



UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT

Yachting is a business like no other. The glamour, the glitz and the jet-set lifestyle that goes with it is what makes it so tantalisingly appealing.

To many, they are a distant dream. Whilst to others just another of their many homes, to relax, entertain and have fun in. And, as with any home-proud owner, their yachts need to be designed and fitted with the same care and attention to detail as their residences.

In this, our first 'soft' feature on yachting; we are talking to Hot Lab, an award-winning boutique design agency, about their experiences in designing yachts. This Q&A will shed some light into what's involved in the whole process, from concept to the finished product and delivery. Further down the line we will be focussing on more extensive coverage of this fascinating business, with guest writers and more profiles of companies involved in all aspects of the yachting industry.

Hot Lab Studio was formed in Milan back in 2004, when three designers; Michele Dragoni, Antonio Romano and Enrico Lumini decided to join forces and form a partnership. Armed with a working knowledge of the luxury automotive and interior design sectors, they decided to take their expertise and move into yachting, and haven't looked back since. Working closely with private clients and shipyards, they have produced some exceptional designs and won numerous awards for the projects they have

worked on over the years. We recently caught up with Antonio Romano, one of the partners and spokesperson of the company, and posed some questions to him...

Urban Life: what made you decide to make the transition from automotive design to yachting design?

Antonio Romano: The idea from the beginning was to have our own studio, since in automotive design you mostly work in-house for big car brands. The work involved in yacht design is also much more complete. You play with exterior shapes, interior design, fittings and decorations and so on. We're talking about architecture that moves, or floats.

UL: How do you approach each project and what steps are involved once you've taken on a brief?

AR: First of all we have a meeting to talk about the brief. The best of our clients are private yacht owners, so they usually give us an idea of style, dimension and budget. The first step is to then determine the competitors in that range after which we design the GA (general arrangements), which are then constantly updated. At the same time we start on the first exterior sketches, side views and perspective and we plan several internal meetings amongst our team. And when we arrive

at an interesting solution we plan a second meeting with the client to receive their first impressions and feedbacks. If we're in line with the client's idea, we then start to do the first 3D models and after that several realistic renders. If we're also involved in the interior design, we show some materials, colors and style suggestions, after that we get on with our interior design proposal.

UL: Is there freedom to be creative or are you restricted by your client's imagination?

AR: I don't think that this is pure creative work as such. You have to follow the client's idea first of all, since every custom yacht has little technical or design improvements or 'wow' factors. At the end of the day the layouts are all quite similar, however, with exterior shapes there is much more room to create something new.

UL: And typically, how long is the process of designing and producing a yacht?

What's involved, from start to finish?

AR: Usually with a custom yacht you're involved for two years. From the first sketches to the technical and shop drawings for the yard, until the final selection of the last items on board (even tableware for example).

UL: Given the costs involved, is it fair to

assume that everything is custom made for each project/yacht?

AR: If we exclude big items such as engines, generators, finns, propellers, electrical parts, appliances and so on, the rest can be considered to be custom made. Usually sofas, chairs and other interior details are chosen from famous design companies, but even with these we prefer to customise some details. Every yacht has to be unique.

UL: How do you approach the interior design of the yachts? Is this something you do as an agency or do you bring in other interior designers?

AR: We usually receive a precise brief from the client. However, we also engage with the client to understand a little more about his taste (what car he drives, interior style of his houses, what hotels or clubs that he likes etc), after which we prepare colours, materials and style suggestions. Choosing the materials with the client, showing the final renders and sometimes using videos helps to get a first close look at the interior design. We usually go from there.

UL: Yachting being such a specialised (and costly) industry, are there any trends that you follow, if any?

AR: As in the automotive sector, there are some trends of course. And there are different types of yachts, so you can easily compare a cabrio to a fast open, or an SUV to a displacement yacht. Similarly, the exterior lines can be soft and pure as an Aston Martin or straight and masculine as a Cadillac.

UL: What are the most interesting projects you've worked on?

AR: Actually we're working on a 38 metre displacement that will be built in Turkey, with very interesting exterior lines and big interior volume. We'll do the exterior and interior design and the naval architecture will also be done in Italy. We're also working on two other amazing concepts: a 73M for Icon Yachts and 86M for Oceanco (considered to be the most important shipyard in the world).

UL: How do you choose shipyards?

AR: Depends a lot on the budget! We can take clients to Turkey, Italy or The Netherlands. But the prices will vary as will the quality, although when you're inside, it will be hard to see the main differences of quality. We have very good relationships with all these countries, so we can advise our clients on the best options.

UL: What's the minimum amount of money needed to build a decent yacht?

AR: If we talk about about a 30 metre yacht for example, I really don't suggest spending anything less than 3.5 million Euros.

UL: Are designs limited by money or imagination?

AR: Mostly money. If the budget is there, you can do anything. There are yachts with a Harrier jet or submarine on board, so depends just on how much money one has.

UL: Which other designers do you admire and why?

AR: I appreciate the work of Gianni Zuccon, one of the masters of Italian yacht design. There's also Studio Nuvolari and Lenard that are able to work on big yacht projects and you can always recognise their style and taste.

UL: What are the categories of yachts, and what is a yacht versus a super or mega yacht?

AR: Super or mega yachts are strange names created to impress. A yacht is a boat bigger than 24 metres. Anything over 40/45 metres is called a super yacht and mega yachts when they are more than 60/65 metres, but at the end of the day everybody writes what they want. Talking of categories, just as for cars, we have different categories for yachts too, for example; runabout, day cruiser, open, cruiser, flying bridge, classical Motor yacht, Navetta, Trawler, Explorer vessel, Mega yacht etc.

UL: And finally, what does the future hold for the yachting industry? And, with the rise of the new breed of ultra-rich in Asia, are you seeing more orders coming from that side of the world?

AR: At the moment we're seeing a return to the past. I mean that the economic crisis has hit the yachting sector just like any other and seems impossible to go back to the numbers of 2007. However, as a result, there is now more research on having more performance hulls, less consumption of fuel and there are some interesting eco-yachts in construction, which means we will move to hybrid solutions in the future. As for the Asian and Middle East markets, they are still too quiet. There are a big number of rich people out there but they have no service infrastructure or marinas for big yachts, so they have to leave their yachts in the Med, which means the market can and will grow.



Yachting

Chantier Naval Couch (CNC) unveils the first of their 37m super yachts, Arion.

The 3700 Fly, fitted by Ken Freivokh, was recently delivered to her owners following a presentation to local dignitaries and the media in the historic quays of Bordeaux, France.

Arion is the first collaboration between CNC and Freivokh, as well as the first yacht to come out of the shipyard in 2011. Eric Robert Peillard, President of Couch

says: "Arion pays homage to the quality of teamwork undertaken over the last two years. It was with pleasure that our office took on board the inspirational ideas of a celebrated designer to deliver an outstanding bespoke interior commissioned by a discerning client. The end result is a stunning yacht of rare beauty, from the aesthetic finishes of each cabin to the quality of craftsmanship throughout. A real work of art..."

The next project is the 50m 5000 Fly, due for launch in September 2011.



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