



DESIGNED WEST, BUILT EAST

WORDS FRANCES AND MICHAEL HOWORTH

The Kingship Columbus 90 Belle Isle, designed by Vripack.

Frances and Michael Howorth take a look at the top designers in the West who are designing for the cream of the crop in the East



The Cheoy Lee Sport Fisher 27, designed by Howard Apollonio.

► FOR FORTY YEARS OR MORE, BOATYARDS IN ASIA HAVE BEEN TURNING OUT THE WORLD'S FAVOURITE BOATS WITH BRANDS SUCH AS GRAND BANKS, HORIZON, FLEMING, OFFSHORE AND PRESIDENT GAINING LARGE FOLLOWINGS AMONG THE BOAT BUYING PUBLIC IN THE WEST.

Many believe that it is only in recent years, as Asia itself takes to the water, that top designers have been working for the better boatyards. Yet in fact, the opposite is the truth, with many of the west's designers drawing for eastern shipyards for almost thirty years.

Howard Apollonio of Apollonio Naval Architecture, based in Lynden, Washington USA, began designing yachts for Asian customers some 28 years ago, in 1983, building up clientele steadily up until the present. "It has," he says, "been an interesting and worthwhile endeavour."



The Hampton Endurance, by Howard Apollonio.



The Hang Sheng 46, designed by Bill Dixon for the China market.

The first and most prolific of these was Angel Marine, in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, introduced to him by a boat dealer in Seattle. Following that meeting they produced over 150 fast motor yachts to his designs from 13 to 17-metre length in a wide variety of styles and custom variants. When they went out of business, the basic product line went over to a new company, Prima Yachts, formed by one of Angel's employees. A few years later, after they had moved to Shenzhen China, he worked with them again on their 16.5 metre line and new 19-metre model.

Bill Dixon, who is probably the only yacht designer in the world who can claim to have yachts in build on five continents, at the same time has also worked with companies in Asia for nearly thirty years. In 2010, he was named Yacht Designer in Asia of the Year at the Asia Boating Awards in Hong Kong. He was one of the very first European exhibitors at the Shanghai Boat Show, having already developed very close ties with builders in Taiwan, and is now working with several fast growing Chinese builders who have been quick to appreciate, not only his understanding of their local markets but also the experience that he can bring to them of markets worldwide.

Guido De Groot is very proud of the new range of yachts, which he has developed together with Howard Chen of Jet Tern Marine. At Selene and Artemis Yachts

his new 28-metre Selene 92 and the 21-metre Artemis 70 are currently under construction. De Groot says, "These yachts stand out in their design approach and are very original and recognisable in terms of their looks."

JC Espinosa started working in Taiwan styling and designing for Mckinna Yachts about ten years ago in association with Howard Apollonio to create two new series of modern Euro-style 17 to 21 metre express and pilothouse motor yachts. These were built initially at Lien Hwa, and later HerShine, in Kaohsiung, Taiwan. These too are fine performers; but what sets them apart was that they have become known for exceptional finish, quality, and level of outfit.

Three years later Espinosa, started a very successful relationship with Horizon Yachts out of Kaosiung, Taiwan. He has also worked with Jade Yachts again in Kaosiung, where he built a very successful line of Bandido Explorers. The Bandido line started at 27 metres with a



Jet Tern's Selene 92, with stylings by Guido de Groot.



JC Espinosa, a long-time collaborator with Taiwan's Horizon Yachts provided the look for the Horizon 120 Espresso. (Above) Espresso leaving Kaohsiung Harbour.



Espresso's salon.



The NISI 2400, designed by Ward Setzer.

52-metre superyacht under construction, also. He has also had projects on some yard in Mainland China, some were completed others did not.

In the 1980's it was Taiwan, that was in the boatbuilding spotlight. Motor yachts in the 13 to 20 metre range were being built for Tiger Marine, in Keelung; Bluewater Yachts in Taipei; and Nautique & Camargue Yachts in Kaohsiung. These boats all had exceptional ride quality and efficiency over a range of speed. Styles ranged from sundeck and cockpit cruisers, through sport fishers, flush deck motor yachts, and European styled sport yachts, all with highly regarded interiors.

The early 1990s saw a shakeup in the Taiwan yacht building business, with many builders departing. Some went to mainland China, like Hi-Star, who purchased Camargue's moulds and modified those models under the Activa name.

As yacht building in China took off in the 21st century, the nature of yachts changed

from the modest size and styles of 1980s Taiwan to larger and more contemporary types. Some of these have become world-class. Examples included: Hampton Yachts, in Shanghai; and Cheoy Lee Yachts, Tricon Marine, and Maxi Marine in the Zhuhai area all of who used designers from the West. For Hampton, Apollonio Naval Architecture designed three model lines of their Endurance series hybrid hull long-range cruisers, efficient and sea kindly at displacement and semi-planing speed, and he is developing two other series for them. Cheoy Lee produced two outstanding 27 metre fast and sea kindly sport fishers to his design.

