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THE NAUTICAL ATELIER

Hot Lab creates completely personalized experiences of life on the water, enclosed in "architecture for voyagers"

We might call the productions of the studio Hot Lab sartorial, made to measure for the client, incorporating not just their needs for life on the water, but also their personality, habits and attitudes. **Antonio Romano** and **Enrico Lumini**, the founders of this award-winning Milan-based firm, have achieved a leading position in a competitive, complex sector, that of full-custom nautical design, for interiors and exteriors. Guided by the slogan "Architecture for voyagers," they create boats "seen as works of architecture in motion, capable of generating emotions in keeping with the places crossed and their perception on board," in a context of correct proportioning of values and clean forms. We talked about all this with Antonio Romano.

*author: Veronica Orsi
photos: courtesy of Hot Lab*

Hot Lab is a relatively young studio, which has rapidly asserted its presence. How did this experience get started?

Hot Lab was founded in 2004. Previously, Enrico and I worked in a product design firm in Milan, specializing in industrial design. But we both had ties with the nautical world: I had had the chance to study at the university with Giovanni Zuccon, one of the greatest Italian yacht designers, while Enrico has always had a very strong personal passion for the sea. The turning point came when we visited the Genoa Boat Show, without any particular aims: we just wanted to make contact with shipyards, offering our services to design products for boats. But then we got acquainted with the Raffaelli shipyard in Pesaro, which was looking for new yacht designers: we introduced ourselves as such, exaggerating our real expertise, but they immediately challenged us to design interiors for a 60-foot boat: and we passed the test! This led to the opportunity to create our own studio and to make our own first boat. All at the age of 23. We were young, we had to learn the job on our own, but we are pleased with what we have achieved thus far. And there is still much to be done.

Was your background in industrial design useful in the passage to the world of yachting?

The open vision of industrial design definitely offered useful reference points. In the end, a boat is architecture in motion, so it has various affinities with automotive design and architecture. Having studied industrial design, and also architecture in Enrico's case, and having lived for many years in the atmosphere of Milan with its emphasis on design, were more important factors than having specific training in the creation of yachts: we had the right orientations and ties with sector companies, with whom we now collaborate.



