



Achille Salvagni's Tuhura superyacht for Oceanco. Courtesy of Achille Salvagni

Business Analysis

Luxury Yachts Are a Dream Project for Lucky Designers

For those fortunate enough to score one of these projects, further commissions and visibility often await

By Brook Mason

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When it comes to expanding their portfolios, several A-list architects and designers have turned their talented hands to designing [superyachts](#).

London-based designer [Achille Salvagni](#) is ahead of the pack when it comes to designing not only yachts but also their interiors. In a span of some 15 years, he has completed a staggering 25 yachts while working with five shipyards in Europe

(Azimut Benetti, Perini Navi, Rossinavi, Baglietto, and Oceanco). On his drawing board right now? A 475-foot mega-yacht and also a 394-foot, five-story one for the Azimut Benetti Group shipyard in Italy.

“In many ways, yachts are the ultimate dream project—from shaping the walls and ceilings in new and novel ways, to designing not simply a graceful staircase or two but practically all of the furnishings,” says Salvagni, who relies on a team of 25 architects, naval architects, and interior designers to help him.

Just as with residences, working closely with a client is a key aspect of maritime projects. In designing the sleek Aurora Longitude yacht, for instance, Salvagni included a portion of the owner’s vast art collection, ranging from an Anish Kapoor to a 19th-century French porcelain bust.

For the designer, developing that kind of rapport has led to yacht owners commissioning 12 other projects from him, including their homes. “Even when I’ve designed a smaller yacht for a first-time owner, eventually they trade up to a larger yacht,” Salvagni says, while adding that many times he is often called upon to work on the next one. “Press, exposure, and word of mouth should lead to yet even more commissions,” the designer says.



The Numptia design was conceived by Salvagni for the Rossinavi shipyard. Courtesy of Achille Salvagni

Giovanna Vitelli, who serves as the vice president of the Azimut Benetti Group, is the driving force in tapping top-tier architects and designers for nautical projects. She brought not only Salvagni on board but also the Manhattan firm [Bonetti/Kozerski Architecture](#).

“I grew up in the maritime industry and realized that recruiting architects and designers to design our yachts was critical to attracting a new and growing generation of highly sophisticated enthusiasts,” says Vitelli, speaking to AD PRO from the company’s Livorno shipyard on the coast of Tuscany.

Bonetti/Kozerski is no stranger to high-end commissions, as the firm is responsible for the recently completed 75,000-square-foot Pace Gallery and Ian Schrager’s Public Hotel in New York, among other projects. But the 133-foot Oasis was its first vessel design. “Designing the Oasis was no simple task; it rather required a multifaceted approach to inject a sense of elegance and calmness,” says partner Enrico Bonetti. “The spaces had to flow seamlessly—from the four sun-drenched decks, including one with an infinity pool, to the restrained interiors,” he adds.

Clearly, Vitelli's instincts in commissioning design talents for [Azimut Benetti Group](#) are right on target. Case in point: In less than two years, 34 of Salvagni's Azimut Grande 27-meter yachts have sold. When it comes to the [Bonetti/Kozerski yacht](#), a total of 12 have been sold.

All of those sales grant the firms even more visibility globally. "Ultimately, that will translate into securing other yacht commissions but, more importantly, ever more buildings abroad," says Bonetti, who currently is completing two hotels in Tokyo and a hotel spa in Ibiza, along with two homes in Tuscany.



Bonetti/Kozerski's Oasis 40m yacht for Azimut Benetti Group. Courtesy of Benetti

Other top-tier talents have dipped their toes into the yacht design waters. AD100 designer [Alessandra Branca](#) just completed the installation of a vessel that clocks in at 173 feet from bow to stern. In addition to four suites, there are cabins for a captain and a crew of eight. When not sailing to Europe and cruising the Mediterranean, the yacht is anchored off the Florida coast and plies the Caribbean.

As for her approach to such projects, Branca says, it's not unlike any other major commission. "Life on the sea is no different than life on land: It is a place to be with people you love and it must be comfortable no matter what you are doing, whether having drinks in good company or simply watching the sunset."

Branca knows full well that yacht owners entertain at the drop of a hat. And whether anchored in luxury ports such as Monte Carlo or sailing the open seas, guests are practically always on board. Of course, countless designers have picked up commissions while nibbling hors d'oeuvres at clients' cocktail parties.

At the end of the day, securing a yacht commission is a highly effective way for designers to up their cachet to an entire new category of clients globally, while potentially scoring some major residential projects along the way.