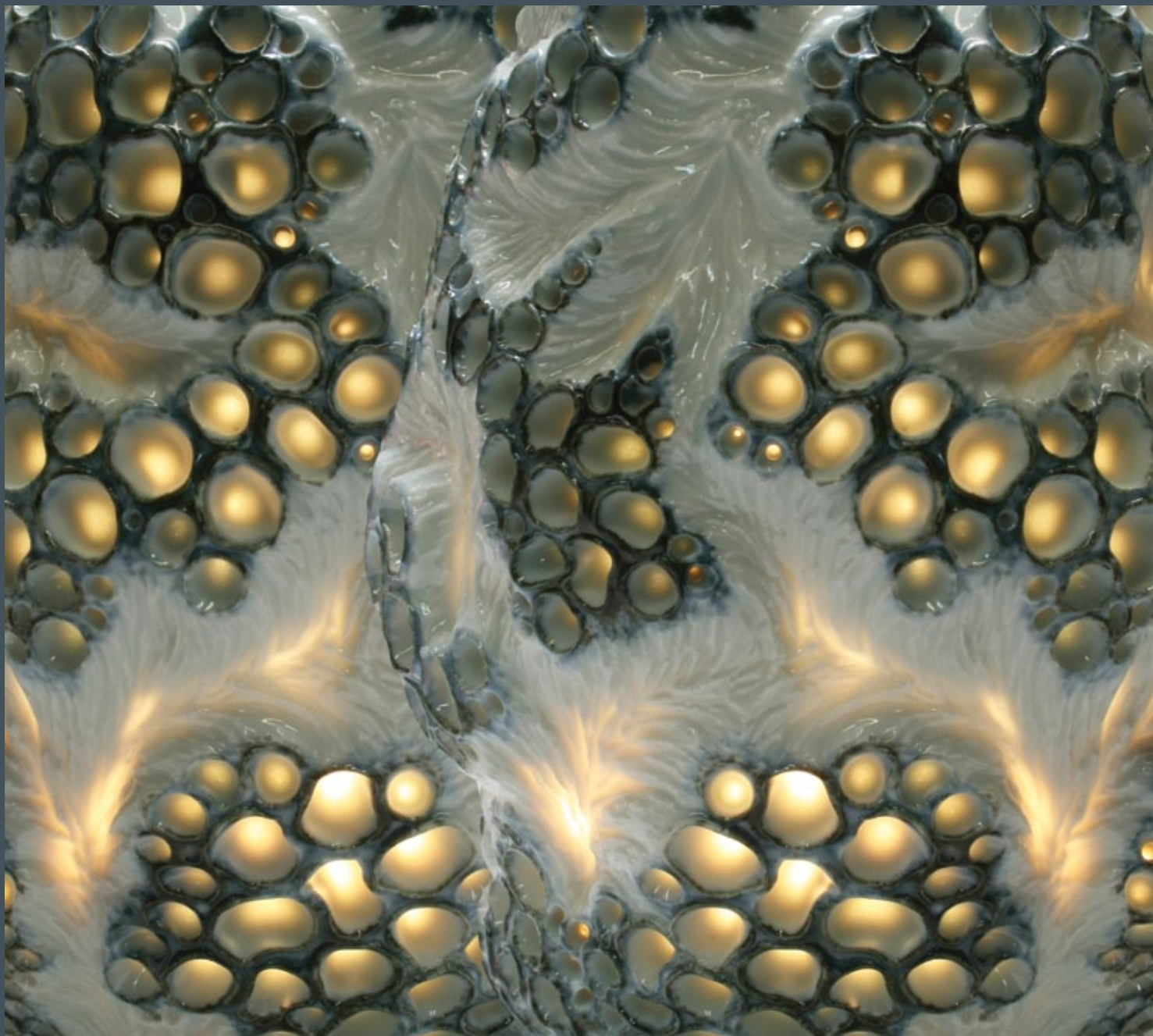


Superyacht

INTERIOR DESIGN EXTERIOR SPACE CREATIVITY AND ARCHITECTURE



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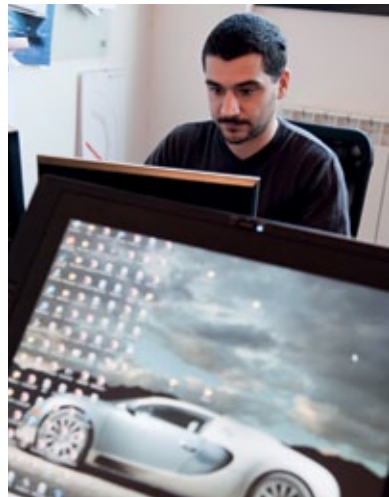
ATION

