



# Philippe Briand

AS ONE OF THE WORLD'S LEADING SAIL BOAT DESIGNERS, PHILIPPE BRIAND HAS ALSO SUCCESSFULLY TURNED HIS TALENTS TO CREATING INNOVATIVE MOTOR YACHTS

FRANCES & MICHAEL HOWORTH REPORT

**T**o the French, Philippe Briand is the man who brought home the Admiral's Cup, introduced watchmaker Corum to yacht racing, put France at the heart of the America's Cup — and designed many of the nation's best loved sailing yachts.

Bright at school, he sped through the curriculum and even had to skip a couple of years of class.

At the tender age of 16 he visited Spain for his first boating business meeting, at an Alicante yard that would subsequently build his first three boats in wood, earning him 2,000 francs. They would later build 15 more out of GRP. And today, more than 12,000 of his yachts can be found sailing the world's seas.

## Skills development

"After that meeting, I went on to spend two years working in Sweden with Pele Petersen," he explains. "There, I was responsible for designing *Sverige*, Sweden's 1977 America's Cup challenger.

"When I returned to La Rochelle in 1978 I was keen to develop my own design studio — especially as, by then, I had my first full-time employee — but the French navy had other ideas. I was called up for national service and assigned to a special elite

sports group that supported the French Olympic sailing teams.

"Yet, during that time, I always kept an eye on my fledgling design studio back home."

At the age of 22, Briand tried to sell some of his designs to Jeanneau, but they sent him away empty handed. Six months later he returned, having achieved fame, if not fortune, on the racing circuit.

"Jeanneau then asked me to turn one of my racing hull designs into a cruising boat which they could mass produce," he recalls. "The result, the 10m (32ft) *Symphonie*, went on to sell 300 hulls. That was the start of my career as a production yacht designer, and since then I have designed more than 100 different models."

His rise through the ranks of sailboat racing would be both meteoric and noteworthy. He raced against King Harold of Norway, and won, then designed a Swedish

(and then the first Swiss) entry for the America's Cup. He also won the IOR One Ton Cup and designed every French America's Cup contender."

In 1992 he began to make a name outside yacht racing circles when he was commissioned to draw his first superyacht — *Mari Cha III* — beating off Bruce Farr and German Frers.

He went on to design the CNB 70, 29m (95ft) *Grand Bleu Vintage*, 

## CAREER DETAILS

► **Current role:** Naval architect and yacht designer

► **Early experience:** Briand began sailing Optimists at the age of four and won the IOR Quarter Ton Cup when he was just 15. He and Christina, his equally boat-crazy younger sister, spent every minute of their spare time on the water winning races. When not helming, he was drawing revised underwater profiles in a bid to make them go faster and win more races.

# TO THE POINT



## What is the secret to designing high performance yachts?

You have to be a sailor yourself and enjoy the sport before you are truly able to describe yourself as a sailing yacht designer. I like to be at the forefront of yacht design, everything I do is new, and I enjoy breaking new ground with every project I begin.

## How do you approach your job?

I am a visionary, more of a conceptual designer. I see a finished yacht when I design, and I make sure it covers every aspect of her being. I don't use a computer, I sketch by hand. Then I pass it on to those who are quicker than me at working with software. I always keep a pad of paper beside my bed, and can often be at my best design-wise when I wake up early in the morning.

## What made you turn from sailing boats to motoryachts?

A boat is not just one thing any more than a woman is just a blond. Cookie is my muse and my inspiration. She dragged me screaming into a world where I now also design motoryachts.

## What defines how a yacht should be designed?

A yacht is not defined by a single characteristic. She is in fact a whole series of things that make her unique. My designs are for early adopters who want something different. Ninety per cent of superyachts are motorboats, but why do they all have to look like three tiered wedding cakes?

## How do you work at the start of a superyacht project?

"I like to develop designs with an out-of-the-box approach to

the role of superyacht ownership. I try to get under the skin of the owner and their guests and imagine how they will want to use the boat, so I can turn it into their very own small world.

## Is an owner's desire to be green changing how you work?

Green is not just linked to ecology. Green is the ultimate luxury, and gives you the ability to control your destiny on the water. Superyacht owners do not want big polluting yachts. My goal is to design motoryachts that are 30 per cent more efficient than normal, and I don't think that's

a ridiculous figure to strive for. I believe that yachting is a good platform on which to experiment. New technology is going to be seen first onboard superyachts, because the owners have the money to develop new ideas.

## What defines luxury for you?

Remoteness in the world is a luxury that most people cherish above all else. A superyacht is unique in that it's both a destination and a location. Nothing else on earth can be both, and everywhere else you go there will be some constraints. On a superyacht, the owner remains more in control of the environment.

## What has been your favourite design so far?

"My best boat is always going to be my next one."

**"For true remote exploration, superyacht owners need a boat which they have more control over — which led to the conclusion that it had to be a motoryacht"**

*Mari Cha IV, Hamilton II, Spip, Whimsy, Gliss, the Briand 105, CNB 80, Bristolian II, Vertigo 220 and the 38m (125ft) Perini Navi P2 for the owner of Perseus.*

But it was a yacht called *Audacious* (ex *Turmoil*) that would provide the next twist in Briand's extraordinary career path — designing motoryachts.