Under US ownership and management, Tricon Marine have established impressive facilities for future growth in China, building a line of quality high performing 26 to 28-metre craft for Argos Yachts. These have been designed to be efficient at both displacement and planing speed, with remarkable ride quality. Tricon have also been working for US-based Ward Setzer on the NISI project.

Described as a cutting-edge performance and ergonomic yacht that can reduce or eliminate the need for a full-time crew. With the first model, NISI 2400 (24 metres) they have developed what Setzer refers to as a "super-hybrid" hull maintaining the seaworthiness commonly reserved for displacement yachts, while achieving top speeds of over 30 knots, the first of which is scheduled for delivery in May of 2012. The first 24-metre NISI, built in Zhuhai, will make her debut at the Cannes Boat Show and is a contender for the Superyachts Awards. Setzer currently has a 23.9 metre underway, a 26 metre and the new Setzer Hookah 36-metre all in build at the yard.

Setzer is currently working to expand the NISI Yachts range, which currently offers high performance motor yachts in the 22-26 metre range. The expansion will come in the form of the new Hookah Edition of motor-yacht. These will be offered in the 36-40-metre range and will include a tri-deck model and other custom build options.



The new NISI 3600 Hookah, also by Ward Setzer.



The Kingship Green Voyager, with design by Axis yacht design.



Rdo Humpherys developed the ultra-efficient Echo for Taiwan's Kha Shing. The tooling have been built and the design is complete.

At Kingship, Setzer has the first build of their 110' Expedition Yacht and for Astral Ribs he has designed a 12-metre Ultra-Modern Ribs that is currently out for bid in China yards and will be constructed exclusively for Hong Kong based partners. Currently in lamination at Kingbay in Ningbo China is his 20.5 metre Express.

Maxi Marine, a new company, has successfully undertaken production of an ultra light, 45-60 knot, 20-metre Euro-style express cruiser to a design from Howard Apollonio based on a unique proven hull, first built by a US company. They have also built the Streamer Line of 6.5 metre ultra-modern Bay Boats in Zhuhai, to designs by Ward Setzer and craft are now shipping from there to the USA for distribution.

As China embraces boat building so designers seek to set up shop there. Among them the Italian Design and Engineering Company, Axis Group Yacht Design created by Horacio Bozzo. He recently opened a new overseas representative office in Shanghai, inside the Jin Mao Tower, to play a key role in better addressing the Asian market by offering a customised quality service as well as pursuing a constant development strategy.

Green Voyager's very open interior.



Currently, projects inhand inside Asia for Axis include the 44-metre Green Voyager, presently being built at Kingship Shipyard in ZhongShan, and slated for delivery in 2013. They are currently designing a new 42-metre motor yacht for Kingship as well.

Dutch design firm Vripack have also worked for Kingship to create Project 5605, a smart 40-metre superyacht for a private one-off client. The steel-hulled yacht has aluminium superstructure and is driven by twin Caterpillar 3412E DI-TA engines. Project 6074 is a larger, 47-metre superyacht, but as of yet, no details are available. Vripack have also undertaken design, naval architecture, engineering and refit work for Jade Yachts.

British designer Rob Humphreys has drawn designs for an efficient looking explorer yacht being built at the moment for Kha Shing in Taiwan. Humphreys has a number of models under construction including the new Echo, a displacement motor yacht that is under the MCA 24 metre designation but is in fact 25.6m overall. Humphreys did a lot of work minimising hydrodynamic resistance and helped to support the project's claim as an ecologically inspired model. The project was the result of extensive CFD work and tank testing. His team is also working on a smaller sister vessel, probably around 16 metres overall, which will be designed along similar lines.

Separate to this range, they have produced a few models in the Monte Fino range, namely the 76 and 100 on an existing hull mould they had earlier developed in-house, and more recently have produced a semi-displacement hull mould for them which is capable of generating designs in the range of 26 - 33 metres. This was extensively tank tested and is capable of good all-round performance.

Canadian Greg C Marshall, like JC Espinosa, designs for Horizon Yachts in Taiwan but has, in recent times, become famous for the concepts that resulted in *Big Fish*, the 45-metre



The EP 105 by Horizon; designed by Greg C Marshall.

expedition yacht, and the 50-metre *Starfish*, both commissioned by the Australian businessman Richard Beattie whose businesses are based in Hong Kong. One of the more recent creations from Horizon and Marshall is the new EP105, two of which have been sold – one to a Japanese buyer, the other to a mainland Chinese buyer based in Singapore.

