

ASSERTIVE GEOMETRY,
DEFINED HORIZONTALS
AND CRISP WHITE AND
FRESH LIME ACCENTS
STAND UP TO THE STEELY
GAZE OF CANOVA'S
ARROGANT YOUNG
NAPOLEON DEPICTED ON
A MOSAIC MURAL AT THE
FORWARD END OF THE
MAIN DECK SALOON

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CHOOO

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FRESH COLOURS, MODERN LINES AND A RARE QUALITY OF LIGHTNESS



NOTHING DISTURBS THE EYE IN THAT LONG GALLERY ... UNLESS IT IS THE UNCOMPROMISING STARE EMANATING FROM THE MARBLE EYES OF THE EMPEROR

When Viareggio-based architect Angelo Neri was asked by the president of Versilcraft to help create the interior of his new flagship, the suggestion was not taken too seriously.



Laura Neri

Neri was not, after all, in that charmed and charming circle of established yacht interior designers, being more at home in the world of private houses and prestigious hotels. Initially Neri dismissed the suggestion of his friend Andrea Pezzini and went back to work. 'The yachting world had been closed to me until that day,' says Neri. 'Until that time my team had only dealt with construction projects in a variety of different fields.' In fact, Neri's team had impeccable credentials having been responsible for the restoration of several major historical landmarks such as the Hotel Principe di Piemonte in Viareggio,

as well as a rich variety of civil and industrial buildings. This had not gone unnoticed by Pezzini. 'When I realised that Andrea was being serious, I started work straight away on the interior design together with my colleagues.'

The 36.25 metre Planet 120S, named *Choo Choo*, was an important milestone for Versilcraft and not a project to be taken lightly. Commissioned by a client from Hong Kong with strict criteria, among which was a brief to keep the interior light and contemporary, she was in all other respects the designer's dream boat: a blank canvas. What the owner definitely didn't want was the slightest hint of anything classic or traditional, dripping in dark mahogany or teak. Enter Signor Neri.

Choo Choo is a pocket superyacht with the notable addition of a hard top – an opportunity that Neri was to seize gleefully. This also means that, by enveloping the flying bridge, the raised pilothouse could be omitted, while the extra 3 metres of hull length dramatically increased the guest accommodation. The blank canvas was about to be drawn on. 'Having been born by the sea, I have always been fascinated by all things maritime,' Neri says. What he clearly did not have were preconceived notions of what the interior of a large yacht should look like. Freed of those restraints, he could – within the boundaries of practicality and safety – do pretty much whatever he liked.

SEVENTEEN METRES OF SALOON STRETCH ACROSS THE MAIN DECK, UNIMPEDED BY AN ALMOST IMPERCEPTIBLE GLASS STAIRCASE, WHILE ORANGE, LIME, CHOCOLATE AND CREAM ADD DELICIOUS DEPTH TO NERI'S LIGHT, FRESH DESIGN

What strikes you first on entering the saloon is its length – a 17 metre long, wide, open-plan corridor, almost entirely devoid of bulkheads, that leads effortlessly from the informal seating area aft, with freestanding furniture by companies such as Minotti and Zanotta, via a lime green-themed bar area to the cosy dining room. It is the seventies with a contemporary twist – the lime greens and oranges working in vivid harmony with the chocolate browns of the leather armchairs and ottomans, and the cream sofas. Reminiscent, maybe, of the tones of that decade, the effect is totally fresh. 'We are acutely aware that all our projects are contemporary and modern,' says Neri. 'Therefore we have taken care to use



materials, colours and forms that belong to the year 2006.' Correct lighting combined with the use of the right colours were essential to ensure the overall concept of 'lightness' that Neri holds dear. 'Italo Calvino in his book *American Lessons* described this concept as a philosophical one,' says Neri. 'But I have found and applied this concept in my field as architect to enhance my designs.' Lightness, he believes, prevents any flattening or reducing of space and has been used to good effect for nearly a millennium.

The main deck has a lowish ceiling, and so careful design was critical in retaining this feeling of space and openness in the saloon, which is the centrepiece of the whole concept. The space is unified by its light ash laminate floor, uniform pear wood panelling with aluminium-coloured wooden bandings, and above all minimal lateral intrusion. Although limited in height for much of its length from the aft deck doors, the saloon ceiling soars to 4.5 metres where her predecessors had a raised pilothouse. And looming ever closer as you proceed towards your place at the dinner table is the face of a young Napoleon, after the bust by Canova, picked out in Bisazza mosaic on the forward bulkhead – as fascinating, if slightly disconcerting, a dinner guest for those sitting around the table as they could wish for.

The scarcely intrusive staircase to starboard – a green-tinted, toughened glass affair held together by a minimal amount of stainless steel – leads to the upper saloon, a superbly light, refreshing area, lime and cream-themed, contiguous with the

bridge, and with 360-degree views. This all accords perfectly with Neri's theory of functionality. Certainly the practicality of an open-plan saloon layout such as this makes for easier cleaning and stowing. 'When I design I become immersed in the project and envisage the living areas,' he says. 'Yachts must be both pleasing to the eye and also practical.'

Below deck the Neri effect is just as marked. Connected by a central corridor are the owner's and guest cabins, the former full beam, with views either side through those distinctive lip-shaped windows. Here there is no restriction on headroom, which is around 2.2 metres throughout, and it has allowed Neri to indulge in a little more intimacy. The colours are muted, subtle light browns and creams with a splash of that vibrant green in the bathroom, an echo from the upper saloon but executed in Bisazza tiling.

There is an absence of designer's ego in *Choo Choo's* interior that is as refreshing as the décor itself. It is light, young and – in a word – fast, as befitting a yacht which will top out at 26 knots when the skipper eases forward all three throttles. Yet there is a tranquillity too. Nothing disturbs the eye in that long gallery as it focuses forward from aft deck to dining room, unless it is the uncompromising stare emanating from the marble eyes of the emperor.

'We are delighted that the original "joke" suggestion by Andrea turned out so magnificently,' says Neri. Judging by the crowds that lined up to get a glimpse of her at Cannes, his first yacht commission was a triumph.



JAMES TAYLOR

BRIGHT, LIGHT AND UNCLUTTERED, THE UPPER SALOON EMBODIES NERI'S DESIGN CONCEPT OF LIGHTNESS, WHICH IS CREATED WITH THE USE OF CONTEMPORARY MATERIALS, COLOURS AND FORMS

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