

# Interior Yacht Design: Evolution and New Scenarios

Mariateresa CAMPOLONGO<sup>a1</sup>.

<sup>a</sup> *Università degli Studi di Genova*

**Abstract.** The recreational craft market (for boats longer than 24 metres) is particularly interesting as it continues to grow, displaying an ongoing positive trend since 2010 (source: Altagamma and SBI) with motor yachts constituting the major segment. These boats offer several points for consideration, particularly regarding their interior design, a topic of great interest nowadays. The interiors of large boats were characterized for decades by recognizable aesthetic traits that led to the definition of a proper nautical line: lacquered mahogany for furniture and bulkheads, white ceilings, blue and white striped fabrics, and bright brass handles all make up what has been called "Old Navy Style". In the last twenty years, however, there has been a real revolution in the interior design of these boats. Various key points underlie this new concept of Interior Yacht Design: a renewed interest in synergy between domestic interior and nautical styles (with the arrival of a new generation of designers eager to present something different: architects, famous fashion designers and well-known civil architects), the search for the most suitable materials and technologies, and a desire to open up the boat outwards. In this varied panorama, what are the possible future scenarios of Interior Yacht Design?

**Keywords.** Interior yacht design, pleasure motor craft, evolution, trends.

## 1. Introduction

Interior yacht design is, today more than ever, a fascinating topic that appears frequently at the centre of the cultural debate, as demonstrated by the dedicated university conferences and various boat shows, as well as industry publications.

This paper focuses on interior yacht design of a specific typology of pleasure craft i.e. that of motor yachts larger than 24 m. Such yachts are considered to be "super yachts" if they are more than 30 metres long, and "mega yachts" if over 60 metres.

The larger boat typology is particularly interesting from a commercial viewpoint: "the sector is growing, confirming a positive trend that has been ongoing since 2010 (source: Altagamma and SBI), (...) with motor yachts constituting the major segment (89% of the entire portfolio)" [1]. In addition, "Italy (compared with the rest of the world) captured 49% of overall power-yacht sector orders in 2017 (source: Altagamma and Deloitte)" [2].

This type of boat is part of what is called "luxury design" or an "extreme" field of design where "Man is allowed to experience very special conditions and where the

---

<sup>1</sup> Mariateresa Campolongo, Università degli Studi di Genova, Scuola Politecnica, Dipartimento Architettura e Design, Stradone di Sant'Agostino n°37, 16123 Genova, Italy; E-mail: m.campolongo06@gmail.com.

phenomena are revealed with such emphasized and special characters as to make the rules that govern them appear clearer " [3].

The boat represents the materialization of a dream, that of its owner. "The Boat is not an object, it is a piece of the world, in the case of a yacht the world is in the image and likeness of the owner, his perfect world, where only those who want him are admitted, the last refuge of the modern man" [4]. While the exteriors are more constrained by the regulations in force and rules of fluid dynamics, it is in the interiors that the shipowner's dreams become more evident and can leave viewers speechless.

## **2. The Interior Tradition of Large Motor Yachts**

### *2.1. Origins of Large Motor Yachts*

The first large private and pleasure motor-yachts date back to the 1920s when the highest aim of interior design was to recreate a family/home atmosphere. Private boats were mainly built in the United States and Canada and tried to reproduce a domestic environment by referring to the permanent interiors of the past, as if to look for sure references in historical roots. The interiors, with their traditional wood constructions, reflected the prestige that the boat had to have. The interior was opulent, with constant and barely-hidden references to land-based interiors, like the fireplaces, chandeliers, thick carpets and seats covered with precious fabrics.

In the 1930s, Germany also became an important hub in the construction of large yachts. Inside there were still very strong references to the domestic world but there was an initial simplification in the way of interpreting the interior.

After the pause in the Forties, in the following decade it is not easy to find projects of large motor yachts built from new; the most common was the conversion of military boats into luxurious yachts. The most emblematic case is represented by *Christina O*. Belonging to the Greek magnate Aristotle Onassis and launched in 1943 as a frigate of the River Class for the Navy of Canada under the name HMCS Stormont, *Christina O* represented in 1954 (the year of its refitting) one of the largest and most luxurious yachts ever to exist in the world. The mega-yacht had bathrooms with gold taps and ivory handles, a fireplace studded with precious stones, lapis lazuli sinks and a bathtub inspired by that of the legendary Minos, king of Crete. The furnishings boasted Louis XIV furniture and museum paintings, including a Rubens, an El Greco, and a Renoir. The bar stools in front of the panoramic window, where the magnate loved to offer an aperitif, were covered in whale skin.

The *Christina O* represents an interesting transition point in interior yacht design: while there are typical examples of domestic design furniture, such as in the bathrooms or in the dining room, in other environments, such as the bar or the living room, a more nautical line becomes apparent due both to the safety measures that are transformed into real aesthetic signs, and the introduction of materials typical of the nautical field.

