

# Don't call me stylist

AS THE ROLE OF A YACHT DESIGNER FRAGMENTS INTO SPECIALISMS, AN INFLUX OF EXPERTS FROM DISCIPLINES SUCH AS CAR DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE IS CHANGING THE FACE OF OUR INDUSTRY. WHAT EFFECT ARE THOSE FROM NON-NAUTICAL BACKGROUNDS HAVING ON TODAY'S YACHTS?

'Could you do me a great personal favour?' asked the late Jon Bannenberg in a letter to a New York yachting magazine in 1990, 'When mentioning my name, refer to me as what I am: a designer, perhaps a nit-picking, irritating one, but nonetheless, not a stylist. That is a title I gracefully concede to Vidal Sassoon.'

Bannenberg expresses an irritation with the term 'stylist' that persists to this day in the yachting industry. It is easy to see why a designer (responsible for the exterior appearance, arrangement and perhaps also interior design of a yacht) would balk at being called a stylist, who is responsible for the vessel's exterior appearance only. Or, in the stronger words of Bannenberg's missive, someone whose business is the 'flimsy tweaking of a structure'.

But charges that echo these might have been laid against Bannenberg himself in the 1960s, when he was at the vanguard of a movement that pioneered the profession of yacht 'designer'. This reduced the naval architect's domain to technical aspects and hulls, and left the looks and layout of yachts to people like him – who often weren't naval architects.

Indeed, ever since, the roles of those involved in yacht design have been fragmenting from naval architect, who did everything, to designer who did some things, to stylist who does one.

This growing spectrum of roles has opened yacht design to outsiders from a wealth of backgrounds.

The initial stages of this evolution were undoubtedly good for the superyacht industry. Bannenberg, a designer who trained as a concert pianist, could design yachts such as *Carinthia* (1971) and *Limitless* (1997) because the perception that you needed a naval architect to design the entire yacht had changed. The same could be said of architect Norman (Lord) Foster, responsible for some of the world's iconic buildings, or Philippe Starck, who's designed everything from toothbrushes to houses.

The question is whether specialisation has gone too far – whether the person contracted to create a yacht's exterior no longer knows what happens inside it, a disconnect that can hamper a yacht's performance, viability or safety.

