

The Superyacht Refit Report

OPERATIONS

The Superyacht Refit White Paper

A crowd-sourced guidance document for ensuring best practice at every stage of a major refit project.



The Mega-Sesh: our biggest gathering of design minds share their ideas – and a few pints – down at the pub

BUSINESS

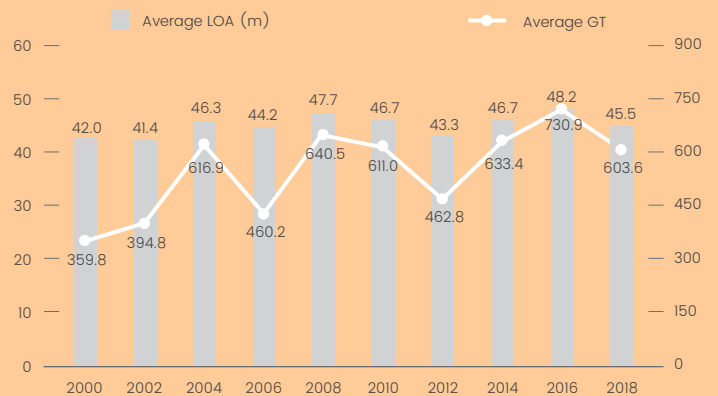
Yard of origin vs refit specialist

We invite a selection of principals from both sectors to outline why their way is the right way.

FLEET

The Superyacht Refit Report

Refits by average LOA (m) and average GT, 2000-2018



DESIGN

Working in complete *Harmony*

How Amico and Imperial delivered a 12-month refit in just six.

TECHNOLOGY

“Installing AV/IT systems adds significant time to a refit project, but it is also a relatively new concept, so it is something that many people aren’t used to having to factor in to their refit project planning.”

Chris Hinder, senior project designer, Ideaworks



THE 'MEGA-SESH'!

The Superyacht Report returns to the pub for its biggest gathering of design minds to date. And once again, as the pints flow, so does the conversation.



BY GEORGIA BOSCAWEN

What could possibly make a pub session with a designer that little bit better? By inviting more designers along for a megasessh, of course. Here at *The Superyacht Report*, we thought it was time to ramp up this series a notch and bring together a group of designers to discuss myriad issues and solutions from within the world of superyacht design.

So after selecting an appropriate pub on the River Thames, and by appropriate, I mean one that has a decent selection of beers, a relatively low requirement to be honest, we invited a number of industry figureheads along for an insightful and enthralling discussion about what needs to change in the superyacht industry. This time, The Duke's Head in Putney was our arena, with Steve Keeling, Sean Trowbridge and Guglielmo Carozzo from DKT Artworks, Selina McCabe from Winch Design, Rob Armstrong of ThirtyC and Evan K. Marshall of Evan K. Marshall Design in tow, all armed with their take on the market and what could be streamlined for the benefit of all parties.

"You can get so caught up in the nuances of a project that you become this middle man between the client team and the people producing the work," says McCabe, senior manager at Winch Design. "Sometimes you have to step back and think that everyone wants the same thing here and we all want this to be a success. In terms of making the process better, that's what I try to be mindful of – to be respectful to the people making the work."

One fascinating aspect important for all those taking part in the discussion was the ability to decipher someone else's idea and turn it into a reality in a clear and concise way – which is, of course, easier said than done. "One of the biggest challenges is that now clients are coming to expect the concept that they

have been shown initially will be the end result," says Evan K. Marshall. "The reality is that there will be another end result. Part of our job is to ensure that those two reconverge.

"What we do is endeavour to make sure that we provide regular updates that point out how it's evolving because we found, to our detriment, that when something is three quarters of the way through and the client wants to get involved ... and then you get that call saying this is really not looking good."

Keeling, co-founder of DKT Artworks, agrees. "Maintaining communication is such an important part of the process," he says. However, this is certainly something that is difficult to come by and can even hinder the process further on.

"A lot of the time, we have to explain to the client that the design is not finished yet and it's a large part of our job," adds Marshall. "As designers and artists, we appreciate the process of design. But most of the time when you say that you're going to send the client some progress photos, they are expecting to see the end result."

"It's a bit like trying to sell a haircut halfway through," offers McCabe. "No hairdresser will cut half of your hair, pick up a mirror and say 'What do you think'. But we, as designers, are expected to do that and keep the momentum going."

The process of design is obviously a long one, taking up to four years, so keeping everything on track is an immense task and one that needs to be cleverly approached by all involved. "In four years, you change as a person so much in that time," says McCabe. "We walk to a pub and our breadth of the world is so much smaller. They are in their jet [on the way to] to their friend's yacht, going to newly opened retreats in India, and that is a challenge."

