

**BUILDING FASTER**

p. 4

The rapid completion of the Nordic explorer yacht U116



**BUILDING BIGGER**

p. 14

Key industry players on the inevitable 200+ metre market



**BUILDING SMARTER**

p. 8

Understanding the semi-custom PRIME Megayacht platform



# super yacht

TIMES

## LOBANOV DESIGN

“After three projects, things start to happen”

26

Igor Lobanov



The SuperYacht Times

Issue 12 January / February 2017

## HOT LAB

22 *The Italian design studio operating at full speed*



**SHIPYARD**  
**ROYAL HUISMAN**  
*Why 2017 is the year of Royal Huisman*

6

**OWNER**  
**BINA**  
*The life onboard the family-owned yacht*

12

**DESIGN**  
**FRANK NEUBELT**  
*Going beyond design with German Yacht Couture*

25

**EVENTS**  
**SUPERYACHT GALLERY**  
*Exciting new superyacht exposition to be hosted at London's Saatchi Gallery*

28

**DESTINATION**  
**AUSTRALIA**  
*An off-the-beaten-track superyacht stopover*

30

Advertisement



**ALIDA** 55M

READY FOR CRUISING  
MARCH 2017



# HOT LAB

THE ITALIAN DESIGN STUDIO  
TAKING OVER THE OCEAN  
ONE YACHT AT A TIME



Mondomarine's Ipanema

By Gemma Fottles

Not every story is worth telling, though the story behind the Milanese design studio Hot Lab is certainly one of them. Established 14 years ago by three fresh out of college, barely 20-something designers, Antonio Romano, Michele Dragoni and Enrico Lumini have poured blood, sweat and tears into their journey to success, ensuring that Hot Lab is a force worth reckoning with.

Meeting at their first professional jobs within a small product design studio, neither Antonio, Michele or Enrico originally anticipated a career in superyacht design. Though Antonio had studied under Giovanni Zuccon in Rome - who, he admits, had planted the seed that grew into a distinct passion for yachting - at this point, yachting was still just something that piqued all three's creative and professional interest. But, as Antonio remembers, it wasn't long before opportunity came knocking. "One day we decided that as we're all thinking about yachting as a possibility in the very distant future - let's go to the Genoa Boat Show. It was 2001, and we just wanted to think about designing a seat or an anchor. A product, basically - but never the yacht. So we went to every single exhibitor at the show, enquiring about products and sub-contractors."

After an exhausting day of enquiries, the 21-year old trio decided they deserved to get on board at least one yacht at their very first boat show. Sidling up to the hostess of a small fibreglass boat from the Italian yard Raffaelli, she asked, "Do you have a yacht?" Looking at each other, the reply came naturally: "But of course we own a yacht!" The bold and brazen no-fear approach that goes hand-in-hand with youth was in full force, as Antonio continues: "She told us the owner of the yard was thinking of a new model and he was looking for a new designer. We said, 'Well, here we are!' We immediately went to meet

Gianpiero Raffaelli, and he asked us if we had already designed some yachts. We looked at each other again and said, 'But of course we've designed yachts!' He didn't know that, actually, this was our first time on a boat..."

Bold and brazen, indeed, if not a little naive and overly opportunistic, but this fearless move was a lucky shot that, fortunately, paid off. How did you have the confidence to undertake such a project without any previous experience in yacht design, I ask. The answer comes easily. "We were 21 years old," laughs

Enrico. But more seriously, each of the Hot Lab boys had something in them; a drive, a passion, a yearning to not only succeed, but to excel. And so, what could have been potential (and premature) career suicide was flipped to a golden opportunity. Pouring themselves into the project and learning on the go, they successfully delivered the interior design of the 16-metre project to the yard, putting themselves on the first rung of the ladder of superyacht design in the process.

The years that followed proved hard but

productive work for the three new yacht designers. In the years leading up to the Crisis, they say, Italy really was a land of opportunity when it came to design, and working on several smaller projects proved to be the perfect learning curve for the team as they tried out the ropes. Being young and brimming with energetic enthusiasm also played to their advantage. Although the big bucks were yet to come, their determination to make a name for themselves overpowered their desire to reap rapid financial reward. Antonio elaborates: "The first years were very tough for us, but we were happy with €8000 in our bank accounts. We were young and ambitious and full of energy - money did not matter to us. From day one we believed in working very hard. We've seen other younger studios who after two years do not achieve the success they envisioned, so they move on to other careers or work from other studios. That was not an option for us."

This period of practice was also a contributing factor to Hot Lab surviving the Crisis years, as Enrico puts it simply: "We were too small to die." Without a huge team to support and before being accustomed to the real 30+ metre superyachts that fill their drawing boards today, Hot Lab were able to not only ride out the Crisis years, but to make the real step towards superyacht design with the signing of their first real superyacht project, the 37.5-metre Bilgin-built Noor, in 2007.

It would be easy to mistake Hot Lab's trail of successes to this point as luck. Luck, however, is a word thrown about far too much in regards to success. Luck implies chance, but the signing of the project in question was the result of an aggressive branding and marketing campaign, not a simple fortunate accident. The Hot Lab team knew it was imperative to create a name for themselves - and they wholeheartedly endeavoured to do just that. "At the beginning, we sent our designs to every single yachting and design publication possible. We really focused on creating the name," says Antonio. "We knew



we were too young for the big yards to take us seriously, but we were not stupid. Articles started to be written, designs published... we brought ourselves into the spotlight."

