient and safe, with 3 inch bulwarks with teak caprails to keep your feet on deck.

The masts are all deck-stepped with tabernacle bases and the pulpits are all formed like cradles to accept the mast when lowered. This is the ideal rig for cruising the canals of Europe.

If you think I'm rushing through all this to get to the construction, then you're absolutely right, because to me that's the most exciting aspect of these unique little yachts.

Vindö is very flexible in its layup of hulls, and although all hulls are now built to Lloyds of London specs, I would recommend as a good minimal layup for the smaller boats: two layers of mat and roving at topsides, three at the water-line and four in the keel area. For the 39 footer add a lami-

nate everywhere. If you are happy with the rather old method of Lloyds of London rating, then take the hulls as they come.

The bailast is of internally-placed lead castings.

Now, the most interesting part is how the deck and house are made. The deck is actually layed up as traditional fiberglass decks are, with a flange bulwark. Between the hull and deck joint they fill with micro balloons and resin. Then the hulls are bonded with laminates to the deck from the inside to create a leakproof unit. The deck layup continues part way up - about 3 inches - to form the base of the cabinside. This high vertical lip is the beginnings of the house and is a very vital part, for it eliminates the potential deck leaks that old wooden boats had at the joint of house and deck.

The entire cockpit is a fiberglass molding, again eliminating a constant source of rot and leak problems common to most wooden boats, for cockpits undergo a lot of strain from steering Systems, jumping bodies and dropped winch handles.

As you can see, so far we are talking about a fiberglass boat that is missing a few details, like cabin sides and a house top but those are coming next. Once the deck and cockpit are securely in place, a heavy layer of black polysulfide - the best sealant you can get - is layed onto the 3-inch high vertical fiberglass lip that's the foundation of the house sides, then the nearly 1 inch thick *solid* mahogany sides are screwed to the lip on 3 inch centers.

Now comes the best part. I always thought that the beautifully curved forward part of the house was some thin veneer which would die an early death. Not so. The entire front piece is a series of *seven* laminates of 1/8-inch-thick *solid* mahogany, layed in a massive jig and glued and clamped together. They are then fit and scarfed, with the most perfectly fitting joints I have ever seen, onto the house sides.

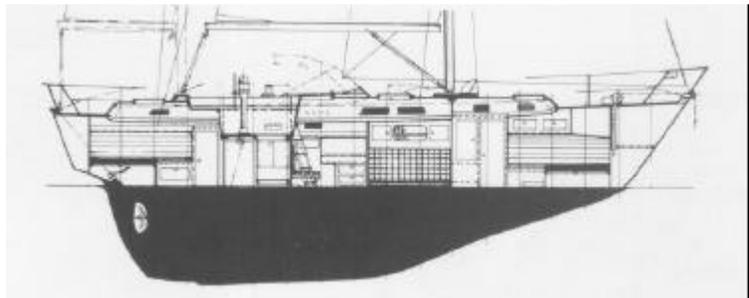
Next, a set of laminated deckbeams are set into the house sides on about 12-inch centers, and a layer of plywood that has been milled to look like tongue-and-groove is glued and screwed onto the beams. The heavy 1/2 - inch teak decking is then layed over that. If you're skeptical in the least regarding this construction, remember that they have built three thousand boats this way in the past fifty-eight years which all worked well just as they were meant to. Ideally the teak should be set into thickened epoxy glue which would create a tremendously strong structure.

Things like the covering boards on the house top, which are actually the corner of the house top itself, are meticulously crafted with beautiful overlapping joints in the corners. All the hatch openings are amply reinforced and generally the house and deck feel enormously solid. We saw a boat that was over twenty years old, sitting in the winter sheds, and except for needing a coat of varnish - just to liven up the shine and for no other reason - the whole structure seemed as if it were only a year old, with not an open or cracked seam or joint anywhere.

The next step at Vindö is to cover whatever is fiberglass with a layer of heavy solid teak. So the fiberglass decks and cockpits vanish under some fine woodwork, and even the sides of the cockpit-well get covered over.

To preserve the teak in top shape, the seats are sloped to let the water run off, but then, just to be sure, there are little copper tubes set in the seat to insure drainage in case the boat is loaded out of trim.

