

History of Donoratico Boat Building

The **Cantiere Navale Donoratico** (popularly known as *Ca.Na.Do.*) was the legendary cradle of Italian boatbuilding. Founded in **1946 by Count Gaddo della Gherardesca**, the yard grew from a post-WWII workshop into a global powerhouse of wooden craftsmanship before its eventual closure in 1977. [1, 2, 3]

The 1960s and 1970s marked both the absolute zenith of its global sporting influence and the turbulent dawn of industrial composite manufacturing. [1, 3]

1. The 1960s Golden Era: Wood Transformed into Speed

By the 1960s, the Donoratico yard employed over 100 master shipwrights (*maestri d'ascia*). It became an elite hub where legendary craftsmen like **Lido Filippi**, Renzo Giunti, Giovanni Ciolli, and Otello Salani converged. [1]

- **The Honduras Cedar Tradition:** The yard specialized in sourcing premium Honduras Cedar. Craftsmen manually shaved and molded the wood to create fluid, deep, V-shaped hulls. While notoriously challenging for rowers to balance ("set up"), these hulls offered unmatched tracking speed once stabilized. [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]
- **The Sectional Innovation:** To solve the logistics of transporting massive 60-foot boats across Europe and the Atlantic, Donoratico pioneered multi-sectional wooden boats (such as three-piece eights) that bolted together seamlessly without losing structural rigidity. [1, 2, 3]
- **1964 Tokyo Olympics:** The yard achieved legendary global status when the underdog U.S. men's Olympic eight (represented by the Vesper Boat Club) won the gold medal in a custom-built Donoratico shell named the *Doc Riggall*. Lido Filippi served as a chief designer on these mid-century builds. [1, 2]
- **1968 Mexico City Olympics:** The shipyard hit another historic high when the Italian national crew captured Olympic gold in the coxed pair ("due con") using a Donoratico hull. []

2. The 1970s Diversification: "Utilitarie del Mare" & Catamarans

As the global economy shifted, the shipyard expanded its catalog beyond elite rowing shells to capture commercial markets. [1, 2]

- **Pleasure Craft & Speedboats:** Capitalizing on the Italian economic boom, they manufactured small, accessible motorboats and sailing yachts dubbed the "utilitarie del mare" (the fiats of the sea). [1]

- **Oceanic Catamarans:** In the early 1970s, Donoratico became a pioneer in multi-hull design. They built highly advanced, lightweight racing catamarans and trimarans—vessels virtually unheard of in Italy at the time—including custom commissions for the King of Greece and the Italian Naval Academy in Livorno. [1, 2]
- **American Collegiate Dominance:** Even as internal changes loomed, their 1960s-vintage wooden shells—like the famous *Donoratico Corsair*—remained prized possessions in the U.S., driving Northeastern University to historic EARC Eastern Sprints championships in 1972 and 1973. [1, 2]

3. The Structural Shift and Closure (1977)

The late 1970s brought a massive technological disruption that the traditional artisanal structure of Cantiere Navale Donoratico could not survive. [1, 2]

- **The Synthetic Revolution:** The global marine market rapidly shifted toward chemically synthesized materials like fiberglass, Kevlar, and carbon fiber. These materials required industrial molding, chemical resins, and entirely different manufacturing infrastructures than woodworking. [1, 2]
- **The Final Carbon Experiment:** In a tragic piece of irony, Count Gaddo della Gherardesca actually anticipated this future. In the mid-1970s, the yard actively experimented with early carbon-fiber prototypes. However, the aggressive cost of retooling the factory, combined with an intense economic recession, caught up to them. [1, 2, 3]
- **The End of Ca.Na.Do.:** Unable to maintain the pace of industrialization, the historic shipyard officially closed its doors in **1977**. A short-lived worker cooperative attempted to revive the brand shortly after, but it folded quickly. [1]

The Living Legacy

Though the original shipyard closed, its DNA survived entirely through its pupils. Lido Filippi took the master carpentry secrets, the obsession with hull rigidity, and the lessons of the composite transition to open **Filippi Boats** in 1980, keeping Donoratico at the absolute center of the rowing world to this day. Today, the architectural site of the original 1946 shipyard has been preserved and transformed into the [Canado Club Residence Hotel](#) along the Tuscan coast. [1, 3, 4, 5]

Filippi Boats Founded in 1980

Filippi Boats was officially founded in **1980** by Lido Filippi in **Donoratico, Italy**, but its deep roots in the town's elite woodworking tradition stretch back decades prior. Today, the company operates a highly advanced facility in Donoratico, producing over 1,000 Olympic-class racing shells annually. [1, 2, 3]

The history of Filippi and its connection to Donoratico developed through several key eras:

The Donoratico Apprenticeship (1960s–1970s)

Before starting his own business, Lido Filippi worked for years as a master carpenter and designer at the pre-existing, historic **Donoratico shipyard**. During this era, Donoratico was already a prestigious name in rowing; for example, the U.S. men's Olympic crew won gold at the 1964 Tokyo Games using a famous 8-man wooden shell designed by Lido Filippi and built at the original Donoratico yard. As the market shifted, Lido decided to branch out on his own. [[1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#)]

Humble Origins in a Small Shed (1980)

In 1980, Lido Filippi established his independent company, **Cantiere Navale Filippi Lido S.R.L.**, alongside just five other shipwrights. They began manufacturing wooden rowing boats in a tiny, 200-square-meter shed near the Tyrrhenian Sea. [[1](#), [3](#)]

- **The First Shell:** Lido's breakthrough design was a red cedar single scull that featured a innovative wooden deck instead of the traditional waterproof canvas sheet. []
- **The Breakthrough:** After champion sculler Alfredo Bollati tested this rigid, responsive boat on Lake Garda, word of its speed spread rapidly across Europe, sparking an influx of international orders. []

Global Success and Modernization

The company quickly scaled up, transitioning from its small workshop origins into an international powerhouse: [[1](#)]

- **First Medals:** By the mid-1980s, Filippi hulls began dominating international racing, winning gold medals at the 1986 and 1987 World Rowing Championships. [[1](#)]
- **Material Evolution:** The yard transitioned from traditional wood craftsmanship to advanced carbon-fiber and composite "white boats," which became the iconic trademark of the brand. [[1](#)]
- **Quality Control:** In 1997, Filippi became the first rowing manufacturer to achieve ISO quality certification, ensuring every custom boat signed off by the Donoratico craftsmen met identical rigorous standards. [[1](#)]

The Modern Donoratico Yard

Today, the original 200-square-meter shed has expanded into a **3,000-square-meter high-tech facility** located at [Via Giacomo Matteotti, 113, Donoratico](#). Now run by Lido's son, David Filippi, the company designs over 70 different hull shapes tailor-made to specific athlete weights. Their blue-and-white shells consistently account for **60% to 65% of all boats raced** at elite World Rowing and Olympic events. [[1](#), [2](#), [3](#)]