

Black Pearl



words: Ivor Wilkins
photography: courtesy of LOMOcean Design

AN UNCONVENTIONAL PROCESS INVOLVED A NUMBER OF NEW ZEALAND YARDS POOLING THEIR SKILLS FROM DISPARATE LOCATIONS. LUCKILY, THE TEAMS INVOLVED ARE NO STRANGERS TO COMPLICATED PROJECTS

By the time *Black Pearl* was completed and launched this year, the 31.6 metre motor yacht had already notched up a quite adventurous mileage by land and by sea. Built under an unconventional 'virtual yard' model, the construction of the long-range passagemaker went through a series of disparate New Zealand contractors at widespread locations before being handed over to its Australian owner.

The project was choreographed by Diverse Projects, run by partners John Vitali and Lars Bjorklund, who co-ordinated a team of half a dozen main contractors throughout the two-year process. This included commissioning the design from Craig Loomes and Andre Moltschanivskyj of LOMOcean and then managing the build all the way through to launching and commissioning.

Construction began in the landlocked city of Palmerston North, in the lower North Island, where the aluminium hull and superstructure were

fabricated by Profab Central Engineering, which also installed the engines, gensets and most of the pipework.

The hull and superstructure were then separately trucked 180 kilometres by road to Napier, on the east coast, where they were joined. Then, a 600 nautical mile tow to Whangarei, in the upper North Island, where the yacht was completed, before a 100 nautical mile passage to Auckland for the formal christening.

Compared with the more conventional format of start-to-finish construction in a single yard, this was a peripatetic gestation that might not appeal to all owners. But Vitali and Bjorklund, both of whom have extensive hands-on superyacht experience, have done it all before and say their model has considerable benefits for owners. 'We run a totally transparent operation,' Vitali explains. 'We put together a team of five or six contractors who are highly skilled in their particular fields. We are fee-based, so there are absolutely no hidden costs. The owner sees

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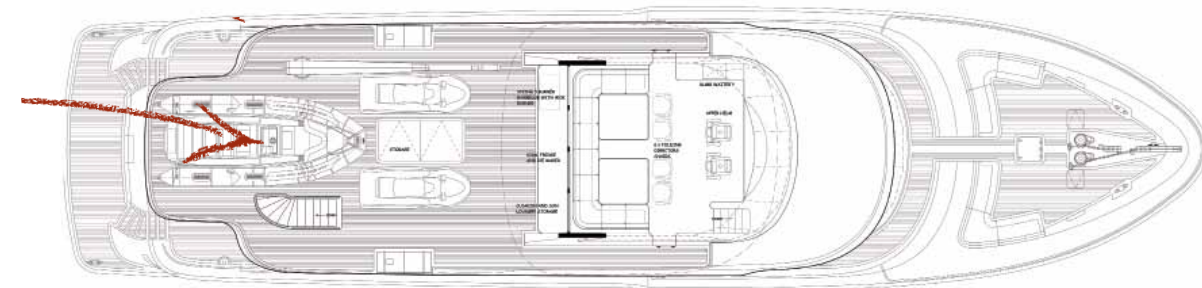


On *Black Pearl*, construction techniques focused on fully fairing the bottom, working on the shape and finishing of all appendages to reduce drag. Other efficiency-improving measures included ensuring that all anodes were recessed to lie flush with hull





With the composite tender cradle stowed away, a golf driving range can be set up to keep the swing well practised



every invoice throughout the process. The budgets are set and updated every two to four weeks. And the owner owns the asset all the way through. He runs no risk of his asset getting caught up in a yard going bankrupt halfway through.'

This doesn't happen often, but there have been occasions of owners having to buy shipyards in order to see their project through to completion, or risk losing everything in the financial morass of a yard closure. In fact, there was a sense of relief in the *Black Pearl* construction when one of the yards that had bid on doing the build went out of business. *Black Pearl* happened to be on the premises, but only as a tenant renting shed space. In the event, the boat did not even have to vacate its space, as new owners Oceania Marine renewed the tenancy and undertook the fairing and painting contract.

