



SUPERYACHT TIMES



CONSTRUCTION
"For me, it's all about the emotion. I love the ownership. It's my boat and it's my details."
-KOMMER DAMEN P.24

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Depicted image is her sister ship Monaco Wolf

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JUSTIN RATCLIFFE



Soul Mates

There are very few owner-designer partnerships that have lasted as long as that between Pierluigi Loro Piana and Mario Pedol of Nauta Yachts. SuperYacht Times talks with the Milan-based owner and designer about yacht design and their ongoing working relationship.

BY JUSTIN RATCLIFFE

Pierluigi Loro Piana's connection with Nauta dates back some 40 years to when he bought an Avventura 703, a Mini Tonner designed by Andrea Vallicelli and produced by Mario Pedol when he was still a university student. Ten years later, the co-founder of Nauta Yachts sold him a Nauta 54 at the Genoa Boat Show and Loro Piana named her *My Song* after his favourite jazz composition by Keith Jarrett. It was the start of a personal friendship and professional relationship based on mutual respect and shared values that has resulted in three other sailing yachts named *My Song*, each bigger and faster than the last, culminating in the Baltic 130 delivered in 2016. Nauta has also designed three chase boats for the owner: two built by Toy Marine and a carbon composite 14.6-metre recently launched by Maxi Dolphin.

"After all this time and so many projects together, Mario and I share an empathy with regard to what sailing yachts should look like and what they are designed to do," says Loro Piana, known as 'Pigi' to his friends. "I have quite clear ideas of what I want and he understands implicitly my likes and dislikes – and has the patience to accept them."

The Italian owner and entrepreneur has always combined racing with cruising. To this end, his yachts are designed to perform on the regatta circuit, but also to be comfortable, safe and easy to sail when cruising with family and friends. His carbon composite Baltic 130, for example, races with square-top main and running backstays, which are swapped out for a pinhead main and fixed backstay in cruising mode. Pop-up loungers in the cockpit's teak decking provide respite for guests unused to 20 degrees of heel when sailing upwind, and fold down flush with the deck when the race crew is on board.

"Whenever there's sufficient wind, a sailing boat should be sailed," says Loro Piana. "When I'm racing the boat is most fun and becomes more of a toy. Racer-cruiser or cruiser-racer? It's a fine line, but one that Mario and the Nauta team understand very well. My priorities have evolved rather

than changed over the years, and the 130 is better set up for cruising than my previous 25.6-metre."

That said, the 40-metre sloop still oozes power and grace. Able to cruise in excess of 15 knots and reach speeds of 30 knots on the plane in full racing mode, last spring *My Song* won the Seicento Miglia organised by the Yacht Club di Livorno, covering the 600-mile course in light airs in just over three days and crossing the finish line a full day before her closest rival. She followed up with overall victory in the Loro Piana Superyacht Regatta. But it's below deck that the yacht reveals her split cruiser-racer personality with an interior design by Nauta that, despite contemporary flourishes, is soberly refined and traditional. "There's no accounting for taste, but I know that Mario shares my aesthetic sensibility based on classic Italian style," says her owner. "A boat is a boat, not a 5-star hotel or penthouse suite. Good taste, like timeless design, is understated."

The Loro Piana clothing range made from the finest wool, cotton and linen is similarly understated. The family is now a minority shareholder in the famous brand that carries its name, but Pierluigi Loro Piana is still the company's vice-president and his Milan office is brimming with fabric samples. His research into the mechanical properties of linen fibres, derived from the flax plant, led to an unlikely but ingenious solution for the interior of *My Song*: what looks like hardwood veneer is actually a composite material made from linen fibres impregnated with epoxy resin.

"We did dozens of tests to get the right tone and finish, but as a strong and super sustainable natural material it's ideal for a lightweight interior," says the owner, warming to a subject of professional interest. "An added benefit is that it's also very good at absorbing noise and vibration, which is not a bad thing on a carbon fibre boat."

Early on in the design, Loro Piana was keen to integrate the fibres into the hull structure itself, citing a Mini Transat 6.50 prototype built using flax-reinforced composites that successfully crossed the Atlantic. Baltic Yachts ran some studies, but eventually advised against applying such an experimental material to a 130-metre super sailing yacht.

Between racing and cruising, the owner spends two months or more on board each year. Just after our meeting at the end of June, he was due to start a cruise of Italy's western coast, taking in Amalfi, Capri, Ponza, Sardinia and Corsica along the way, before transferring to Palma di Mallorca where *My Song* was to serve as a mothership while he raced his Mumm 30 in the Copa del Rey regatta.

"Because the boat is fast in light airs – we can easily cover 100 miles in a day's cruising – the Mediterranean suddenly seems quite small," he says. "We're nearly always anchored offshore in a quiet bay and rarely stay in the same place for more than a day or two. The boat is designed to be independent and the lithium-ion battery pack can run the AC overnight without using the generators, so she's very quiet."

Loro Piana belongs to a select breed of purist yachtsmen for whom the only way to go to sea is under sail. But the market for large sailing yachts has suffered of late and there have been notable closures, especially in New Zealand, as some builders struggle to attract the younger generation of owners (Loro Piana's own 84-metre *My Song* was built by Cookson Boats in Auckland).

