

Yachting Developments' 37m Bliss has an ultra-modern interior with futuristic design by Design Unlimited

“WE ONCE HAD TO MAKE A CHANDELIER GIMBAL ON A SAILING YACHT”



SEPTEMBER 2024



As UK-based studio Design Unlimited celebrates its 25th anniversary, *Risa Merl* speaks to founders Mark and Julie Tucker about the design inspiration that keeps their business sailing along

LIFE UNDER SAIL





You are both cruising and competitive sailors. Did you grow up sailing?

Julie Tucker (managing director): I grew up sailing, and as a family we were brought up on the water. My dad designed a range of 28ft sailing catamarans called a Hirondelle, which you'll still see in many harbours and rivers along the South Coast of England. I also raced sailing dinghies for many years, doing the Open Meeting circuit around the country.

Mark Tucker (creative director): I started sailing as a teenager, crewing on a friend's Enterprise in Mumbles. I then raced Mirror dinghies and Lasers before moving on to cruiser racing, including the inaugural Round Spain Race, Fastnet, Cowes Week and Cork Week.

Julie: We actually met on the water when Mark joined the Lee on the Solent Sailing Club where I was a member. We have raced a whole range of sailing dinghies competing at local and national levels. This year, I've taken a break from dinghy sailing, and Mark now races a Hadron H2 single-hander, which he loves.

What boats do you currently own?

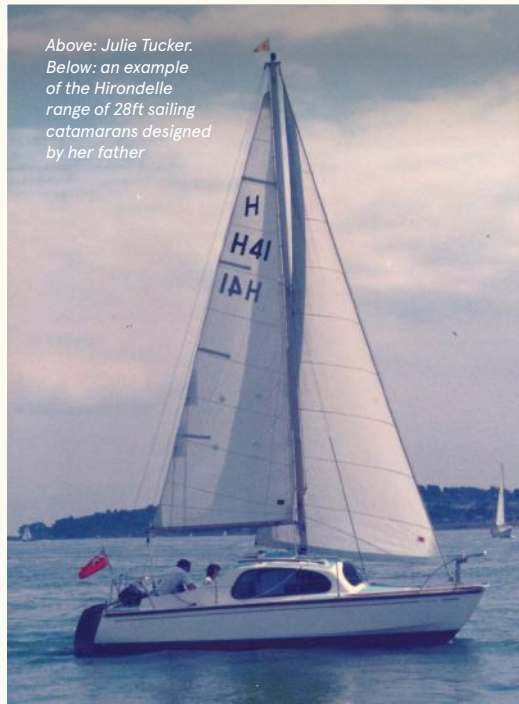
Mark and Julie: We started our family boating in a RIB and then moved on to cruiser sailing and enjoyed a Bavaria 33, Hanse 400 and Vision 42 (which we designed for Bavaria). However, now that the family have grown up, we have gone to "the dark side" and bought a motor yacht to enable us to get to the places we love more quickly. Our attitude is still that of sailors, though, and we often find that we are the only motorboat anchored overnight in our favourite places like Newtown Creek, Beaulieu River and Chichester Harbour!

How has your experience as sailors translated to key points in the design of sailing yachts?

Mark and Julie: Our personal experience has given us a good understanding of life at sea and what is required to live aboard a yacht, which is key to understanding how to design them. This knowledge has been passed on to our team, many of whom also enjoy sailing. We have learned a lot about the practicalities of materials, functionality of spaces and the importance of comfort whilst sailing.

How do you approach designing a sailing yacht vs a motor yacht?

Mark: The main things to consider when designing a sailing yacht are: the interior volumes are more restricted; the layout must be considered for passage making with regards to ergonomics; and there's also the matter of heeling, which can make certain design choices



Above: Julie Tucker.
Below: an example of the Hirondelle range of 28ft sailing catamarans designed by her father



"We pride ourselves on turning our clients' dreams into reality, no matter how extraordinary or ambitious they may be"

Above: Design Unlimited's saloon redesign on Ravenger, formerly Pink Gin VI, and the original saloon, below



Left: playful marine wallpaper adds fun to the functional, and elegant lighting reimagines a small dayhead

The interior must be comfortable with a connection to the sea, and ergonomics are important as life on board needs to be lived comfortably at a 15-degree angle of heel.

After 25 years of Design Unlimited, what projects are you most proud of?

Mark and Julie: We've designed many sailing yachts over this period. As well as custom projects, we have also been involved with several production sailing yacht ranges. Custom projects include *Visione*, *Pink Gin V*, *Sojana*, *Bliss*, *Ran*, *Singularity*, *Hamilton*, *Leopard 3* (refit), *Escapade*, *WinWin*, *Pink Gin VI*, *Missy* (now *Pattoo*) and *Karibu* (refit), as well as the refit of *Pink Gin VI*, now *Ravenger*. We also have some custom projects in build that we are looking forward to launching, including the *ARES 61-metre*, *Balance Catamarans 750* and a *Vitters 44-metre*. Production and semi-custom boats we've worked on include the *Brenta 80*, *Baltic 67*, *YYachts* and *Infiniti 52*.