This heavy, smart investment into branding and marketing paid off with the signing of the Bilgin project, though the Hot Lab team still, undeniably, had a lot to prove. This could not be demonstrated more by the fact that the Turkish owner was actually building Noor in conjunction with a sistership belonging to a friend, with a bet placed in good humour on who would have their boat delivered first. Young and inexperienced with a substantially lesser price tag, it seemed an easy win for the client's friend. But this was not to be. Hot Lab recognised this opportunity as make or break. They gave it their all regardless of accepting a substantially lower fee than their rival designers, and, of course, finished ahead of schedule with a perfect product and an extremely happy client. "When we were working on Noor, we were young guys, and we succeeded," Enrico proudly reminisces. "We finished first in the challenge that we had been pulled into, and she went on to win the Showboat Awards for Best Interior."

With a happy owner and a network of advantageous relationships now established, it wasn't long before other shipyards started noticing Hot Lab. Interestingly, Italy was one of the more difficult to establish a presence within, with age once again being a factor in this respect. "You are a young designer if you are below the age of 45 in Italy, so being 25 was unthinkable. Of course our colleagues in Turkey or Germany or Holland were surprised when they met us for the first time because we were so young, but once you hand over the sketches and they're correct, it is no problem. But it certainly did prevent us from working in Italy in the beginning."

One of the most notable projects riding on this success being the refit for one the most



Primadonna

**"We looked at each other again and said, 'But of course we've designed yachts!' He didn't know that, actually, this was our first time on a boat..."**

## HOT LAB ON...

### PRIMADONNA

We presented the 110-metre platform, Primadonna, in 2014 in Monaco with Oceanco, which was a very exciting step for us. We worked for a year and half on that project in monthly meetings with the yard in order to answer every possible technical question before presenting - we do not like presenting concepts that are potentially unfeasible. This project really follows the philosophy of the studio: beautiful, timeless with some wow effects. She's beautiful now, she will be beautiful in 10 years, and she doesn't need to show off too much. She was the first really impressive, significant project that we had developed at that time in many respects.

### THE ITALIAN INDUSTRY

Within Italy we have UCINA and another organisation, Nautica Italiana, and they are fighting! Throughout the Italian industry, the family business mentality is very present. This worked in the past when many people were doing 15 to 20-metre yachts of just one or two units a year, but the cost for that production is not sustainable anymore. Clients after the Crisis got a lot smarter, so they squeezed the prices of everything. There are also less clients, so markets and budgets are also squeezed down. Italy is still the number one country in the world for yacht building, but they fight with each other a little bit more than we see in other countries. The point is, everybody wants to preserve the small market in Italy instead of joining together for the benefit of all. We don't know how this issue could be solved - it's a mentality. There is no easy solution.



Hot Lab's latest collaboration with Heesen: Project Cayman

well known, important Turkish family's 43-metre Trinity Yachts built vessel, Keyla, which strengthened the brand's position in Turkey. "She won The WSA (World Superyacht Award) in 2014 for best rebuild, and she was done for an important family in Turkey," says Enrico.

A successful collaboration with Mondomarine improved all this, with their inaugural Italian-built superyacht being no other than the very first Mondomarine M50, the Ferrari-red Ipanema. Measuring 49.2-metres and delivered last year, Ipanema, Michele tells us, was the project that really developed the Hot Lab design style. He says, "Ipanema started a little bit of a design signature for us, and there is something in Ipanema in several of our other projects. The best part of this project was having time to spend on it, and no pressure - like it should be every time, but of course it's never like that. So if you can spend 6 months on the lines with no stress, it's going to stand out.

Ipanema allowed us to develop ourselves and her lines are really striking." Met with industry-wide acclaim, Ipanema quickened the already-moving snowball effect of good recommendations and visibility.

Proving this, 2016 saw the Hot Lab team spark a new collaboration with another Italian shipyard, this time Baglietto, which saw three superyacht projects developed. Antonio continues, "This year also saw a new collaboration with Heesen Yachts (project Cayman) as well as enquires from RMK, of which we have the 55-metre XXL, and from Sarp Yachts for a 63-metre project Aouda that we presented in Cannes and Monaco. Then we have started to design a 68 metre superyacht under construction at AES, and we are working directly for the final customer. They have a great team full of very smart people from all over the world, and she is scheduled to be delivered in Spring 2018. She's huge, 68 metres but over 1,800 GT. We are very happy with how that process is going."

So, where to from here? "In the next five years, we're going to present a collaboration with one of two of the most important shipyards in Northern Europe, something we are seriously working on at the moment. In the next seven years, we would like to have a 70+ metre boat in the water - we're also seriously working towards this. In the next 20 years, we will buy all of the other studios and we'll be at the top! J. Bannenberg and P. Spadolini are truly the masters, and now is the time of Espen Oeino and Nuvolari Lenard, these people are creating the most iconic yachts in the market. We will get to this stage. We will have just one delivery this year, a 26 metre from Filippetti, so we know that this is a year where we will show less in the water, but more for the future. In 2018 we'll have two big yachts in the water, and we have a surprise which we hope to announce soon enough," Antonio tantalisingly concludes our interview. With no shortage of projects keeping them beyond busy, it seems that the guys at Hot Lab are not just hot, they're on fire.