It may not be a model for everybody, but Michael Buxton, Australian chairman of the New Zealand company that commissioned the build, was quite comfortable with it. 'As a property developer, this is a model I am totally familiar with,' he says. 'We sub-contract all aspects of our projects, so I know this process well. We had our captain, Paul Sewell, overseeing the build, so he was always monitoring the process to ensure we got exactly what we wanted and kept a close watch on costs. We had good accounting systems. We did go to tender with a number of yards in New Zealand, Turkey and Australia, but in the end we opted to

work with the Diverse Projects team and we are absolutely delighted with the outcome.'

Buxton is not new to boating, having owned a number of sailing yachts and having completed a number of ocean races and long offshore cruises, culminating with an extended Pacific cruise in his 24 metre pilothouse sloop, *Ke-Ama II*. He was therefore able to bring a number of sailing concepts into his company's motor yacht design brief. Philosophically, he wanted to retain a strong connection with the sea, requiring a low-profile classic design with large windows. And, most importantly, Buxton was keen to recreate the sense of a yacht pilothouse.

This led to one of the most striking aspects of the *Black Pearl* design. In Buxton's view, the almost obligatory main deck split comprising a formal dining area and lounge makes no sense. 'It is a shocker,' he says. 'I just don't see the point of it and I reckon in most boats that have this arrangement the formal dining room is hardly ever used. On our sailing yacht, we loved the pilothouse. We ate there. We played games there. When the boat was at sea, that is where we were. On *Black Pearl*, we wanted the same arrangement as we feel our clients will have a more enjoyable experience with this design feature.'

The low profile requirement did away with a flybridge. Instead, the upper deck comprises an enclosed saloon, which includes a helmstation forward and the dining area aft. The arrangement is a U-shaped settee



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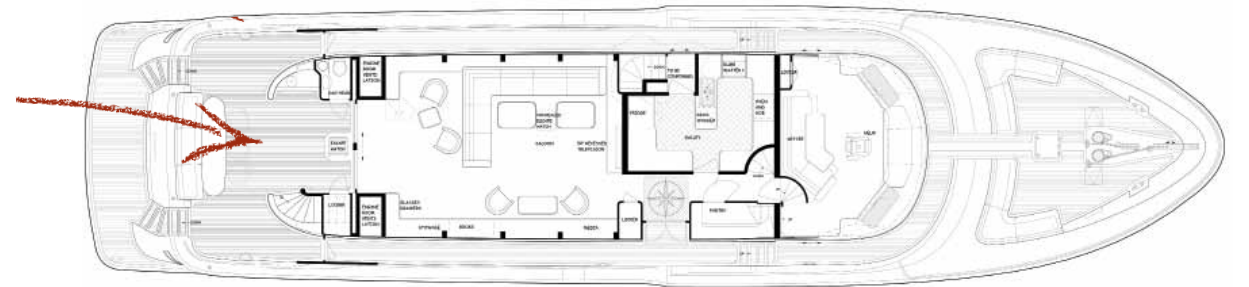


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BLACK PEARL *Diverse Projects*

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| LOA 31.64m LWL 28.48m Beam 7.83m Draught 1.98m Displacement 165 tonnes Engines 2 x 600hp 1800rpm Caterpillar C-18 A-Cert A Rated Speed (max/cruise) 14 knots/13 knots | Range 2,600nm at 13 knots 4,000nm at 10 knots 10% reserve fuel Thrusters Hydraulic Bow - Trac 16". Stern - Lewmar 300 Swing Retractable Stern Generators 2 x 51kW Cat C4.4 Fuel capacity 27,300 litre | Freshwater capacity 6,000 litre Owner and guests 10 Crew 5 Tenders 1 x 5.8m RIB Construction aluminium Classification GL # 100 A5 Motor Yacht MC | Naval architect LOMOcean Design Exterior styling LOMOcean Design Interior design Chris Connell Sales broker Diverse Projects Auckland, New Zealand. tel: +64 9 358 5331 email: info@diverseprojects.com | web: www.diverseprojects.com Builder/year Diverse Projects & Profab Central Engineering / 2011 Palmerston North, New Zealand. tel: +06 354 9595 email: info@profabengineering.co.nz |
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In the absence of a formal dining area, guests can dine at an aft deck table, accessed via two large glass doors.



around two square tables that can be joined with an infill. Additional freestanding chairs would provide dining space for 14. A dumbwaiter conveys food and dishes from the galley directly below. To emphasise the outdoor connection, the large aft-facing window and the two rearmost side windows of the upper saloon lower at the push of a button to allow the breeze to waft through.

