



Interviewed by Frances and Michael Howorth

“Doing it just for money and personal gain will not lead you towards a truly sustainable career”



The Captain

Aaron T. Clark

Age: 38 Place of birth: Auckland, New Zealand Previous yachts: *Spirit*
Current yacht: *Four Wishes* Number of crew: 10

What was your first taste of the sea?

When I was eight years old, my family moved to Beachlands, a small coastal town in New Zealand. I started sailing Optimists at the local sailing club, and I used to help my father who was a commercial fisherman. I started dreaming about bigger boats, and saved my money to buy boating magazines: I fantasised about being a yacht captain. Since becoming a superyacht captain 13 years ago, I have had only two full-time captain's positions; not many captains in this industry can say that. I have not updated my CV since I was 25 – so that means neither of my last two employers have ever seen my CV!

Which ports and harbours do you most look forward to visiting?

The most beautiful port that we visit with guests has to be Portofino. My favourite port without is Genoa, because Pesto the agent really makes us feel welcome. Genoa has a lot of culture and is fun for crew.

What are your favourite onshore hangouts?

Karakter beach bar in Sint Maarten is my favourite because they have a Friday night jam session. I go there with my saxophone!

What are the biggest changes you've seen in the industry?

Boats are getting bigger, and the owners are tending to be more business-orientated than in the past. A captain needs to have a good business sense as well.

What do you like most about your current yacht?

I built this boat and have been here eight years since we launched her – there is nothing about her that I don't know.

Which is your favourite on-board toy?

My wife!

What would you change about the motor yachting industry?

I think there should be a proper standardised apprenticeship programme. Standardisation of employee training would make this industry ten times better. There are currently inconsistent standards: you would think an 80-metre yacht would have a better quality of service than a 45-metre, but this is not necessarily the case.

What's the most curious request you have had from a guest?

There are funny requests every week. One that comes to mind is that after cruising for ten hours to a new location, my guests wanted to return to the original place because having arrived they found the water temperature was half a degree colder than it had been where we were!

What's the worst weather you have encountered on board?

When I was 18 I worked on a coastal fishing trawler. We once spent 36 hours seeking shelter in seas so powerful they bent the steelwork.

Who is the most eccentric/strangest/funniest member of your crew?

All of them! It takes a unique and somewhat different person to do this.

Who was the most troublesome crew member you've worked with?

They never worked for me for long enough so that I can remember their names or positions!

What's the most stressful part of your job?

Ensuring that everybody has his or her expectations fulfilled. This includes owners, charter guests and crew. When any are dissatisfied, the infrastructure deteriorates rapidly and creates more stress.

Any advice for an aspiring captain?

Focus, and have vision towards building your skills. Condition yourself for responsibility. Try to structure your career as a lifestyle and something to be proud of. Doing it just for money and personal gain will not lead you towards a truly sustainable career.

Who would be your top five fantasy charter guests?

I have had trips with A-list celebrities and they are just normal people! My favourite trips are those with self-made people.

What's the biggest cock-up you've ever seen another captain make?

After doing this for so long, I have seen so many dumb things done on the water that it makes me think some captains are not competent to be taking charge of peoples' lives. In St Barths over New Year, I constantly found tenders speeding through the harbour day and night. Everyone knows this is dangerous, yet they still do it, with many tenders coming from some of the highest-profile vessels.

And yours?

When I was 17, I was on watch just after sunrise after doing an extremely long day 20 miles off the coast, and gave my eyes a rest for ten minutes. The captain caught me and dealt with me in old-school fashion. It would have been less painful if he'd hit me with a Taser gun!

Captain Aaron T. Clark was talking to Frances and Michael Howorth on board Four Wishes. The yacht is available for charter through Fraser Yachts for \$170,000pw. www.fraseryachts.com