



The Art of (sea) Force

Captain Magic's floating canvas

We refer to finely finished shiny boat equipment as boat jewellery or bling. The best yachts have often been referred to as works of art, yet until 2008 such comments were metaphorical. Certainly art has been hung within (and in one notorious case nicked from) superyachts, but this year two launches changed all that. *Guilty* was reported in *The Crew Report* issue 25 and *TYR100* in PPPs and Justin Ratcliffe explains *Sea Force One* here. The latter is actually due to be exhibited at The Biennale in Venice as an art object. Justin visited the yacht and interviewed the Owner, who styles himself as Captain Magic. He told him of the concept and the role of constraint and conservatism of style and even the financial crisis effect on yacht ownership and creation.



“AN IMPORTANT MILESTONE AND FURTHER CONFIRMATION OF our brand in the megayacht marketplace”, was how Annamaria Jaselli Ceccarelli, Chairwoman of Admiral Mariotti Yachts (AMY), described the official presentation of the Admiral 54, *Sea Force One*, in Genoa last July. “Less than three years after its inception, today AMY celebrates its first launch, while a second sister ship for a Middle Eastern owner is under construction and due for delivery in 2010.”

The evening's entertainment went smoothly until night fell and fireworks announced the arrival of the yacht. Unfortunately, the combination of a brisk breeze, a lack of space to manoeuvre and a nervous yard captain meant the vessel came to a standstill, showing a scruffy-looking port side with traces of masking tape, instead of the black hull's shiny starboard side that had been spruced up for the event. Luca Dini, author of the yacht's dashing exterior profile, was not amused, but in the excitement of the moment few of the 400 guests present even noticed the faux pas.

AMY was created in October 2005 when two established Italian shipyards joined forces to build a new line of steel-hulled displacement superyachts. It was a strategic alliance that made perfect sense

as it pooled the talents of Cantieri Navali Lavagna, a builder of aluminium planing yachts and owner of the Admiral brand name, and the Mariotti shipyard in Genoa, a specialist in the construction of luxury cruise ships. A dedicated facility was set up in Genoa in addition to Admiral's two existing production plants in Lavagna and Riva Trigoso. The Mariotti alliance took on new significance recently when it was announced that the expired lease on the site in Riva Trigoso would not be renewed.

Well before the launch of *Sea Force One*, rumours were rife that the owner, a former Admiral client and keen collector of contemporary art and sculpture, had collaborated closely with Luca Dini on the yacht's interior and that it featured such macabre motifs as human skulls and bones. He also insisted, somewhat bizarrely, on being referred to as Captain Magic, a sort of piratical alter ego. So it was with some trepidation that I went aboard the yacht during the Monaco Yacht Show. But before we take a look at the yacht's one-of-a-kind interior, it's worth pointing out how the CNL-Mariotti partnership has influenced other aspects of the project.

Designed by Luca Dini with naval architecture by AMY, *Sea Force One* was constructed in blocks – 17 steel blocks for the hull and seven aluminium blocks for the superstructure. These pre-engineered, multi-deck sections, with piping and cabling largely completed, were then craned into place and welded together. As a commercial ship builder, Mariotti is entirely at home with the practice, but it is still relatively rare in superyacht construction. It would seem block assembly makes

increasing sense as the industry moves towards ever larger yachts that share a common technical platform, where standardisation, repetition and automation lead to improved production efficiency and, in turn, to lower costs and faster schedules. But the method also has its drawbacks, such as the need for highly accurate assembly, a larger investment cost in facilities and on-time delivery of materials.

ABS and RINA certified, *Sea Force One* carries RINA's Green Star notation (already familiar to Mariotti as it was originally developed for the cruise ship industry) and a new RINA initiative known as "Secure Yacht" certification. This is designed to step in where the International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code stops short. Although individual Flag Administrations can choose to apply the ISPS Code to private superyachts, in practice it is only applied to yachts in commercial use with a gross tonnage of 500 and over.