From left to right: Guglielmo Carozzo, Georgia Boscawen, Sean Trowbridge, Selina McCabe, Rob Armstrong, Steve Keeling and Evan K. Marshall.

During the process, clients tend to change the original design having been inspired by new things and this is something that could really throw a spanner in the works. "If the client sends you a photo of [a] chandelier that they like after [everything] has been agreed, you have to humour them and try to take stylistic elements from that into the design," says Armstrong, creative director at ThirtyC Design. "But the reality is that it's very difficult."

"Part of our role is to bring them back, and sometimes we have to be the adults in the room and have to explain to them that the original choice was the right one," explains Marshall. "You can't say, 'Oh you can't be serious, come on'. But it's part of the skill. We have to remind them that we put together a concept and we can't start picking and choosing elements as it will ruin it. But if you present it to them with a certain degree of authority, the owner respects that as they have hired you to play that role."

Ultimately, the role of a designer and creator such as DKT involves so much more than simply designing. Judging by the conversations, a great deal of tact is required when it comes to dealing with individuals during the design process.

"In circumstances where we have direct communication with the client, it's so much easier to resolve any issues that arise," observes McCabe. "If, however, there are certain layers between you and the actual client, from the owner's representative to the whispering friend – all who have an opinion on behalf of the client – it can be very difficult. I pray for the days I can pick up the phone to the client to reassure them."

Sometimes, as Marshall explains, it may be advantageous to postpone meetings until all the core members of the process are present. "If we have to put off meetings until the client is there,



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that is better,” says Marshall. “However, sometimes they can be great as they can warn you if there is a problem which can be resolved. They do always want things to go smoothly as well.”

“A good client rep can be a good thing,” adds Keeling. This is, of course, an essential piece of the puzzle; it seems there are too many parties that have the capacity to disrupt the process, but ultimately all involved want the project to be successful.

“For me, the most frustrating thing is when the client doesn’t really know what they like,” offers Marshall. “And when they are interpreting it through a filter of what their friends may be impressed by, we have to ask if they themselves actually like it and sometimes the answer is ‘I don’t know’. That is the client [who] is susceptible to a friend coming on board and saying this is [rubbish] and then we have a train wreck as they don’t know how to change it.”

“This is one advantage to a short build time as they have less time to change their mind,” says Keeling. Managing egos as well as design changes requires tremendous skill that comes only with the experience of working in this unique industry. All designers have anecdotes about how to manage clients and of the times when it backfires.

“I got fired from a job and rehired the next day because, during the process,

we were doing another project for a friend of his and we said, ‘This is what we’re doing for them’,” recalls Marshall. “So we showed him the sketch and then he left the room and someone said, ‘Mr Marshall, your taxi is coming’. He then said, ‘How dare you do something that is better looking for him than you are for me? We’re done’. It was a completely different design. But then, the next morning, I get a call to the meeting and we never spoke about it again.”

McCabe adds, “Know who your audience is because when you are designing, make sure that you get [the] sign-off from the people that are signing it off. If you are only meeting with the husband in the first couple of meetings, but actually it’s the wife who is making the design choices, you are going to get a big shock further down the line. Never underestimate the power of pillow talk and respect all parties in the process.

“Ultimately, we are lifestyle designers. So whether it’s a yacht, plane or a private residence, we have to understand the lifestyle and get underneath the skin of how that client and their family is using that environment and deliver it. You may not agree with it but once you understand that, the process is so much easier.”

“You can be a great designer but one of the real skills is people management,” says Marshall. This a vital take-away point from the discussion. I often feel

it’s an aspect of the role that can be overlooked or underestimated; from the tone of the discussion, getting this part wrong could be detrimental to the entire process.

“The real question is, can we improve any of this?” asks Keeling, bringing the conversation to its crux. It’s clear that design is far more than ‘just design’ and all those here have their own experiences of how things don’t always run smoothly. The important thing to remember is that every client is different and will have their own way of doing business and, therefore, building their superyacht. Big egos there may be, but there comes a point when one’s own reservations have to be cast aside to ensure the job gets done in the best way possible.

“Sometimes you will be at the table and the owners-to-be will be having an argument,” says Marshall. “You dread the moment when they turn to you and say, ‘What do you think’. But I enjoy it because that is the intimacy that we become a part of.”

We work in an incredibly unusual, intimate and bewildering world, packed with an array of egos and personalities, and the management of these is among the most important skills of a designer. But once you’ve grasped it, it certainly seems to aid the process exponentially – and only then can the actual design process come into play. **BB**