



BY MICHAEL PETERS

SIGHTLINES

Star Architecture Is Born

WHAT WERE YOU THINKING, SIR NORMAN?



The 135-foot *Ocean Emerald* pushes the naval-architecture envelope. Got a comment for Michael? Give him a shout at inbox@pmymag.com.

With the recent arrival of the world's top 100 yachts issues from many of the major yachting magazines, I was struck by the cover of one magazine that featured the Michael Leach-designed 312-foot *Palladium*. Like a fantastic machine straight out of a Jules Verne novel, it looks as if it was attacked by a giant octopus and the octopus won.

The design world has entered an over-the-top period and it has come to roost among yachts. Long the forgotten stepchild of the design world, yachts once took a distant place behind the epitome of design practiced in architectural and automotive fields. In the last ten years this has all changed, however. Superyachts arrived and, with super rich clients and super big egos, came an opportunity to make super big design statements. Architects and car designers wanted in on the party.

I blame the architect Frank Gehry for most of this. Ever since the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao was unveiled in 1997 in Bilbao, Spain, the design world has been trying to catch up and outdo this masterpiece of free-form titanium. The Guggenheim put Bilbao on the map and the world took notice. Now London has its Gherkin, Milwaukee its Art Museum, Los Angeles its Disney Concert Hall, Barcelona its Torre Agbar, and Dubai its Burj Khalifa. These days you really do not live in a major world city if you cannot boast a Frank Gehry, Santiago Calatrava, Sir Norman Foster, Zaha Hadid, or Renzo Piano architectural centerpiece. An

Eiffel Tower for everyone. Star architecture has been born.

But what to do if you don't own a city? You are just a poor billionaire, perhaps without a country to call your own. Maybe you are famous only for algorithms, or making money disappear, but otherwise unknown to the world. You have unlimited resources, but are a little insecure, so you want to get yourself some respect. What to do? Make a huge statement that only you can make: build a superyacht. No run of the mill superyacht, but something really special that will get you noticed wherever you go, even if you are moored alongside your rival's 500-foot yacht. First you will need a good designer, but not just an ordinary yacht designer, certainly not one mired in tradition or limited by experience. You need a star architect.

Now that yachts have hit prime time and reached their deserving place on the food chain of design, there are more than a few of these architects willing to flex their superior design muscles and take a shot at superyachts. Sir Norman Foster, Great Britain's most celebrated architect, has designed the rather esoteric, paramilitary looking 175-foot *Izanami* and the more recently aesthetically challenged 135-foot *Ocean Emerald*. What were you thinking Sir Norman? The spectacular \$300 million, 390-foot *A* was designed by the world's leading industrial designer, Philippe Starck, who has famously claimed the design took him less than an hour. Frankly, I believe him, because I have one of his toilets and it looks just like the yacht. Adding to *A*'s uniqueness is an entirely new hull form developed just to accommodate Starck's aesthetic, which sports a dreadnaught bow, abandoned a century ago for its tendency to run more like a submarine. Maybe that's how they fill the foredeck swimming pool. How practical.

Automotive designers Pininfarina and BMW Designworks have joined the fray, as will more architects. Just as boats present the last bastion of escape and adventure, they also represent a world stage on which to show off. While less functional or seaworthy, that really is not the point. The point is to be as bold as possible, to put yourself on the map.

Personally, I kind of like these yachts. I don't mistake them as good design; sometimes far from it. But I can't wait to see what's coming next while I sit on the sidelines. Perhaps we will see a 500-foot yacht with a titanium superstructure based on a crumpled paper design. Where are you Frank Gehry? I just hope you can see out of it and it doesn't tip over. But I am just being practical. □

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