To show what kind of care is taken with details here at Vindö, let's look at how the deck drains. The deck scuppers are *bonded* right into the deck to prevent any leaks into the interior. On most production boats the drains are led directly through the hull at deck level, allowing dirty water to run down the topsides and leave horrendous dirt stains on the hull - and oh, how many cursed hours I have spent scouring the unscourable from ours! But at Vindö the drains lead into heavy pipes bonded right onto the inside skin of the hull, which then lead down to the drainholes in the bootstripe. Now that's good engineering.



The rest of the boat is as well thought out: the tiller on the 29, hinges up onto the aft deck leaving the cockpit free; the steering mechanism on the 34 is completely accessible for maintenance and inspection; there are interior red night-sailing lamps all over the boat; and the beautiful good-sized teak and bronze mooring cleats are set up on the caprail where they are out of the way and from where the docklines lead overboard fairly eliminating the need for chafeguards on the caprail.

The bedlogs for the engine are enormous pieces of wood and the engine installation is well done, as is the electrical and plumbing - the seacocks are all bronze. And there are endless hours invested in lining even the lockers with mahogany strips, beautifully dressing and bullnosing the most hid-den dropboards, and varnishing them three times, and fabricating teak grates in the head that are works of art.

I must mention one thing that I have seen on very few yachts other than Vindö, and that is the beautiful, solid china sinks in the heads. Not only do they look good when the boat is new, but because they won't scratch or stain or discolor, they'll look beautiful for years to come. All you builders who use the ugly little plastic monsters read and learn.

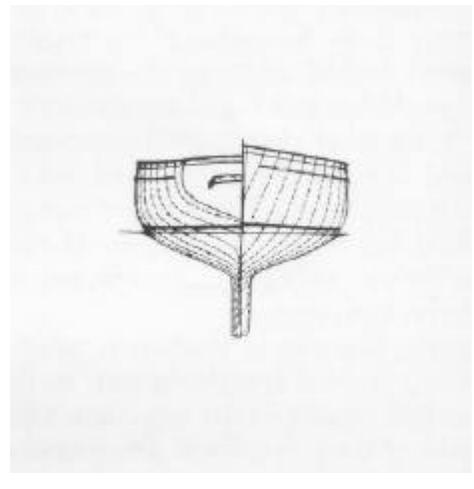
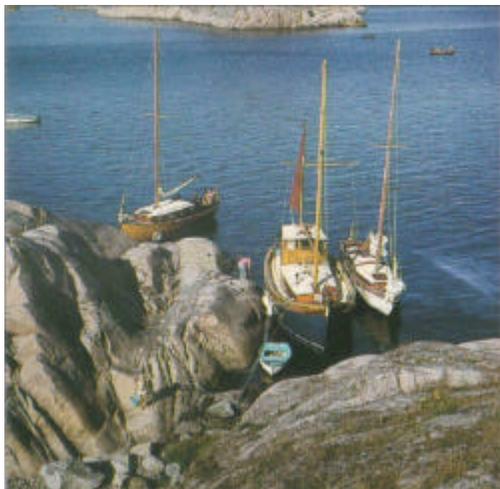
One question that always comes up with the Swedish yachts is: Why do they all use mahogany instead of teak for interiors and, in the case of Vindö, for all the exterior structures as well? The answer to that is tradition. For over a hundred years mahogany has been the wood used in this region. Besides, mahogany is an infinitely better wood for structural use than teak, since it glues and laminates well, whereas teak, with its enormously high oil content, does not. The mahogany in use at Vindö is bought in solid logs, and only the finest pieces with the best grain and color are used in places where the wood is visible.