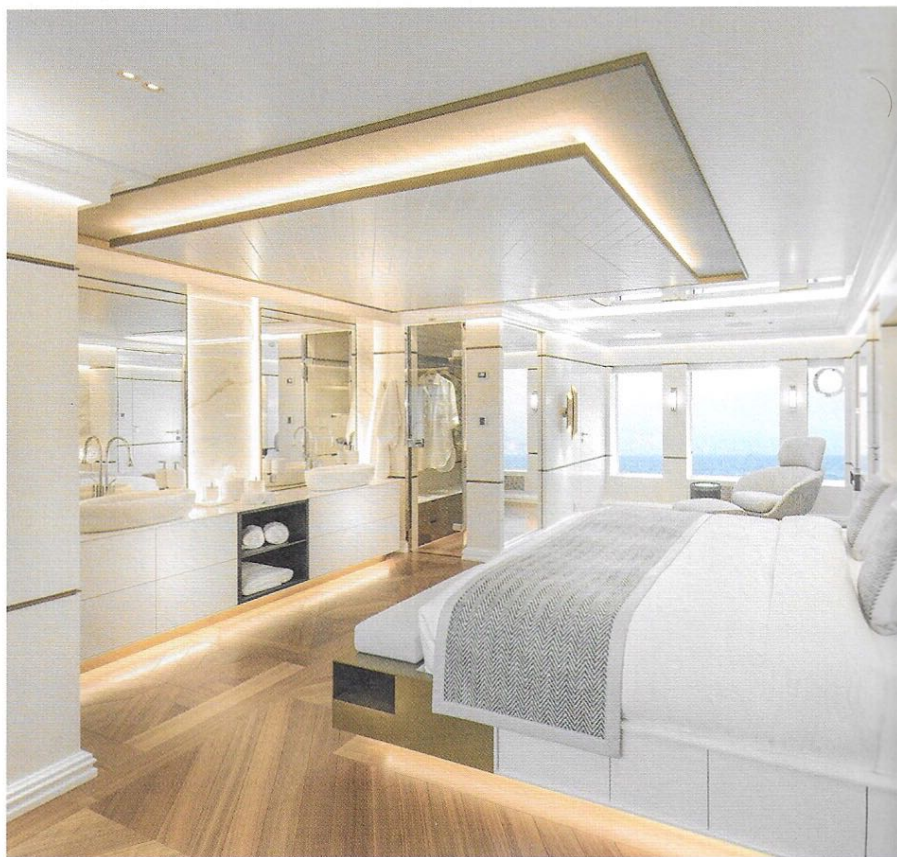


Your specialization is full custom, a particular approach for the sector...

Yes, it's a real niche. We tried different paths, but from the beginning we initiated projects with brokers. Many yacht designers are linked to shipyards, so the work on serial or semi-serial production; as a result, their style also has a family feeling, imposed by the shipyard itself or the mother company. Instead, we interact with the yachtsman himself, so the taste is more that of the client that something we insert – we try to refine and implement the client's taste. The project is made to measure, based on how the owner lives on the sea, alone or with family, and for us this implies close contact with the final customer, about whom we have to know everything, even if they usually sleep on the right or the left side of the bed! So every project is different from the others. The world around us is that of extreme luxury, for large yachts – our core business is for boats from 40 to 80 meters in length.

What is involved in this way of working with yachtsmen, rather than shipyards?

We are rather atypical: this "full custom" approach is more common in northern Europe, in Holland or the English-speaking countries. In Italy very few studios – five perhaps – have this kind of focus. We work with



foreign yachtmen, mostly from South America, Turkey, the Middle East; the clients contact us because they know about the studio, or through third parties like brokers, lawyers, intermediaries. With this very international clientele, the requests are highly varied: but whether we already know the client, or he is introduced to us in a relationship handled by a broker, lots of empathy is required to complete a true custom design. This is true of both the interiors and the exteriors, which in the case of yachts over 24 meters represent two totally different worlds of production.

In this operation of maximum personalization, can we talk about emerging trends? What do you come across most often?

In terms of livability, there is a trend towards more contact with the water: this has continued for a number of years, and lately it has gotten even stronger. The volume of the stern, which was previously closed, now features openings towards the water, the so-called "beach clubs"; now this volume is being lowered, to have direct visual contact with the water. This happens on different sizes of yachts, even the biggest ones. For example, in one of our latest projects – the Atlantique 43-meter we are designing for Columbus Yachts –

the stern is very low: at anchor, the lateral wings can open to expand the walkable area. Another trend is to have an unencumbered view of the sea from the inside: the indoor-outdoor connection involves windows that open, and above all are placed from deck to ceiling. While in the past there was more protection, now people want this inside-outside contact. The outdoor spaces are utilized much more intensively: the classic formal dining area in the main salon is almost never used, so on smaller boats (though always around 45 meters in length) it has been eliminated, moved outside for an informal convivial zone, perhaps with glazing to protect against the wind. We are also seeing the creation of spaces to welcome larger groups of friends: big sofas for 20 people, more islands (perhaps 4 sofas for 5 guests each), to have separate corners for socializing. These are among the many requests that arrive, for projects of different types. External lines are changing a great deal. This is a very personal question, mostly on the level of styling, without altering the hydrodynamic performance. Speaking of fashions, though, we can say that today the boats with a straight bow are much in demand: in the past they might have had 10% of the market, while today they have about 40%. For expert seamen and yachtmen,

Baglietto M/Y C:
Interior design by Hot Lab,
Exterior design by Horacio
Bozzo Design

Yildiz M/Y Fiftyfive:
Interior design by Hot Lab,
Exterior design by Ginton Naval
Architects BV



there is a big rise in demand for explorer yachts: the volumes shift towards the bow, all the aft space is completely open, for landing helicopters or to have various tenders outside on the bridge. The hull is often a straight bow, and this is seen as a higher class of yacht, for venturing into unexplored zones.

