



Stick to what you know

ONBOARD's resident sage asks "What makes architects think they can design a superyacht?"

It is always slightly worrying when a shipyard finds the need to bring a concept to the market place. It has a whiff of desperation about it, a sort of "Look chaps we haven't got enough work so what about taking a punt on this one!" I cannot think of many concepts that have been turned into successful yachts except perhaps that odd looking thing that was built for Steve Jobs before he died. I can at least understand the idea of bringing a workable concept to the table but I find it hard to look kindly upon professional architects who design marine carbuncles and then call them superyachts.

Successful and sought after superyacht designers, draw on their own understanding of ships, the sea and what is possible to build when they draw the lines of a conceptual vessel. That understanding comes after years of working with shipyards, yacht owners and having sailed occasionally in yachts they have designed. In short they know what works and what does not! There is a very good reason why these highly successful yacht designers never get involved in designing skyscrapers. The reason is that they do not fully understand the complex problems involved in making such a design, a reality.

Good on paper

Sure they can draw a skyscraper and give it perhaps a twist, or a top floor balcony that overhangs the foot print on the ground but they have no idea about whether or not it will stand up to the winds a gale force 8 might inflict on the structure. So very sensibly they stick to what they know and are good at. So I would like to ask, why do the likes of 'Gerkin' architect: Lord Foster, the Haute Couture fashion designer: Elie Saab and recently the Pritzker prize-winning architect: Zaha Hadid think they can draw a superyacht?

Hadid collaborated with the Hamburg-based shipbuilders Blohm + Voss to design a new superyacht. In recent years the German shipyard has built many of the world's most prestigious superyachts. This, their latest concept, is based around the sculptural form of a master prototype conceived for a 128 metre yacht and creates a family of five individual 90 metre yachts that explore the design philosophies of the master prototype. The concept was, from a public relations point of view a staggering



success. The world's press gave the shipyard acres and acres of coverage in lifestyle and design oriented magazines all stating how wonderful the new yacht was going to be.

Very few suggested that it was a concept or that the idea was to start a conversation about building a boat. They all leapt to the conclusion that the German Shipyard that built the Bismark was going to build a yacht that looked like Gruyere Cheese. Fortunately, nobody at Blohm + Voss actually suggested that the "mother ship" concept would ever work as a functioning vessel. But equally no one in yachting circles pointed out that there was nowhere to hang fenders, no exhaust outlet, no tender doors, no navigation lights, and no communication domes. No one questioned the navigating officer's view from the bridge or suggested that deck crew would find it impossible to clean! Hell, if you ask me as drawn by the architect the thing probably wouldn't even float upright!

Working together

To be fair I have talked with the Blohm + Voss naval architects and from them I learn that they have worked very closely with the designer to ensure that the "children" would "work" could be built and would meet all of the classification and safety standards along with the practical requirements of crew and guests. But having looked at this design and the carbuncles drawn by other well meaning soul looking for a fat fee, I think, on reflection, architects are better off designing multi storey car parks, car show rooms and airport terminal buildings and they should, I think, leave superyacht designing to the experts.

