

Designs for life

words: Caroline White
photography: Courtesy of Hoek Design/courtesy of Nauta yachts

FOLLOWING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF PIONEER JON BANNENBERG, THE 1980S GENERATION OF TALENT SET THE STANDARD FOR BESPOKE SUPERYACHT DESIGN

A quarter of a century ago the superyacht industry exploded, igniting some of the brightest sparks in the industry. In the early to mid 1980s big yacht building grew and solidified into a serious, self-contained industry that required designers, and in 1986 Hoek Design, Nauta Yachts, Andrew Winch Designs (featured in the last issue of this magazine) and Bill Dixon Design, all entered the breach. The influence of these leading design teams has – quite literally – shaped the modern superyacht, in all its variations.

‘What surprised me is in all those years since there have not been that many new design offices,’ says Andre Hoek, founder of Hoek Design. ‘It’s not an easy market [in which]

to design and build a business like this; you have to be passionate about yachting, focused and a little lucky.’

Indeed, Hoek’s background describes a determination to work in yacht design, even when it was not an easy path. After a naval architecture degree in Holland and an apprenticeship at C&C yachts in Canada, Hoek was unable to find work at a design studio. So he took a job as a salvage engineer at a Dutch company, where he supervised the enormous submersible ships that carry offshore drilling platforms. In its own way the job was excellent training for a superyacht designer, with an abundance of engineering, stability and organisational work.

‘During those years I was also always involved in yacht design, but not on a professional basis – I did it more as a hobby for clients who were friends and family. I was optimising a racing class of leeboard yachts that are popular in Holland, yachts I raced myself for a very long time. We optimised sailplans, stability, performance, foilshapes in leeboards and more, and later on designed new yachts in this style. Through the past 25 years more than 300 of these yachts were built to our designs.’

In 1983 he left his job to take an MBA in business administration, but his growing reputation as a designer interfered with his plans.

Andre Hoek (opposite) has been sailing Dutch leeboard boats since he was a small boy, experience that has helped him design quality sailing yachts such as *Adele* and her sister ship *Marie* (far left) and more recently motor designs such as the *Hollander* project (below)



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Superyacht Design



‘When people heard I’d quit my job I got a lot of enquiries asking if I could do boats. It took me three years to do the MBA and when I finished I was already working with four people – it turned from a hobby into a business.’

Mario Pedol, founder of Nauta Yachts took a similarly round-about route to the profession. He began working as an agent for Oyster Marine in Italy in 1978 and

became increasingly interested in the design of superyachts. When he learned that a new school of design had opened in the north of Italy, he left his job and signed up. When he finished his studies, he spent time working abroad for Scott Kaufman in New York. On his return to Italy Pedol founded Nauta Yachts with his business partner Massimo Gino.



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‘For the first six years of Nauta we were designers and constructors, we were selling finished yachts to clients. But in 1993 Italy suffered a political and economic catastrophe and the market stopped. We decided to take our design expertise to the market – selling not a product but our experience, know-how, design services and project management services.’

At this stage, Pedol’s expertise was in sailing boats – and the design house is still best known for its work in this field. Innovations such as carbon fibre and changes to competition rules governing hull shapes have changed the way Nauta makes yachts, but Pedol’s philosophy of ‘balancing performance and comfort’ has remained the same. *My Song*, one of his favourite yachts, embodies it beautifully.

‘The owner has a passion for racing and cruising,’ says Pedol. ‘It is difficult on a yacht to combine these, because cruising means comfort and comfort means weight, but for racing you need speed, which means lightness. The way we’ve done this is by making some contents of the yacht removable for racing. With four days of crew work it can be turned from a cruising boat into a racing boat.’

The company’s most famous foray into motor yachts is project Light, an 80 metre commission that is both visually and physically light. It was well received within the industry, but the 2008 economic crash put the project on hold. In any case it has led to a commission for another 100 metre-plus motor yacht.

Hoek Design is also active in motor yacht designs, and is working on various projects including the 50 and 65 meter Hollander project. But it, too, is best known in the sailing arena and like Pedol, Hoek believes his sailing yachts have a definite character.

‘You can definitely recognise the boats that we do,’ says Hoek. ‘We have an emphasis on performance and also on looks – how it looks on deck, how well-balanced the profile is.’

In particular, Hoek Design has become renowned for yachts offering classic styling and modern performance. Its early analytical work, optimising Dutch leeboard sailing yachts, caught the attention of big-yacht owners.

‘We got clients asking if we could design a boat in a similar way – a classically styled yacht optimised for performance – but ocean-going. That’s why the early Truly Classics came out. It was a design that looked like a J boat, but with the in-water configuration of a modern sailing yacht.’

The Truly Classic series was inspired by a yacht created in partnership with Michael Peacock, former captain of the British Admiral’s Cup team. Launched in 1994, the yacht *Truly Classic* (now *Zephyr*) won the Spirit of Tradition Class at Antigua Classic Week three years in a row. She is one of Hoek’s favourite yachts.

‘She was extremely successful on the racecourse but was also a very good cruising yacht – a very nice combination,’ he says.

Another favourite is the 55 metre ketch *Adele*, launched in 2005.

‘We developed an interior with an owner’s deckhouse, a large cockpit and an owner’s cabin all connected – a privacy concept. She proved you could do circumnavigation or go to the Antarctic on a really beautiful-looking yacht. You don’t have to go for an ugly looking boat, you can do this in style.’

That, perhaps, is the mark of this golden group, the first fully-fledged crop of yacht designers – not naval architects or interior designers – to enter the arena, after Jon Bannenberg pioneered the profession. When it comes to yachting, they have taught us how to do it in style.

Massimo Gino and Mario Pedol (opposite, top), with the model of a Southern Wind 100 DS, designed by Farr and Nauta. Pedol’s favourite yachts include *Nilaya* (opposite, far left and centre), and *My Song* (below and below centre). Hoek’s top yachts include *Truly Classic* (now *Zephyr*) (opposite, far right) and *Adele*, (below, far right)