The extensive aft deck on this level carries a six metre Explorer RIB jet tender, two jet-skis and two 16-man life rafts, plus a large composite storage box. Launching and retrieving the tender and skis is done with a 3,000 pound Nautical Structures crane. Once the tender is launched, the deck provides a large sun deck, with a line of cabinets along the forward bulkhead concealing a stainless steel custom barbecue, wok burner, ice maker, fridge and freezer.

Down a level, the main saloon is just that: an expansive, inviting room uncompromised by the standard requirement to share the space with a seldom-used dining area. Four enormous windows on either side open up terrific views, while the internal furniture has been kept low to maximise this connection with the great outdoors. The window sills, which normally would be about 90cm high are just over 70cm in this case, with the furniture and joinery heights aligning all the way around.

Although this is a large space, the furniture is arranged to create distinct zones. The lounge takes the lion's share, but there is also a more intimate seating space, a study area and a card table. A super-thin 55-inch 3D television is concealed in a forward cabinet. Its choice represented an ever more familiar conundrum. 'Every week, there seemed to be a new model on the market with better features than last week's version,' says a bemused Vitali. 'It got to the point where we just had to draw the line and make a decision.' Forward of the saloon is the bridge, which includes a sofa, where guests can watch the action, or which can convert into a watch berth at night.

As with many new builds, *Black Pearl* grew from its original concept during the design process. 'The design started at about 27 metres,' says Buxton, 'and then gradually crept up to 31.6 metres. That was about as

much as we could do with a crew of just three or four. We were very clear that we did not want more than three or four crew.' In the event, they have ended up with four and a half, because their captain, Paul Sewell and his wife, Linda Brown, now have a baby boy, who will sign on as part of the crew – complete with his own compact cabin.

The accommodation split between guests and crew is another unusual feature, in that the crew accommodation on the lower deck is situated aft of the guest quarters. The placing of the owner's suite is also unconventional, as it spans the full width of the boat amidships, just ahead of the crew accommodation and aft of the other guest areas. This is a bright, spacious suite, with a very generous en suite on the port side and large in-hull windows on the starboard side. Behind the centreline kingsize bed is a spacious walk-in wardrobe and office.

Forward of the owner's suite and up a half flight of stairs is a central companionway with two mirror-image guest suites on either side. Both can convert as double suites or twins. The companionway culminates forward with a large bunkroom. All the guest suites have en suites and full access to the iPod-compatible Niles entertainment system, including satellite television.

Interior design was by Chris Connell, an award-winning Melbourne designer who has done notable work in the residential, hospitality and commercial sectors. *Black Pearl* was his first boat interior, but he has retained his trademark simplicity of form and colour. Buxton describes the look as 'Giorgio Armani'. Using a palette of soft greys and whites, the lines are spare and angular for a contemporary, cool look.

The interior fit-out was completed by Whangarei-based Specialist Marine Interiors and includes some intriguing detailing, particularly in the treatment of the curved recessed handrails on the stairways – which look stunning at night, highlighted by concealed lighting.

