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- [Features](#)
- [News](#)
- [» Bridge](#)
- [» Connection](#)
- [» Technical News](#)
- [» Marina News](#)
- [» Business News](#)
- [» Broker News](#)
- [» Travel News](#)
- [» Career News](#)
- [» News from Crews](#)
- [» Write To Be Heard](#)
- [» Latitude Adjustment](#)
- [» The Triton e-survey](#)
- [Press Releases](#)
- [Columnists](#)
- [» In the Galley](#)
- [» Nutrition](#)
- [» Fitness](#)
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- [» Photography](#)
- [» Horoscopes](#)
- [» In the Stars](#)
- [» Environment](#)
- [» Saftey Drills](#)
- [» Personal Finance](#)
- [» Customer Service](#)

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Porto Hussong 'is going to become a megayacht center'

Nov 01, 2006 by [John Freeman](#)

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ENSENADA, MEXICO • Along this stretch of Baja California known as the Baja Riviera, Hussong's Cantina in downtown Ensenada has long been revered as a legendary watering hole.

Its namesake, Porto Hussong, an extravagant resort that's about to take shape just north of Ensenada,

now has its eyes on the globe-trotting megayacht clientele.

The project will be built in partnership with Walter and John Hussong, brothers and descendents of the cantina's founders and owners of a prized 16-acre property along the waters of Todos Santos Bay. Currently, the land is home to Quintas Papagayo, a collection of modest 1940s-vintage rental homes, two tired tennis courts and acres of unused dirt.

The \$350 million project will include an array of amenities, such as 450 private oceanfront condominiums, priced up to \$3 million each; a 90-suite boutique hotel and private residence club; and a high-end retail center.

For the yachting industry, the property's calling card will be the decidedly upscale marina of 300 slips. Sixty will be for vessels up to 200 feet, as well as two for vessels up to 300 feet.

"This is going to become a megayacht center," Christopher S. Merson, CEO of Meridian Development Group, told a media tour in mid-October. "Our vision is to create a destination resort that will rank among the finest in the world."

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» [April 2005](#)

» [May 2005](#)

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» [Aug. 2005](#)

» [Sept. 2005](#)

» [Oct. 2005](#)

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» [June 2006](#)

» [July 2006](#)

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With a growing population of 40,000, Ensenada is about two hours south of San Diego by car. Among yachties, it's best known as the finish of the annual 125nm Newport Beach to Ensenada sailboat race, one of the world's largest.

Merson's firm, headquartered in Reno, Nev., has developed successful high-end resorts in such Mexican cities as Cabo San Lucas, Manzanillo, Puerto Vallarta and Acapulco.

John C. Corrough, a Newport Beach, Calif.-based marina designer, also brings impressive credits as the project's marina consultant. He's designed high-end marinas in Kuwait, Mexico, Brazil, Costa Rica, Taiwan, Singapore and Japan, among others.

The well-traveled Corrough is convinced that Ensenada will soon emerge as a megayacht center.

"I remember coming here in the '70s when it was just a sleepy little Baja town, but it was always a welcome way to end the race and we always made a stop at Hussong's," said Corrough, a veteran sailing racer. "These days, Ensenada has evolved to a point where it has now plateaued. We want to skip the next several levels and make it *the* place for yachts along the West Coast. Working with the Hussong family, we all have the vision and investment capital needed to make that happen."

The developers emphasized that full funding has already been established by outside sources and equity from Meridian's other Mexican properties, assuring that the project won't be halted by lack of pre-sales, a common occurrence in Baja.

First-phase sales have been brisk, they said.

John Freeman is director of communications for Knight & Carver YachtCenter. He spent more than a dozen years as a journalist at the San Diego Tribune and Union Tribune newspapers before joining the marine industry. Contact him at jfreeman@knightandcarver.com.

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	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

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