Lighting is a challenging element on all yachts, but in particular on sailing yachts due to lower overheads, structural requirements and intrusions. How do you approach lighting as a design element?

Mark: As glass is used more in boat design, gone are the days of hulls with small portholes (or no portholes!) Now clients are expecting a much greater amount of glass in their hull designs. Improvements in LED lighting has made its use and control much easier. Indirect lighting can be incorporated to illuminate dark corners and make ceilings and furniture "float" to give a more spacious feel.

The tendency in many boats is to have too much lighting at night and it is only by using boats that you realise that sometimes less can be more. Fewer light fittings can create a more intimate and relaxing ambience rather than loads of harsh spotlights – especially in the cabins.

Is there a beneficial cross-pollination from working in both custom and production design?

Mark: Absolutely! You learn from both market sectors. Many of our superyacht clients worked their way up through dingy sailing and production yachts into the semi-custom market before going on to create their own personal dream yacht.

Getting used to the smaller spaces on production yachts allows us to utilise more of the larger spaces on custom yachts. We also investigate the practicalities of materials during our custom work, which can then be used on our

challenging. We once had to make a chandelier gimbal on a sailing yacht!

In general, spaces on sailing yachts tend to be tighter due to structure, which impinges on space and volume, so planning storage is important. We have also found that sailing-yacht clients tend to be more involved in their build, maybe because of their passion for sailing.

What is the first thing to keep in mind when working on a sailing yacht's interior design?

Mark: Function! What does the interior need to deliver to achieve the owner's aspirations? The general arrangement is critical from the outset. Understanding the owner's space requirements ensures they enjoy their time on board while also ensuring the space for systems and storage are balanced to get the best out of the available space.

Right: deck lighting at dusk on Escapade, the 37.5m Fitzroy sloop with a contemporary, eclectic interior with Malaysian influences by Design Unlimited.
Below: Mark Tucker



larger production projects – we're now doing much more research on sustainable materials in both market sectors. Finally, our production work also makes us conscious and respectful of costs.

Why do you think the sailing yacht market has not grown at a faster rate given the increased awareness of carbon emissions as a causation of global warming?

Mark: There are only a certain number of clients whose families want to go on a sailing yacht and even fewer clients who want to race sailing yachts. Motor yachting is easier for those not brought up with sailing yachts. Also, the technicalities of the actual sailing do put some potential clients off. Sailing is a skill that takes longer to master and requires a large amount of dedication from all members of the crew. Experiencing the joy of sailing is not something readily available for everyone. Hopefully, future generations will be inspired to look towards sailing as a hobby because of its lower impact on the environment.

Are there any features that designers can exploit more to lure non-sailors into sailing yachts?

Mark: Any improvement in stability would help – some families do not enjoy sailing due to heeling. The surge in the popularity of catamarans has helped with this, but then there are other issues with mooring space and whether people like this approach to sailing.

One suggestion is to improve the connection between inside and outside (as featured in our new Vitters 44-metre project) to remove the “down below” feeling you can experience on sailing yachts. This might be possible with new

“Fewer light fittings can create a more intimate and relaxing ambience rather than loads of harsh spotlights – especially in the cabins”

electric drives, batteries and modern systems and materials where the layout can be adjusted more radically, giving greater opportunity to the designers.

Another idea is using foils for increased stability and to reduce heel and pitch, such as on the Infiniti range for which we have undertaken the design.

You have put pianos and chandeliers, bathtubs and spa pools on sailing yachts. What's next on your imagining list?

Mark: All of these items have been driven by the imagination of the client, and we pride ourselves on turning our clients' dreams into reality, no matter how extraordinary or ambitious they may be. Our dedicated team works tirelessly to exceed expectations, and we are always ready to embrace new challenges and innovate. Our goal is to continue creating extraordinary and personalised experiences for our clients – so who knows what will be next?

Some of our imaginings include glass-bottom aquariums, basketball courts, diving boards,

yoga studios, ice rinks, wellness retreats, green spaces (mini forests, gardens/hydroponics) and cinemas.

You have had a couple of commissions where you have been asked to refit a boat that you designed originally (such as Pink Gin). Is it hard to rip out your own work and give a new look to the space?

Mark: No, it's really fun and interesting to give a yacht that you have previously designed for a client a new lease of life and see the interior in a different way. The smart thing to do with a refit is help a client see beyond the original owner's vision while keeping control of what can be done sensibly and within a budget.

The recent *Pink Gin VI* refit at Baltic Yachts is a very good example of this as the interior was originally a very eclectic and personal design, and her transformation has been incredible. While still using a large amount of the original interior, it has been decorated differently and we have used some very subtle changes to certain furniture elements and materials to transform her look.

What is your ethos when it comes to working with clients?

Mark and Julie: Every client is special, and it is important to understand them 100 per cent, whether we are designing a 30ft production sailing yacht or a 175ft superyacht. The enjoyment of your client's time onboard is super important, as it is their relaxation time.

We have spent many years sailing and have met some great people and clients who are passionate about their sailing yacht projects. We are bonded by our shared love feeling connected to the sea. ■