

The Superyacht

TRUTH • OPINION KNOWLEDGE • IDEAS AND EXPERT INDUSTRY ANALYSIS



REPORT

PLANNING FOR PERFECTION

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Value-Added Experience

A photograph of two men in business attire leaning over a conference table, reviewing documents. The man on the left is wearing glasses and a dark suit with a blue tie. The man on the right is bald and wearing a dark sweater over a white shirt. They are both looking intently at the papers on the table. The background is slightly blurred, showing a green plant and a white wall.

Lady Candy, a 56m motoryacht in build at Benetti in Livorno, is the latest and largest yacht owned by Alan Chuang, a Hong-Kong based entrepreneur, real estate developer and experienced owner. Based on a tried and tested Benetti platform, Justin Ratcliffe reports on how the interior layout and exterior styling have been thoroughly revised by Central Yacht, headed up by Captain Paul Brackley, who has some very specific ideas on how yacht design can be improved based on his 20 years of experience at sea.



“Most of today’s superyachts are designed by people with very little sea time and, beyond that, probably no time working in a service environment.”

Lady Candy is Captain Brackley’s third new build project with Benetti, having been owner’s representative and subsequently captain aboard 65m *Ambrosia*, and overseen construction as build captain of 60m *Xanadu* (now *St Ekaterina*). *Ambrosia* was notable for having diesel-electric/Azipod propulsion, a first for the Italian shipyard, while *Xanadu* won the Robb Report’s ‘Best of the Best Charter Yacht 2009’ award. His involvement in both these projects, and *Xanadu* in particular, has proved invaluable when it came to fine-tuning the basic design concept, interior layout and technical specifications for *Lady Candy*.

“Most of today’s superyachts are designed by people with very little sea time and, beyond that, probably no time working in a service environment,” Brackley immediately points out. “Inevitably, they miss things that are important from an operational standpoint.”

This realisation led him in 2006 to set up Central Yacht, a partnership of professional seafarers and architects with experience of designing, building and operating yachts. In addition to Brackley, the associates include Brett Mitchell, a marine engineer who started out as fleet engineer for a fishing company in Australia’s Gulf of Carpentaria, where a faulty freezer can mean a million dollars’ worth of catch is lost; Andrea Manco, an accomplished naval architect and interior designer who formerly worked with François Zuretti; and Paul Coupland, a seasoned chief steward who began his career at prestigious venues in London, including the Savoy. Together, by thoroughly analysing and understanding the practical operation of luxury yachts, they seek to create efficient vessels where form truly follows function and beauty is not just skin deep.

Brackley was introduced to Alan Chuang in Hong Kong when the owner was looking to upgrade his current 38m Versilcraft, *Lady Candy 3*, for a larger vessel. Together they developed two projects based on technical platforms from Benetti and Jade Yachts in Taiwan. Following

over a year of design development and extensive reviews, the decision to build with Benetti, beyond the yard’s established reputation, was founded primarily on commercial reasons (the contract was finalised in 2010 at a time when new orders were thin on the ground and the Italian builder was looking for ambassadors to open up opportunities in mainland China). The new yacht is based on Benetti’s 55m technical platform, of which *Ulysses* is the most recent example, but the LOA was later increased by one metre with an aft platform extension to provide the space required for a hydraulically operated swim ladder.

“Fifty-five metres is an ideal length for a superyacht if you want to take it to the best marinas around the world,” says Captain Brackley. “With 60m *Xanadu*, for example, we could get into St Barths, although it was nip and tuck, and in Barbados the bow was virtually on the beach. It makes sense to reduce the overall dimensions by using space more intelligently, so *Lady Candy* is shorter but offers around the same volume at about 950gt. If you can take the yacht almost anywhere and still park comfortably in front of the Café de Paris in St Tropez, what more do you want?”

The layout of the service areas, and the pantries in particular, aboard *Lady Candy* can be traced back to *Xanadu*, where the aim was to improve crew service by reducing ‘back office’ time on a yacht whose owner wanted to charter the yacht extensively.

“Chinaware and glassware on large yachts are usually stored in the main dining room or cupboards distributed around the yacht,” Brackley points out. “This means that during a five-course dinner you have a leaning tower of dishes in the pantry that cannot be put back until all the guests have left the table. Besides the risk of breakage – and these dining services are worth many thousands of euros – it means the stewardesses are hanging around when they could be doing other things or simply off-duty.”

So *Lady Candy* has a pantry/cleaning station away from the dining areas for acoustic privacy, with adjoining

storage cabinets for the flatware and glasses. This seemingly obvious yet often overlooked solution saves time and improves efficiency by maximising the crew workflow – time that can be dedicated to the owner and his guests.

