



VIVA ITALIA!

IN THE ERA OF THE SERIOUSLY STYLISH FAST CRUISER,
TOBY HODGES LOOKS AT HOW ITALY IS DOMINATING
THE MARKET AND FASHIONING TODAY'S YACHTS

Style and considerable substance: the Mylius 80
from the drawing board of Alberto Simeone

Carlo Borlenghi



‘THE ROOTS OF ITALIAN STYLE GO BACK TO THE RENAISSANCE’ *Alberto Simeone*

Stroll along the main sailing yacht pontoons at the Cannes Yachting Festival in September and you’ll be stopped in your tracks by an armada of the latest monohulls, their sizes ranging from 50-80ft. The majority of these lovely yachts will be Italian or have had an Italian hand in their design.

Notable are the sexy, sleek, lightweight performance cruisers from yards such as Mylius, Grand Soleil, Advanced Yachts, Solaris, Eleva and Ice Yachts. Their seductive lines come from the boards of Nauta, Cossutti, Lostuzzi, Felci, Argento... designers whose very names sound arty and musical.

Yet just ten years ago Italian yachts were still largely cruiser-racers, designs trying to meet the demands of two very different types of sailing. And they were typically 40-45ft. Nowadays they are predominantly 50ft-plus fast cruisers, the majority of which are used for pleasure sailing in warm waters. Style is everything: long waterlines, clean decks, low cockpits, blister coachroofs, minimal hardware and contemporary, light and minimalist interiors – the antithesis of a traditional cruising yacht.

But why are there so many, why are they so popular and why are the Italians so good at producing them? And what’s behind this resurgence of Italian design and the proliferation of large, fast cruisers?

In short, the way people want to use their yachts and like to spend their time afloat is changing and designs are reflecting this, particularly on the Mediterranean coastline. The Italian yards and designers have been able to translate this desire in the most effective way.

We spoke to many of these yards and designers, and it’s clear they are passionate about finding the best design solutions (usually aesthetics-led), and that style seems to be in their blood.

Designer DNA

Italy is famed for style, from art and fashion to furniture and industrial design to cars and boats. To look at current trends and where they came from, we must first look back – arguably all the way to the Renaissance period in art, or the 1950s for furniture design – to help understand how art, style and fashion is inbred into the Italians’ DNA.

“Certainly, the roots of Italian style go way back to the Renaissance, when Italians produced scores of talented designers, able to match a big technical capacity with a deep appreciation for beauty and, more recently, adding an attention for the sensational,” says Alberto Simeone, who draws contemporary fast cruisers for Mylius.

Mylius builds super minimalist, semi-custom, full carbon fast cruisers, like this 80, finished with striking modern interiors (inset)



Carlo Borlenghi

“The design DNA of Italians is something real,” Umberto Felci agrees. Felci is a naval architect best known for his work for Dufour over the last 15 years, but with an impressive portfolio of fast cruisers including Ice Yachts.

“My mother was an artist who worked for a famous design group. The vision is strictly connected with art, something you can’t gain in one generation. You have to live and breathe it; you have to innovate. In marine you have big walls – tradition – that you have to be creative within.”

In yachting terms, if you look to the mid-1990s you’ll see a gradual change in design, sparked by the Italians, which has spread over the last two decades. It is perhaps Wally Yachts and its visionary founder, Luca Bassani, who should be credited with the demand and trend for Italian aesthetics in yachting today.

North Sails CEO and three-time America’s Cup winner Tom Whidden says that on meeting Luca Bassani 25 years ago he realised that Bassani had a vision for sailing yachts that was noticeably different.

“His idea was to utilise advanced technologies to produce relatively lightweight boats that were fun and simple to sail. And his boats looked different. They were sleek and beautiful with minimal winches and hardware.”

Designer Lorenzo Argento also credits Wally and Bassani with helping to shape the direction of Italian styling. “He was the one who had that idea to push into this era of minimalist boats,” he says, describing Bassani as a producer who can get the best out of the people he works with.

Argento worked with Bassani while at Brenta Yachts on the iconic superyacht projects *Wally B* and *Wallygator II* (now *Nariida*). Together with *Ghost* (the Green Marine 2005 build), the lines and concepts of these groundbreaking large fast cruisers have filtered down to the Med-style yachts we see at shows today.