### Chance meeting

"My sister Christina insisted I sail aboard *Audacious* on the last day of racing at the Voiles de St Tropez in 2002," he says. "I wasn't keen to sail aboard a yacht designed by anyone else — but Christina insisted. If she hadn't, I might never have met Cookie."

Veerle Battiau, better known as Cookie, was the owner of the yacht, and she was destined to become the love of Briand's life and a close business associate.

"Cookie is no stranger to the high-flying business world," he explains. "She gained an MBA in Chicago and was responsible for the success of the software giant, Numetrix, which was eventually sold to Oracle.

"The Vitruvius superyacht concept was conceived in

2004 when Cookie and I were sailing from Corsica to Sardinia," he recalls. "Cookie was looking forward to a quiet night in a peaceful anchorage after a hard day's sailing. But the waters around Cala di Volpe started to cut up rough, to the point where our plans had to be changed, and we had to find a safer anchorage.

"It was then that Cookie began to formulate her vision. She saw that the key aspect about any sailing yacht is that the weather, rather than the owner, dictates when the yacht will depart, and where it can go. She reasoned that for true remote exploration, superyacht owners need a boat which they have much more control over — This led to the conclusion that it had to be a motoryacht.

"At the time she was of the opinion that most motoryachts were aesthetically unacceptable and the most polluting machines at sea. But she was determined to find a way for superyacht owners to travel to remote and isolated parts of the world whilst respecting the oceans that would carry them there."

### Design principles

Having both agreed on three essential principles for the design — efficiency, sustainability and robustness — Briand sat down at his drawing board and designed the specifications for the Vitruvius project, using what he now calls the BOS (Briand Optimised Stretched) Hull.

"For efficiency, each yacht has to have an efficient ratio of superstructure to hull, and be built of steel and aluminium so they are lightweight, consume less energy

and emit less CO<sub>2</sub> than similar boat designs,” he says. “Each boat features the BOS Hull which is designed for maximum hydrodynamic efficiency to reduce water resistance and increase the waterline length.

“The optimisation of volume and weight distribution allows for lower fuel consumption and therefore a more environmentally friendly long-range yacht.

For sustainability, each yacht is designed to use all current and future innovations, including treatments of liquids for limited emission, the use of low impact materials and substantial use of renewable energy.

“The yachts are also designed to endure the most extreme conditions, and particular care is given to the guest’s comfort through smoother motion at sea achieved by the special hull shape, which features a plumb line bow for drag reduction.”

“To date, the plumb line bow, or axe bow, has mostly been developed for commercial, security or military applications — but now the idea is slowly catching on with superyachts.

### Capital injection

There is always a hiccup, even in the best-laid plans.

In this case, it revolved around the proclamation by Lürssen Yachts that they would build the first of the Vitruvius yachts for a Russian client.

“They made the announcement at the Monaco show in 2005 and it generated huge amounts of media attention,” Briand recalls. “But despite the many editorial pages filled with aspirational drawings and smiling designers, the Russian interest faded away and it became apparent that the small size of the yachts would not fit well within Lürssen’s business plan — so the idea was eventually dropped.”

It was this media attention however, that would be the chrysalis for the next crucial stage — finding an owner brave enough to invest money into what was essentially an experimental yacht.

“But we did find him,” says Briand. “He’s a hugely experienced owner who has circumnavigated the globe several times in his own superyachts, and has spoken at superyacht design conferences and symposia.

“He loves nothing more than to get away from it all by seeking out isolated atolls in far away seas and anchoring inside coral lagoons, rather than the standard ports beloved by many other superyacht owners.

“About the same time as Lürssen was making its announcement, this owner was deciding to build an expedition motoryacht that would enable him to sail to exotic locations, particularly those in the Pacific Ocean.”

When he discovered the initial Lürssen project, he was struck by the yacht’s beauty, and because he fully supported the need for a yacht to possess a more environmentally friendly footprint, he followed up the lead in the media.

He discovered that he shared the same vision as Cookie and Philippe Briand and realised that, with his financial support, they could combine to create the ultimate superyacht — one that would achieve the considerable reduction in fuel consumption and CO<sub>2</sub> emission he was looking for.

“He told me he wanted his new superyacht to have

all the typical attributes of an explorer yacht, but without the associated drawbacks such as a deep draft and traditional styling,” says Briand. “Furthermore, he wanted her to carry an amphibious jeep and a hovercraft below decks that would allow him and his guests to step ashore at the most inaccessible of islands and atolls.

“One of his key criteria was that his superyacht would be shorter than 50m (164ft), weigh less than 500grt, and have a draught no more than 2.4m (8ft). We agreed she would be equipped with a superior forward scanning sonar. Her powerful yet silent bow thrusters and her stern anchor would allow safe manoeuvring inside the tightest of uncharted anchorages.”