An additional area that Brackley looked into was the position of the owner’s suite. Traditionally this is found on the forward main deck, which dates from the days when gentlemen’s yachts were at most tri-deckers with guest cabins below, owner’s suite on the main deck and wheelhouse above. However, this happens to be the worst place for pitching movements and noise from the bow thruster and anchor operations. For most yachts of this class, tank test reports will show that the forward suite is not the most comfortable place to be while under way. As a consequence, the full-beam master suite on *Lady Candy* is on the upper deck aft, where it can also take advantage of the 180-degree panorama over the owner’s private aft deck.

The upper deck hosts the VIP cabin and terrace, which are just as ample as the owner’s suite. Between the owner’s and VIP cabin is a central salon and office. With flexibility being the watchword for charter operations and depending on who is on board, the salon can serve either as a public space, shared between the VIP and owner’s suite, or reserved as part of an enormous owner’s apartment. Freeing up the main deck allowed dedicated cinema room to be placed where the



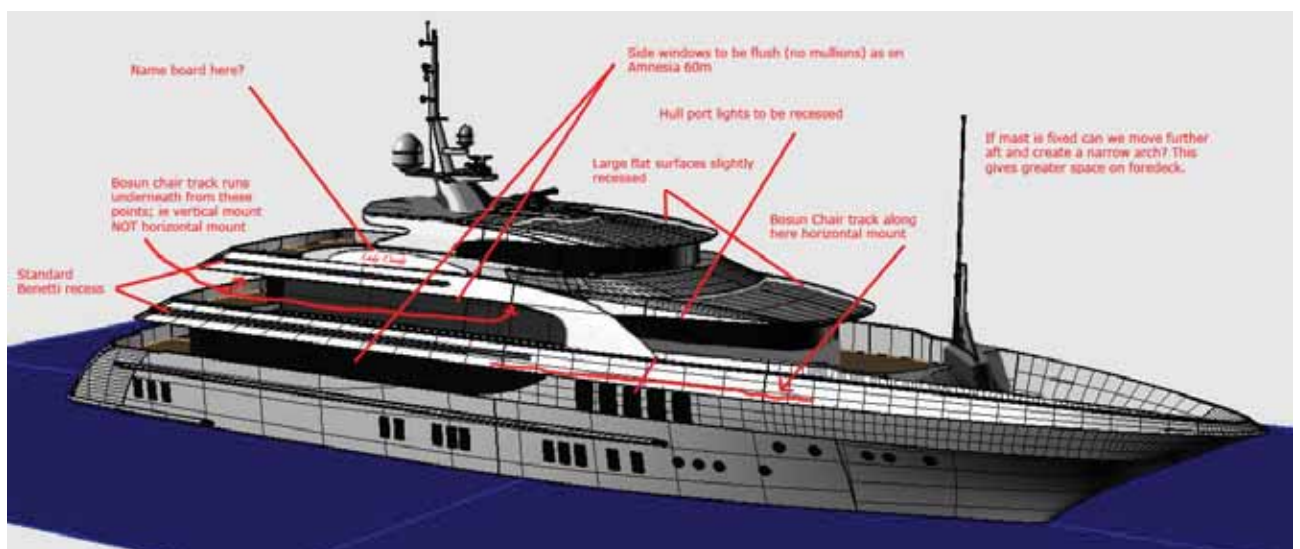
owner’s office is usually found, with seating that can also function for karaoke sessions or small meetings.