The choice of LOMOcean to handle the naval architecture was fortuitous. Both Loomes and Moltschanivskyj have yachting backgrounds, but are probably better known for a series of highly innovative motor yacht projects. These include wave-piercing trimarans,

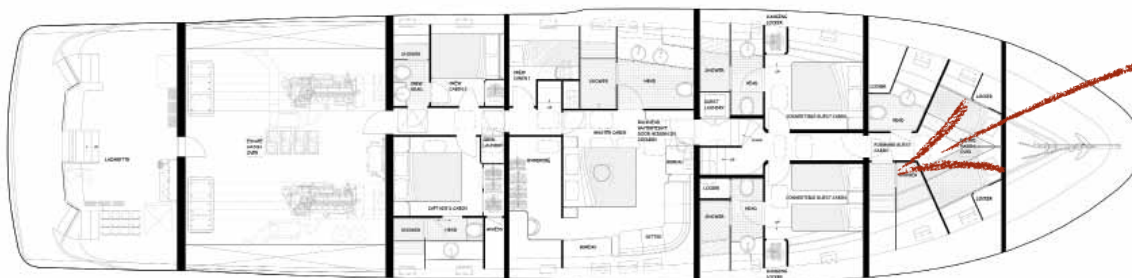


Designer Chris Connell's first yacht interior uses beige and light wood, picked out with muted orange. The master cabin (left and en suite, right) is simply furnished, in keeping with the other suites





Black Pearl's design is geared towards efficiency. With a fuel load of 28,500 litres, the requirement for transoceanic range at a cruise speed of 10 to 11 knots can be easily achieved



The large en suite bunk room in the bow, comprising four bunks, is ideal for children to sleep in

high-speed military vessels, a 31 metre catamaran with 537 square metre solar panel array currently attempting the first solar-powered circumnavigation of the world (see *PlanetSolar*, page 98), and the futuristic *Earthrace*. Skipped by New Zealander Pete Bethune, *Earthrace* smashed the UIM powered circumnavigation record by 13 days before coming to an unfortunate end in Antarctica where it was rammed by a Japanese whaleship during an anti-whaling protest.

Although their preferred medium is advanced composite construction, the LOMOcean team are also well versed in aluminium, as selected for *Black Pearl*. 'We have done so many innovative boats that it was fun for us to do something more conventional like this,' says Moltschaniwskyj, who describes the look as a 'modern classic'.

Partly because of their yachting background, but also because of a concern for a more sustainable future, the studio has devoted a great deal of attention to maximising efficiency across all its projects. Achieving high performance from low horsepower is what they are about and similar efforts went into the *Black Pearl*.

'We are totally focused on efficiency,' says Loomes. 'Perhaps coming from a sailing background means we never throw away any energy. Whereas some motor yacht projects simply add horsepower, we prefer to concentrate on hull shapes and detailing to achieve the most slippery shapes possible. In design terms, this involves optimising the prismatic coefficient, something sailboat designers work on a lot. It is all about modelling the underwater form to carry the displacement and distribute the volume to arrive at the most efficient shape. In efficiency terms,

prismatic coefficient is king. Then it is a question of large diameter propellers turning slowly and ensuring that great attention is paid to detailing the underwater surfaces.'

The effort paid off. 'A typical 30 metre motor yacht would require twin 1,000hp engines to achieve 14-knot performance,' says Moltschaniwskyj. 'We are doing that with twin 600hp engines (Caterpillar C18) that are A-rated, so they are not even using their full power potential. It is logical that if you are only using about 65 per cent of the power to achieve the same performance, you are only using about 65 per cent of the fuel.'

Because so many of their projects are highly specialised, LOMOcean is used to fully integrating every aspect of their projects from the first brief to the final details like graphics and colours. Under the Diverse Projects model, this was a more arm's-length affair, largely confined to the naval architecture, internal space planning and exterior styling. 'The result has been outstanding,' says Loomes. 'It has definitely exceeded our expectations.'

With a name like *Black Pearl*, expectations inevitably turn to Johnny Depp's extravagant piratical exploits as portrayed by Hollywood in *Pirates of the Caribbean*. In fact, the name relates just as much to a Tahitian black pearl Buxton bought for his wife, Janet. But, in the on board artworks there are nods to the pirate theme as well.

That duality is appropriate. In reality, Diverse Projects has skilfully orchestrated an unconventional build process with some unusual features to arrive at a thoroughly sensible and strikingly handsome motor yacht. Captain Jack Sparrow himself would no doubt thoroughly approve.

