

DUBAWI



A Leisurely Conversion

Although still a very young shipyard, Platinum Yachts in Dubai is not without a certain experience. “Platinum Yachts started out most unusually with a major challenge – to build the largest yacht [in the world]”, Kostas Antonopoulos-Rothschild (below), the Managing Director of the shipyard, explained to Justin Ratcliffe at Abu Dhabi Yacht Show. Justin was attending the new show there and visited Dubawi Platinum’s latest conversion. He learnt what it takes to turn a former *Leisure World 1* cruise ship built by Fincantieri into a superyacht of considerable size, with a design and layout tailored to the needs of an Emirates owner.

THE YACHT THAT STARTED PLATINUM WAS THE 162-METRE *DUBAI*, which began life as the Platinum Project at the Blohm & Voss shipyard in 1996 when it was commissioned by Prince Jefri Bolkiah, younger brother to the Sultan of Brunei. Following the Prince’s bankruptcy, the yacht was mothballed until the uncompleted hull was sold to Sheik Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum, the Crown Prince of Dubai.

The hull was shipped to the port of Jebel Ali aboard a 200-metre, 10,000-ton capacity floating dock where a hastily gathered production team was faced with the daunting task of completing a project the yard describe as “far from finished” while incorporating a whole raft of change orders from the Crown Prince. “The learning curve was steep and full of obstacles as the size of the yacht tested the limits of the industry to deliver



quality and detail in such large volumes”, continues Kostas, rather understating the challenge of fitting out a 13,000GT vessel to superyacht standards with a raw team of imported workers. Despite these difficulties, the project was duly completed and *Dubai* hit the water in 2005 and received her Lloyd’s certification the following year.

Platinum Yachts is part of the same group that includes Drydocks World Dubai, a 10,000-personnel commercial shipyard, and is now based in Dubai Maritime City, which is being developed to turn the region into a major shipbuilding and maritime hub. Following *Dubai*, the fledgling yard then took on the complete refitting of a 45-metre Turkish-built schooner, re-launched as *Dubai Magic*, and acquired the 90-metre mini cruise ship *Leisure World 1*, formerly employed as one of the bright orange easyCruise vessels. A sister ship is also awaiting conversion, while a 120-metre former naval vessel named *Cosmos* is now up for sale after it was deemed unsuitable for the owner’s needs.

The converted *Leisure World 1*, now renamed *Dubawi*, was originally built by Fincantieri in 1989 and is the third Platinum project to be owned by an Emirates owner. It was presented at the Abu Dhabi Yacht Show last March when TYR was invited to tour the vessel in the company of Dirk de Jong, Commercial & Business Development Manager for Platinum Yachts.

The six-deck, 4,200GT *Dubawi* was easily the most voluminous vessel at the dock, dwarfing the 72-metre *Silver* moored alongside. The sight of this behemoth, and *Dubai* before it, raised the conundrum of when is a yacht not a yacht but a ship? More than simply a matter of size, function is the more relevant issue here. In this context, *Dubai* was conceived as a private yacht from the beginning, whereas *Dubawi* was originally designed to function as a cruise ship – and I’m sure Platinum Yachts will agree that it shows, at least from the outside.



This is because relatively little of the exterior has been changed, the major modification being the replacement of a section of the steel top deck forward of the funnel with an aluminium structure to save on weight. This was a consequence of the stability issues created by the 50-odd tons of filler used to fair the 5,000m² of hull. Despite the addition of all the stone and marble for the interior, the vessel at light load was a third of a metre short of her maximum 4.1-metre draught. A second area of exterior intervention was the extension of the transom by five metres, plus a new swim platform and double staircase to the main deck. The owners later decided there was no point in having two such stairways and so the starboard stairwell has been covered and turned into a water feature (although with the steps still in place the original function is touchingly obvious). All of the old davits have been removed and replaced with cranes for operating the two 11.5-metre tenders.