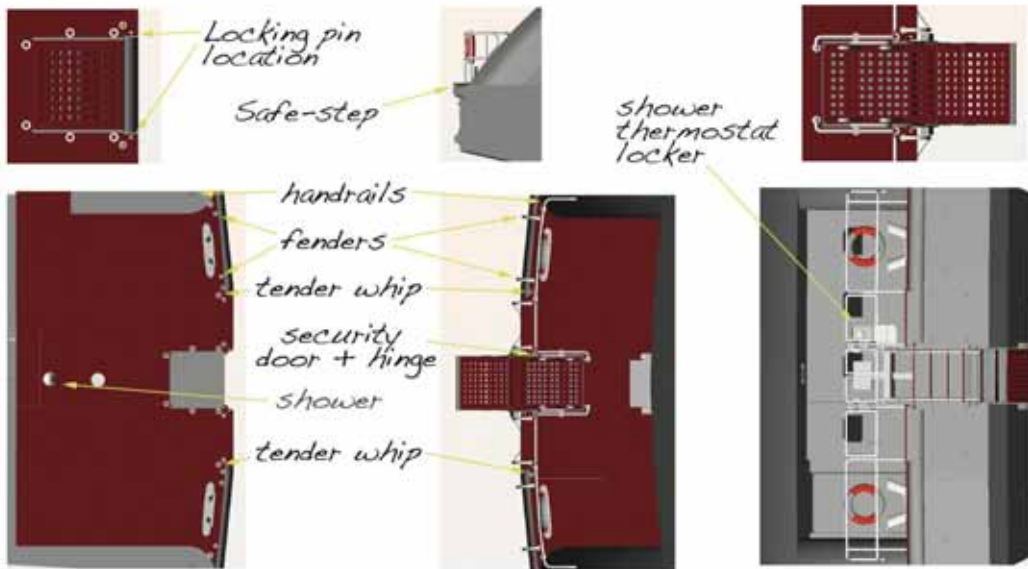
The customary location of the tender garage is another bee in Brackley’s bonnet. Again, tradition dictates that it is usually located in the aft section and served by either stern or side-opening hydraulic doors at close to water level. The problem here is that near to ideal sea conditions are required for tender launch and retrieval operations to be carried out safely.

“I had personal experience of this at the 2008 Monaco Yacht Show when *Xanadu* was anchored offshore and a very important guest couldn’t get off the yacht because of the sea state,” Brackley recalls. “If a *Mangusta* comes round the aft end and comes off the plane pushing up a wake over a metre high, tender operations can become very hazardous. So we moved the tender garage on to the forward main deck, the noisiest and most uncomfortable area anyway, where

ABOVE: DETAIL ILLUSTRATING THE LAYOUT OF THE SUNDECK ABOARD *LADY CANDY*. BELOW: DOCUMENT HIGHLIGHTING JUST SOME OF THE MODIFICATIONS CENTRAL YACHT HAS INTRODUCED TO THE EXTERIOR DETAILING.

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: SCENES DURING A RECENT OWNER VISIT TO THE BENETTI SHIPYARD TO MONITOR PROGRESS ON THE BUILD.

it is well above the waterline, which frees up the entire lower aft area for the beach club and gym. An added advantage is that we only require two crew to launch the tender in conditions where we could not even hope to launch the tender from *Xanadu* with the requisite five crew.”

With service efficiency again in mind, Brackley has done away with the dining area on the upper aft deck so crew do not have to traipse through the lounge to get there. Instead, full dining facilities are provided on the sundeck close to both the dumb waiter that emerges at waist level (not inconveniently close to the deck, as is usually the case on sundeck installations) and the BBQ area, which is protected from the wind and equipped with an extraction fan to remove cooking odours.

“Our goal is simplicity and more simplicity,” explains Brackley when it comes to technical specifications. “There is no point in seeking complexity for the sake of it.” *Lady Candy* is based on a standard technical platform, but certain equipment has been upgraded with the above credo in mind. The standard piston-type air compressors, for example, which tend to judder and vibrate when starting up, have been replaced with quieter screw-type units more commonly found on large sailing boats, and these have been moved to the aft end of the engine room instead of up against the guest accommodation bulkhead.

A very practical upgrade concerns the black and grey water system as emerging MARPOL regulations will further limit the emission of effluents in ports and marinas. Most waste treatment systems on large yachts comply with the existing regulations, but treatment plants commonly retain five per cent of the waste as sludge, which is piped ashore or has to be pumped out at least 12nm offshore.

“A yacht of this size might be treating 10,000 litres of dirty water a day in a marina, which translates into 500 litres of sludge,” Brackley points out. “If you only have a sludge tank with a 2,000-litre capacity – and there are many yachts with smaller tanks – you’re

LESSONS FROM AMBROSIA

Although *Lady Candy* is powered by diesel main engines and generators, the technical knowledge Brackley picked up as captain of the diesel-electric *Ambrosia* is further evidence of how experienced seafarers can provide valuable know-how during the design and build process. In the course of developing an operating manual for the yacht, he proposed a number of recommendations to both MARIN and the Azipod supplier ABB.

“One of the problems with smaller Azipod yachts is that they have very sensitive steering, so a small adjustment can lead to a big change in heading and the steering is ‘hunting’ all the time,” Brackley explains. “So I proposed an asynchronous steering system, whereby if you turn to port you use just the starboard Azipod, and vice-versa. ABB certainly weren’t aware of this issue at the time and they have now incorporated asynchronous steering into the Kongsberg DP system.”