Vindö Yachts of Sweden is without parallel in boat building today, with their small and medium-sized yachts with fiberglass hulls, side decks and Cockpits, and beautifully varnished solid wood houses. Vindös look exactly

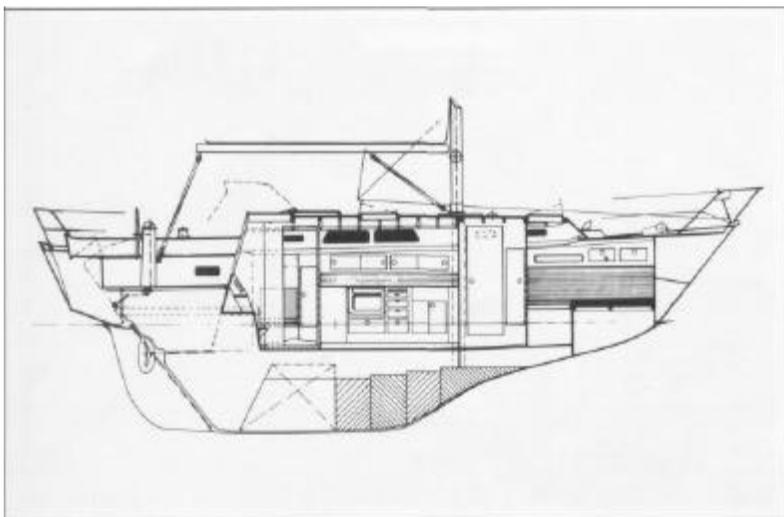
as a good yacht should. They have been building boats for almost sixty years and currently have three models: the little 29 footer, a 34 footer and the 38-foot center cockpit. The workmanship is so precise that a violin maker couldn't improve on it, but then some of the best shipwrights here have been

building Vindös for 35 years. The photo in the top left corner shows the beautiful cabin top covering boards and the curved frontal piece laminated from seven 1/8-inch thick layers of solid mahogany. The photo to its right shows the 34 footer head on, with just a trace of tumble-home. The thirty-year-old photo





in the bottom left-hand corner shows a small Vindö to the right on the rocky Swedish coast, while the photo beside it is again of the 34 footer under sail. The 38-foot center cockpit is shown in the drawings. Above is a good photo showing the extensive wood-work in house and deck.



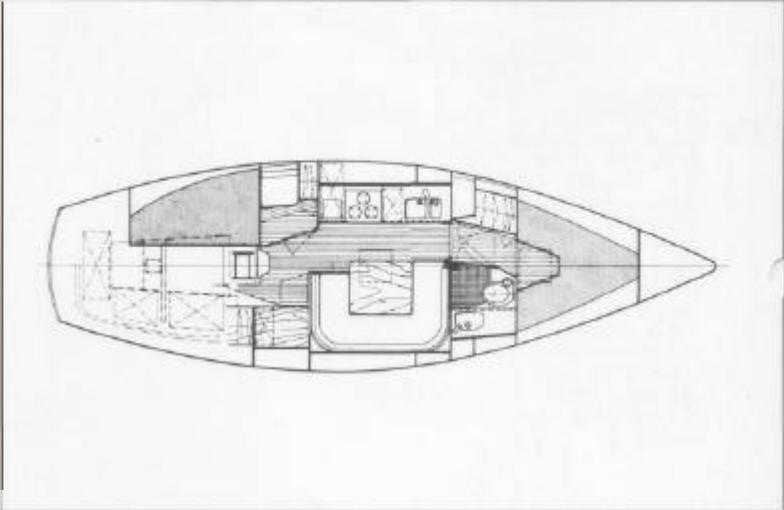


The top left

photo shows the laminated front of the cabin top. The entire front is one piece, with the seven laminates mentioned staggered, so the center seam you see is only one

its right shows the solid turtle hatch under which the main hatch slides. It is built as one piece with the curved base for the dodger. In the top right corner is a beautiful mooring cleat set wisely out of the way on top of the caprail. If you look really hard, you can see a strip of brass behind the plate guarding the caprail against rope

