

The lap of luxury

By Nick Vinson

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Accommodation on the Why is split over three levels

When Luca Bassani Antivari, president and chief executive of yachtmaker Wally, and Pierre-Alexis Dumas, artistic director of fashion house Hermès, decided to create a boat together, two important points were established right from the start. First, that simply having Hermès fit out a Wally was not an option; instead the two men would link their two approaches and processes and build together. Second, instead of working on a speed-led structure they would opt for a slow and stable dynamic.

The resulting concept of aquatic architecture from their new joint venture business Why, Wally Hermès Yachts, was unveiled at the Monaco Yacht Show in September. It is more of a "floating island", as Bassani Antivari refers to it, or a "house on the water", as Dumas puts it, than a mere yacht. Why's extraordinary triangular hull looks like nothing seen before: the 3,400 sq metres of guest space has the interior and exterior volumes of a villa, is stable even in full swell and has an optimum cruising speed of just 12 knots.

"We, Hermès, don't need to go on to the sea, so we need a reason," Dumas says. "This idea of the island is seductive. Sailing is not about getting from A to B but about being on the sea and the time you spend on the sea."

Dumas believes that, except in the case of aircraft, "speed as an aesthetic is passé". He questions when we now have time to think. "Time like this is not a luxury, it's a necessity. If we don't think, we alienate ourselves in a dangerous way. Going slow is a natural reaction to the artificial speed of light we created." He could be reading from the Slow Food manifesto, with its systematic challenge and critique of the current world order, the insidious virus of the fast life. "Time for yourself is a form of freedom," he says, so going slow means pleasure will be amplified.

The most unusual thing about Why is its low-lying, almost triangular structure, 58 metres long with a 38-metre-wide beam, wider than that of a 300-metre-long cruise ship. The accommodation is contained within the hull, with only the cockpit emerging.

Bassani Antivari, Dumas, naval architect Mauro Sculli and Hermès design director Gabriele Pezzini were looking for a wide beam (to give stability), and had already dismissed the idea of a catamaran. Then Bassani Antivari came across the Ramform hull, which is used for seismic survey vessels and was developed and patented by Norwegian Roar Ramde. Sculli and Ramde then adapted it for the Why project.



The Why features a 30-metre long 'beach' accessing a naturally lit spa

The bow has a 25-metre U-shaped pool that follows the prow and a helipad. A 130-metre-long jogging track traces bow to stern and a 30-metre long "beach" flanks its stern, as the boat's design creates a totally flat sea behind it when anchored. The roof, made of photovoltaic cells, operates like a giant Venetian blind, following the sun or retracting completely to expose the terraces below.

Unlike conventional yachts, the propulsion system is in the bow, as is the hold for the tender and "toys" garage (it can take a 14-metre Wally 47 tender).

Accommodation is split over three levels, all primarily facing the stern, with further glazing on both sides. At the top is the owners' deck, with a 200-sq-metre apartment opening on to a private terrace. Below this is the guest deck,

offering five suites – two of 60 sq metres and three of 30 sq metres – plus a lounge/library and its own terrace. A wide, sweeping staircase leads down to the 720-metre main saloon deck, with living, dining, media and music rooms, a spa and gym, all leading to “the beach”. Below this is accommodation for the 20 or so crew (apart from the captain’s and first officer’s cabins, which are up top).

Interiors, part inspired by prewar Nordic architecture (think Alvar Aalto) and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe’s Barcelona Pavilion, are by long-term Hermès collaborators Rena Dumas Architecture Intérieure. Materials include paper, wood and leather; textures are matt, colours are kept light and edges are softened for “total comfort, elegance and relaxation for the eyes and the body”, according to Denis Montel of RDAI. He has also attempted to soften the characteristic hard light you normally get afloat: three patios pierce through the boat, the largest housing a tree and possibly a kitchen garden. With their large picture windows, the patios enhance the relationship between the exterior and the interior and, with sliding screens, help break up the vast spaces into a human scale.

Pezzini, who has also developed the Hermès helicopter, thinks that most yachts are very conservative but says: “We did not look for innovation, just something that makes sense.” David Pelly of the Boat International media group thinks Why’s “super-vision” presents “a face of new yachting and is bound to be influential”. “Most changes to yacht design have been gradual – of course they have improved the construction techniques and the engines but these are step changes rather than anything big like this.”

