

The Superyacht Design Report

BUYER

“Sometimes clients say that because this boat will be their last hurrah, they don’t mind what it sells for down the road and end up selling, eventually, for a 30 to 40 per cent price cut, which could have been avoided.”

Joe Foggia, Northrop & Johnson, highlights the need for broker input during the design process

TECHNOLOGY

Discover the on-board system that the owner will never see but has the potential to shave millions off the cost of the new-build process.

FLEET

164

Number of 30-45m exterior projects produced by Stefano Righini Design between 2008 and 2018.

BUSINESS



OWNER

Life begins at 40

As Heesen celebrates a landmark year, TSR showcases *Irisha*, its latest creation.

DESIGN

Top tier

TSR steps on board *Volpini 2*, Amels’ latest delivery and the world’s first Tier III-compliant superyacht.

OPERATIONS

‘Yachts are obviously commissioned for owners and their guests, and I understand that there is no getting away from this. However, for the best owner experience, it’s imperative that the spaces in which crew work are designed to encourage efficiency and safety.’



A round-table discussion with prominent female designers

From left: Fiona Diamond, Daria Cabai, Lay Koon Tan, Selina McCabe and Rachel Rowney.



The 'Rown' Table





In a twist on The Superyacht Report's regular Industrialist feature, managing editor Rachel Rowney sits down with a number of female designers to discuss their experiences in the superyacht market and how they see the industry evolving.

INTERVIEW BY RACHEL ROWNEY

When the opportunity arose to host a round-table (or, in my case, a 'Rown' table) for this issue's Industrialist feature, I invited a selection of leading female designers from different areas of the superyacht world to discuss their experiences in the industry. I was joined by Daria Cabai, naval architect and founder of Navalmartin; Fiona Diamond, founder of Seymour Diamond; Selina McCabe, partner at Winch Design, and Lay Koon Tan, co-founder of Nature Squared.

I want to start the discussions with some data from the 2018 Wealth X Report that outlines how the share of female billionaires rose by 18 per cent in 2017, which increased the female share of the global billionaire population to 11.7 per cent. The global wealth landscape is evolving, particularly in the case of women, and I wondered if you had any initial thoughts on this and how it could affect the yacht market?

DC: There are more opportunities on a mass level. There are incentives where there have to be a certain [number] of women on the board in some places, equal pay, and salaries are being revealed.

FD: It's about women having the ability and opportunity to earn the money in order to be able to go out and buy something luxurious like a yacht. If there are billionaire women out there, there's only one that is very well known for doing various sailing yachts; there aren't very many well-known female owners, unless they are married to a famous man. Would their choice be to build a boat? I don't necessarily think that it would be their first choice.

When we talk about attracting new blood into the industry – attracting new owners – and how we need to engage with the next generation, is it going to be young women?

FD: I think what is refreshing is when you deal with a couple, it's becoming more apparent that the women are controlling what they are spending or what they are doing. There are intelligent women who are involved in the design of boats. Originally, a yacht used to be a bit of a playboy ground; men had it as a bit of fun. Nowadays, boats are becoming family boats and, as a result, clients are getting the women involved. For me, the women are becoming part of the process in order to make it into a home.

Speaking of the 'next generation', how have your interactions with clients changed? I know a lot of communication is now conducted over WhatsApp or via text message.

FD: I think it's brilliant. I've seen a rise in family offices, which I'm sure serve a great purpose, but you end up with more and more people between you and the client. [With WhatsApp] you can have a direct correspondence with the client, even if it's just to send a picture. I think it's really important to keep that relationship going. I don't mind them WhatsApping me – any time of day.

DC: I think it's instant. If somebody sees something, then they want to send it out and have an immediate response. It's better communication and a [better] level of understanding.

SM: Also, if there's an issue, it's dealt with right away.

Is that a generational thing? Ten years ago, that wouldn't have happened?

FD: Definitely! It's also the ease of translation. If you have a client who doesn't speak English well, they can get it translated ... even if it's an emoji smiley face!

SM: For me, I think one of the hardest things has been the rise in the client representative and actually getting face to face with a client. When you are doing any project with a client, it's emotional and when it's a yacht, it's a journey that you go on for four or five years.

FD: I think [the rise of owners' representatives] needed to happen as there were a lot of unscrupulous people who were ripping people off.

LKT: Do you really think that owners' representatives solve that issue? I think they can exacerbate that issue ...

DC: As a designer, you need to have a direct contact, otherwise it's like Chinese whispers. A lot of information is lost and a lot of time wasted, and it really doesn't do anyone any favours.

FD: There have been occasions where we have spent a week designing something based on a client representative's request and then the client says, "This isn't what I asked for." [The representative] thought they knew what was in the client's interest. So it wasted time. For me, I love facial expressions. I get so much from someone's reactions. You get a 'no' face. You can read the response. And often, a client doesn't know what they want but they know what they don't like.

SM: When it comes to communication with a client, we would all endorse more face-to-face time. You may have the logic, money and facts that form the basis from which the client makes the decision, but the actual decision, when they say 'yes' or 'no', that moment is emotional. And that emotion can't be given by a representative; it has to be when you are with that person.

Is the role of designer unique in yachting because it's very much based on a personal brand and relationship?

FD: I think if you are the point of contact, you have to have a character that works.