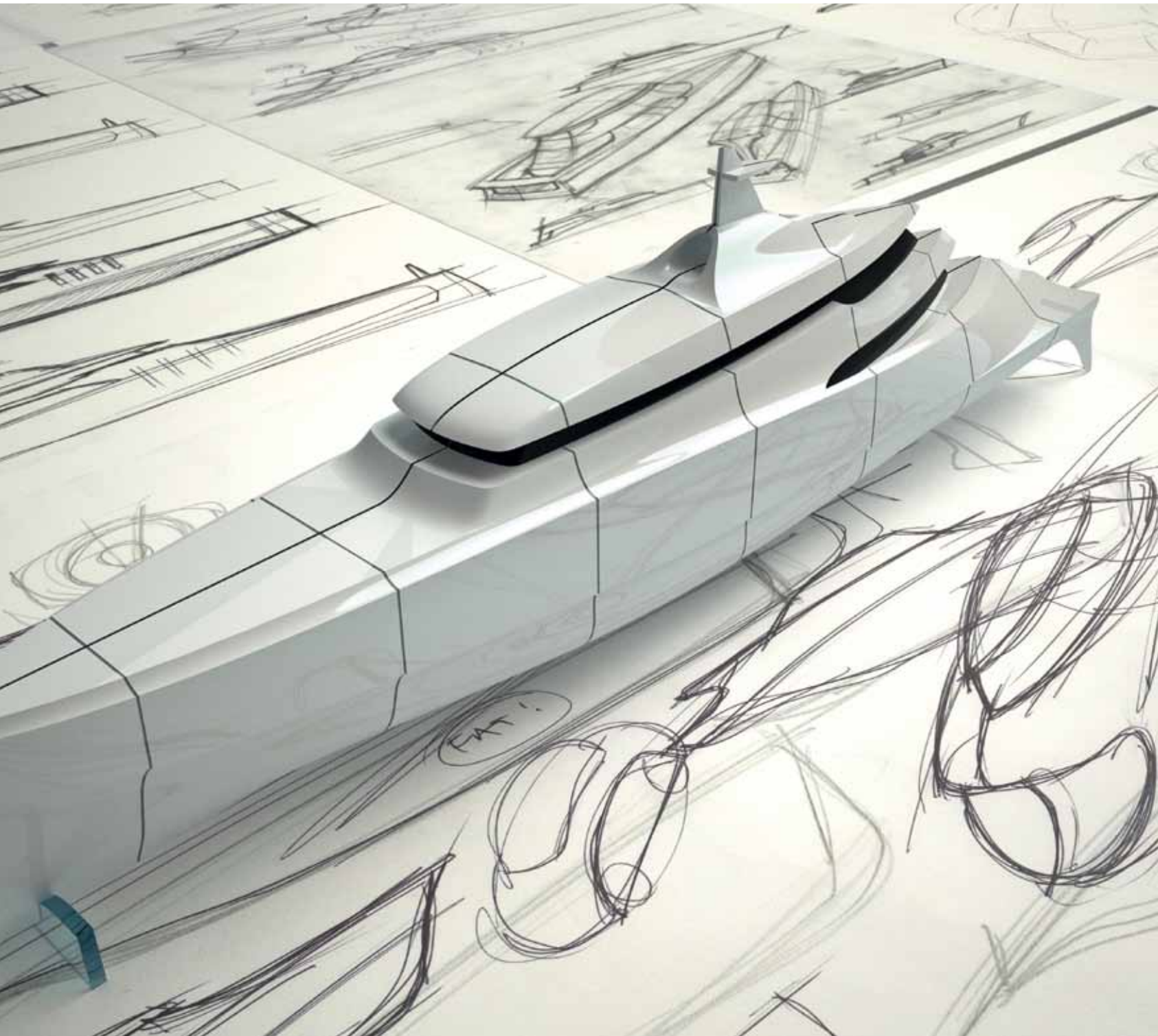
It's a problem that could easily have affected the famously avant garde project motor yacht *A*. Based on an American military research vessel, legend has it that Philippe Starck designed the concept in three hours. Martin Francis, technical and naval designer on the project, collaborated with Starck to make it buildable.

'He drew this thing with an inverted bow. It had no size, no engines, no crew accommodation – it was an image,' says Francis. Although not a naval architect, Francis has

words: Caroline White



CLAYDON REEVES/E



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# Superyacht Design

worked in architecture and engineering for much of his career. He decided with Starck on the size, general arrangement and power, but also developed a lines plan and did all the calculations. Then he tested it and drove an advanced scale model around the Solent. 'This was before going to a shipyard. Nobody ever does that stuff normally before going to a shipyard,' says Francis. 'I wasn't prepared to go off on a tangent in terms of styling, a whim, if it turned out it wouldn't perform well or it was dangerous.'

As it transpired, *A* performed beautifully, with a fine entry and an efficient hull.

Collaboration of this sort works for other designers without naval architecture backgrounds. Bannenberg & Rowell designs both interiors and exteriors, but neither of its directors – Jon Bannenberg's son Dickie or Simon Rowell (a designer who came to yachting from hotel design) – is trained in naval architecture. Nevertheless, they consider technical aspects from the beginning.

'We employ a designer who happens to be a qualified naval architect. So even if we're talking about conceptual, early-day design, it's not pie in the sky,' says Rowell.

When it comes to sailing yachts, where rig and hull are all important, or high performance motor yachts, this early integration is even more important.

Íñigo Toledo, president of Barracuda Yacht Design, is a naval architect and yacht designer who has worked on Spain's America's Cup campaigns. He believes fast sailing

and motor yachts are still the realm of the naval architect.

'If you want a boat to do 60 knots you can't have someone styling the boat and someone else doing the engineering architecture. That doesn't work,' he says.

'If you want your boat for parties only, these things don't matter. Then you start with the marble and the swimming pools – fine. But we're (Barracuda) especially good at other things. We can do floating apartments, but the guys who do floating apartments cannot do what we do.'

And here lies the crux of the problem for stylists – and to some extent designers: if a naval architect can do what you do and more, why do we need you?