### *2.2. Development and Affirmation of a Properly Nautical Line*

In the Sixties, with pleasure now the new priority (both in Italy and elsewhere in the world) the sporadic cases of large boat projects became a much more widespread phenomenon. In these years there was the development of leisure and entertainment;

the boats started to grow in size and new players like Italy, Holland and France started to appear on the international market.

"With the evolution of the idea of travel by sea shifting from necessity to pleasure, there evolved, gradually, the yacht" [5].

In the Sixties, little by little, there was the birth of a more consciously proper nautical line, which began to replace the imitation of land-based interior design. Although this type of yacht was planned by different designers and built in different countries and shipyards, it is possible to find characteristic and easily recognizable features: lacquered mahogany for furniture and bulkheads, white ceilings, blue and white striped fabrics, and bright brass handles all make up what has been called "Old Navy Style".

In the Seventies, a specific nautical line in the design of yacht interiors began to develop and to assume an increasingly well-defined and recognizable identity which reached full maturity in the Eighties. This was a decade where aesthetic appearance was very important and even the interiors of big motor yachts were affected, becoming much less sober and exaggerated in terms of materials, colours and textures.

A striking example is *Nabila* of Fratelli Benetti shipyards (J. Bannenberg - exterior designer, L. Sturchio - interior designer) built for Adnan Khashoggi. With its 86-metre length, 2,465 dwt and dream interiors, the *Nabila* has become the most famous yacht of its era. Indicative of the luxurious interior of this boat was the master bathroom, which included a barbershop, sauna, shower and walk-in closet with mirror. It was a very suggestive environment, characterized by precious materials such as onyx to cover some bulkheads and the tiles that cover the pavement following a pattern of sun rays, or the entirely gold-plated taps. Of particular importance is the bathtub which, in the form of a shell and provided with thirteen nozzles for the water, was made from a single block of onyx hand-worked by a team of expert Italian artisans employed for a full year solely on this piece.

In the Nineties, an excess of materials, colours and objects was reached within the interior design of yachts. We can cite as examples the *Denitta II* of Italian shipyard Fratelli Benetti of 1990, the *Hakim* of Australian Lloyd's Shipyards of 1991 and the *Swiftship* of the homonymous American shipyard of 1992. All three of these boats, although geographically distant, are united by interiors where there were various materials, objects and colours juxtaposed to create a sense of the prevalence of "full" over "empty" and of very charged environments.

It was in these years that some projects began to display a break with the previous design philosophy: new possibilities arose because some shipowners thought they were moving towards a new interior language and aesthetic culture, much closer to the home environment.

### **3. Towards a New Vision of Interior Yacht Design**

In the 2000s, the perception of yacht interiors was undergoing a real revolution, thanks mainly to the influence of designers arriving from civil architecture, "starchitects" and haute couture designers.

### 3.1. Interior Yacht Design as Seen by Civil Architects

Although land-based design and luxury yacht interior design are very different in nature, these two fields are actually very close in some aspects. However, it is important to bear in mind that while a boat is subject to movement, the other is not and this basic difference means that a boat needs an additional series of safety precautions, which may also influence the aesthetics of the interior. In addition, "on land-based structures there are almost always some common characteristics, such as the squareness of the walls and the box-like structure which in themselves define the living conditions. Although unaesthetically appealing, a simple concrete box can be viable as a house. At sea, these elements do not exist: the hull never originates as a habitable space. To make a hull livable, it is necessary to select residential characteristics: the borders of the living space are not outlined and someone has to draw them freely, with the language of the designer being defined in an independent and different manner than that used on land" [6].

Despite these basic differences, at the beginning of the 2000s there emerged a total change in interior design, with the main authors being designers from the land-based world, with no background at all in nautical design.

In fact, some signs of change had already been seen from the mid-Nineties, as with the *Blue Velvet* of Codecasa Shipyard, a super yacht that presented itself in a completely different way from other boats of the time. Entirely made of Danish leather (for bulkheads, ceilings, walls) and exclusively raw silk for the seats, it gave a unique sense of purity and elegance. The advent of a new user who requested boat interiors very similar to those of classic homes, brought into the equation renowned architects such as Lazzarini & Pickering, Ivana Porfiri, Dordoni Architects, Parisotto & Formenton, Achille Salvagni, Michela Reverberi, and many others who showed the boat in a new guise. The materials used started to take on significant importance, and a real sensory on-board experience was created, with the most striking example being the *Nina J* of Baglietto in 2005 (Figure 1). Objects and materials were transferred from the land-based world, such as - in exceptional form - the plaster of marble for the walls, and the vertical garden, never before seen on a boat. The *Nina J* was an original project, one of the first cases where attention was paid also to the so-called "soft" performance of materials: everything is based on the idea of sensoriality, where the naturalness of the materials invites a tactile, visual and olfactory experience.