SM: Ultimately, you have to be the meeting that they don't want to cancel. That's what I always say to my team.

Clients are so busy, you are just one in a line of people who are doing their house, their business, their hair, their tailored suits. You have to be the one [of whom] they say, 'No, I want to make that' and then leave excited. They need to love the meetings.

FD: If you are not giving your top-notch service to a client who expects it, the smallest thing can be blown out of proportion. If people underestimate that, then they are in the wrong business. It's a service industry. You don't challenge why you're doing something, you work out how you can make it better. That's the attitude that you've got to go in with.

LKT: In the end, the brand is encapsulated in the person you are having the relationship with. It's the values you stand for that are reflected.

In your opinion, how has the design field changed? For example, the influence of residential and car designers ...

FD: What we do in design is personal expression. It's something you do with heart to a brief that you are given. What we're selling is the skill set to get it right for that particular owner, and more and more people – sadly – are thinking 'Oh [yacht designers] have done that really well, I can do that.' A lot of decorators are coming into yacht-ing from people's houses and they have a relationship with the client, which is fair enough, but there are intrinsic points to designing a yacht that are different from residential and, unfortunately, that is not recognised by people until something goes wrong.

DC: A lot of car designers and land-based architects come [into yachting] and then you have a boat that looks beautiful, but you need a boat to perform. A boat needs to have a certain weight. If you have a decorator who comes in and may not understand the concept of the very thorough weight control, it can be a disaster.

FD: And the experience of doing it. We have all made mistakes, no one is perfect, but [when] you have done it once, you never do it again.

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SM: I think in terms of the yachting lifestyle, there is a certain way of life that a yacht owner has. To design a yacht without any understanding of this yachting lifestyle ... the world where you get off your private plane, you are helicoptered to your chauffeur-driven car, you're driven to your tender, your tender takes you directly to the boat ... how you live on board a yacht, it's almost like going back in time.

FD: Also, you have the millennials coming through who want the yachting lifestyle but in a far more relaxed environment. If you talk to them, they want their own kitchenette by the bedroom as they want to be able to make their own coffee in the mornings.

SM: But it still has to function; they want that relaxed feel, but when you actually get to the bones of it, everything is considered. These dot-com boomers are 28 and they are worth \$25 billion. They don't want to have a stuffy, over-the-top [design] or whole service staff watching them. But they do want to leave a room, come back in and suddenly the bath has been cleaned. It's about finding that balance.

That is what a non-yacht designer wouldn't understand.

FD: One person we were working with challenged the cost of something because he said, “Why would somebody pay that money for it? My wife doesn't earn that in a year as a school teacher.” If you're in the position of challenging the financial aspect, you're missing the point of understanding that you are producing a service, a design, that fits with the lifestyle. You have to accept it and work with it.

LKT: The value proposition is just one side. Obviously, in the end, it's how they perceive the value, which will be how they use it and how they live it.

We acknowledged the somewhat male-dominated superyacht industry earlier. Have you ever encountered any issues as a female designer?

LKT: Depending on culture, sometimes it can be very overt. I remember being in a meeting in Dubai where I turned up to a presentation and the guy looked around me and said, “Where's the man?”

DC: Yes, I've been asked where the 'decision-making person' is.

FD: I focus on training people who I work with now. Anyone who works for me, if anything happened to them I would stand up for them, and I never had anyone who would do that for me. [If anything inappropriate happened] there was always a male boss who would say, ‘Don't make a fuss, we don't want to lose the project’. If something happened, you were meant to laugh it off.

SM: We all have those stories where we say, “Looking back, that was so inappropriate.”

And moving forward, how do you see this changing? Working with more female clients?

DC: I believe that 10 years from now, we will have more female billionaires.

SM: There are certain stages of the project where the husband says, “Ask her, it's her decision”, so I feel like [change] is happening. [The woman] might not be the person signing the



From left: Diamond,
Cabai and Tan.

cheque but the relationship feels a lot more balanced.

LKT: I think that's the point; it is a relationship that they are in. However, where the balance lies, that's how the decisions will play out.

FD: Even if the women aren't signing cheques, I can say in the 30 years that I've been doing this, it first started that I would deal with men and men only. Then it has slowly become that you are dealing with the wives as the men are accepting that the wives will take on that role. I'm glad to say that I'm dealing with more women.

DC: You see a lot more young women owners coming to young female designers.

FD: I think clients don't want to be dictated to, they don't want to be made to feel small. If it's a woman to a woman, you can be more honest because they don't feel vulnerable or that they are going to be judged.

SM: Or overpowered!

You want to see yourself reflected in who you work with ...

FD: There's a younger generation of people coming through now that have the finance and a younger team around them. They are looking for someone to work with who will respect their views and their brief, not 'This is how I think you should do it'. The younger generation don't have all the history of the big names in yachting, so they have the freedom to go out and look for the best person to work with, who won't show them an arrogant 'You'll do it my way or not at all', and I think with social media there are more people who are exposed to that. People make more choices so it's a very competitive market. Which is why I think a lot of design comes down to character and the right fit for the client.

SM: That moment when the whole presentation may not have worked, but just that one thing clicked. Perhaps women do offer a different shoulder in what was a man's world. Especially when women are coming in that you can relate to and you can show a different empathy to their brief. At the end of the day, that's the bottom line. **RR**