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February 2025 boatinternational.com

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This month: aquaculture mogul Tolga Vural splashes out / owners' adventures in Hawaii and Dubai / bye-bye *Blush* for Eddie Jordan



ON
BOARD
WITH

Tolga Vural

Every fisherman needs a boat... and the founder of an aquaculture empire has taken delivery of a custom explorer, as *Risa Merl* discovers



● The owner of *Kasif* remembers precisely when he fell in love with boating. “It was my first time, in 2005, on an old sailboat heading to Bodrum. I remember the silence and the peace of that journey,” Tolga Vural says. “Within the year, I purchased my first small boat – a 6.15-metre Beneteau Flyer 650 with just a 150hp Yamaha for power.”

Just shy of 20 years later, he now owns a yacht of significantly more substantial proportions, having taken delivery of the custom 42-metre Bilgin-built explorer yacht *Kasif*. An explorer is a fitting mode of travel for visiting his aquaculture empire; Noordzee is one of the most significant players in fish farming and one of Turkey’s leading exporters.

“Fish is our business,” says Vural. He and his wife, Selin, were both born in Istanbul, and prior to moving to Bodrum, where they later met as adults, neither had spent any time on the water recreationally. But perhaps Vural was always fated to become a seafarer. After all “a fisherman”, as he humbly refers to himself, needs a boat.

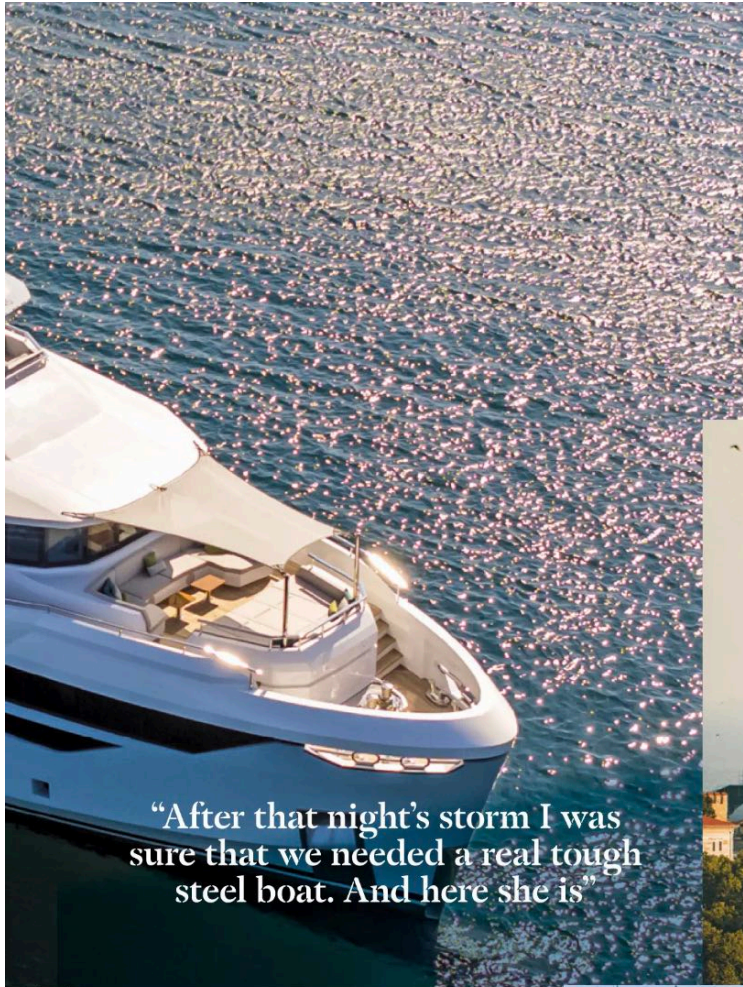
“My father started a fish business in Istanbul,” he says. “In my spare time when I was young, I worked with him and my uncle.”

After studying geological engineering at Istanbul Technical University, he then moved to Bodrum and founded a fish business of his own, Noordzee, which specialises in sea bass, sea bream, steelhead trout, rainbow trout and stone bass.

The company has fish farms spread out across the Mediterranean, Aegean and North Sea. As well as the farms, it runs processing and packaging facilities in various factory locations. “Noordzee produces fish feed with the extruder technology in an integrated fish feed plant, which is one of the biggest feed plants,” Vural explains. “Besides that, Noordzee manages every step of the juvenile production in our own hatcheries.”

It was during a build project on one of his factories that Vural and his wife’s paths first crossed. “I met my dear wife Selin in a design meeting for one of our factory projects,” he says. “After that I tried to find a way have dinner with her, and from there it began.”

Selin studied architecture at Yıldız Technical University in Istanbul and has a master’s degree from the same university. Her design background is varied, ranging from residential projects to hotels and office buildings. It’s no



“After that night’s storm I was sure that we needed a real tough steel boat. And here she is”

Right: the Vurals’ children take the helm. Below: the family support hospital charities in their native Turkey



Right: Vural and wife Selin. Below: Kasif was a star of the Monaco Yacht Show in 2023



surprise that after meeting Vural, she became Noordzee’s go-to architect for the company’s factories and offices. “Selin also designed our house that we still live in,” he says.