The ship is now RINA class under the UAE flag and no longer SOLAS certified, mainly because of the lifeboat issue (although it would not take much to return to SOLAS as fire precaution measures such as sprinkler systems, hoses, fire doors and escape routes are intact). As an existing build she would probably not be required to comply with MLC 2006. Existing keels are exempt; however, conversions (completed after the convention comes into force) that amount to totally

rebuilding the crew accommodations are required to comply. Avoiding this is fortuitous as some crew cabins have six-person occupancy – four in excess of the MLC maximum. If, though, these are for staff or retinue who normally work ashore rather than as the yacht’s crew there would be no problem with six to a cabin.

The engine room and major systems also remained largely intact. The MAN engines were overhauled and modified to take marine grade diesel instead of heavy fuel. The ship is equipped with two powerful shaft generators (up to 2,500kW) that were in good working order. *Dubawi* uses retractable stabilisers and Fleet Manager Mike Meyer commented that the ship is surprisingly manoeuvrable thanks to a very powerful bow thruster, in addition to the controllable pitch propellers and flap rudders. The engine room itself is split into three sections for the main engines, chiller and sprinkler systems. The HVAC plant has been replaced and an upgraded UPS system installed to avoid voltage fluctuations. Minor work in the engine room, such as cladding and painting, is ongoing and being carried out by the ship’s crew. Like many yachts in the Gulf region, *Dubawi* spends much of her time in port, cruising for brief periods of three or four days at a time. With relatively rare opportunities to venture beyond 25 miles offshore, her black-water tanks can hold 100 tons, equivalent to a couple of weeks in port with a full complement of guests.



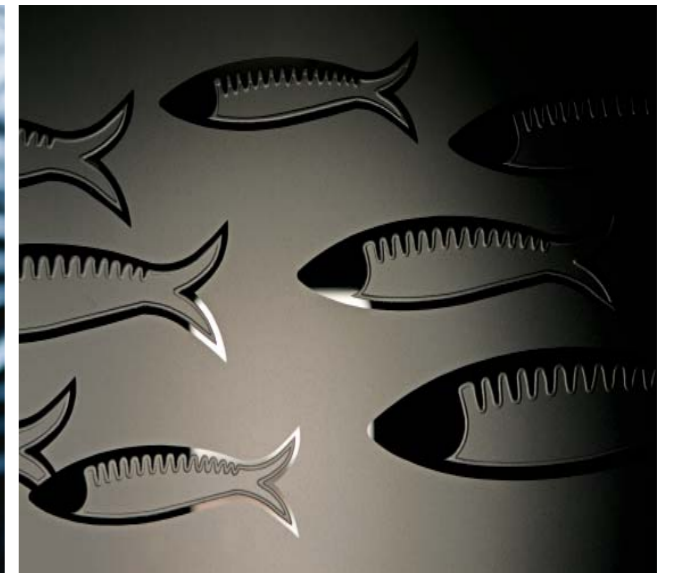
The bridge is another area where intervention has been kept to a minimum and *Dubawi's* cruise ship pedigree is still evident. The original brief was to make no cosmetic changes at all to the bridge, but wisely it was later decided to at least replace the rubber flooring with synthetic teak and clad the original console in leather and clad the ceiling and wall panels with wood veneer and lacquered panels. New plotters and radars have been fitted and the echo sounder upgraded with fore and aft transducers. CCTV security cameras have been added throughout the vessel and a new A/V system with Crestron controls installed.

So far so very ship-like, but once I penetrated deeper into the guest areas of *Dubawi* I was in for a pleasant surprise. Conceived completely in-house at Platinum Yachts by a five-person design office, the new interior décor is fresh and contemporary with a range of dark wood veneers that contrast with vibrant textiles and fabrics. By eschewing gold plating, heavy drapes and

ornate detailing in favour of more restrained (if not exactly sober) styling, this is quite unlike what we have come to expect from Middle Eastern tastes. Even so, a sense of regional culture is retained in the intricate tile mosaics and bold patterns of the bespoke carpets that decorate the interior throughout. The outfitting by the same four local companies that worked on Dubai is of high quality and comparable with European standards.

Dubawi has two master staterooms – a common feature on yachts with Middle Eastern owners – eight VIP cabins and 12 standard cabins on various deck levels for a total capacity in excess of 42 guests (with a similar number of crew). The 12 standard cabins were only minimally refurbished to complement the new interior styling, but it is likely that they will be refitted in line with the rest of the vessel.

