

# SUPERSAIL



WORLD

ISSUE 40 – FREE WITH  
YACHTING WORLD

\* SHOWCASE VIJONARA \* SUPERYACHT CUP PALMA REPORT \* MONACO SHOW PREVIEW





JAKE SUDDEN

PROFILE

# MARK TUCKER DESIGN UNLIMITED

Some of the boldest and most original superyacht designs of today are often from the creative team of the Design Unlimited studio. **Mark Chisnell** talks to the man behind it, Mark Tucker

Over the past 18 years Design Unlimited has become one of the go-to studios for both internal design and external styling, garnering a shelf full of awards for its portfolio – most recently for *Pink Gin VI* at the 2018 Sailing Yacht of the Year at the World Superyacht Awards.

The creative force behind the business is Welshman Mark Tucker. "I made my mind up when I set up Design Unlimited that it wasn't going to be called Mark Tucker Design, it was going to be called Design Unlimited, so it wasn't just about me. Some people said I was crazy doing that. Some people said, 'Oh, it should be your name over the door.'"

This initial impulse also drives Tucker's philosophy for the design studio, and must be credited for much of the studio's success. But the story begins, as it so often does, with a childhood love of everything connected to the water. "From very young, I started canoeing with my dad, a double-seater canoe, straight in the water; then surfing, and then surfing into dinghy sailing, and then dinghy sailing into cruiser racing, and a career in sailing..."

Tucker's initial ambition to become a naval architect ran aground on school rules that forbade him taking art, maths and physics together. He wasn't about to drop art to specialise in the sciences and so he couldn't get on to the renowned

Southampton University naval architecture course.

"In those days, art was the route into design and I was just passionate about art. I didn't want to drop it. My mother is an art teacher. My dad was an engineer. My sister is a very good artist. It was in the family. I suppose your creative side is one side, and your technology side is another side, and I was trying to mix it together. I just had that in my genes... I suffered a little bit, but I mean it's only one little hiccup."

Fortunately, his mother found other options. She suggested that he take a foundation course to study different areas of art and figure out what else he wanted to do. "I found product design within that, and managed to get on a degree course. I centred my degree around product for boats; my final product was a cooker for a boat. So, it was always there."

It was just as he graduated from the Cardiff School of Art that he got a break. "I think there's a lot of luck in the world; you do get your breaks. I happened to walk out of my





UNFUSSY LUXURY:  
THE INTERIOR OF  
THE 36M DUBOIS  
YACHT BLISS

## TUCKER: THE MILESTONE DESIGNS

"We've had so many boats. I love them all... It's really hard to pick them. There's *Escapade*; *WinWin* won us the Sailing Yacht of the Year Award; *Pink Gin VI*'s just done that for us again.

"One of the boats that I was very much involved in early on was *Atlantide*, which was Tom Perkins' restored [by Camper & Nicholson's] motor yacht, and working with him opened up a completely free-thinking experience.

"The first boat we finished here was a Sunseeker 82 yacht. Sunseeker came and worked with us as a studio for one boat... We just had that one shot to do something that was fresh, and clean, and exciting... It just happened very quickly, and it was the first boat we launched. It's a big milestone in any company.

"A connection with Baltic led to *Pink Gin V*, which was a client we've got to know very well. We've done four boats with him. It was a big sail boat, 152ft carbon, the interior all our responsibility. Those projects are pretty awesome.

"We were responsible for the interior and exterior design of *Shemara*. There was a designer, Ilse Crawford, involved in it as well. That was a massive project for us, and that just lifted us.

"We did the *Ran*, the Maxi 72, for Niklas and Catherine Zennström. We did quite a cool interior for her (left). Catherine wanted to have it a bit fancier than just black carbon. A couple of shots they took of the interior of that boat led to more work than I could imagine, and not work doing that sort of boat."

degree course with a portfolio under my arm and a visiting lecturer stopped me – an interior designer from Bristol – and he put this letter in my hand."

The letter was from Nick Maris, who ran the Camper & Nicholson's boatyard. He was looking for an intern for the summer to help in the design office. Tucker got invited to London for an interview, and the interview led to a job. "He gave me the job as a designer in the design studio, which was their little tiny office. The first thing they did was put a feet and inches scale ruler in my hand and said, 'You need to sort out this deck with this scale ruler.' I thought, 'How do you read that? They didn't teach me that in college!'"

The job with Camper & Nicholson's provided a very solid grounding in yacht design. "Then *Royal Eagle II* arrived, which was a 100ft Ron Holland design, with an Andy Winch interior; one of the first superyacht sailing boats, I suppose. My interest then came into doing interiors, because I was doing

the interior drawings for the joiners working with Andy Winch.

"I got working with these guys, which was fantastic, because they were a bit older than me and you could learn a lot about what was going on. So, quietly, I started taking over the interior pieces of the design office, moving more from product into interior design, because it was fascinating, and I enjoyed it.