Another issue he came across was controlling propulsion through the rpm via the throttles. The problem here is that as the yacht heads into heavy seas the yacht’s speed varies significantly, as does the load on the engines. On a standard yacht, where the generators are separate from the propulsion motors, this is not a problem, but on a smaller diesel-electric yacht a heavy wave can significantly reduce boat speed and lead to electrical power fluctuations. Larger commercial vessels are less susceptible because their sheer mass prevents sudden deceleration, but Brackley discovered on *Ambrosia* that the audio-visual and lighting systems, in particular, did not like these power fluctuations. As a result of talks with the ABB technicians, they are investigating a system of regulating electrical propulsion by power control rather than by rpm.

Many of these issues are the result of scaling down the diesel-electric systems common to commercial vessels or cruise ships. According to Brackley, this is completely misguided as a yacht has very different voyage and operational criteria.

“On a diesel-electric superyacht you need to address three operational scenarios: at anchor, cruising speed and maximum speed,” begins Brackley. “We already know down to a few kilowatts what the power demands are in these situations, so we can match generator size to requirements. In the case of *Ambrosia*, we had two large generators and two small ones. At cruising speed we used just one large generator. This provides efficient fuel management, but also savings in terms of maintenance and servicing. We generally ran only one power plant, whereas a conventional yacht will always use three. When we wanted to go faster, we could use both large generators in parallel. Again, even at full speed we only used two generators, while at anchor we operated like any other yacht using just one of our two small generators to optimise the load. For DP [Dynamic Positioning], we could parallel the two small generators, or even proceed in ‘stealth’ mode at up to seven knots, with the small generators in their sound shields making almost no perceptible sound.”

going to be in trouble after just a few days. So we have a 6,000-litre capacity, which means we can stay put for well over a week.”

Central Yacht intervened to modify the yacht’s exterior styling, but for functional as well as aesthetic reasons. This meant removing the customary Benetti fashion plates to provide space for larger, unencumbered windows, and doing away with the Portuguese bridge in front of the wheelhouse. This latter feature was initially conceived as a way for the helmsman to make his way quickly from one side of the vessel to the other while manoeuvring, but on today’s yachts it makes more sense to pass through the wheelhouse where the wing station controls have to be switched over manually (Brackley knows of at

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least one docking accident that has been caused by the captain taking the exterior route and forgetting to make this switch). A recessed central area on the wheelhouse coachroof provides a styling feature, but includes a safety ‘lip’ to prevent crew going too near the edge, while sponsons at upper deck level have been extended to provide comfortable footrests while cleaning the windows. The swim platform can be accessed from an external staircase or (unless very rough) direct from the beach club to the maindeck.

The layout of the sundeck came in for particular attention and has been designed to provide seating for 21 people (12 around the dining table and a further nine at custom, fold-down stools at the bar), without impeding crew service. An aluminium ring frame extending aft from the central coachroof can be fitted with a watertight awning to protect the diners below from the sun and rain (an important consideration in tropical Hong Kong). The sun umbrella stems are provided with small integral tables for resting drinks or snacks and a running machine can be stowed away underneath the sun lounge aft.

Fixed, robust stainless-steel handrails on the swim platform provide added safety and the bespoke hydraulic swim ladder, with its attractive teak grating steps, can remain in place even when a tender is alongside. The mast spreaders carry the VHF and weatherfax antennae, but also serve as support for the signal flag hoist. As any deckhand

who has had to clamber up the mast to attach these signals will tell you, it can be a precarious climb, so the flags can be hoisted from a halyard that runs down to the bridge wing station where it is secured by a cleat. In fact, the mast design is a study in efficiency by avoiding the customary side-by-side dome arrangement associated with poor reception and including steps that have been integrated into the arch structure as a styling feature, while also providing safer access for maintenance.

There is a lively ongoing debate about who is best qualified to manage new build projects – build captain, owner’s rep or the shipyard’s own management team? All these parties have important roles to play and there is some crossover in terms of responsibilities, but for Brackley, who spends at least a couple of hours on board each day, having someone with practical hands-on experience permanently on site can only be advantageous.

“Quality control demands that you need to be there every day, because you miss a lot if you’re visiting just once a month,” he maintains. “By being aboard everyday, the design process is an ongoing concern and we are always finding small items that can be improved or fine-tuned. It’s also important to show that someone cares; I know most of the guys working on *Lady Candy* by their first names – that can make a difference in terms of their attention to the job and their pride in the final result.” ■

Images: Justin Ratcliffe & Central Yacht

A full interview with the owner, Alan Chuang, will be included in issue 4 of *The Superyacht Owner*, published in September.

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