In the recent annual edition (Issue 130) of *The Superyacht Report*, SYD editor Justin Ratcliffe wrote of young designers whose work displays "a remarkable maturity and a shrewd empathy with the new generation of superyacht owners". With this in mind, our Case Study presents a double bill of two emerging studios that illustrate this tendency: Hot Lab in Milan and Van Geest Design in Amsterdam.



JUSTIN RATCLIFFE

Antonio Romano, Michele Dragoni and Enrico Lumini, the three founding partners of Hot Lab, met as young postgraduates working for a small design firm in Milan. With their varied backgrounds in architecture and automotive and interior design (Antonio also studied yacht design under Giovanni Zuccon at La Sapienza University in Rome), they set up on their own in 2004. They chose the name Hot Lab to evoke both their passion for design and the formal research that goes into their projects.



Fast forward to 2012 and the three designers, still in their early 30s, are on the cusp of breaking through into the big time. A hint of what may lie ahead came at the end of last year when the studio won a ShowBoats Design Award for the interior design of 37.5-metre M/Y *Noor* by Bilgin Yachts in Turkey. The award judges were wooed by the meticulous attention to detail that went into the yacht's interior design, reflected in the elegant combination of dark ebony with contemporary lacquered



JUSTIN RATCLIFFE

accents, fabric and leather panels, and carefully selected loose furniture items. In fact, industry recognition for Hot Lab had started much earlier with an honourable mention at the 2005 Millennium Yacht Design Awards (MYDA) for the diminutive 7.5-metre Gotcha runabout by Blue Yachting, which looked like a sports car without the wheels, and another MYDA prize in 2007 for a 47-metre explorer concept, when the judges highlighted the project's "innovative stylistic solutions to the explorer theme, intelligent distribution of space and sophisticated décor throughout the yacht".

"Winning the award for *Noor* has been a tremendous springboard for us," admits Antonio Romano, who along with Enrico Lumini also teaches yacht design part-time at the Istituto Europeo di Design (IED) in Milan. "But we've learned the hard way by working on smaller projects, dating back to our first Genoa Boat Show as a studio when we won a contract with Cantieri Raffaelli to design the interior of the *Ontera 70*. We like to think it's significant that Nuvolari & Lenard started out with the same brand."

Other projects followed, including the interior design for 28.5-metre M/Y *Biscuit* and the 2007 refit of M/Y *Alessandra* (formerly *Berengaria*), a 30-metre Akhira by Cantieri di Pisa. For both commissions, Hot Lab injected a crisp, contemporary touch to the interiors on

a limited budget. In the case of *Biscuit*, this involved a neutral base palette of creams and natural veneers brightened by playful accents of colour in the Frette fabrics. Aboard *Alessandra*, they worked with Marijana Radovic to replace the dark mahogany on an ageing boat with lighter woods and introduced a modern, open-plan owner's bathroom with a bathtub fashioned out of a single piece of Corian. Yet, despite the importance of both yachts for the emerging studio, it was *Noor* that represented a significant step up for the budding designers as a 37-metre new build.

"The owner hired us because he had seen and liked our explorer concept," says Antonio. "He then followed the interior design down to the smallest detail. Everything had to be coordinated: the AC grilles, for example, match the design of the exterior companionway gates and the façade of the bar. We went shopping in Milan with the owner and his wife to select the light fittings, glassware and cutlery. What was interesting was that *Noor* was built alongside a sister ship belonging to a friend of the owner's, who chose a well-known British design firm to do the interior. We finished our boat six months ahead and went on to win the award."