"Everything started when we first received some requests for on-board security assessment for private yachts", said Paolo Moretti, Head of RINA's leisure yacht division. "The application of the ISPS Code was not mandatory due to the service of these boats, but for the owners it was very important to demonstrate, even on a voluntary base, that their yachts were being operated in a secure manner." Increasing concern over the privacy and protection of owner, guests and crew has meant that the security equipment being installed aboard superyachts is much more sophisticated than that of merchant ships. "We thought that the high level of security applied on board many large yachts should be properly evidenced", continued Moretti, "and we decided to do it by drawing up a new Secure Yacht notation."

Secure Yacht certification mainly deals with the proper installation and type approval of security hardware such as anti-intruder devices, additional lighting, portable metal detectors, CCTV networks, digital locking devices and master key systems. Assigned together with the Class Certificate, it has a five-year validity, which is approved through annual surveys carried out in conjunction with the Class inspections. By certifying that the yacht has been designed and equipped in compliance with both RINA Rules and the ISPS Code, it represents added value for both the builder and the owner.

Luca Dini's exterior styling is aggressively handsome – exactly what the owner was looking for to coincide with his buccaneering alter ego. Part of the reason why Dini was peeved that the yacht did not present

its "best side" to onlookers during its official debut was because the starboard main deck features two of three hydraulic terraces. These are familiar design features now, but when Dini first penned the exterior lines nearly four years ago they were still an innovation. One of these terraces is at the starboard level of the main lobby, while the forward master suite has one on either side of the hull. Two blisters flanking the sky lounge on the upper deck house a further two permanent balconies, which Dini identifies as a "truly innovative concept, because now you get to enjoy an open-air view from the sides of the yacht as well as the fore and aft deck, especially while under way."

As Admiral's first displacement superyacht, it was hardly surprising that *Sea Force One* was delivered a few weeks behind schedule, but Captain Magic must be the only owner I know of who was actually happy about the delay. "I didn't think so at the time, but in retrospect it was a good thing the yacht was late", he admitted. "Had it been delivered on time in the first week of July it wouldn't have been properly finished. I actually took delivery on my birthday in September, which has to be a good omen." There is nothing remarkable about the yacht's reliable Caterpillar main engines and gensets, but in terms of performance the owner is clearly satisfied: "We went to Capri and back at an average speed of 16 knots – excellent for a yacht of this size." Four zero-speed stabilisers and sound and vibration insulation by specialist consultants ScanVibra mean the ride is a quiet and comfortable one too.

And so to the yacht's interior, which is quite unlike anything I have come across before. I was simultaneously impressed and appalled: impressed by the owner's imagination and sheer *chutzpah*; appalled by what it meant in terms of cleaning and maintenance for the crew. The only way to make sense of it was to talk to the young Italian owner, *aka* Captain Magic, himself, who called me one day from London to provide the promised interview. I soon learned that to my surprise, even consternation, it was exactly the sort of reaction he was looking to provoke.

"I love to create things for the sole purpose of making people enjoy a given space in different ways and so the basic concept behind *Sea Force One* was to build something that gave an emotional rather than a rational experience", he explained during a thought-provoking telephone conversation. "And in order to do that you have to create a story that precedes the boat itself – otherwise it is just the sum of its steel, aluminium and fabric parts." This storyline is provided by the contradictory persona of Captain Magic, who combines elements of aggression and romanticism, transgression and discipline. This dichotomy – or Yin Yang as the owner calls it – is summed up in the half-skull-half-mask logo on the transom and "applies to every single part of the boat insofar as I was able to interpret it". The owner as Captain Magic was photographed wearing such a mask and a swashbuckling costume in a recent 12-page feature in *AD* magazine – the first time the architectural digest has dedicated so many editorial pages to a yacht interior.