Marshall has also designed for Ocean Alexander, for whom he is designing Project 4230 the first Ocean Alexander 110. This project is a joint venture with the London-based designer Evan Marshall with GCMNA is providing the Hull Design, Naval Architecture and Engineering, while Evan is doing both the exterior and interior styling on this Fibreglass Production. This yacht is a tri-deck with 4 staterooms in the hull deck and a master on the main with a huge master head and bath. It is powered by two MTU 12V2000 giving a top speed of around 23 knots.

John Decaro of All Ocean Yachts selected Tricon Marine as the yard to build his All Ocean 90' expedition yachts in, when superstructure material is requested in fibreglass. The AO90, as it will be called at Tricon Marine, is designed by John Decaro together with Luis de Basto, and is currently being offered in steel hull, in which case it will be built at the Inace yard in Brazil. After visiting and researching yards throughout Asia, Decaro identified Tricon as the only shipyard he would consider working with in Asia. The yard was selected for its modern facility, quality control systems, extreme organisation and cleanliness. Production on the first fibreglass AO90 is now slated for 2012. Tricon is also working with both DeCaro and de Basto to design and construct larger A0100 and the A0110 models.

British design firm BMT Nigel Gee have been working in collaboration with the Thailand-based company Ruea Yachts developing some yacht concepts that have yet to be contracted or constructed. They are looking for potential projects elsewhere in Asia having worked on numerous commercial vessel yards in the Philippines, Singapore and China.



Above and middle: The A090 by John Caro and Luiz de Basto, fibreglass versions to be built by Tricon Marine.

Then there is Morrelli Melvin, and Gino Morrelli in particular, who has become a familiar face in South China and is always looking for new opportunities. So obsessed with getting it right for his clients he lived for almost all of 2009 in Fuyang helping set up shop overseeing new production at Sino Eagle Leopard. The result was his 11.5 metre Leopard 38 sailing catamaran, Leopard 37 powercats. He then spent five months during 2010 dividing his working weeks between Sino Eagle Leopard, Ocean Alexander, McConaghy and Nilesk. He has been back twice already this year and plans several more visits before the year is out.

Morrelli is really excited about what he calls Agility, a 15-metre carbon fibre, wave piercing, hydrofoil assisted, pod driven recreational powercat, a concept funded by Niels De Jong of Nilesk. Elton Nolte, head builder at Nilesk, first worked together with Morrelli in Cape Town on his Robertson and Caine 11-metre Leopard 37 powercats, the boat was recently awarded a prize at the Asian Boating Awards. Aimed at the Young Tiger market in Asia, this boat



Top: The engineering of BMT Nigel Gee and stylings of Design Unlimited on the 75 metre for Ruea Yachts of Thailand.
Middle: The Ruea 60M
Bottom: The 60M top deck.



incorporates the latest technology in many areas from hydrodynamics to production boat building and the company hope to start construction later this year.

Designers from the West have, in the past, handed Asian builders plenty of abysmally bad advice and guidance. This was particularly true in the 1960s, 1970s, and even in the early 1980s. Inferior and inadequate designs were given to builders with requests to produce yachts at unrealistically low cost, by westerners eager to maximize profit for dealers. Clearly the new wave of designers from the west have a different agenda having discovered the talent available within Asia to produce the designs they conceive into products that grace the pages of this very magazine. ■■■

FEATURED DESIGNERS:

- Axis Group Yacht Design
www.axisgroupyacht.com
- Bill Dixon
www.dixonyacht.com
- BMT Nigel Gee
www.ngal.co.uk
- Gregory C Marshall Naval Architect Ltd
www.gregmarshall.com
- Guido De Groot Design
www.guidodegroot.com
- Howard Apollonio
www.apollonioavarch.com
- JC Espinosa
www.espinosainc.com
- Morrelli & Melvin
www.morrellimelvin.com
- Rob Humphreys
www.humphreysdesign.com
- Vripack
www.vripack.com
- Ward Setzer
www.setzerdesign.com

FEATURED BUILDERS:

- Cheoy Lee
www.cheoyleena.com
- Hampton Yachts
www.hamptonyachts.com
- Horizon Yachts
www.horizonyacht.com
- Jet Tern
www.selene-yachts.com
- Jade Yachts
www.jade-yachts.com
- Kha Shing
www.khashing.com
- Kingship
www.kingship.com
- Maxi Marine
www.maxi.hk
- McConaghy's (China)
www.mcconaghyboats.com
- Ocean Alexander
www.oceanalexander.com
- Pama Motor Yachts
www.pamamotoryachts.com
- Sino-Eagle Leopard
www.sinoeagle-yacht.com
- Tricon Marine
www.triconmarine.com