"I stayed there for seven years, and got a good grounding in not only design, but also in production... Everything that we do has to work, it has to fit in, has to take note of the systems, be serviceable, and I think that's something that I drill into the young ones – to teach them that things have to be built. It's not just a dreamland.

"After seven years there, Camper got into difficult times. I was laid off and I was picked up by Ken Freivokh. I worked for Ken for seven years. I became an associate partner there, and that was inspirational. It was great to get out of a yard design office, and into a proper design team... It gives you a bit more freedom, if you like."

The appeal of that freedom could only have one end, and in 2000 Mark Tucker struck out on his own. "It's inevitable as you grow older, you want to try your own things... So, I took the leap with Julie, and set up Design Unlimited. That was 18 years ago."

Mark's wife Julie is a central part of the story. "It's very much a team effort. Design Unlimited is a company and while a lot of people put my name to it, behind it there is also Mrs Tucker. My connection to the business is the design, the creativity and all that side of it. She's a legal executive, so she was working her way through law and then, when she met me, we started a family so she stopped working. ▶



ESCAPADE, A  
37M SLOOP, WAS  
AN EXCITING  
VENTURE

WINWIN WON  
SAILING YACHT  
OF THE YEAR



RAN, THE YACHT OF  
SKYPE FOUNDER  
NIKLAS ZENNSTRÖM  
AND HIS WIFE  
CATHERINE

'Everything we do has to work, has to fit in, has to be serviceable, has to be built. It's not just a dreamland'



"She came into work here because it suited her because she could bring the kids up, work flexitime. It meant that her understanding of accounts and the business side of it was really good to have. We can't forget her in this story." The Tuckers met sailing, and still race dinghies and take their holidays cruising their Bavaria Vision 42 together – a design they both worked on.

Design Unlimited started in a cabin on a farm owned by Julie's uncle. "It was full of spiders, and we had to refit it first. There was a glider in it, and there was a leaking roof, and all that. We spent about eight months refitting it and then started, just myself, Julie, and a secretary."

Design Unlimited now has its home in a spacious, airy office building filled with light and images of beautiful yachts. It's on the outskirts of Fareham, on the UK's south coast and not far from Gosport and Camper & Nicholsons. In addition to Mark and Julie are four designers and an office manager.

"The [Design Unlimited] studio philosophy is to bring in designers and work as a team, and listen to people of all ages, clients, customers,

and try to get the best out of everyone, and give them freedom to work and let them create. I've tried to be true to that, to the studio, since the beginning. In terms of a studio style, we haven't got a particular style that we're known for. We probably do more sailing boats; maybe 60/40.

We've done a lot of boats over the years, and we've done a lot of production work, as well, which is cool – it's something I learnt from Ken. Ken tried to keep this nice balance of production and custom work, and I think I took that into the studio.

"Currently, we're working on three motor yacht projects. We've just finished a very big sail boat, *Pink Gin VI* last summer. The next few projects that have come through the door have been motor yachts. I can't really tell you what they are, but there's a 40m, a 48m, and a 36m. So, they're nice size projects.

"We're also working on a range of foiling, or dynamic stability sailing yachts, with Infiniti Yachts. We've got a range of five boats with them that we're currently marketing. ▶