As Whidden puts it: “Wally has changed sailing as we know it – forever. In fact, they are a standard for how most boats look today.” The evolution of the private aft deck area, for example, was first seen on Wallys like *Tiketitan* ➤



Carlo Borlenghi



Guido Cantini/seasee.com

Right: Solaris is an Italian yard, but one that, unusually, uses an Argentinean designer, Soto Acebal. The result, as on this 47, oozes typical Med style. Left: the Felci-designed Ice 60 is also an Italian thoroughbred



Jesus Renaco



'YOU HAVE TO LIVE AND BREATHE IT; YOU HAVE TO INNOVATE' *Umberto Felci*

and *Tiketitoo*. It is something often imitated – most production yacht designs nowadays feature scooped transoms with aft platforms. Wally's latest 145 in build has an entire owner's cockpit aft too!

"Today you want to have more and more open space, but be sheltered from the sun," Bassani tells me. "Our clients typically cruise in warm, calm weather. The Italians designing yachts know what we want for living in this kind of weather."

What is 'Med style'?

I often refer to a Med-style cockpit in my boat test reports. By this I mean a low-profile coachroof tapering into long, lean coamings, sailing systems positioned aft, and a focus on outdoor living space. Nordic and North European yards typically build yachts with deep, protected cockpits to protect crews from the elements. Those sailing in the warmer waters and calmer winds of the Mediterranean often have better access to the sun and sea, room to be able to stretch out on deck, and to swim and use the dinghy and toys easily.

"There is definitely a trend towards the pleasure of cruising," says Nauta's Mario Pedol, who heads a design firm that is responsible for an impressive amount of superyacht styling, along with its long-established work with Beneteau and Grand Soleil. Pedol says the mild weather and light winds of the Med means they "pay more care to open air lifestyle, to contact with the water... which has been further boosted by the last generations of modern hull shapes which are very beamy aft. That allows

the designers to conceive the kind of 'terraces on the sea' where guests can enjoy direct contact with the water."

These aft terraces are designed into Beneteau Oceanis and Sense models, and Pedol's sentiment about sailing for pleasure's sake is one shared by Beneteau's general manager Gianguido Girotti, also an Italian naval architect:

"Over latest years there has been a shift more towards the need to have a good time on the water with a beautiful and powerful boat rather than focusing towards performance for racing, which is a segment that compromises pure performance for handicap most of the time."

Think of the pin-up production yachts that have launched in the last few years, such as the Solaris 50, the Grand Soleil 58 Performance, the Mylius 60, the Eleva 50 and the Ice 60 and you see a trend for stylish boats that elevate performance and looks over any racing attributes.

If they do race, owners of these types of yachts are doing so more at rendezvous social events than traditional handicap regattas. The size and cost of these designs (many of which are approaching or exceeding seven figures), also lend themselves more to pleasure sailing.

"The sizes from 50ft to 80ft are those that present the best proportions for this type of boat," says in-demand designer Maurizio Cossutti, "especially with the new delta shapes. Boats of that size can get the proper interior height without [an excessive height] coachroof, appearing very sleek in the water."

This continues to be the on-trend sweet spot for new yachts. "We are on with fast cruisers," Giovanni Ceccarelli confirms, having recently drawn the Eleva 50 and 42. "People need to be happy six weeks a year, under the sun, in our sea, with ten knots of wind. They are looking for a large, comfortable family cruiser, but this does not mean slow and stiff, with half the boat dedicated to a sofa and kitchen.... New Mediterranean all-weather cruisers, not a beautiful Swedish heavy boat, nor a recordbreaker."

Of course a Med-style layout can come at a cost when the weather turns and biminis have to take the brunt, the cockpit crew slide off their sunbathing cushions and those below bounce around as if in a giant pinball machine.

That may only rarely be the case, but there is an argument that the Italians might be taking things too far when it comes to style over practicality.

"We are trained in an atmosphere of beauty and are



Grand Soleil has long been the go-to yard for Italian performance cruisers and found renewed success with this new Long Cruise series

Andrea Rizzato



New brand Eleva is a yard experienced in composite builds producing modern Ceccarelli designs such as the 50 (left) and the 42 (right). Below: Italia Yachts build definitive fast cruisers, like this 15.98, that are a delight to helm



Nicola Brullo/Five Zone

TOP 5 WALLY TRENDSETTERS

Olivia Anselmi

 Wally founder Luca Bassani selects the landmark designs that helped shape one of the most talked about style brands in yachting:

1. NARIIDA (EX WALLYGATOR), 1994

"The first big sailing yacht with a modern racing hull, changing the look with a plumb bow, a very beamy hull and stern, a very flush deck and carbon fibre construction and sails."



