



Andrew Winch

AS ONE OF THE WORLD'S BEST-KNOW SUPERYACHT DESIGNERS, ANDREW WINCH HAS SUCCESSFULLY DIVERSIFIED INTO AVIATION AND ARCHITECTURE

BY FRANCES AND MICHAEL HOWORTH

From early childhood, Andrew Winch knew he wanted to design yachts. Although his dyslexia made the academics of naval architecture challenging, he always relished the creative side — eventually becoming one of the best-known names in superyacht design.

“Some could perceive dyslexia as a disability, but in my case it has clearly brought me good fortune,” Winch explains. “It encouraged me to draw as a means of explaining my thoughts, in a way that I couldn’t do with words.

“This improved my artistic skills and I developed an eye for minute details.”

We are sitting in his Mortlake design office in London, where he has cleared his desk, switched off the telephones and opened the floor-to-ceiling, glass sliding doors onto the balcony. Outside, the River Thames can be seen through the trees, and our conversations are occasionally punctuated by the calls to ‘do better’ and ‘pull harder’ that emanate from the coxes of the rowing eights practising on the river.

“I actually grew up on the other side of the Thames, in Kensington,” he says. “When I was seven, I learnt to sail on my own gunter rigged Gull called *Fabiola*, before graduating to Lasers and Fireflies, and eventually becoming captain of the school sailing club. When I was growing up, my father had a 12m (39ft) Beneteau called *Waterbeater*. We paid a premium for her to be built with a white hull, instead of the then standard beige, but Beneteau liked it so much they never reverted to the beige

colour. We spent a lot of time racing and sailing on *Waterbeater*, and later on an Oyster 39. I still sail this size of yacht, in fact, I share an 11m (35ft) Southerly sailing boat called *Juste de Bonheur* with my brother-in-law.”

Steer in the right direction

“After school, I went to Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design for a foundation course, then on to Kingston College of Art to study 3D design,” he says. “I originally wanted to be a sculptor, but my father advised me, very sensibly, that I should get a more commercially-orientated training.

“It was during my time at Kingston College that I began seriously pursuing a career in yacht design. A family friend introduced me to Jon Bannenberg, 

CAREER DETAILS

- ▶ **Current role:** Owner of Andrew Winch Designs
- ▶ **Early experience:** Andrew Winch has successfully developed his company over the last 27 years from a husband and wife start-up to become recognised as one of the world’s leading international design teams. He now leads a studio of 47-plus employees operating inside five departments spread across two three-storey buildings situated by the Thames in West London.

Photo: Frances Howorth

TO THE POINT



How would you describe the superyacht design business?

Our industry is a collection of very talented individuals from all walks of life. However a creative yacht operation needs to have a structured knowledge of the sea, an understanding of shipbuilding, a passion for design, a talented client, and a sprinkling of good humour.

What is your approach to running a successful business?

My wife and I started our studio with the ambition to do well. As it grew, we tried to keep a family atmosphere, and I am proud that a large proportion of the company has been here for many years helping to grow the business. The success of the studio is not built on one or two people alone, it is built through the combined strength of a talented team.

What would you describe as your favourite ever yacht?

One of the first yachts I saw with beautiful lines and a lovely ambiance is *Puritan*, a schooner designed by John G Alden and launched in 1931. I saw her in English Harbour in the Caribbean when I was 23-years-old, and I have never forgotten her. However, I believe that each new project is the best, so *Ace* is my current favourite.

What are your thoughts on the artistic side of your work?

I see each project as spatial art. I dream of it as an art structure and then I create it. You cannot live inside a Monet or a Picasso, but one can look and appreciate the picture. I am very lucky to have the opportunity to create spaces that visually reward the owner in the same way as a painting

does, but which can also be lived in and interacted with.

What underpins the quality and detail of your designs?

I am inspired by everything that I see, hear and experience. Pushing the envelope in design is something that I strive to achieve. Each project is designed to fit the client's tastes and lifestyle as precisely as a bespoke Saville Row suit.

What is your working method for producing great designs?

I never stop thinking about design. I am always dreaming, sketching or describing.

Typically I work directly with the clients, then I feedback to my team. Together we interpret our client's desires and produce a bespoke design, including concepts and visuals that can be shown to the client.

To whom do you hold the greatest debt of gratitude?

Jon Bannenberg. The skill set I learned working for him is the very same that I use to this day. I am grateful that he encouraged me to experience sailing firsthand.

What might you have done if the business hadn't succeeded?

When we started the business we agreed to sail the world if it wasn't successful. We are immensely pleased that this never happened, but I look forward to more opportunities to sail in the future.

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who showed me the technique of drawing hull lines using splines and weights, as well as the French curve, at his studio on Burnshall Street in Chelsea. I have never forgotten those early lessons. He agreed to mentor me throughout my design course, as no other tutors at the college had experience in yacht design. In the years that followed, he tutored me on several other occasions and was a great help in developing my early training.