Do these changes stem from a change in our way of perceiving yachting, and our styles of on-board living?

I'd would say yes. Today there are many new yachtmen, and the age bracket has changed: while in the past they were around 70 years of age, now they are in their forties. This means money is circulating, there are new wealthy customers, new entrepreneurs thanks to the new economy, who approach yachting by starting with a 40-meter boat – which would have been unthinkable just 5 or 10 years ago – they see it as an entry level boat! It is true that yachts are now being utilized in a different way with respect to the past: less for long cruises, more for short vacations and weekends. The boat has become a way to socialize with family and friends, a place to have lunches and spend time together. While ten years ago the owner's idea was to sell his company, buy a boat and spend months at sea, or even live on the yacht year round, today the idea is to work during the week and have the yacht taken to the Costa Smeralda, for example, where the owner can arrive by helicopter for the weekend.

So the yachting experience has completely changed. Hence the need for many on-board activities, bringing lots of water toys, a demand that has a big impact on design because it means providing more garage space, for tenders, jet skis and many other things.

Have the demands for entertainment, contact with the sea and on-board socializing become factors behind the positive progress of the industry over the last year?

Definitely. At the start of 2020 things were on standby, then a boom of orders arrived from the last quarter of 2020 into the first two quarters of 2021, especially for used boats, namely solutions that are all ready to go. Wealthy people who had never thought about buying a boat, because they enjoyed cruises and luxury resorts, realized during the pandemic that a yacht can offer more safety and security. Those who had small yachts have taken the step towards something bigger, for greater comfort. The idea of "you only live once" certainly had an impact. What happened in 2020 has been fundamental. In the long run, the nautical market follows the periods of the economy and geopolitical events. The forecasts call for a peak until 2023 (the boats being ordered today will be delivered for that date), but we are hoping for a long wave that can be stabilized; because there is also the other side of the coin, namely the present difficulties in procurement of materials like aluminium, silicon and steel.

***Yildiz M/Y Sunrise:
Interior design by Hot Lab,
Exterior design by Ginton
Naval Architects***





Your latest projects?

This year we have delivered six boats, of which four were over 40 meters, all with completely customized interiors, each in a different style. Specifically: M/Y Sunrise, a 43-meter for a Turkish yachtsman, the most classic of the three large boats, with very refined details. The M/Y Fiftyfive, a 41-meter the yachtsman gave himself as his 55th birthday present, an extremely glamorous vessel that stands out for its exceptional materials. Finally there is the M/Y C, produced by Baglietto, a full custom 54-meter with large volumes, not just length: this is the biggest boat created by our studio and by the shipyard over the last 15 years, in terms of volumes. It is also the most contemporary, a festival of Italian design – all the leading industrial design companies are on board. We also delivered two smaller boats: an Arcadia Sherpa XL (for which we designed exteriors and interiors), and a sailboat for an American shipyard, with a length of 60 feet. We now have eight boats under construction in Italy, Turkey and Holland: this is a good sign in general, both for us and for the market.



**ARCADIA SHERPA XL | HOT LAB**

When a yacht and its interior furnishings share a philosophy of elegance and functionality then a pleasing synergy is the inevitable result, one that's clear to see in the case of Meridiani and Arcadia Yachts. Sherpa XL is a pocket megayacht providing 221 square metres of real space for maximum comfort and decor created to reflect the owner's personality. The Sun Lounge is both a terrace over the sea and a focus for on-board life. Meridiani has furnished the spaces with a modular sofa, armchair and solid iroko Claud pouffe. The soft upholstery and minimal design of the Claud collection coordinate perfectly with those of the Sherpa XL. The set also includes the Bongo collection of low tables in matt lacquer, the perfect finish for outdoor life and open spaces.

Photo © Arcadia Yachts, Alberto Cocchi