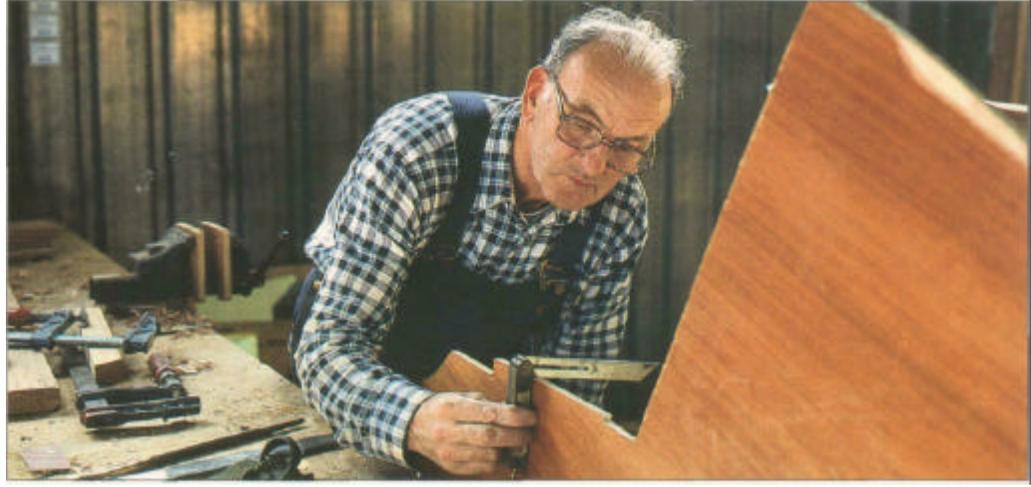
chafe. Below it is a detail of the lapped joint in the house-corner, while the large photo shows the wood-lined cockpit. I say wood-lined because, to prevent leaks, there is a monocoque fiberglass molding underneath the wood. A classy idea, to say the least! In the bottom left corner are three





interior shots and a drawing of the 34 footer, showing the lovingly crafted mahogany (the traditional wood in these parts) interior. Note the laminated beams which are the structural part of the house, and the tongue-in-groove patterned cedar overhead over which the teak decking is laid.

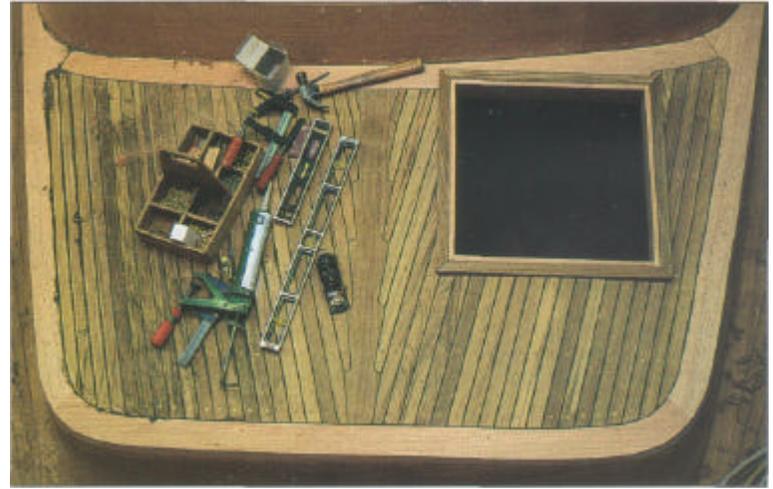




Here you see step-by-step photos of how it's done. In the top left corner Mr. Isaksson -- who has been fitting those houses on the Vindös so beautifully for thirty-five years-- beds and bolts his house sides to a

vertical lip in the fiberglass deck. Note the all-fiberglass cockpit and hull stiffeners below. In the photo below is Vindö's woodshop. They buy whole logs and mill them themselves. In the large photo, Mr. Sture Björklund, manager and half pwner of Vindö, inspects a freshly decked hull. On the top of the right-hand