“I remember inviting him to see my final piece of work at the college exhibition; it was a design for a 16m (52ft) sailing yacht. On the very last day of the exhibition he came to view my work. I was bold enough to ask him for a job, but he wisely advised me to go and get direct yachting experience. This was some of the most sound advice I have ever received and has stood me in good stead with regard to designing ever since.”

In 1979, at the age of 23, Winch was hired by a yacht owner to sail his 16m Morgan Out Islander across the Atlantic to the Caribbean.

“I ran the boat for him for one season, during which

time I gleaned valuable experience as a skipper, and learnt about employment as a crew member aboard a working yacht,” he continues. “When I left the yacht, I travelled to the US to examine its architecture and art.

“Shortly after, I returned to London and asked Jon for a job for the fourth time and was lucky enough to be offered the role of office junior. Terry Disdale had just left the studio, but Tim Heywood had joined a year earlier. Under the guidance of Jon, I spent the next six years at Bannenberg working at his studio.”

From humble beginnings

“My first project was 24m (80ft) sailing yacht, *Shirley B*, built at Southern Ocean Shipyard,” he says “She was followed by *Garuda* and *Acharne*, then 27m (89ft) *Starlight*, with her eight-wheel amphibious tender that we also designed. Never did anyone have a better tutor or mentor, but the hard fact was that after six years of working for Jon I wanted to carve my own design path.

“I married my wife, Jane, in 1984, and in June 1986 we started our own small yacht design company in the spare room of our home. Our plan was to see how we were doing after one year. If successful, we would continue, if not, we would sell up and sail around the world together instead. Jane and I are still planning that sailing expedition 26-years later. We often drive to Bosham for a weekend's sailing in the Solent, discussing what we might have done instead.

“In those early days, Jane ran all of the accounts and administrative roles within the company, while I

focused on the design aspect. Fortunately, Jon contracted me to manage three of his ongoing sailing projects that were nearing completion. He instantly went from being my boss to my first client. Then Nick Maris who, at the time owned the Camper & Nicholson shipyard, asked me to design a new CNI 45, and Nautor wanted me to redesign the interior and exterior of the Swan 11m sailing yacht in collaboration with naval architect German Frers.

“The brief was to turn away from traditional dark interiors, and small exterior windows, opting instead to imprint an original stamp onto the design. I felt it was essential to have a place in the cockpit to lie down and relax, as well as having tables around which friends could comfortably socialise, both on deck and below. As a child in the 1970s sailing up and down the harbour, I remember looking at the boats and thinking how one

lot about how interiors should be conceived.

“We had grown to a studio of eight when the 1991 recession loomed, and were fortunate to receive a commission from a Singapore-based hotel owner who asked me to design a 49m (161ft) motoryacht for him. He had decided to build at the De Vries Feadship shipyard, and it was a major project for both the yacht builder and Andrew Winch Designs.

“*White Rabbit* was built for a client who enjoyed entertaining, and she had to be able to accommodate up to 24 guests for a fully seated Chinese banquet. With this in mind, we incorporated a galley that ran the whole beam of the yacht directly behind the wheelhouse on the upper deck, providing access to the dining area below and the adjacent sky lounge. The dining table in the sky lounge was custom designed to be converted into a roulette table for additional entertainment.

“That particular client had a very specific lifestyle and taste, and the collaboration proved to be a success, and a valuable education into understanding our clients’ cultures and requirements. Perhaps the biggest design challenge on *White Rabbit* was her tender. The client wanted a 10m (33ft) tender for game fishing, and the only way to carry and launch one of this size on a 49m yacht was to do so athwartships over the transom. Working closely with Feadship, and their design team at De Voogt, we conceived and built a revolutionary crane — a twin beam stern launch. It was a huge success.

“Throughout the design time of *White Rabbit* the client was adamant that he wanted to maximise the internal space onboard. This really put my sailboat experience to good use. It was vital for me to closely consider the ergonomics needed to make it easy for the crew to do their job both discreetly and seamlessly.

Another project the team developed with Feadship was the beautiful 55m (180ft) motoryacht *Claire*, launched in 1996 (now sailing as *Samax*).

“During the build, another of our clients bought the project and we were asked to finish it.” says Winch. “On completion, she was sent to the Far East, where her official launch name was announced.

“Since her delivery she has subsequently been sold, but the elegant interior has not been changed. At least 10 years after we delivered her, our decoration studio was asked to re-supply all the original materials for a redecoration by her owner, who was intent on leaving the design exactly as we had originally conceived it.”

Royal attention

“When it was announced in 1994 that British royal yacht *Britannia* was going to be taken out of service, our firm was among those invited to pitch a concept for a potential replacement. The model of our design went on display in the window of a Mayfair-based yacht broker. There it was spotted by a passer-by who rang me up asking to meet to discuss the designs for a 160m (525ft) motoryacht for a Royal family.

“The team prepared the designs before I eventually flew to the Far East in 1996 to sign the contract to design the exterior and interior of what was going to be the world’s largest ever superyacht. Alongside the yacht, we were also asked to design a marina for the



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day I would design ones that looked much better. So for Nautor I wrapped glass over the deckhouse to fill the area with light and to create a feeling of space.