**'It's very important to listen and to understand your clients and what they really want to do with their boat'**



## MARK TUCKER

**NATIONALITY:** "I was born in Windsor but left for Wales about four weeks later, so I classify myself as a Welshman."

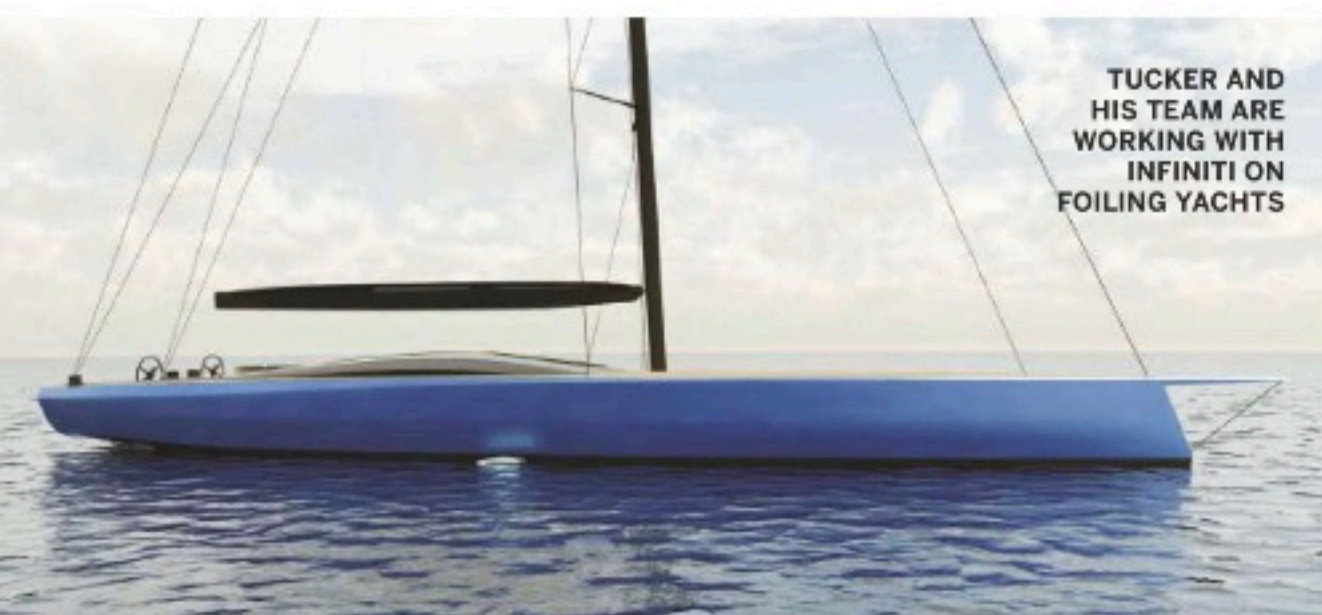
**HOBBIES:** "I used to play squash, until I set up the business... I also played football and rugby and enjoy sailing and windsurfing. Photography is also a big interest of mine."

**INSPIRATIONS:** "I think my mother, when the chips were down, saw that there was something there that was a career direction, and she went and enrolled me on the course, because I was off surfing, and enjoying myself, and not really worried about life after A levels. "I think she saw (a) that I was artistic, and creative, and (b) she held a route into it, and understood what the education system could give me. I guess that was the piece that I just needed as a push forward."

**CAREER HIGHLIGHTS:** "The highs are seeing boats launched, when you've been

part of the whole process, and seeing them dropped in the water and a happy client; every one is on a high. A lot of them are three, four, five years long, the projects, and you just get so involved with the client, and you work so closely with them. The whole thing is just overwhelming, at the end, and you just have this massive feeling of, 'Phew! Oh, did we do that?'"

**CAREER LOWLIGHTS:** "I haven't got many. I've got a lot of highs. Maybe not taking the route in through naval architecture [was a low], but I think that I found a nice route that probably suits me better, because I'm not such a technically-minded person. I prefer to avoid the maths and calculations, and get on with drawing something. "And there was being made redundant on Christmas Eve at Camper & Nicholsons. That was really low. That was the worst one. The 24th December. 'Oh, we don't need you in the New Year.' I was lucky, by the end of January, Ken [Freivokh] had found out from someone else that I was available, and he happened to need someone."







GIN PALACE: THE SUMPTUOUS INTERIOR OF PINK GIN VI, THE WORK OF DESIGN UNLIMITED

MARCO WOODIG

There's been quite a lot of intense work gone into that, and it's trying to highlight the new technology. The foiling technology is pretty cool. I think it brings a lot of benefits to stability – less heeling angles, lighter boats."


Mark Tucker sees some other clear trends in the industry. "I think everyone's trying to get more and more connected to the sea. The explorer-style boat is becoming popular, both motor boats and sailing boats... people just seem to want to go a bit further. Is it going to stick like that? I think it will for a while.

"There's also a lot of interesting new materials out there that you can use, not just for building boats, but also for fitting them out. We're using highly compressed paper flooring. It's masses of paper just put together, and it's all completely recyclable.

"We're always searching for new things. I think anything that you can bring into boating to try and do a little bit for the planet is great. Why not? It's having owners that are willing to have a go at that sort of thing and have that mindset really, because a lot is driven by a client wanting to try something new."

And it's that notion, along with the studio/team approach that really encapsulates how Mark Tucker views design. "I think I'm quite a good listener, and I think it's very important to listen, and it's very important to understand your clients and really what they want to do with their boat.

"I think you have to really make sure you capture their thoughts, their thinking, and then help them, and guide them and work with them... And you really do meet some fantastic people, really interesting customers. And they're all from different walks of life and different businesses.

"I never come into work thinking, 'Oh, another day at the office'. I always come into work invigorated to get on with the day, and get involved with the design as much as I can. I don't know what else I would do? I'm passionate about sailing. I absolutely love going sailing. So, if I can sit there and draw boats, what's wrong with the day?" 



MARK TUCKER ENJOYS SAILING HIS OWN YACHT, A BAVARIA 42.

RIGHT: SOPHIE PORTEOUS, ONE OF THE DESIGNERS IN THE STUDIO



**MARK CHISNELL**

Mark Chisnell has written 16 books. He has sailed and worked with seven America's Cup teams and won three World Championships. He's currently the technology coordinator for Ben Ainslie's America's Cup team.