There are other bold concepts around but nothing quite this challenging to the status quo. Why’s hull, plus the fact that its ideal cruising speed is just 12 knots, means that it requires less power than a traditional boat of equal size (in volume terms that is a 100-metre conventional yacht). It uses a state-of-the-art diesel-electric propulsion system and the 900 sq metres of photovoltaic cells that cover the roof and sides provide about 20 per cent of the energy required to live on board. There are high-efficiency batteries to store energy, optimised thermal insulation, a system to recover lost energy and a smart consumption management system.



A sweeping staircase links the living deck with the guest level

In addition, the company is considering installing a wind kite propulsion system called SkySails which, in optimal weather, can substantially reduce fuel consumption. However, put in context, life aboard a super-yacht uses around 20 times more energy than a similar-sized villa. Nevertheless, these are big green steps.

Why is far from being a carbon-neutral vessel. Yet, according to Pelly, it certainly represents “an important move”. “In a conventional motor yacht, this is not easy to do and this is one of its plus features.” He also thinks that there is a general realisation that speed is antisocial: “The flashy speed boat might have had its day.”

Yacht broker Jamie Edmiston, director of Edmiston and Company, agrees. He admits there is not much available yet but thinks that “green will be the future and Why will set the trend”.

David Pelly says that though there are “plenty of concepts about, not many get built”. One that was presented at the Monaco Yacht Show at the same time as Why, and again two weeks ago at Fort Lauderdale through Brokers Camper & Nicholsons, is Callender Designs’ Soliloquy, a 58-metre craft designed by 23-year-old Alastair Callender. His idea (which is getting lots of press attention but remains on the drawing board for now) uses technologies from Australia’s Solar Sailor, including three rotating rigid solar sails covered in photovoltaic cells that fold away when not in use.

For the launch, Why built a full-scale maquette, something usually used only in the aviation industry. Housed in a boatyard in Ancona, Italy, it serves two purposes: giving brokers and potential clients something real to see and walk on, plus giving the team the opportunity to fine-tune their design.

Why was the talk of the Monaco show and Pelly thinks “a lot of people will be scratching their heads”. “How would you use something like that? – quite a lot of it is practicality, which is a big card to play.” Potential clients will head for guidance to brokers such as Edmiston, which is showing it to “quite a lot” of people. According to Jamie Edmiston, some love it, some hate it, but they all appreciate the innovation. “Wally has always been at the forefront of innovation. The Why concept is a testimony to what an innovative company it is.”

These are typically clients with some experience of yacht ownership but Why could open up the market to others; those who never saw the attraction of racing from port to port and spending the days in between moored at a marina, packed in side by side with other super-yachts, with the noise from guests and crew on other boats, the odour of diesel and a view from the stern of the usual international luxury boutiques and overpriced restaurants.

This is where the idea of your own movable island begins to sound like a really good alternative. If you have the estimated €90m-€100m to spend, of course.

www.why-yachts.com

Nick Vinson is special projects director at Wallpaper magazine*

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Floating Fantasies: Buoyed by success

Until Why, one of the most extraordinary things you could spot on the water belonged to Greek art collector Dakis Joannou, who commissioned artist Jeff Koons and designer Ivana Porfiri to build his 35-metre yacht Guilty. It is completely covered outside with a multicoloured version of geometric Razzle

Dazzle camouflage, originally used in the first world war to confuse the enemy over which direction the boat was travelling in. Inside it features the work of Anish Kapoor, Nathalie Djurberg and the Campana Brothers.

Also notable is Philippe Starck's 119-metre submarine-shaped motor yacht A, developed with naval designer Martin Francis and delivered in 2008 to Russian businessman Andrey Melnichenko.



Dakis Joannou's 35-metre yacht, Guilty

There is also the Maison Flottante conceived by industrial designers Erwan and Ronan Bouroullec and architects Jean-Marie Finot and Denis Daversin, as a live-work studio for resident artists of the Centre National de l'Édition et de l'Art Imprimé (national centre for print art) in Chatou, France, although it floats on a river rather than the open sea.

Then there are the yet-to-be-built high concepts, such as Magma by naval engineer and architect Sylvain Viau, and the 76 metre long Oculus and 91 metre Infinitas by Kevin Schöpfer, which appear like giant whales complete with jaws and eye sockets.

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