“I worked with German Frers again, on the Swan 44, then with Nautor and Jeanneau. I created the Sovereign range for Oyster, and the Sun Fast Fleet for Jeanneau, as a brand category for their racing yachts, as well as the Sun Odyssey Fleet, to establish their range of cruising yachts — in essence redesigning their entire fleet.”

Bespoke designs

“As the company grew so did the size of the projects we took on. The ketch-rigged 43m (141ft) sailing yacht *Cyclos III* was one of my first watershed projects. I believe she truly broke the mould of sailing yacht interior design. Her owner had very fixed views. He did not want air conditioning or furling sails, and stipulated that there should be no visible wood anywhere in her interior. I allowed for rotating, tropical fans to be built into the ceiling, which were used to bring air down from the skylights and hatches so fresh air flowed through the boat. This actually worked very well, and I learnt a

royal fleet that should be capable of accommodating two 160m motoryachts, along with a further 10 private yachts for the family, each of 60m (197ft).

“This was an enormous project for us and we needed to expand the firm quite quickly. Over the next few months we almost doubled our staff. Only one facility in Germany had a floating dock large enough to build the yacht in, so we, and a team from Lürssen, began to work together on the project at Blohm + Voss in Hamburg.

“I had to visit the Far East every month with a presentation until the complete design was finalised. We were instructed to design everything inside and out, from fabrics to furniture. Then suddenly in 1998, two years after the project started, it was suddenly stopped. The 162m hull and partially completed superstructure was later sold and finished to become *Dubai*, but we never did complete her interior, even though the exterior was finished to our design. By the time, *Dubai* was stopped, our team had grown significantly and had moved to our current location on Mortlake High Street in Barnes, London.

“We still had yachts in design, such as 36m (118ft) sailing yacht *Unfurled*, with her minimalist and contemporary design concept, as well as the beautiful 43m classic sailing yacht *Hetairos*, whose interior was centred on the structure of the boat itself. All of her structural beams were on display, for example, and instead of hanging paintings on the bulkheads, we commissioned artist David Barker to



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cover them in painted murals. *Hetairos* went on to sail from the North- to the South Pole and has subsequently sailed around the world four times, becoming somewhat infamous for having several parrots onboard.”

Diversifying the brand

“In amongst all of this sailing boat activity I went to see a client about a potential sailing yacht, and came away with the request to design the interior of his private Boeing Business Jet II. At the time, our studio had never designed a plane, but I was confident that we could deliver a high quality and original design. The delivery of the finished aircraft coincided with an interview the owner gave to the *Financial Times*, which instantly raised the design studio’s profile in the world

of private aircraft design. Soon after that we were commissioned to design our second aircraft, a Boeing 767, and in the past 10 years we have established a dedicated aircraft design division, led by Jim Dixon.

“Meanwhile, our interiors department now employs 10 people, and has evolved to satisfy the demand for more unique decoration from our clients. We moved this department into another building across from the main studio, along with the yacht division, led by director Matthew Chatt-Collins. The aviation, accounts, and managerial teams are housed in the main building of what was, in years gone by, a fire station. They have been joined in recent years by an architectural team who work on designs for residences and offices.

“One of our first architectural projects was the design of a private office in the Ukraine, working with Loher in Germany, and bespoke furniture companies in France. Our architectural team now has projects running in London, Moscow and Miami (among others), led by head of architecture, Simon Tomlinson.

“Multi-projects for our exclusive clients have become the base of our business plan. We have developed our studio, culture, quality and personalities around delivering a range of projects for our clients. Today, 80 per cent of our design work on yachts includes both the interior and exterior design, whilst the remaining 20 per cent of our yacht-based work is for interior work only. Superyachts comprise about 50 per cent of all our design projects, while aviation and architectural projects take up approximately 25 per cent respectively, with each department working with the interiors division.”

Onwards and upwards

“Sure we have taken risks, but we have never stopped challenging ourselves, and we have never said no. Our designs have ranged from highly contemporary, to French classical. When a client trusts us, and believes in us, we don’t let them down, and I’m lucky that we have brave clients who do trust us. They are all successful individuals with different tastes, passions and lifestyles, and the biggest compliment is that they have continued to ask us to design their motoryachts, sailing yachts, private jets and architectural projects.

“At the end of this year we will have delivered seven projects. Very few people know how much work we achieve in our studio. We are lucky to have such a broad scope of projects. I love being busy, because busy equals creative opportunity. We have just completed the six-year design and build process for the 85m (279ft) motoryacht *Ace*, and are now working on 33m (108ft) carbon fibre sailing yacht *Inoui* with Philippe Briand.

“I hope it is our innovation, experience and talent that sets our work apart from that of other designers. Unlike other designers, I don’t have a signature design. Every one of them has been different from the last. However, in all of our projects we strive to produce unique creativity that incorporates unrivalled attention to detail and quality.

“Will I stop working? Why would I? I want to continue to work with my colleagues, and I am sure that the firm will continue to grow and evolve, which I really look forward to being a part of.” **SB**