While *Noor* was still in build, the studio's confidence was boosted by invitations to work on high-profile concept projects for Icon Yachts and

Oceanco. For the first of these, the Icon 54 in 2010, Hot Lab worked with the Dutch builder to produce a striking exterior and interior design that was compatible with its 53-metre common platform. They followed up last year with Oceanco's PA168, an 86-metre concept based on the proven Y700 series, and a larger 73-metre concept for Icon, described somewhat obscurely at the time as "a revival of a pre-rationalist architectural style".

"Most of the superyacht designs we see out there are way too static."

These concepts reveal a number of signature stylistic elements that have begun to distinguish the Hot Lab portfolio. One is the sweeping 'swoosh' of the hull sheerline; another is that each exterior profile displays a distinctive personality of its own, a feature linked to Michele Dragoni's interest in automotive design:

"If you look at car designs," he explains, "most of them have a face, if you like, framed by the radiator grille and the headlights. This gives each brand a unique identity, something that is more difficult to introduce on a yacht. On the Oceanco PA168, for instance, the brow design and round cut-out in the bulwark on the top deck resembles an eye, which lends the profile character."

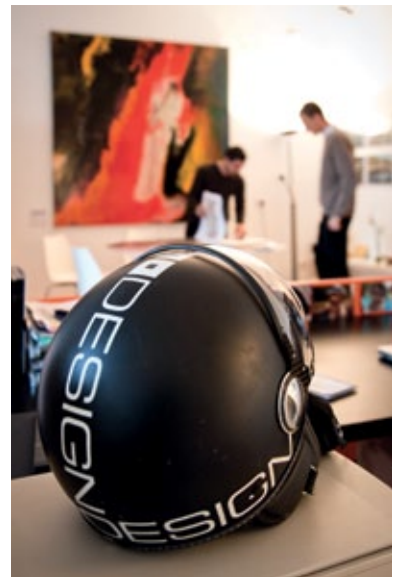
On the same project, wooden bull noses that frame the aft deck swimming pool were inspired by the rear styling

of Renault's DeZir concept car, the first project to be led by Renault's new chief designer Laurens van den Acker after he took over from Patrick Le Quement. At the time of its debut at the 2010 Paris Motor Show, the car's designers described the DeZir as "a statement of our new formal design language, which conveys notions such as movement, sensuality and emotion through ideal proportions, in much the same way as an object whose forms have been honed by nature"—an interpretation that coincides with what the Hot Lab partners feel is missing from yacht design today.

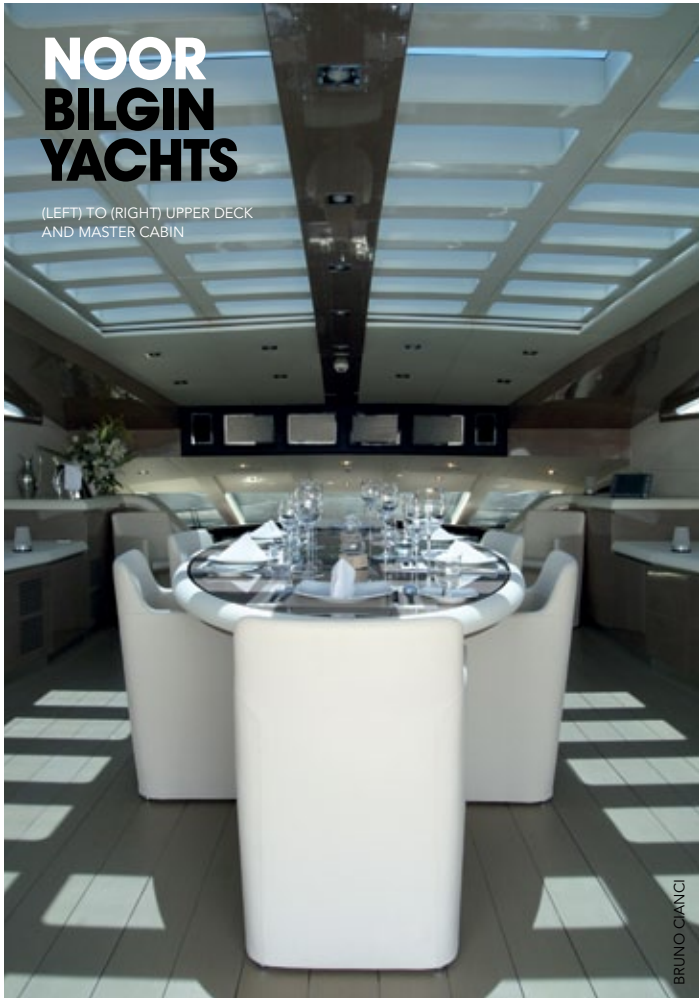
"Most of the superyacht designs we see out there are way too static," continues Michele. "They may have perfect proportions and volumes, but they're not designed to provoke an emotional response. Radical styling is not the answer; instead, we like to play with the exterior surfaces like car designers do—just look at how the car companies update their models with a slight styling change here and there. On PA168 we were able to explore some of these avenues and we're now working with Oceanco on a bigger concept project."

