

HOT LAB: YOUNG GUYS DOING BIG GUY STUFF

Angelo Colombo interviews Antonio Romano, partner in the studio Hot Lab yacht & design of Milan.

Hot Lab is one of those companies in the Italian yachting sector built on talents that are young but might be defined as capable of expressing "big guy stuff". There are three partners – Antonio Romano, Michele Dragoni and Enrico Lumini – joined by Antonio Scognamiglio, Laura Rizzo and Vittorio Pieroni, all daily involved in multiple Hot Lab activities on the yachting and naval design scene. A company which, as we shall see from the words of partner and marketing manager Antonio Romano, is young in years as well as in the ages of its members. In spite of this youth, Hot Lab have developed numerous and above all quality projects, so we wanted to give our readers a summary through the words of one of the founding partners.

Mr Romano, Hot Lab is a young company of young people. Tell us about how it came into being and about the professional team involved.

Hot Lab was set up in 2004 by three partners, very young at the time, who were all fired by the same passion for yachting and design. Creating a design studio at the age of 26 was certainly a risky move, and it was particularly tough early on, knocking on the doors of various shipyards great and small. Not always easy. But we believed in our potential right from the start, and experience came as we went along.

The first real collaboration project was with the Raffaelli shipyard in Pesaro: we did the interiors of their flagship Ontera 70'. Then we had some small jobs with, for example, the Gagliotta yard in Naples and Blue-Yachting in Treviso. Thanks to the Gotcha project developed in close collaboration with the Blue-Yachting yard, we won prizes such as the Millennium Yacht Design Award, and we were written up in various publications, which certainly helped to get the studio's name known.

This was followed by projects for bigger vessels, for example the interior refitting of a splendid 1979 Akhir 100', then Biscuit and Noor, two yachts that were highly important for us. In the meantime we created small boats for yards like Cayman Yachts and did significant projects for big names like Icon Yachts and Oceanco. Right now, after eight years, we've got a seven person team that works well together, four boats under construction, several projects ready to kick off shortly, and the same enthusiasm as on day one.



What added value do you feel is brought by different professional backgrounds, as in the case of the work experiences that distinguish all of you individually?

Bringing together different profiles from the world of design into the same Studio may be the key to the execution of many successful projects. Moved by different passions, we manage to convey our knowledge into every project, mixing in our know-how from experiences in fields outside the yachting world. For example car design is a means of giving yacht exteriors a more dynamic and alluring appearance, since a boat communicates its identity first and foremost from the outside. The industrial design sector tells you how to operate logically and pragmatically in dealing with interiors. And it's important to understand what you may experiment with for a certain type of owner, with the established budget, the materials he has chosen and an infinite series of limitations. Another sector I feel it is fundamental to know in our activity concerns materials. Awareness of the technical and functional requisites of each one, of their properties, of how to use textures and colours, contributes with the other disciplines to creating a personality in the interior and exterior spaces which must satisfy the owner's wishes. Without going specifically into individual roles, it's great to see the coexistence of the aggressive and decidedly creative work of a car designer side by side with the rationality of an architect and the delicate taste of an interior decorator. The results are always different, sometimes unexpected, and this happens also because everyone in the studio is an active part of the project.

Tell us about the projects you've completed to date.

Considering the various projects we've been involved in so far, I feel that three have been especially meaningful for us. Undoubtedly M/Y Noor, a 37 metre built in Turkey by Bilgin Yacht and launched in 2010. The owners chose our studio to design the interiors and décor. During construction we entered into a special relationship with the owners and they greatly appreciated the final result. Each individual material was chosen with them and they played an active role in the project right from the start. The prestigious prize we won last year precisely for this interior design was just the right crowning of a splendid adventure. We also like to recall the project for M/Y Biscuit built by Filippetti Yacht in 2010. Also in this case our studio was chosen by the owner to handle interior design. The boat went through a turbulent phase of construction: first it was in a shipyard that went bankrupt and it arrived at the Filippetti yard in Mondolfo only after various legal wrangles. The budget was really tight and the studio had to change its work method, adapting to the production logic of both shipyards involved. Lastly I'd like to mention the



Hot Lab:

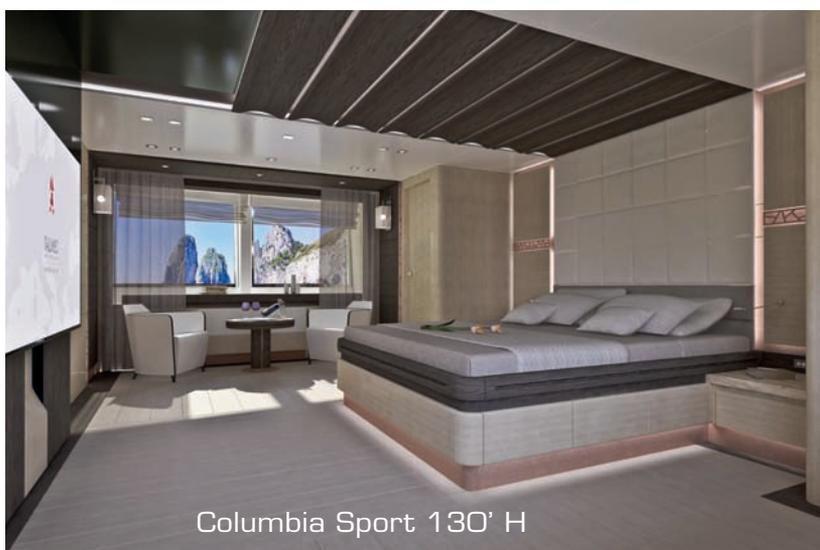
young guys doing big guy stuff



Mondo Marine



Mondo Marine



Columbia Sport 130' H

concept for Oceanco. An 86 metre yacht called DP 019, with soaring and almost aggressive lines for which we studied various innovative solutions, especially in the layout. Working with Oceanco was a splendid experience: development of the concept took more than a year. We have an excellent relationship with them and we'll shortly be defining a new project. It's often said that the upcoming project is the most interesting, and on this point I wanted to tell you that at the next Monaco Yacht Show we'll be presenting a semi-displacing yacht created for and with Mondo Marine. We're very proud that the yard chose us to begin what for them is a new and important phase, with highly ambitious projects on the way. The M50 has elegant and soaring lines, innovative layout solutions and considerable volumes while remaining beneath the 500 GT threshold. Later on we'll also be presenting a 60 metre with the same family feeling.

What do you think is the trend in yacht design?

The tendency of design in general is always to innovate, and in yacht design to amaze, also through innovation. Being amazing however isn't always a mark of good design, as I've said in other interviews. I've happened to see certain projects that are so futuristic as to verge on the absurd. There's often too much attention to detail and too little to project culture. As for Hot Lab, the focus is always on maintaining a sober but refined style, on putting forward different layouts, in spite of the fact that being identified is a professional approach with us, and letting yourself be identified means wanting to be understood. Let's say that Studio Hot Lab projects should in certain ways be extensions of the three of us put together. We certainly share an aesthetic sense oriented towards a modern classicality, which is timeless and never redundant.

From the stylistic and functional points of view, what are the elements you consider indispensable?

The freshness of a design is certainly recognised through a grouping of stylistic features such as contemporaneity stretched forward in time, the modernity of the forms, for example, for the exterior; with the insertion of new materials and technologies and different options/layouts for the interior. In the style phase we maintain an enthusiastic and extemporaneous approach typical of creative people. Technically we like the idea of maintaining a thread with a stylistic element that is repeated and developed throughout the boat. But a professional designer knows how to be stylist and technician of his work, so it's important to retain an attitude made up of functional viewpoints, where I think it's inevitable that ergonomic elements will be applied to guarantee comfortable and convivial spaces to those who are going to be on board. The owner must feel at home, first and foremost.

In conclusion, your upcoming ports of call?

As I said, we'll be presenting the M50 project at Monaco with Mondo Marine, while at Ft. Lauderdale we'll be showing a preview of the M60 project. Still at Monaco we're presenting the project for a 50m explorer vessel for the Dutch shipyard Acico, a really innovative project from the design and layout viewpoint.

I think that this yacht could be really welcomed on the market. 2013

is going to be a very important year for us: summer next will see delivery of the Columbus Sport Hybrid 130', with interiors by our studio, and also an old 43 metre Trinity where we

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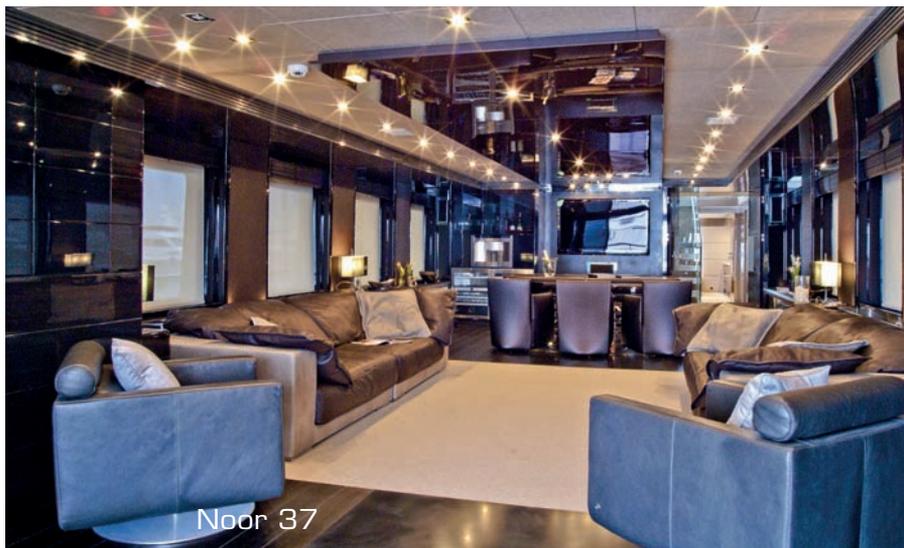
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Noor 37



Noor 37



Noor 37



Trinity 43



Trinity 43

oversaw the complete interior refit at the RMK yard. The projects will have a very different design, the Columbus more traditional and the Trinity more contemporary. Special attention was paid to seeking materials: over and above less common types of wood and marble, we used silver-leaf, mother-of-pearl, oxidated brass and so on.

There's also a little 26 metre Navetta for which we're designing the exterior and interiors, for a private owner. It should be ready in the same period but I prefer to use the conditional tense. Then there's a 54 metre yacht on which we're doing the interior refit, for delivery in 2014. Lastly, we'll be launching our first sailboat, a Hylas 63' designed by German Frers for which we drew up the interiors. Not to forget the concept under way for Oceanco, and another German yard which for the moment we're keeping top secret.

All that remains is to extend my compliments for your commitment and wish you all the best for the future...

I'll pass them on to the Hot Lab team, with whom I'll be tackling every challenge that comes our way, be it big or small, and always with the greatest passion. What I'd like to express as a designer is what I do through every project and in everyday life. My aim is to get other people excited, with projects and with ideas.

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