"It breaks my heart when I see yards like Alloy, Fitzroy and Cookson close down due to lack of orders," says the owner. "Personally, I see a lot of young people who are passionate

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- PIERLUIGI LORO PIANA



CARLO BORLENGHI



CLOCKWISE: Pierluigi Loro Piana and Mario Pedol in Milan; *My Song*; the 40m cruiser-racer launched by Baltic Yachts in 2016; the first Nauta project for Loro Piana was 54-foot *My Song* in 1987.

about sailing, including my own children, and I know some owners who have made the move from motor to sail. For day cruising I can understand the logic of a motorboat, but if you want to spend more time on board you can't beat sailing. It's more eco-friendly and, because you're actually doing something instead of just sitting around watching the scenery go by, much more fun."

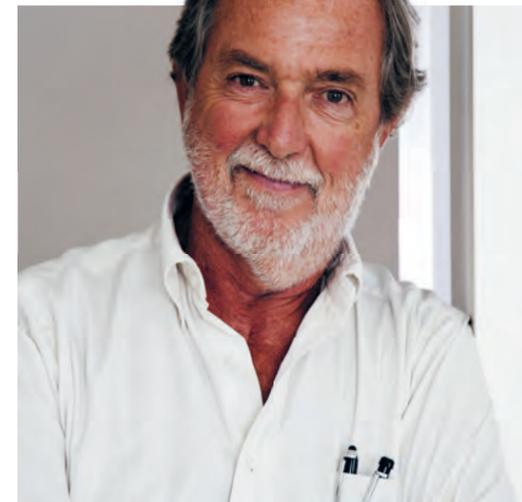
Loro Piana gets good mileage from his yachts and kept his 84-metre for 18 years before upgrading to the latest iteration, which he is still fine-tuning for maximum performance on the race circuit. He doesn't rule out a successor to *My Song*, but is certainly not in any hurry.

"Some owners get a kick out of the whole business and can't wait to start the next one, but that's not for me," he says. "I enjoy the design process and was a regular visitor to the Nauta studio and the shipyard in Finland during the build,

but I love using the boat even more. My boats are designed for the long term and the latest probably represents the sum of my aspirations. But never say never."

Throughout our conversation, Mario Pedol is happy to take a back seat, chipping in now and again with a few dates and technical details in his softly spoken way. When asked what he has learned from his most long-standing client, he pauses to gather his thoughts before responding:

"Working with an experienced and demanding client like Pigi has been a huge stimulus to design the very best, which is something I try to carry through all our work at the studio," he says. "He never accepts second best and is always searching out new solutions. With all the digital design tools we have at our disposal nowadays the possibilities are endless. And with Pigi we've explored most of them." ♦



A LIFE OF DESIGN WITH MARIO PEDOL

In the early 80s you took a year out and sailed back and forth from the Caribbean. Tell us about that experience.

That was a very important experience for me because my Oyster dealership, Oyster Marine Agency, suddenly wasn't competitive because the value of the pound spiked against the Italian lira, pricing Oyster yachts out of the Italian market. So I decided to sail my Oyster to the Caribbean and to live aboard for a year. This turned out to be a fundamental experience for my future career as a yacht designer because there's nothing more important than sailing and living aboard a 37-metre yacht for understanding what is really fundamental.

The sailing yacht market has been in decline for a while. Where do you see areas of improvement for the sailing industry?

I'm happy to say that in the sailing market sector we work in - yachts from 10 to 40 metres - we're still growing. We have been either producing more designs or have seen a larger total length of yachts produced every year. There has been a decline in the numbers of series yachts produced in the worst years from 2008-2012, but in our studio we haven't seen a decline in the number of 20 to 40-metre custom and semi-custom projects sold. In fact, we have grown.

I think that it's fundamental to stay innovative and to never be happy with what's already on the market, what already looks familiar. But you still have to keep in mind the right balance of aesthetics, function and performance... The crisis years weeded out and filtered a lot of what was on the market and also stimulated us to be more innovative and to think outside the box, something that's important to us when we're designing both sailing and motor yachts.

What's on your drawing boards right now, and what can we expect to see in the future?

Our most recent sailing yacht projects are the Southern Wind 96' (with two hulls launched in the past year and a third under construction), the Southern Wind 105' (the first hull is launched, two more are under construction), the Mills-Nauta 75' for Maxi Dolphin and the second hull in the Advanced 80 series.

We're also working on a new 100' custom, with very aggressive and modern lines and we're doing the interiors of a custom 100' catamaran. We're also doing the new interiors of *G2* (ex *Cinderella IV*), redesigned by Nauta for her, and we're working on a new 42-metre monohull for a famous European shipyard. You'll see that in the fall at the boat shows.

Still on the drawing board for prospective clients we have a 130-metre and a 145-metre, both bluewater sailing yachts that are high performance composite, with Gran Turismo performance characteristics. Sort of like modern Range Rovers-step on the pedal and they fly!

We also have several interesting motor yacht projects underway, but we can't talk about them just yet...