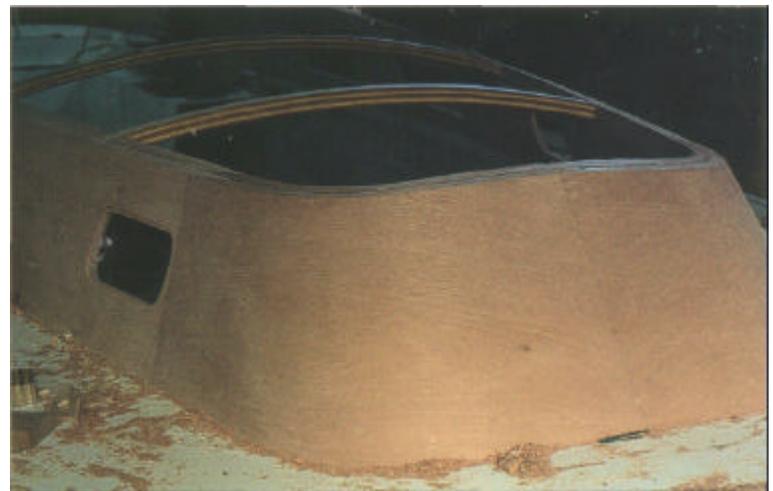
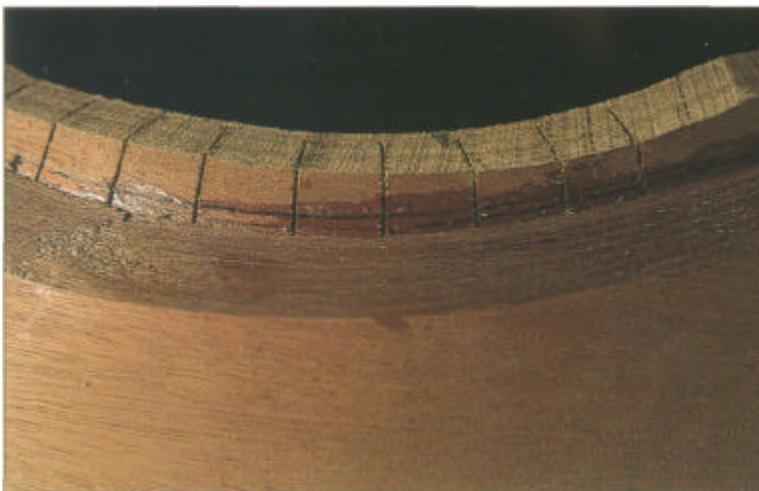
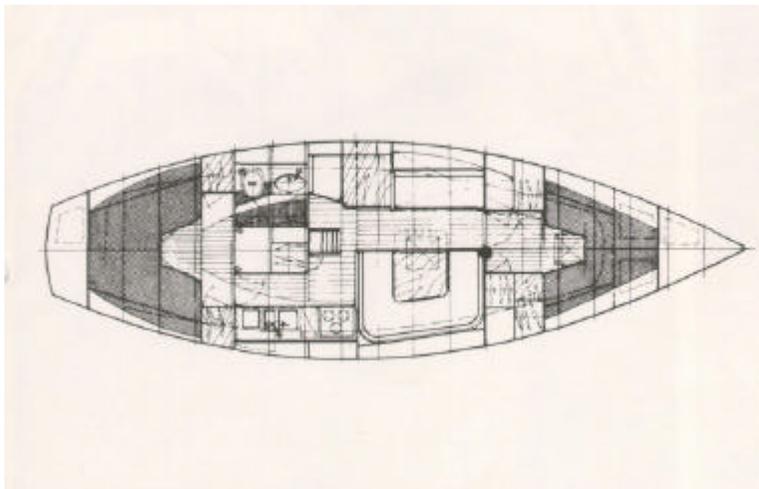




page are detail shots of the bow and stern of the 38 footer. Note double ground-tackle stowage wells and generally flawless workmanship. One indication of the sophistication of a teak deck is how nicely the ends of planks that are let into the kingplank are shaped. When they are as beautifully rounded

as you see here, you know you're looking at the work of a master. The interior drawing is of the 38 footer. The three photos that surround it attest to the solidness of the house. The top one shows the thickness of the side with the interior piece in place. The deck beams are let into it. If you look just above the portlight,

you can see the double scarf where the front piece joins the side. In the photo below the drawing, the inner piece can be seen cut to allow it to make the drastic curve. On the next page is the elegant wheel and the yachty, louvered, companionway doors. Unques-tionably one of the world's best boats.



And so the amazing craftsmanship of woodboat building lives on in the fiberglass hulls at Vindö. The beauty of the boats is hard to describe and the photographs don't do them justice. But when you're down at the docks that are full of some of the finest all-fiberglass craft the world has to offer, your eyes keep wandering until they find the glowing wood house of a Vindö and you say to yourself in quiet admiration, "Now there is a *real* boat." And it's hard to look away.

