

Maiden voyages

Designing yachts is not an easy profession to crack, as these celebrated names attest. By *Claire Wrathall*

Peder Eidsgaard realised at an early age that he wanted to design yachts. As a child in Norway, he'd spend two months every summer messing about on the water – “Boats were really my passion” – but in 1984, aged 12, he chanced upon a magazine article about the visionary designer Jon Bannenberg, the man who more or less invented the superyacht, and had an epiphany. “I knew immediately that it was what I wanted to do,” he says. After taking a degree in transportation design at the US ArtCenter College of Design's Swiss campus at La Tour-de-Peilz, near Vevey, he moved to London, where he spent nine years working for the distinguished British yacht designer Andrew Winch, himself a protégé of Bannenberg's. By 2005, however, Eidsgaard was ready to go it alone, and the company he co-founded, **Harrison Eidsgaard**, was born.

If his career trajectory is a logical one, his Polish wife and business partner Ewa Tasiorek Eidsgaard's is unusual. She was working for Goldman Sachs when they met, rising to become a vice-president specialising in high-yield bonds. “She'd always been very interested in photography and design,” says Peder, and she collaborated with him from the start, “at



weekends and in the evenings”, not merely using her business acumen, but designing the interiors of the boats he was working on. It was a productive partnership: suddenly they had a dozen projects on their books, so she quit Goldman Sachs to devote herself to it full-time. They stopped working from home, moved into a studio, hired support staff and brought in a third partner, Ben Harrison, an architect by training and a keen sailor, with whom Eidsgaard had worked at Winch. The practice hasn't looked back. Among the major projects it has completed over the past decade are *Madsummer*, *Tango*, *Elandess*, *Vanish* (now *Hampshire*), *Halo*, *Irisha* and the appropriately named *Auspicious*.

In many ways Peder's and Ewa's routes into this famously hard-to-break-into industry typify the two classic approaches. You can train for it: Southampton Solent University offers an undergraduate degree in yacht design and production; ISAD in Milan a master's in yacht design; and the University of Strathclyde runs an MEng in naval architecture and marine engineering. Or you can cultivate connections in the hope that someone you meet will open the right door.



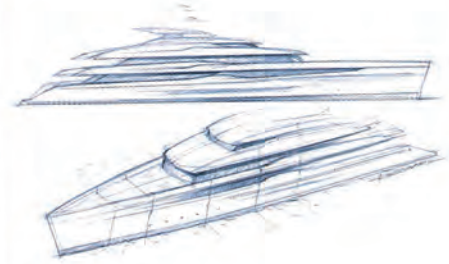
Jon Bannenberg
virtually created
superyacht design



Peder Eidsgaard, above left, and the aluminium and glass staircase on board 51m *Irisha*



Harrison Eidsgaard's award-winning interior of 74.5m Elandess



be clever with space". A decade on, she adds: "I am fortunate enough still to be designing yachts and am currently working on a 56-metre Perini Navi boat for a long-standing client."

Perhaps unexpectedly for such an enduring influence on contemporary superyachts, Jon Bannenberg's own design career had its origins in residential too. Born in Sydney in 1929, he began his career as a musician. At 19 he was married; a few years later he sailed for London, having joined Ngaio Marsh's theatre company as stage manager and pianist, which was bound for a tour of New Zealand; and by the late 1950s, having briefly been Noël Coward's rehearsal pianist, he and his second wife, Beau, had set up an interior design practice in London, named Marble & Lemon.

One day a client, the aerospace engineer Geoffrey Simmonds, came in, carrying some preliminary designs for a yacht he had commissioned through Camper & Nicholsons. As Dickie retells the story: "He asked Jon, 'What do you think of that?' And Jon said, 'I think it's bloody awful.' So he said, 'Well, you do better.'" The result was the 24-metre sailing yacht *Tiawana*, which took to the water in 1968 – the first of almost 200 yachts he went on to design. And his studio, Jon Bannenberg Ltd, also became something of an incubator of talent. Andrew Winch forged his career there, as did

Tara Bernerd of design practice **Tara Bernerd and Partners**, best known for her hotel and residential interiors, was offered her first yacht contract in 2009 "through a mutual friend", she says. She jumped at the chance, not least because she too admired Bannenberg's work – she keeps a drawing by him of the *QE2* in her office. "He was a family friend," she recalls. "An incredibly stylish man." (So attentive to detail, in fact, that he had the school shorts of his son Dickie tailored by the legendary Doug Hayward because, Dickie recalled, "he didn't like the cut".) "I always had an eye for the boats," she says.