On a practical level, it is worth noting that designers who are not naval architects have been involved in successful high-performing yachts. David Summerfield, architect and senior partner at Lord Foster's firm Foster + Partners, was responsible for the exterior styling of the *Pantbalassa*, a well-regarded 56 metre ketch that came third in last year's Perini Navi Cup. 'We started on the project at the same time as the naval architect, so it was completely seamless teamwork,' he says.

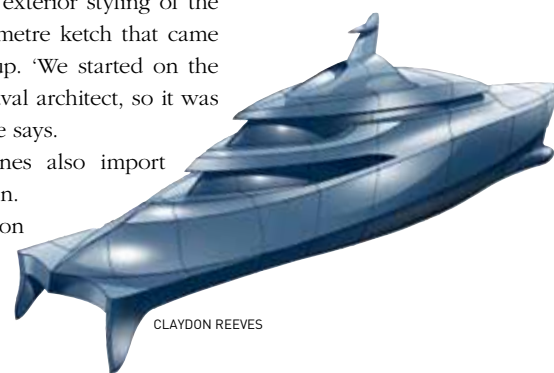
But those from other disciplines also import expertise that enriches yacht design.

'Architects are very keen on emphasising the quality of space inside the yacht, trying to get as much light in as possible, and ▶



MARTIN FRANCIS

A hydroform model by Claydon Reeves (previous page); Starck and Francis-designed motor yacht *A* is tested (above); and the finished yacht (bottom)



CLAYDON REEVES

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The influence of non-industry expertise can be seen in the light, open-plan interior (left) of the ketch *Panthalassa* (above), by the architect Foster + Partners

DAN ANNETT

## ‘Clients work with us on the livery. The wrapping creates the identity, and in our business, it’s about a unique identity.’

on *Panthalassa* we took away walls on the main deck so it opened up completely,’ Summerfield says.

‘But more generally, we’re involved with quite a breadth and width of projects, from door handles to skyscrapers, so it gives us a comprehensive view of looking at things.’

That’s true of James Claydon and Mike Reeves, co-founders of design studio Claydon Reeves. Reeves also studied architecture, but both are from automotive professional backgrounds, where the term styling is more commonly used, although in yachting they eschew it. That’s because they are well informed about yachts and the title suggests they are not. During client presentations they use physical ‘hydroforms’ as well as renderings and drawings as additional tools to inform and take the process forward.

‘Hydroforms are pure models – a pared back, distilled version of what the final boat will be like,’ says Reeves.

‘It involves a client in the design process, describing to them what it could be. It’s not ground-breaking, it’s just not one people have used in the yacht industry. For a long time the car industry has been doing things like this.’

The pair’s experience in surfacing cars – the design of the wrapping – is also a cut above what many yacht designers bring to their work. ‘A lot more subtlety that can be brought into surfacing, real detailing. The interaction of a concave surface with a convex surface,’ says Reeves.

Similarly, Peder Eidsgaard and Ben Harrison, Eidsgaard

Design’s creative directors, have experience in other fields.

‘Peder designs planes as well,’ says Harrison, who trained as an architect. ‘You can’t change the body of the plane, but clients spend a lot of time working with us on creating the livery. The wrapping creates the identity, and particularly in our business, it’s about a unique identity.’

Indeed, modern desire for expressing individuality may be at the root of the rise of the stylist. Peder Eidsgaard estimates that while the interior accounts for 90 per cent of a designer’s work, and the exterior 10 per cent, most whole boat contracts are won on the basis of the exterior design.

‘Some boats express aggression; others will be calm and gentle. This is often a reflection of how the owner sees themselves, or what they want to portray,’ says Eidsgaard.

And why this fixation on expression through looks rather than, for example, speed? Eidsgaard believes that for motor yachts, besides quality, the aesthetic remains the pivotal element setting one apart from another.

‘In all industries technologies are so advanced and so accessible that the way to separate products is through visual identity. That goes for cars, electronics, like a fridge or a microwave – it’s only aesthetics that differentiates. The same thing has happened in the yachting industry.’

Perhaps then, since its style has become such an essential element of a yacht, the term ‘stylist’ will one day lose its negative connotations. Especially if its purveyors continue to show there is substance beneath it. 