### Finding a new yard

With Lürssen out of the running, another shipyard had to be found. The choice of Perini Navi was a surprise to many people in the industry, especially as it had never built a motoryacht before.



“In terms of quality, Perini Navi had already established itself as a benchmark builder,” says Briand. “So we went to see it with Giancarlo Ragnetti and Fabio Perini, and agreed to work on the project together.”

Perini had already decided to revive the Picchiotti name, a brand they had acquired in 1990 when they purchased the yard whose last yacht — the 46m (151ft) *T M Blue One* — was built for Valentino and launched by Sophia Loren in 1988. They were looking for an opportunity to build motoryachts that were different, and were keen to establish a new industry benchmark.

Work began at the Cantieri Navali Beconcini shipyard (now Picchiotti Shipyard) in La Spezia, which covers a total area of 32,000m<sup>2</sup> and counts on a staff of 51 people. Following a recent expansion in the infrastructure and production capacity, it now possesses three new 1,500m<sup>2</sup>, 70m (230ft) long sheds, two travel lifts of 260t and 820t, and two new 50m (164ft) docks. 

**Briand with his design team — and Cookie (centre)**



**Briand with Cookie (who inspired his transition into motoryacht design)**

"I gave the yacht, *Exuma*, her look using the optimal balance between straight and curved lines, together with the presence of large glass windows that bring high visibility and luminosity to every deck of the yacht," says Briand.

"I think *Galileo G*, our second superyacht to be launched, is equally appealing. She is larger and has been designed for remote polar exploration. We had to ensure she could work well in ice, so we ended up with a strengthened hull and prop shafts, propellers made of Nibral (nickel-bronze-aluminium alloy), and ice knives fitted to the leading edges of the rudders."

**"Both Vitruvius yachts have out-performed their specification brief. Fuel consumption is better than hoped for and the yachts handle well in a seaway"**

Built for owners who love discovering and conquering tricky, challenging destinations across choppy waters, *Galileo G* offers the perfect platform for exploring the planet's exciting ice regions. The use of titanium in all the external handrails offers extremely high reliability — even in the most extreme conditions.

"Having them constructed this way does of course mean that many man-hours spent varnishing woodwork under the hot tropical sun have been eliminated," he explains. "Both of the Vitruvius yachts have out-performed their specification brief. Fuel consumption is better than hoped for and the yachts handle particularly

well in a seaway. That's what I call a result."

But Briand is not a man who is happy to rest on his laurels. The hull of the next Vitruvius is under construction at Perini Navi's Yildiz yard in Turkey.

Bigger than the previous two, Project MY011 is a 73m (240ft) version being built for US clients, and is scheduled for delivery in 2013. Once again, power efficiency is paramount and Briand has specified that she should be powered by diesel electric motors driving ABB Azipod propulsors. Fellow Frenchman Remi Tessier has been chosen to design the yacht's interiors.

### Future developments

"Still on my drawing board, but nevertheless gaining much attention, is a 44m (144ft) version, a 50m with a revised layout, and a 95m (312ft)," he says. "I even have a 9.5m (31ft) version, which could be carried as a tender if the biggest gets the go-ahead.

"All in all it means that our Vitruvius range currently has yachts from 9.5m-95m."

Motoryachts may mean that Briand is now one of the most sought after superyacht designers in the world, but does it mean that he has forgotten that the roots to his multi-million dollar design studio are in sail?

"No way," he replies. "I have a six-strong team at my office in La Rochelle, and spend around 25 per cent of my time there working almost exclusively on sailing yachts. Many of them are production yachts for both Beneteau and Jeanneau. CNB will unveil a 23m (75ft) model shortly and Jeanneau will soon have new 509 and 469 models to my design.

"Meanwhile six more people work with me on motor and sail superyachts in our London office. *Inoui* is my 33m (108ft) carbon composite designed sloop being built by Vitters Shipyard in Holland. Green Marine in Southampton, UK is currently building the composite hull, and we expect her to launch in May 2013.

"Based on what her owner wanted I designed a high-tech carbon yacht to be a high performance sailboat, featuring a lifting keel with a draught of 5m (16ft). The owner wanted a timeless design so I have given her a very modern plumb bow, a moderate beam from the 1960s, a sloped transom from the 1980s, and a low freeboard and accentuated sheer line reminiscent of the J class. A high aspect ratio sail plan is directly based on the latest monohulls used for the America's Cup.

"I am also working on at least five other sailing yacht designs for clients ranging from 27m-54m (89ft-177ft)."

Is *Mari Cha V* among them SB asks? But Briand, the sole of discretion, just smiles and taps his nose, meaning that if he is designing her, he's keeping quiet about it.

Briand can be said to have conceived the idea of the optimized hull design, but now others are incorporating the concept into their own designs. With a Gallic shrug, he admits to being flattered by their mimicry.

"It says to me that other designers, not only admire our style and appreciate what we are doing, but actually want to create that for themselves," he says.

"As an organisation we constantly strive to be innovative and original in all our design work — our sailing projects as well as motoryachts — and I am confident we will continue to do so." **SB**