**Figure 1.** Nina J, Main Deck. Courtesy of Baglietto Yachts.

Other luxury yachts that paved the way in a new language for yacht interiors include the *Sai Ram* in 2003, a 52-metre super yacht by the Benetti shipyard with interiors by Lazzarini Pickering Architects. Overturning the norm for yachts, the architects worked mainly on vertical rather than horizontal axes, creating a perception of enhanced heights. As in a veritable architectural promenade, a steel band covered with red leather conceptually links the different environments in a fluid space. The *Sai Ram* rarely reproduces symmetries in the interior as usually happens, and the environments interpenetrate (rather than following a linear form), thus creating a feeling of space within other spaces.

In 2010, the *SL100* of the Sanlorenzo shipyard (Figure 2) formed a new bridge between the nautical and architecture worlds through the involvement of Dordoni Architetti. The grafting of skills from a different field resulted in a project of continuous, fluid spatiality that completely changes the concept of rigid compartmentalization of spaces. Passing through a series of diaphragms, the eye takes in the entire dimension of the hull, both length and breadth. The spatial and visual references bring the gaze from the stern to the bow, with harmonious architectural control, thanks to a series of gradual steps that reinforce the sense of welcome. "Rodolfo Dordoni designs the interior of the first SL 100, which in 2010 was awarded the ADI Design Index National Prize for Innovation. The project is highly distinctive in the layout of the spaces and the use of light. Decisive in the overall vision and detail is the choice of colours and materials creating an extremely sophisticated ambience" [7].



**Figure 2.** SL 100, Main Deck. Courtesy of Sanlorenzo Yachts.

In 2012, Michela Reverberi designed the interiors of *Stella Maris*, a 72m mega-yacht from VSY Shipyard. The project exalted the verticality of the space, the power of light, the unusual relationship between empty and full, reinterpreting the diversity and original characteristics of the boat, connecting each element through a rewriting of the rules that govern the division of space, the light / shadow ratio, and empty / full concept. The rooms thus assumed an exceptional height for a boat of that size, revolutionizing the proportions to which we were accustomed. The incredible size of the windows and the amount of natural light available led to a careful study of the artificial lighting to be adopted. Moreover, with the *Stella Maris* the green colour of seaweed was finally welcomed aboard, a colour which was always avoided previously

because of its common association with nausea, and its use here revealed its great potential to create pleasant and unusual atmospheres.

### *3.2. The Experiments of the Starchitects*

In the 2000s, contemporary research in interior yacht design led to the involvement of some of the world's most important "starchitects" in the project who transported their language within the nautical sector.

Philippe Starck, Norman Foster, Zaha Hadid - to name but a few - completely ruffled the traditional concepts of interior yacht design. These experiments, on the one hand, led (particularly in some cases) to the total negation of the traditional idea of a boat, not taking into account safety precautions and those related to its movement, while on the other hand they revealed the great potential to show something unique and totally new, perhaps before anyone else. Norman Foster, for example, already in 2009 introduced glass windows to *Ocean Emerald*, a reference point today for many projects.

### *3.3. Interior Yacht Design "Fashionable"*

In the 2000s there was an ever-increasing demand for pleasure boats wherein their owners (often famous fashion designers) became an active part of the project, introducing their own personal language. Giorgio Armani, Dolce & Gabbana, Roberto Cavalli and Valentino all pioneered exclusive yacht projects with their boats, each marked with their own signature style in the highly recognizable interiors, so closely connected to haute couture catwalks and their showrooms.

## **4. Which Design Trends Will Dominate in the Next Few Years?**

In today's highly varied context of interior yacht design projects, it is difficult to identify a certain and absolute future, but we can presuppose some design trends for the coming years.

### *4.1. By the Sea*

The continuous evolution of lifestyle and technological progress has allowed a new approach with the marine environment and, each year, this theme offers interesting developments and innovations in the interior design of yachts.

In the next few years, there will be increased efforts to bring yacht inhabitants closer to the sea by opening the yacht outwards - this will also affect design choices for interiors.

The full-length windows common today have distorted the way of conceiving interiors, allowing the owner and guests to maintain constant contact with the outside. The interior design is increasingly frill-free and liberated from an excess of objects and materials, and more attention will be paid in future to highlighting what is possible to admire while sailing. One very interesting example is the *SX 88* of Sanlorenzo Shipyard (Figure 3), a new yacht that looks to the future. Its design focuses on greater internal liveability throughout, without rigid separations between the various internal sections. The wheelhouse is located only on the flybridge while the main deck is

entirely dedicated to the owners and guests. The quantity of furnishings is reduced to a minimum and it is the charm of an ever-changing landscape characterized by strong and changing natural elements that becomes the true protagonist of the interior.



