

**SMOOTH SAILING**

Left: the superyacht designers Andrew Winch, Terence Disdale and Tim Heywood. Right: Madame Gu, by Winch Design



SUPERMEN

The three British designers responsible for building the biggest yachts on Earth. By *Stewart Campbell*

IN THE YACHTING capitals of Monaco, Gustavia and Fort Lauderdale, they're the biggest names in design, responsible for individual commissions frequently running into the hundreds of millions, and collectively, over the years, tens of billions. They're three British grandees who have dominated their profession for decades and whose numbers can be found in the phones of the world's wealthiest men and women.

You have heard of Giorgio Armani, Renzo Piano and Zaha Hadid, but you may never have heard of Andrew Winch, Tim Heywood and Terence Disdale, the brightest stars in the world of superyacht design, whose names are associated with vessels such as *Eclipse*, *Dilbar* and *Pelorus*, and who are HNWI in their own right. Although they have competed for the biggest projects in superyachting, losing to and winning over each other countless times, their friendship, now nearly half a century old, is as strong as ever.

Their lives today are a long way from their apprenticeships in the studio of Jon Bannenberg, the originator of superyacht styling. Before him

there was no such job as "superyacht designer"; he birthed the scene in the 1960s and incubated these three extraordinary talents. Disdale, 72, was the first to join the studio, in 1967, and the first to leave to go it alone. "I was only 20 years old, but had already served five years in the shop-fitting industry as a design draughtsman," he recalls. "Jon never asked how old I was – he was interested only in my drawing skills and hired me on the spot after I gatecrashed his studio looking for a job."

Then, there were a few hundred superyachts cruising the world's oceans; today there are more than 10,000 – explosive growth that has buoyed the careers of hundreds of designers, but none more so than these three. Their approaches are radically different. Heywood, 69, works alone, designing exteriors; Disdale commands a design team of about 15 and works on exteriors and interiors; Winch's studio, Winch Design, employs 110 people and styles everything from private jets and helicopters to properties and yachts.

The yacht they credit for lighting the touchpaper was the 86m *Nabila*, which at the time

of its launch in 1980 was one of the world's biggest boats. It was commissioned by the famously extravagant Saudi arms dealer Adnan Khashoggi and named for his daughter. When he ran into money problems in the late 1980s he sold it to the Sultan of Brunei, who in turn sold it to Donald Trump. He was forced to sell it in the 1990s to its present owner, Prince Al-Waleed bin Talal, when the Trump Taj Mahal casino in Atlantic City, New Jersey, fell into bankruptcy.

Khashoggi chose Bannenberg's studio to design the yacht, and the bulk of the work fell to Heywood to define the lines of the groundbreaking project.

"It was like a city. It was unheard of at the time to build a boat this big," Heywood says. "That project really kickstarted the superyacht business and it got a lot of other people thinking about building boats that size. It laid a foundation."

Heywood would go on to design boats much bigger than 86m – to date, the largest bearing his signature (literally, his name is illuminated on its side) is the 147m *Topaz*. Disdale designed the interior and exterior of the 162m *Eclipse* for



“One client asked for a yacht that could break the transatlantic record”

Roman Abramovich, and Winch's company styled the interior of the 156m *Dilbar*, the largest superyacht in the world in terms of gross tonnage (a 25m swimming pool included).

Each of them is plugged firmly into the billionaire class, which has blessed them with an unrivalled armoury of anecdotes – many, sadly, unprintable. Winch, whose present projects include a private Boeing 787 Dreamliner, recalls an American walking into his office wearing a stetson and carrying a cowhide briefcase, and proclaiming that he wanted to build a superyacht that could go so fast it would take the transatlantic record. The client was Tom Gentry and the yacht, *Gentry Eagle*, eventually crossed the Atlantic in record time, but only once it was rebuilt after accidentally being driven up a beach at 40 knots.

Disdale tells a story of one owner who asked him to secure two bottles of champagne for his yacht's launch – one for the wife to smash on the bow and one for the mistress. And if you ever meet Heywood, ask him to tell you about the client who tasked him with designing a garage on his superyacht that could house a custom-made six-wheel Range Rover.

Is there a sense of frustration that there isn't broader acclaim for the efforts of yacht designers? If so, it's hard to tell. Winch, the youngest of the three at 62, recalls that he and Bannenberg used to laugh that the outside world always looked at anyone who worked in yachting as the “gin and tonic brigade”. “You know, yacht clubs where everyone wears a blue blazer and a peaked cap and goes, ‘Yo, ho, ho,’” he says. “But go to Holland, and yacht design and yacht building are terribly respected;



TOP DECKS

Top left: the interior of *Here Comes the Sun*, by Winch Design, which was also behind the interior of *Al Mirqab*, top right. Tim Heywood designed their exteriors. Above: Terence Disdale's work

they are professions more respected than being a doctor or a dentist.” Superyacht designers deserve pedestals – after all, they're asked to imagine into reality totally bespoke and deeply personal objects for the world's most demanding clients, and make them function in the harshest environments imaginable. Name a car designer who could say the same.

It's a little easier to swallow when you know how big the design commissions are, but these three are far too discreet to reveal precise figures. Let's just say they aren't struggling, and each fully enjoys his success. When he's not fishing from his Thameside home in Richmond, Disdale is driving one of his cars – either a 1972 V12 Jaguar E-Type, a 1951 Jaguar XK120, an Aston Martin DB5 from 1965 or a Range Rover Sport “for getting around”. Heywood, who lives in a castle, and Winch, who has a farm in Surrey, love their Bentleys and Land Rover Defenders, although Winch gets most excited about a John Deere tractor he recently acquired – and the 20m yacht he keeps in the Med.

Crucially, they have not lost their passion for yacht design, and the commissions keep coming, despite a hungry chasing pack eager to wrest some work away. What was once a fairly open field has become crowded as more and more talented young designers enter the market, the fourth and fifth generations of a discipline born in Bannenberg's Chelsea studio.

But these three don't look too worried – they know that having a superyacht designed by Tim Heywood, Andrew Winch or Terry Disdale is still something to boast about in the world's fanciest yacht clubs.