2. GENIE OF THE LAMP, 1995

"The first cruising boat with sails trimmed by hydraulic rams. A T-shaped cockpit at the same level allowed a new deck design and reduced deck hardware."

3. TIKETITAN, 1998

"The first cruising yacht with a canting keel and terrace on the sea."



4. ESENSE, 2006

"A re-interpretation of the traditional bulwark to achieve a safe, full flush-deck, like a New York-style loft."

5. MAGIC CARPET⁵, 2013

"A new generation hull design for racing and cruising in this size."





'DESIGNERS HAVE CONCEIVED TERRACES ON THE SEA' *Mario Pedol*

always pushed to the research of good looking, but I have to admit that sometimes this trend is overwhelming our work," says Ceccarelli. And Cossutti agrees: "I think that one of the things that characterises Italian design the most is the high research for beauty, sometimes preferring the aesthetic features in spite of functionality."

Lorenzo Argento, who was tasked with styling the racy new Beneteau First 53, which will launch in 2019, is more weary still about the current crop of Italian designs, describing it as a downward phase of minimalism.

"We have to be careful – personally I always try to have a good reason for doing something." He feels we are moving in a direction where style is winning over practicality: "I think a yacht should always be a yacht."

Styling and interiors

Whatever the varying views on the practicality of Med designs, it is styling that has shaped this generation of yachts outside and in. Italian car designers, fashion houses, architects and interior designers have all been employed with varying degrees of success to give new yacht models some added panache and marketability.

"Boatbuilders started to realise – around the time when Beneteau started to use Nauta for its interiors – that style was a big element," says Argento. "Style has its own language."

Nauta began designing the interiors for some Oceanis models in 2004. That has proved so successful that the Milan-based brand now does both deck and interior styling for almost all the models within the Beneteau range – plus all Lagoon interiors.

For the last decade or so Nauta has also been the go-to choice for many superyachts, especially those from Baltic Yachts and Southern Wind. The latter and Nautor's Swan

A decade on and still the ultimate trendsetting daysailer: the B42 by Brenta



share a distinctly Italian flavour as both are owned and increasingly managed by Italians and both use Italian-designed interiors.

With regard to Swan, much of the importance it places on tasteful yet contemporary interiors comes directly from CEO Leonardo Ferragamo. Translating his thoughts on style, taste and tradition into real concepts is done by Genoa-based Misa Poggi, a designer in luxury goods, housing and fashion as well as yachts.

Even the latest ClubSwan yachts, including the 50 and 125, which are full pre-preg carbon race yachts, still have a strong focus on styling. These types of lightweight yet visually appealing interiors, which typically use wafer thin veneers over carbon structures, was again something mastered by Wally to help ensure its yachts have a second life – that they can be used for cruising too and have a strong resale value.

Pace to match prestige

But it's not all about the looks. Today's fast cruising Med designs need to offer a certain amount of pace and pleasure on the helm to suit their go-faster looks. Many have lightweight composite hulls or the yards offer performance versions that are lighter, deeper and stiffer than the standard yacht. Mylius and Vismara build full carbon boats, their hulls and decks produced by Rega Yacht in Poland, before they are transported to Italy for fit-out.

The need for speed is one reason yards also look to raceboat designers to help conceive the lines of their latest fast cruisers. Both Giovanni Ceccarelli and Roberto Biscontini have had success working for America's Cup syndicates and have made the transition to production yachts.

Maurizio Cossutti meanwhile made his name with one-off ORC racing yachts and in recent years has drawn production designs for Italia Yachts, Salona, and latterly for More, Bavaria and Vismara.

And the yards themselves, certainly those that have been active for over two decades, mostly come from racer-cruiser backgrounds, so it is telling to see all now targeting the fast cruiser sector.