**Figure 3.** SX 88, Main Deck. Courtesy of Sanlorenzo Yachts.

#### *4.2. Land and Yachting Design: an Increasingly Fascination Connection*

The near future will see ever more contaminations between the house and the boat and, to date, we have gone from sporadic cases to shipyards that have made this phenomenon a real market strategy. It is not just about introducing prestigious brands, with all their specific aesthetic imagery and high specialization in the knowledge of the best materials to be used for furnishing, but also about offering a new theatrical dignity to spaces with games of perspective, unexpected optical illusions and lighting effects.

"To love a yacht is, first of all, to love a superlative house, which is irrevocably closed (...) the yacht is a matter of habitation before being a means of transport" [8].

Moreover, today it is often the fashion world that "dresses" the most exclusive yachts. The consequence of a high number of boats with owners from the world of haute couture is that they are, and will increasingly be, involved in yacht design.

#### *4.3. New Materials in Interior Yacht Design*

While on the one hand there will be a renewed interest in the use of natural materials that involve the user in a sensory experience linked to nature (as in the recent cases of the *Wally House* or the *Amer 100 Quad*), on the other hand the appearance of future motor yacht interiors will be characterized by artistic materials. In a world that increasingly favours sensory experience, the interior design yacht sector will also be affected and, as in the past, this can also act as an experimental platform.

"The senses structure our knowledge, our experience and the mechanisms of recognition, of memory (...) the materials speak to all the senses: they give us a

knowledge of the multi-sensorial world and imply a synaesthetic perception, made of tactile and visual sensations, of sounds, of tastes" [9].

Future trends will increasingly use materials that stimulate the senses by generating a surprise effect, soft comfort and interaction.

The surprise effect will be generated thanks to the use of "false materials", already abundantly used in houses, i.e. materials that aesthetically imitate others and arouse amazement in the end user.

Soft comfort will be guaranteed primarily by surfaces that stimulate the senses thanks to their intrinsic qualities or focused design.

Finally, the interactive materials will change the aesthetics of the interior, guaranteeing users immediate responses from their surrounding environment.

#### 4.4. *Outdoors: a Link between Yacht and House*

In the near future, the interior yacht design will not only deal with the closed spaces but also with all those liveable outdoor areas of the boats.

The outdoors area is increasingly popular, enhanced also with designer furniture. However, it is not just a matter of simply adding elements from the land-based world; it is the shape of the boat itself that is changing. The bow area and, above all, the stern has completely changed and today is called the 'beach area' or 'beach club' because it is possible to fully enjoy the sea and really live the boat outside. The most extreme point of the profile, where living outdoors starts directly from the surface of the water and then climbs upwards (almost as if the yacht were a direct continuation of the waves of the sea) often with a multi-level terrace at the stern, guarantees contact with water. Today the outdoors is a point of contact between the house and boat, and projects for the outdoor spaces can open up even more interesting scenarios in the near future.

"A boat is on one hand a particular and extreme condition of living in a broader sense, which brings with it numerous opportunities for reflection, but it is also the place where new roads of research can meet" [10].

## References

- [1] T. Nastasi, Il mercato dei superyacht, *Superyacht* **49** (2016), 152-153.
- [2] Deloitte Press releases, *Marine industry market monitor 2017 for Nautica Italiana and Altagamma*, [www2.deloitte.com/it/it/pages/finance/articles/studio-nautica---deloitte-italy---finance-advisory.html](http://www2.deloitte.com/it/it/pages/finance/articles/studio-nautica---deloitte-italy---finance-advisory.html).
- [3] F. Celaschi, A. Cappellieri, A. Vasile, *Lusso versus Design*, FrancoAngeli, Milano, 2005.
- [4] A. Ascenzi, Forma e funzione, *Barche* **8** (2011), 72.
- [5] M. Gregori Grgic, F. Lanz, *Interior Yacht Design*, FrancoAngeli, Milano, 2009.
- [6] G. Bojardi, M. Padovani, "Ivana Porfiri", *Interni on Board* **1** (2008), 56.
- [7] D. G. R. Carugati, *Modes of style aboard Sanlorenzo Yachts*, Mondadori Electa, Milano, 2017.
- [8] R. Barthes, *Miti d'oggi*, Einaudi, Torino, 1974.
- [9] E. Fiorani, *Leggere i materiali: con l'antropologia, con la semiotica*, Lupetti Editori, Milano, 2000.
- [10] D. Dardi, M. Paperini, *Interior Yacht Design. Abitare tra cielo e acqua*, Mondadori Electa, Milano, 2009.