

VOLUME IV

TRAVEL

*TWENTY ESCAPES
TO BROADEN THE
MIND AND STIR
THE SOUL*

GASTRONOMY

*CULINARY
TRADITIONS THAT
EXCEL FAR FROM
HOME*

CULTURE

*EXHIBITIONS,
ARCHITECTURE
AND THE NEW
MORALITY OF THE
ART WORLD*

STYLE

*HIGH JEWELLERY,
ESSENTIAL
HANDCRAFTED
PIECES AND
SPORTING WATCHES*

PLUS

*FINE HOTELS &
RESORTS, A
SPECIALLY
CURATED
SHOWCASE*

THE COMPENDIUM

by
CENTURION

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FROM HUMBLE BEGINNINGS TO CENTRE STAGE AT INTERNATIONAL SHOWS, HOT LAB IS THE DESIGNER *DU JOUR* IN YACHTING CIRCLES. FOUNDING PARTNER ANTONIO ROMANO SPOKE TO JOHN McNAMARA ABOUT THE STUDIO'S METHODS, SUCCESSES AND FUTURE PLANS



THE MILANESE TOUCH

They say yachting is an old-school industry, more artisanal, handmade work,” says Antonio Romano, one of the three founding members of Hot Lab, the exuberant Milan design studio with a fast-growing reputation and a portfolio that includes collaborations with the likes of Arcadia, Heesen, Oceanco and Perini Navi. This may sound strange coming from a man whose firm is the very essence of youthful innovation in the sector, and he qualifies his comments by explaining that the long period from conception to delivery of a yacht means that there has to be a “timeless” quality to the final product. But if anyone is well placed to evaluate the changes, subtle or otherwise, of the design process, it is Romano.

In an industry replete with family-run shipyards and long-established, big-name designers, Hot Lab is something of an outlier and a versatile one at that. It was set up by three twentysomething friends in 2004, when a visit to a yacht show in Genoa led to the opportunity to design the interior for a 20m vessel being built by Italian yard Raffaelli. Kicking off with just a laptop, a couple of phones and a philosophy captured in a name – “Hot” references the creativity, or “spicy”, Italian part of the business; “Lab” stands for the scientific precision that marks the final work – Michele Dragoni, Enrico Lumini and Romano have become respected and much-in-demand members of the yacht-building business.

Each has different responsibilities within the studio: Dragoni deals with exterior design, Lumini takes care of the interiors, while Romano focuses on marketing and strategy. Their varying backgrounds are also useful in identifying – and capitalising on – trends in the sector, such as the increasing influence of car design in yacht-building. Dragoni’s experience in the automotive industry is an advantage here – and can be clearly seen in Hot Lab’s work on the Baglietto V-Line projects, for example. “Car design is the most advanced in the field and we are much inspired by its philosophy,” says Romano.

Another fashion that Hot Lab has picked up on is for the greater, more intelligent use of external areas onboard vessels. “You are going to use your bedroom just for sleeping at night and maybe you won’t use your formal dining area during the summer,” Romano explains. So, floor-to-ceiling windows and folding or sliding doors are increasingly used to manufacture an indoor-outdoor effect, while the recreational side of things is also an expanding factor. “Clients want more

direct access to the water, with a beach club and a stern very low in the water.”

Much of this concentration on the exterior areas of a boat has come about due to the increasing size of yachts. In the pipeline for Hot Lab are two 100m-plus concepts for which it has produced interior and exterior design – the 110m M/Y *Primadonna*, in collaboration with Dutch shipyard Oceanco, and the 113m M/Y *Ganimede*, with fellow Italians Fincantieri – as well as the brand-new Perini Navi 83m concept M/Y *Argonaut*. It isn’t just ever-growing lengths, but volume has increased as well, due to changing styles – something very evident in the current popularity of explorer yachts, says Romano, which can have that greater volume due to bigger hulls. Hot Lab has this type on the mind as a forthcoming project with VSY caught the eye when unveiled at the Fort Lauderdale International Boat Show in 2017. The studio will design the interior for the shipyard’s 67m steel-and-aluminium “classical” explorer project. And Hot Lab’s work also caused a stir at the Cannes Yacht Show 2018 when the Arcadia 105 – its collaboration with its namesake Italian yard – debuted. The 32m motor yacht, all chiselled masculine lines, has a remarkable set of solar panels integrated into the superstructure, that not only are at the forefront of energy saving but can also act as a decorative element, says Romano, of a vessel named the most innovative yacht at the 2018 World Yacht Trophies.

The studio will be busier still in the coming year, with its clients and collaborators ever more global.

One area where the trio’s talents are in demand is Turkey: two projects under construction at the Yildiz shipyard are the 43m M/Y *Sunrise* and the 41m M/Y *Fifty-five*, both with interior design by Hot Lab.

Ultimately, though, home is where the heart of the business is. And within the Milan facilities, technology is to the fore. When beginning a design, Romano says, “we still start with a pen and pencil on white paper, but then we start to create a super-detailed 3D model.” And the process does not end there. “Recently we have also added virtual reality. Clients can wear the Oculus system and feel they are in their yacht,” Romano says. “Imagine being seated in the sofa of your future yacht and turning your head around to see every single area.”

Though still very much a developing technology, in Hot Lab’s innovative hands it’s adding a futuristic sheen to this old-school industry. ■