The owner was not closely involved in the interior design, but one seemingly innocuous detail did attract criticism:



they asked that the red lamp shades along the long corridor on the bridge deck where the standard cabins are located be changed. A more significant late change order concerned the small lounge on level 5, which was originally meant to be a gym and then a tender bay for the jet skis and other toys. In this latter function the fact that ventilation ducting to the engine room has been routed behind a starboard bulkhead was of little consequence, but as a lounge the noise levels are unacceptably high. Platinum Yachts is aware of the problem and planning to install extra sound insulation.

The master stateroom and VIP cabins in particular are very comfortable with truly enormous bathrooms and, in most cases, two large flat-screen TVs for the sleeping and lounge areas. The master stateroom on level 6 benefits from headroom well over two metres where the deckhead was replaced with the new aluminium structure. When a consignment of gym equipment arrived unexpectedly at

the shipyard it was decided to put it on the private open foredeck in front of the master suite, although until an awning is fitted exercise is unthinkable during the heat of the day. The area also features a diminutive Jacuzzi under a new radar mast that looks strangely out of place on such an imposing vessel. Exterior guest areas are limited given the size of the vessel, but then sunbathing semi-naked is hardly a part of Muslim culture.

While walking the companionways, Dirk de Jong pointed out an intelligent solution to the problem of fairing such a massive superstructure. Every four metres or so along the exterior bulkheads they placed a half-pipe to break up the expanse of steel into manageable sections. This means that the fairing required less filler and any imperfections are less visible. New profiles were also welded around the fire hose hatches and stainless-steel frames added to the original portlights to give them a less workaday appearance.



A saloon area adjoining the main deck lobby was previously taken up with six guest cabins and the pillars that used to house piping and ducting have been kept in place for cabling and storage. The night club was originally envisaged on the lower deck, but when this space was replaced with a VIP cabin it was relocated to the main deck. The dance floor is effectively a giant computer monitor that relays psychedelic patterns, while a nearby bar unit has a pressure-sensitive LCD surface so pools of light patterns accumulate around a glass or any other object placed on top of it.

Like Turkey, yacht building in the Gulf region depends on a ready supply of cheap labour coupled with experienced Western consultants. Following on from *Dubai, Dubawi* is evidence that Platinum Yachts are more than competent at large-scale conversions. But the jury is still out on whether they can achieve the same degree of competency in the field of new builds (Platinum themselves regard the Dubai Project as a new build, as it is, they say, a bare hull from Blohm + Voss without any significant outfitting, piping or even cable trays). Until recently they were on track to prove what they were capable of with the 87.3-metre diesel-electric Triton project, a stylish Sam Sorgiovanni/Azure Naval Architects' design of just under 3,000gt (compare with 82-metre *Alfa Nero's* 1,950gt) for a European owner.

Triton's design engineering is complete and its propulsion

system and associated electronics are featured in issue 102 on page 86. Unfortunately, the client defaulted and the project is on hold, but Kostas is convinced they have what it takes: "There are economic advantages to building here and we can deliver to European quality", he maintains. "I believe when you see the first new build from the region you'll understand that." The Triton project is available for a new client who will gain a ready-to-build project all set to begin steel cutting, which means taking delivery up to a year earlier than would otherwise be the case.

The economic advantages are not just related to a cheap labour force. Kostas, who was a mathematician before training as a naval architect, was a panel member during a session of the Gulf Superyacht Forum hosted by TYR at the Abu Dhabi Yacht Show. With reference to the current economic crisis, he pointed out that having discovered that a lot of money we thought existed was just a figment in the collective imaginations of the world's financiers, tangible assets will increase in money (if not real) value in the future, especially as governments turn to the inflationary process of printing more of the stuff. In this context, building a superyacht now makes perfect financial sense. Naturally, Kostas hopes you build it with Platinum Yachts.

Justin Ratcliffe

Images: Justin Ratcliffe & Platinum Yachts

To comment on this article, email

issue104@synfo.com with subject: *Dubawi*

READ MORE
synfo extras
www.synfo.com/extras