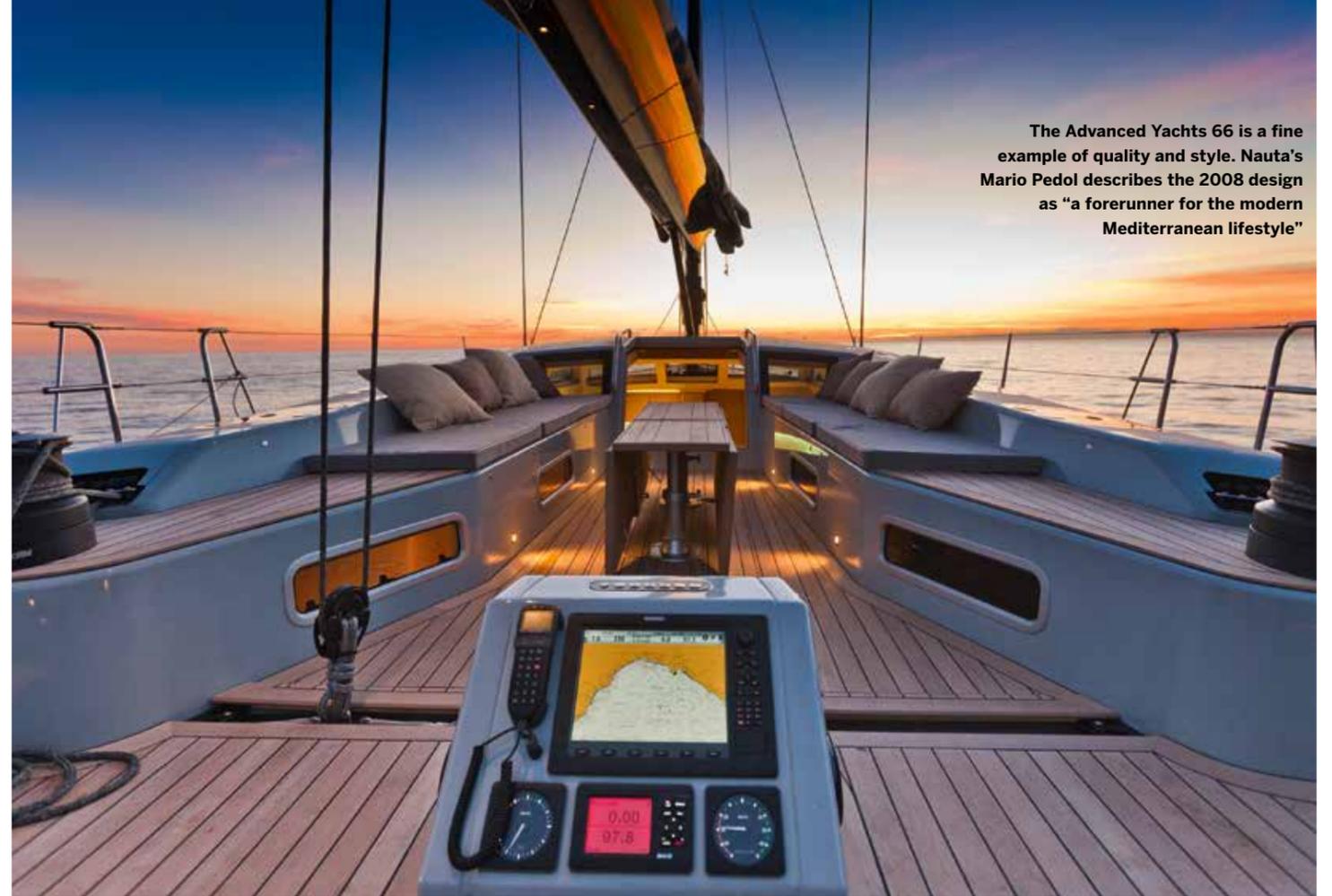
One brand that has proved particularly successful at doing this over a long period in the custom sector is Vismara. Alessandro Vismara's Viareggio yard, known for its avant-garde style, is just about to launch the radical new V69 Nacira – and has a V68 and V70 in build – all by different leading edge raceboat designers, Guillaume Verdier, Mark Mills and Maurizio Cossutti.

Even if some of its yachts have proved to be ahead of their time, Vismara shows that style has staying power. The Italians are adept at finding trends, reinventing styles and refining design.

"The boost of yachting created by Wally on one side and the America's Cup at the end of the 1990s/early 2000 has allowed a shift in modern sailing," thinks Beneteau's Gianguido Girotti. "So probably today the pure executions of the Italian design are very strong and tangible but the origins are a lot earlier and, as rough diamonds, they have been refined for today's world."

So while Italian style is nothing new, it is certainly something that has come of age in the world of contemporary large cruising yachts. ■

Carlo Borlenghi



The Advanced Yachts 66 is a fine example of quality and style. Nauta's Mario Pedol describes the 2008 design as "a forerunner for the modern Mediterranean lifestyle"



Left: Verdier V69 Nacira is the latest raceboat-inspired hull in build at custom yard Vismara. Below left: the SW96 Sorceress, an elegant example of Southern Wind's fast cruisers with Nauta styling. Below: having dominated three decades of super-sized yachts, Perini Navi's designs are becoming more performance-orientated

Carlo Baroncini Photography