Her own career, however, had begun "unconventionally". She left school at 16, starting at the bottom and trying to get as much design experience as she could. In those early years, it can't have harmed her chances that her father is the eminent developer Elliott Bernerd, co-founder of the international property company Chelsfield. But by the time she was 20, she'd designed her own loft. And ultimately her success comes down to "constant self-criticism, thinking outside the box", as well as sheer hard work and exceptional charm.

"I do believe that if you've built up a great relationship, and that client goes on to build or buy a yacht, it would be unusual for them not to want to use their designer of choice," she says. "Without a doubt [designing yachts] requires a very different skill set," she says. "If you work closely with the shipyard, you learn the dos and the don'ts, the practicalities one has to bear in mind in terms of movement, stability, indoor-outdoor living; how the client wants to use it." And, crucially, "how to



Tara Bernerd's interior for a 56m Perini Navi motor yacht



Destry Darr Pethtel (right) and her interior design for the 30m Nordhavn Serenity

Terence Disdale, Tim Heywood and indeed Jon's son, Dickie, who after a degree in geography at Cambridge, worked alongside his father for 15 years and is now managing director of Bannenberg & Rowell.

Like Bannenberg, Destry Darr Pethtel, who founded Fort Lauderdale-based Destry Darr Designs in 2004, followed her father into the industry. In her childhood, her father, "a yacht broker going on 50 years, would take me on board every yacht he could from the time I could walk. It was just part of my life," she says.

A talent for drawing, an analytical eye and an ambition to be an architect led her to study interior design at Florida State University ("There were no schools for yacht interior design then," she notes), where for her final project she designed a yacht interior, seeking advice from Robin Rose, one of the first yacht interior practices. Six months after starting at Pavlik Design Team, she was working at the company. And just six years out of college she was her own boss.

As to how to get into the industry, "my advice would be to gain real-life experience," she says. "Get inside empty hulls. Learn about the structure, from the stringers and beams to the curvature of the hull, and the ways in which that structure, the fuel tanks, stabilisers and other equipment, as well as all of the wiring and plumbing, are concealed. Be a sponge!"

But even if it's not in your genes, dame fortune may yet smile on you and give you a break. Take the New York and Toronto-based interior architect Yabu Pushelberg, which has also designed a



"MY ADVICE WOULD BE TO GAIN REAL-LIFE EXPERIENCE. GET INSIDE EMPTY HULLS. LEARN ABOUT THE STRUCTURE, THE CURVATURE OF THE HULL... BE A SPONGE!"



number of yachts for clients whose homes it remodelled first. Its first marine project, the interiors of the 110-metre Lürssen-built *Radiant* (pictured below left), came out of the blue. "A Dubai-based client asked us to design [it]," recalls founding partner George Yabu. "A prominent billionaire had decided to opt out of the yacht yard slot, and our client had nabbed it. We had to honour and maintain the shipyard schedule or we'd have gone to the bottom of the waiting list, so the pressure was on." And never having designed a yacht, "the learning curve was fast and vast. But we ended up making a distinctive design that not only [benefited from] the expertise of one of the best yacht makers in the world; we also created a megayacht to the highest level of style and rarefied taste." And consequently established themselves as yacht designers.

As co-founder Glenn Pushelberg adds: "It's like there's a mystery about designing yachts, but really superyacht design is like any category of interior design. You have to understand how the back and the front work. You have to consider every inch. And because the boat moves, everything has to be nailed down and put in place. Those are pretty fundamental things."

Practicalities aside, the aesthetics are not so different. "If you're designing a yacht for a family or an individual, you look at the person," chips in Yabu. "What their aspirations are, what their tastes are, what the boat looks like from the outside, and capture the romance of it." ■

bannenbergandrowell.com; eidsgaard.com; tarabernerd.com; destrydarrdesigns.com; yabupushelberg.com