It wasn’t long until she caught the boating bug as well. “My wife fell in love with yachting in our 13.6-metre Bavaria Virtess 420. We enjoyed cruising around with only the two of us on board.” But it was on one of these passages that they realised they needed a bigger boat.

“We had a terrifying night with our Bavaria 420 between Marmaris and Rhodes,” Vural says. “The weather report was showing five Beaufort (classified as a fresh breeze, with winds from seven to 21 knots and seas 1.2 to 2.4 metres),

which I thought we could handle. But the reality was around seven Beaufort (a near gale, with winds up to 33 knots and seas as high as 5.8 metres).” For many hours, the Bavaria fought against the ever-increasing waves and winds. Around 4am they finally made shelter off the Greek island of Symi.

“We were totally exhausted. That night I was sure that we definitely needed a real tough steel boat. The following week, I was sitting with Emrecan Özgün from Unique Yacht Design and explaining to him what my next boat should be capable of. And here she is,” Vural says, referring to *Kasif*.

Vural’s friendship with Özgün, CEO and founder of Unique Yacht Design, goes back to their university days in Istanbul. Long before *Kasif* came to existence, Vural recalls the two talking about ideas for the boat that they might design together one day. Now the time had come. Not only is *Kasif* the owner’s first superyacht, she also represents a first for the Turkish builder as Bilgin’s inaugural explorer yacht. The clue is also



Vural with friend Emrecan Özgün, CEO and founder of Unique Yacht Design

in the yacht's name, because "kasif" translates to "explorer" in Turkish.

Of course, Selin lent her architectural expertise to the creation of *Kasif*, working in close collaboration with the yacht's interior designers at Hot Lab from the project's inception. The interior purposefully showcases the couple's connection to the sea. From the organic shapes that are meant to "flow like a wave" to the sculptural art depicting a school of fish and the use of fish skin from the giant Amazonian pirarucu inlaid in fish-shaped cut-outs, many of the design choices give a purposeful hint at the fisherman who owns *Kasif*.

All of this detail was on display when *Kasif* appeared at the Monaco Yacht Show in 2023, attracting plenty of positive feedback from those who stepped on board. "The Monaco Yacht Show was a wonderful public debut for *Kasif*. We knew that she was a good and well-designed



The couple are also proud owners of a 13.6m Bavaria Virtess 420

explorer, but it was a surprise that she was considered among the best," Vural says, referring to the yacht being a finalist in *BOAT International's* World Superyacht Awards and Design & Innovation Awards. "We owe our thanks to Bilgin, Unique Yacht Design, Hot Lab Design and all who worked on her," he adds.

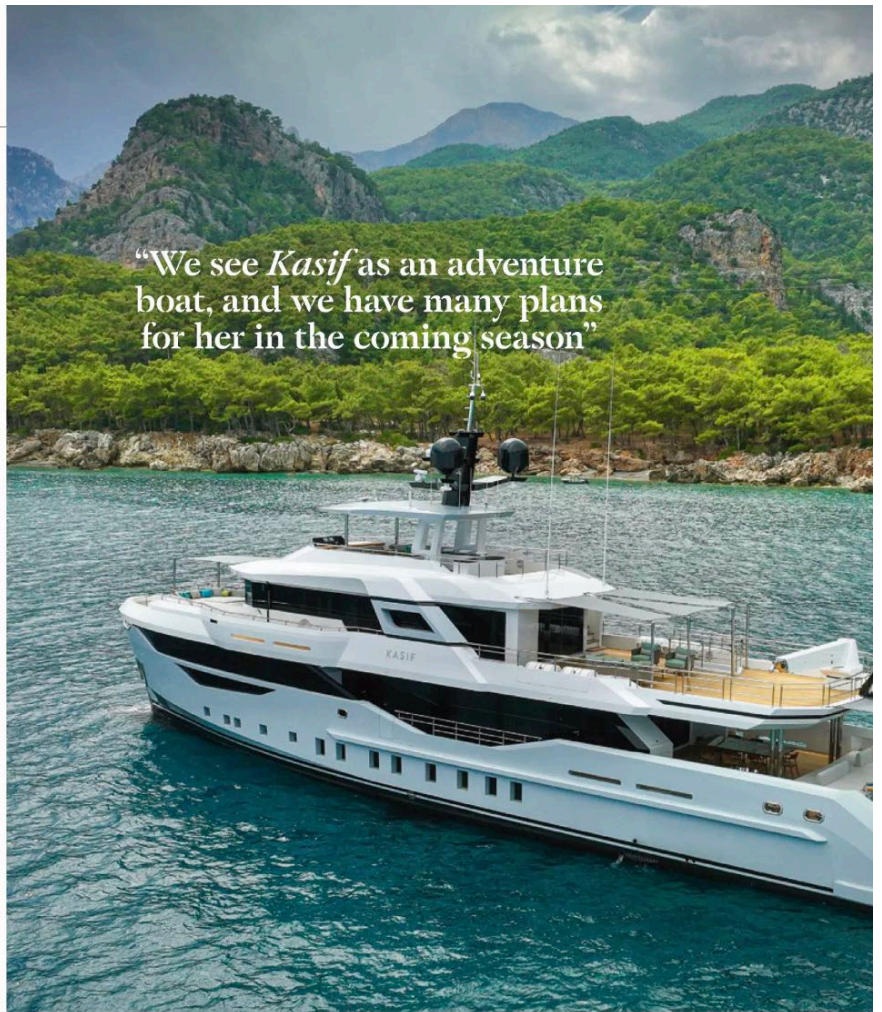
Kasif is not only designed to conjure up imagery of marine life with her bespoke interior, but she will also support Vural in managing the Noordzee fish business. "We like to visit our farms, and we try to spend time together with our staff and try to understand their needs," says Vural, who plans to use *Kasif* for this purpose and has already visited some of his farms on board the yacht, anchoring the explorer nearby. "These visits help me to carry my business to next level." A keen scuba diver, Vural enjoys surveying his farms from below the water's surface as well with a tank strapped to his back. Further merging work and play,

