



Where to Buy Marine Vinyl Fabric for Your Boat?

A Guide for New Boat Owners



Table of Contents

3	Introduction
4	Textile Manufacturers
5	Marine Fabricators
6	Marine Fabric Retailers
7	Conclusion



You've just purchased your boat and now you want to work on outfitting it with a new bimini top or cockpit enclosure. Maybe you also want to buy [a cover to protect your boat](#). How do you approach buying these accessories and fixtures? To answer this question, we have to take a look at how these specialty fabrics make their way from the manufacturer to the finished products on your boat.

The process starts with the marine vinyl manufacturer, who creates the fabric and sells it in large rolls. These are typically purchased in bulk by distributors, marine fabricators, or retailers, and then they are sold to boat owners. The key part of the process is that these fabrics have to be engineered for its particular application.

While some of these boating accessories are sold as-is (e.g., a pre-fabricated generic boat cover), higher quality options are typically created specifically for a particular boat or boat model. This ensures that these accessories properly fit the boat both in terms of size and design. The fabric can be customized for your boat, based on your desired look and specs, and then fabricated accordingly. The end result is a boating accessory constructed from marine vinyl. But who does the fabrication?

Traditionally, boat owners go to a marine fabricator or "canvas shop" to choose the ideal fabric for their project and work with professionals to ensure that it is properly customized to their needs. The marine vinyl is then fabricated and the final product is delivered or, if applicable, installed on the boat. In recent years, though, it's become easier for boat owners to take on the last steps in this process themselves.

By buying fabric from a retailer, watching hours of online videos, and procuring the necessary equipment, it's possible to turn outfitting your boat into a do-it-yourself project. This can be especially appealing to dedicated hobbyists or those who have done previous work with vinyl fabrics.

While it allows a high degree of control over the process, it's also time-consuming and requires significant skill. That's why the majority of boat owners opt to work with a professional to ensure the highest quality craftsmanship without the hassle of taking care of all of the work themselves. Fabricators have the experience to both educate boat owners on the relevant options and then perform high quality work with the marine vinyl quickly and affordably.

To determine what's the best option for you, it's valuable to take a closer look at every part of the process in more detail, from production to sales to fabrication. This guide will help you choose the best way to outfit your boat with the highest quality marine vinyl.

Textile Manufacturers

To understand modern marine vinyl fabric, it's important to look at how it's made.

Textile manufacturers in the US and abroad buy raw materials and transform these into composites like the vinyl fabric that can be used on boats. This material must meet certain standards to ensure that it holds up to elements.

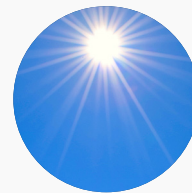
The top three considerations with marine fabrics are:



Water Resistance



Cleanability



UV Protection

Other key qualities include mildew resistance and total waterproofing, which can distinguish some manufacturers from others.

Overall, the quality of the vinyl material is determined by the specific raw materials and manufacturing processes used. Vinyl composite is made of ethylene and chloride, which combines to form polyvinyl chloride (PVC), which is another name for vinyl fabric. This material is typically sold in single sheets or in rolls.

Some boat owners may think that the best option is going straight to the source (the manufacturer) in order to assure quality control and get the lowest price. For the most part, though, manufacturers only sell in large quantities to other businesses in the supply chain.

Although the manufacturer is outside of the direct purchasing process, they can still be an important source of information when making a decision about which fabric to use. When working with fabricators or retailers, you can inquire about where they source their marine fabrics. Certain manufacturers, especially those like Herculite which are based in the U.S., have higher quality standards. It's valuable to keep this in mind in choosing both where you go to buy marine vinyl, and the particular fabric(s) you choose.

When you're starting to look for a material for your marine applications, you can do some research about some of the [leaders in the field of fabric manufacturing](#). Browse some of the marine fabrics they offer, which can help you become more knowledgeable in choosing the right material for your boat. If you like the products of a particular manufacturer, you can even look specifically for fabricators or retailers that source from this company. Taking the time to research the marine fabric manufacturer is a valuable step for boat owners who are very concerned about the quality of the vinyl on their boats, as well as those who want to be conscious of where and how it is manufactured.

The vinyl that textile manufacturers produce ultimately ends up with a distributor, marine fabricator, or a fabric retailer.

Marine Fabricators

Buying a marine fabric is not as simple as comparison shopping for the best material.