Curiously, the founders of Hot Lab feel their work to date has been more appreciated overseas, whether in the Netherlands or Turkey, than in Italy where they live and work. In fact, only recently have they started collaborating again with Italian yards such as Mondomarine, Posillipo and Palumbo. While their concept work for the likes of Icon and Oceanco has no doubt helped to secure these Italian contacts, it has also led to an appreciation of the northern European way of working.

"When we started working with Oceanco, for instance, they gave us a 200-page booklet explaining their



production process and the regulations the design had to comply with," recalls Enrico Lumini and points out that Oceanco introduced a new brand slogan—"Yachts for Visionary Owners"—when taken over by private investor Mohammed Al Barwani in 2010. "By the time they released a press release on the PA168, any potential design issues had already been resolved—and it's worth remembering this was a concept rather than a live project. That kind of thing rarely happens in Italy." ▶





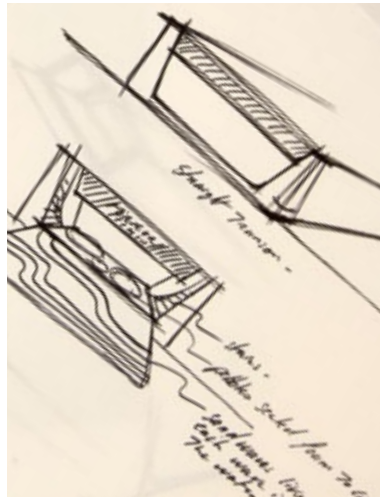
JUSTIN RATCLIFFE

Dutch and Turkish yards also provide the common link with Van Geest Design (VGD) in Amsterdam. The small home-based studio is made up of Pieter van Geest, an industrial designer and former sailboat skipper, and his partner Tracey-Jayne Canavaggio, a furniture designer and keen sailor whose rather exotic name reflects her Anglo-Corsican heritage. The couple met while working with Ron Holland on *Mirabella V* and they decided to set up their own design business in 2006. Shortly after, Tracey-Jayne, who has also worked for Martin Francis and Andre Hoek, accepted a job offer from Rémi Tessier and they moved to Paris for four-and-a-half years. During her time with Rémi, Tracey-Jayne worked as project manager on his yacht projects, including 96-metre *Vava II* approaching completion at Devonport. They returned only recently to the Netherlands to dedicate themselves full-time to Van Geest Design.

"We really wanted to draw on our own creativity to start developing projects," says Pieter. "What's happened is that clients have picked up on our concepts, rather than the other way round when designers work to a brief. In fact, that is largely how we work—we rarely design anything for a client who says how it should be done."

This might be because concept work provides much more freedom than working on a live project, but there is no doubt that the client response has been positive. One of Pieter's early concepts was for a relatively low-volume 85-metre

motoryacht with a very sleek hull and superstructure. One of the concept's defining features was the enormous beach club area on the lower aft deck with its innovative transom 'pillars' connected to the two side stairs leading to the main deck level.



"The transom layout is based on those idyllic seaside homes in the Mediterranean with access to the sea underneath," says Pieter. "The pillars provide that same architectural feeling and some respite from what would otherwise be a very large and completely open beach platform."