he's used *Kasif* to fish besides the farm as an evening hobby.

Beyond enjoying their yacht, spending time with family and friends, and managing a fish-farming empire, Vural and Selin also support charities that help build and renovate hospitals across Turkey. And, after two tragic earthquakes in Turkey, they have also been involved in organisations that help those who were injured or affected.

Kasif is now the largest in a small fleet that includes an Axopar 28 and Vural's first-ever boat, the Beneteau Flyer 650, which he still owns. "The Axopar is the boat we use daily," he says. Whether it's pootling along the Bodrum coastline on the Axopar or overnight trips on board *Kasif* with family and friends, the Vurals make the most of their home base in Bodrum, set in the midst of picturesque harbours that line this stretch of Turkey's coast. At weekends, *Kasif* can be found moored in bays from Bodrum and Marmaris to Göcek and Datça, as well as further-flung locales around the Mediterranean.

"We were in Monaco and Rhodes last summer. And we are planning to travel to the Greek Islands this summer, and maybe as far away as



"We see *Kasif* as an adventure boat, and we have many plans for her in the coming season"

TOP DIVES IN BODRUM, TURKEY

BIG REEF

The aptly named Big Reef is an easy dive in four to 36 metres. The colourful reef is home to lobster, octopus and moray eels and also has a few wreck pieces such as old anchors.

BUBBLE CAVE

This cavern is full of coral, tube worms and sponges. You enter and exit via a chimney, and looking back you can see the air bubbles of other divers still inside, hence the name.

PINAR 1

Turkey has almost two dozen shipwrecks, including the 37-metre *Pinar 1* which lies in 40 metres of water. Deliberately sunk in 2007, the naval wreck is now a thriving artificial reef home to starfish, eel and grouper.

C-47 AEROPLANE

For a different type of wreck dive, descend 20 to 30 metres to see a WWII-era C-47 Dakota. The propellers are still intact, and you might see green turtles swimming nearby.

ARMUTLU BURNU

Ideal for advanced divers, this wall dive can be enjoyed day or night, with a flashlight showing its crevices that hide shrimp, octopus and eel. A group of granite boulders known as Dick's Rock can be seen 36 metres down.



Above: family time on board. Here: Kasif's interior, designed by Selin alongside Hot Lab, contains many nods to Tolga's fisherman past



Bodrum is blessed with a wealth of turquoise-sea bays

Will the boat's explorer credentials and 5,000-nautical-mile range at 10 knots be put to the test outside the Med? "We don't have a plan to leave the Med yet, but why not," says Vural. "Our passion is to visit new places; that's why we built a boat like *Kasif*." He also doesn't rule out sharing *Kasif*'s beauty with others by putting the yacht on the charter market one day - "We've talked with some companies about charter," he reveals - but for now, she will remain private.

While a sailing boat might've sparked his interest in yachting, Vural and Selin aren't sailors - yet. But it might be the next addition to the fleet. "We've tried it sailing before and liked it, and our boys are due to start sailing training, so we plan to have one maybe soon," he says.

Whether sailing along the Bodrum coastline, scuba diving beneath the water or exploring further afield by superyacht, this "humble fisherman" has an inherent connection and passion for the wonders of the sea that's sure to last a lifetime. ■

the southern part of Italy," says Vural. "We see *Kasif* as an adventure boat, and we have many plans for her in the coming season." For now, these adventures are focusing around the Med, with many places still topping Vural and Selin's wish list, including Sicily, Sardinia, Marseille and Barcelona, all of which they plan to visit on board *Kasif*.