The emotional impact is provided by a series of challenging works of contemporary art. Many of these were donated by 20-odd artists,



but others were specially commissioned to reflect, often tongue-in-cheek, the owner's swashbuckling interpretation of the Yin Yang philosophy underlying the interior design. They include a piece called *Untitled (Bones)* of a skull and bones by the German-born American artist Kiki Smith, who was using pieces of human skeletons long before Damian Hurst came up with his *Diamond Skull*, and is showcased in the low, leather-covered table in the main salon. Then there is José Garcia Cordero's wall painting of skulls, Fabrizio Plessi's hypnotic video sculpture that separates the lounge and dining room, Mai-Thu Perret's *Big Golden Rock* in the entrance to the salon and Roberto Vannucci's sculpture *The Piratess* in the media room. In the owner's suite the bed's headboard was made by Carlo Lombardi of the same materials used for constructing carnival floats to represent a coral reef, while the mirrored wardrobes

have been covered with a film layer depicting a map of the world. A large portrait photo of Captain Magic is by artist Michele Alassio, who also designed the yacht's remarkable official website (check it out on www.seaforceoneyacht.com). The massive Maori fish hook in the main foyer was cast from the same bronze used to make the yacht's Delta props and is a favourite motif of the owner, appearing on his previous yacht and in a miniature version around his neck.

The art-as-décor concept recalled to mind Rizzardi's recent launch of 35.3-metre *Guilty* owned by Dakis Joannou, another avid art collector. The exterior paintwork by Jeff Koons (who once had the questionable distinction of being married to the Italian pornstar-politician Cicciolina) is a piece of art in itself. Inspired by the camouflage of military vessels, it is a homage to Roy Lichtenstein and has earned the yacht an apt nickname as the "Lego Boat". The interior design is by the progressive designer Ivana Porfiri who, in an exclusive interview for *Yacht Design* magazine, explained how the owner "wanted to bring art into the very

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bones of the yacht”, which links rather neatly with Captain Magic’s passion for bones in art. I haven’t been aboard *Guilty*, but there is clearly a new breed of owners out there who are no longer content to simply hang an original Picasso on the bulkhead wall as an expression of their artistic tastes. They want the art to be an integral part of the yacht. Take it away and it is no longer the same boat.

And so back to *Sea Force One*. Much of the interior furniture was designed or inspired by the owner himself, such as the hammock sofa hanging from chains in the main salon, the folding-back chairs in the sky lounge and the canopy-effect bed in the VIP cabin created using steel cables instead of wooden corner supports. Unusual materials have also been employed, such as (impossible to clean) woven polycarbonate strips to create the complex ceiling patterns and (equally impossible to clean) back-lit Barrisol panels lining the entrance to the main salon.

Light, both natural and artificial, was essential in achieving the desired effects and the owner engaged light designer Massimo Marzorati to interpret his wishes. The result is an impressive display of underwater lights, but also interior and deck lighting systems that illuminate the whole yacht when night

falls. “Most yacht’s become half their real size at night because the foredecks are not usually illuminated”, explains the owner. “Yachts are meant for living at night as well; a boat has a different personality in the dark and should wake up, but most just seem to go to sleep.”

The owner’s close involvement in the interior design was partly the result of his general dissatisfaction with many of the top designer names: “The yachts they design are too standardised – they all look like huge dining areas.” Even design doyen Philippe Starck comes under fire: “With all due respect, I personally don’t see any innovation in his work now”. Clearly a man of intellect, imagination and humour – evidenced by punningly naming his yacht after the most famous airplane in the world – I asked him if during the build he had felt constrained by what is a notoriously conservative industry. He responded with a message that may yet prove to be eerily prophetic: “Constraint is necessary for creativity. The best classical music came after the Dark Ages; the ‘economic miracle’ in Italy came out of the Second World War; and I believe the current financial crisis will result in an enrichment process in which people focus more on what they have and why they have it, and whether they can or should do without it.”

Justin Ratcliffe
Images by Maurizio Paradisi

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