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Depicted image is her sister ship Home

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The Oyster Yachts Dream Team

BY LAURA ROSE NICHOLLS

Rob Humphreys and Richard Hadida are two gentlemen from completely different walks of life, but they both share an incredible passion for the British sailing yacht brand, Oyster Yachts. For nearly 24 years, Rob Humphreys has helped perfect the Oyster brand through his articulate design work and naval architecture expertise. As an Oyster yacht enthusiast, Richard Hadida was familiar with Rob's creations, and when he heard the news that Oyster was in administration last year he made the quick move to help out and became the company owner and CEO. In doing so, he has moved on from his days as a gaming software entrepreneur and is boosting business for Oyster Yachts, preserving the work of friend and business associate, Rob Humphreys.

With 72 Oyster yachts having circumnavigated the world, there will soon be another 13 to add to the list once the current Oyster World Rally finishes in Antigua in April. It is evident that business is booming for Oyster, who pride themselves on having created an 'Oyster family' of owners and sailing enthusiasts. With Rob and Richard an instrumental part of that family, it was high time SuperYacht Times sat down with the two of them to talk past, present and future.



Rob Humphreys Founder of Humphreys Yacht Design

Do you find anything challenging about designing?

Yeah, it's a bitch of a job! But when it's not you feel very lucky to be doing something you really love doing. It's still a job with deadlines and hard work, but you are making people's passions come alive, so it's a very privileged thing to be doing.

Do you think there's an added skillset that comes with sailing that people want?

At Oyster recently, we had some powerboat owners converting to an Oyster. You know, the luxury level is arguably superior. It comes with more interest really, more awareness of the fuel burn and responsibilities. The range you have with a sailboat is infinite, whereas even super long range powerboats are still limited and you still have to plan where you are going to get fuel from. With sailing boats - the world is literally your oyster.

We did a fleet of Global Challenge Boats and the statistic was that the fleet did an aggregate of one million sea miles and 300,000 of those miles were in the Southern Ocean going the wrong way! That is pretty much without a drop of fuel, just powered by the generators.

What is it that you think is so special about having a good working relationship and having various collaborations in the industry?

It's an advantage I think. It works when there's never a presumption or an obligation, and there is an understanding of one another and the brand. The brand is important, and it is important to keep building the identity.

What is it like working on a custom project?

When working on a custom project you're dealing very specifically with an owner's private dream, and you try to fulfil that. But with an Oyster, for example, it's a more generic profile that has the blue water sailing capabilities. There are a lot of people that have created the Oyster family with very similar requirements such as safety, comfort, luxury, reliability and style. But things can change on an Oyster if you want to request easy access to the water, for example.

When project managers are drawing up a contract and they are told to build it to Oyster standards - that says it all really.

Ermis 2 was a full-custom project. What was the brief for that, and what did you learn?

Sea-keeping, sea-kindliness were the most important drivers. So we ended up with a 37.8-metre, 55 knot boat and one of the



Oyster 565

JOE MCCARTHY

fastest superyachts with a gas turbine engine. The owner is somebody who is time-poor, a very busy man who wanted to go places fast and that was the reason for the speed. But she was built with efficiency in mind rather than top speed, so even with big motors and jets it was a case of even at half throttle, she's simply more fuel efficient than the equivalent size in a normal production Princess or Sunseeker, for example.

I learnt a lot about the powerboat sector! Our experience designing racing sailboats helped because we knew the nuances of hull-shape, sea-kindliness and things. So it made *Ermis 2* even more interesting.

Do you think there's room in the market for new brands coming forward?

Yes! New brands come in and old brands mustn't be complacent. After a time brands can still move forward and still maintain the same ownership profile, even if demographically it is getting younger. You can't sit back and say "this boat's absolutely fine" and never learn to change it because is everything is moving forward!



Richard Hadida CEO of Oyster Yachts

What's your opinion on a good working relationship and a good collaboration?

I think it's when everyone who's at the party adds to the party. The Oyster 675 and all of the range has been designed by Rob Humphreys and so there is consistency and beauty which makes the Oyster yacht iconic. It clearly has the Oyster DNA in every part of the boat, and that's thanks to of years of working with Rob. Oyster is about being a timeless classic and Rob understands that.

The market for sailing yachts has been under pressure, but it seems that it is slowly gaining traction again. What is your view on this?

The sailing market is five per cent of the motor market and without a doubt, the market shares are increasing. Why is that happening? Maybe it's because people want more adventure in their world and they understand that sailing offers them that adventure! I think that the other reason is that as young

people come through, they have been more educated on the environment. This form of transport is five thousand years old and is the most natural form of transport on the planet. You put nothing back into the environment when you sail.

Do you think there is a typical Oyster owner?

We had a new customer recently who is 40 years old, and so is his wife. His kids are seven and eight years old and they are going to buy an Oyster to go around the world for two years with their kids and put a teacher on board. But we are getting more interest from younger people so I think that, as you'd expect with the evolution of any brand, we are concentrating on reaching out to younger people, which is very exciting.

Has manufacturing back in the UK been a success?

It started just under a year ago and we've done a hell of a lot. We've really got the business back in ship shape and now it's more about driving the sales, furthering the brand, getting the message to the world that we're back in business and that we happen to have the best yachts in the world, which is a lot of fun.

Do you have a five-year plan? Where do you see the brand in five years?

I am delighted with the new board and in five years we'll be flying! The turnaround takes two years and so that's a lot of investment going over those two years and I knew that when I bought the business and so we are absolutely ahead of target.

Is Oyster working on anything new at the moment?

Yes, we've got the 565 and 595 which are brand new boats designed for sailors and absolutely state of the art in every respect. The ethos and the DNA of the brand are in every corner. We've also got the 1125 which is a big crew boat coming out in March - it is the superyacht of superyachts.

Rob and I have been working on a 4XX project for the last nine or 10 days, so that's progressing very nicely, but it's still top secret so we can't talk. Watch this space!

Do you own your own boat?

I am lucky enough to own the best superyacht in the world. It is the Oyster 885 which is an entry level superyacht series, and she does everything that any superyacht could do but better. She's perfect. My close friend, the former motorsports boss, Eddie Jordan, has done nearly 10 transatlantic navigations and I've just sent her back to Southampton for a refit. I'm putting some of the coolest technology onboard and then she'll get relaunched in March and go down to Monaco. ♦