Pieter went on to explain that the yacht's simple lines and low volume would make it relatively easy to build, which is what perhaps attracted Icon Yachts to ask VGD to adapt the design

into a 72-metre version based on its own 62-metre technical platform. Since the management changes at Icon, this concept has been picked up again and refined. The hull design is especially interesting as it has a slightly raised, two-tone styling feature on each side of the hull, whose lower edge also acts as a spray rail. The motif recalls the coachwork of certain luxury cars and Pieter showed SYD a similar hull design for a project still under development with raised metal facets, which will be illuminated at night or catch and reflect sunlight during the day.

"We've been playing around with how to make hull designs more interesting," says Pieter. "Nobody seems to think about the hull—it's just that thing you need to float your superstructure on. But you can do a lot with all that hull material above the waterline, so we've been experimenting with how to build these raised facets. In fact, it's nothing extraordinary; it's just that nobody has ever done it before."

Two no-nonsense and more traditional displacement explorer concepts followed: a 42-metre with unfaired topsides and commercial paintwork, and a 55-metre also designed to carry racing sail boats. An unfaired, hand-painted hull is an unusual yet entirely practical feature that was used by Luciano Benetton for *Tribù*, his 50-metre explorer launched in 2007, but the idea has never really caught on with other owners. VGD is developing the 42-metre version for a client who feels that he has no need for ►



90M OPEN CONCEPT



72M CONCEPT

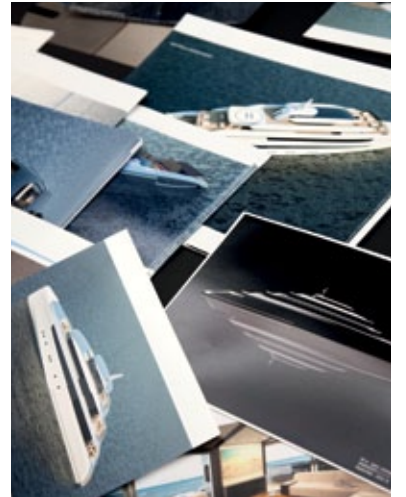


85M CONCEPT



an expensive, shiny paint job, given the yacht's rugged, go-anywhere vocation.

The couple continued to leaf through renders of their conceptual work, each more intriguing than the last. A 60-metre study for a high-performance sloop, for example, has folding hull sides in the aft section to create a wide beach platform (a feature that has since appeared in concepts from other design studios) and glass bulwarks so not to block the view from inside the deckhouse. There is a 98-metre motoryacht concept with a unique terraced superstructure in development for a private client, and a new design for Proteksan Turquoise based on its 72-metre series platform. Like nearly all of Pieter's exterior profiles, these projects present almost clinically clean lines, vertical glass windows on all decks and close to plumb bows.



"We went on a trip recently to Japan and visited a few architectural sights," continues Tracey-Jayne. "We were impressed by the way the buildings fit into the landscape and how everything talks to each other. We think we can learn from these architectural designs and bring some of it into the yachting industry. Without going crazy, of course—most yacht owners want something like their peers have, so there is always room for mainstream."

This is where Pieter and Tracey-Jayne excel: by hitting on that subtle compromise between cutting-edge and conservative solutions that is the secret to timeless design. It is as evident in the recent renders for a retro-styled, two-tone 10-metre tender as in the more aggressive lines for a fast, 60-metre motoryacht with its sharply tailored hull and fully glazed superstructure. ■

"Nobody seems to think about the hull – it's just that thing you need to float your superstructure on."

"Inside or out, we always try to keep it simple," says Tracey-Jayne, in contrast to some young designers who are tempted to make up for inexperience with elaborate styling. "It should never be overcrowded with too many curves or be too cluttered—the idea is that it should make complete sense as soon as you see it, rather than trying to make a statement."

As we spoke, Tracey-Jayne showed SYD around their 16th century home-studio overlooking a canal in a quiet corner of Amsterdam. The interior space is long and narrow and—with windows only at each end of the building—difficult to work in. For the bedroom and bathroom area in the centre of the apartment they have ingeniously created a box structure consisting of a steel frame with MDF wall panels, which can revolve on pivots to act as swing doors, letting in light and ventilation from the end windows.