Whether it's sun shades, covers, boat tops, enclosures, upholstery, or even cushion covers, the fabric must be carefully tailored to meet your boat's specifications and to ensure you get the look and quality you want. **Since this process needs to be precise, boat owners will typically seek out professional marine fabricators to handle the job and ensure it's done right.**

Fabricators are businesses that specialize in working on the fabric part of marine vessels. They can add new features, make repairs, and replace damaged or outdated fabrics. Fabricators stock marine vinyl fabrics and can also order them specially for unique projects; it all depends on the job and the boat owner's preferences. They can help you determine what style of enclosures and upholstery your boat needs, assist with the process of choosing the material, and perform the cutting, stitching, and installing of the material on your boat.

Fabricators are seasoned professionals with years of experience with marine fabrics and their customization. For example, fabricators will know the [difference between laminated vinyl fabrics and coated vinyl fabrics](#), and which option is better for your needs. If you're looking to get the best possible design, they'll be able to guide you through the process. Since they have done similar jobs numerous times, they can help you decide on the perfect fabric for your top, enclosure, or other vinyl-based boat accessories.

They will also be the ones producing the finished product. **The craftsmanship of [marine fabricators](#) is higher quality than other alternatives, due to their experience and professional equipment.** Although it's possible for boat owners to create these boat accessories themselves, this requires a significant amount of skill to get right. For boat owners concerned about achieving a crisp and elegant look, a marine fabricator is the option that brings greatest peace of mind. Sheets and covers will be properly fitted, while elements like zipper for enclosures are sure to work.

[FIND A FABRICATOR NEAR YOU »](#)





Marine Fabric Retailers

Some companies buy marine vinyl fabric from manufacturers and then sell it directly to consumers.

Examples of these types of businesses include online marine fabric retailers, and brick-and-mortar fabric stores that sell marine vinyl along with many different other types of fabrics. The online direct option offers a wide selection of possible marine vinyl fabrics but doesn't allow you to see the fabric in person. In such situations, it's difficult to know precisely how the vinyl will look. **Although it can sometimes be cheaper, it can make it harder to get it right.**

Direct vinyl sales in stores that offer a wide variety of fabrics have a couple limitations as well. Typically, the employees at these stores do not specialize in marine fabrics and may not be as knowledgeable about their specific application in boats. It can ultimately be more difficult to find the right vinyl material without extensive research.

The most significant hurdle with direct-to-consumer sales channels is that they require you, the boat owner, to handle the fabrication process. This can be exciting for committed hobbyists or those with experience in stitching vinyl fabric and constructing boat enclosures. Most boat owners, though, would need to spend time learning the process. **As a result, even though it can be cheaper to obtain the fabric directly, the process becomes quite a bit more complicated, time-consuming, and expensive.** Small errors in the fabrication process can ruin the look and functionality of your enclosures, tops, or upholstery.

An alternative to fabricating the accessories yourself is bringing the marine vinyl you've purchased on your own to a marine fabricator to complete the process. This can lead to some complications, however. The fabricator may not be able to guarantee the quality of the marine vinyl that you've purchased independently, or it may not be easily adaptable to their typical production methods. All of this can cause unnecessary hiccups in the process.

It may be tempting to try to "cut out the middle-man", but doing so when purchasing marine fabrics comes with substantial risks. It can ultimately be a lot more work and hassle for the boat owner. **In order to outfit your boat with the best quality marine vinyl in your boat accessories, it's often best to go straight to a professional marine fabricator.**

Conclusion

When considering where to buy marine vinyl, think about the supply chain progression outlined in this guide. Since [the quality of the fabric](#) is always important, boat owners should do some simple research about manufacturers and their range of qualities. This forms a great knowledge base when buying marine fabric.

From there, the primary consideration for any boat owner should be **how complicated they want the process to be**.

For those up for a substantial challenge, the DIY route may be an option. In such a situation, you could shop for vinyl online or at local fabric stores. Make sure to research the fabric you're buying in order to ensure it's up to the quality standards you desire, and that your fabrication skills are up to the task.

For a good marriage of quality and convenience, most boat owners seek out professional marine fabricators to help them through the process. This can help to provide assurances of quality and product longevity while also saving the boat owner the time and energy required of the fabrication process.

To Find Out What Makes A Great Marine Vinyl Enclosure,
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