

# SUPERYACHT DESIGN

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Q7



# TRIPPING OUT

Tripp Design is a US-based team of engineers, naval architects and project managers specialising in the design of modern super sailing yachts. Founded in 1984 by Bill Tripp, the studio's ongoing collaboration with leading builders, interior designers, mast makers and hydrodynamicists has fostered avant-garde views on design, technology and performance that have resulted in some of the most forward-thinking yachts of recent years.



While I was preparing to fly from Milan to New York in May, Bill Tripp was already on his way to Italy. We didn't quite pass each other in mid-air, but it was sufficiently close that Tripp apologetically postponed our appointment. The reason for his last-minute change of plans was an invitation to sail aboard *Esense* during the Nespresso Cup in Portofino (see Events, page 60).

Unfortunately, *Esense* never made it to the event after engine trouble kept her in Palma de Mallorca—a pity as the owners' children have grown to become keen competitive sailors, despite the fact their parents never intended to race the 43.7-metre sloop when it was launched in 2006. Conceived by Wally with interior design by Odile Decq and hull and rig optimisation by Tripp Design, the carbon composite yacht is one of the most provocative and controversial yachts on the water. Immediately recognisable as a Wally with its 'terrace on the sea' aft deck and open transom, the entire forward area is a broad expanse of teak and soft curves enveloped by metre-high structural bulwarks housing all the sheets, leaving the deck clear of any ropes

apart from halyards and topping lift. The remarkable running shots by Giles Martin-Raget showed a single figure at the helm—the former captain of the yacht—dressed entirely in white. This was 'Wally Style' at its coolest and most Italian, but traditionalists dismissed the yacht as a party boat and her open deck as unsafe, a criticism that Tripp rejected outright when we belatedly sat down to talk at his studio in the small town of Stamford, Connecticut, an hour's train ride from New York City:



"I look at *Esense* as one big cockpit; others see it as an open, unprotected yacht," he argued. "It's not a J-boat with a tiny toe-rail; it has huge bulwarks. You can walk back and forth without climbing around pilothouses or down narrow side decks. You feel safe and the proof of that is people go forward and sit down while sailing—there isn't the usual feeling that you have to be aft where it's more secure. I think the

yacht was initially too far out for the market, but many people are now starting to think that maybe it represents a better lifestyle."

Bill Tripp's first contact with Luca Bassani was when he received a congratulatory note from the Italian entrepreneur following the launch of *Shaman*, an 26.8-metre pre-preg carbon sloop built at around the same time as *Wallygator* (now *Nariida*). The contact was re-established when he was subsequently asked by an owner to draw up preliminary designs in both aluminium and composite for a yacht that would later become 40-metre *Alithia*. Abeking & Rasmussen eventually won the contract to build in Alustar with an interior by Andrew Winch and the yacht was launched in 2001. Tripp describes the boat as "a tour de force for all involved" in successfully meeting the owner's demanding brief for lithe sailing qualities combined with sleek beauty. These were the same Café Racer characteristics that defined Luca Bassani's vision of Mediterranean-style cruising—the difference was that *Alithia* was designed to carry her owners, their five children and a tutor on a circumnavigation of the globe and be independent of shore-based support for up to three months at a time.



JUSTIN RATCLIFFE



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“A lot of design is like music—it’s a question of rearranging the notes to make a different sound,” explained the grizzled naval architect in a surprisingly metaphorical mood. “Luca Bassani understood that when he took race boat design and Italian flair to produce something new by adding a teak deck and turning a very linear, racing hull into a cruising boat. That was very creative, but having been around race boats all my life, working with him on *Esense* was something I felt we had grown into. When I started sailing it was impossible to steer even a 65 footer with one hand—and I’m talking cable steering with feedback, not hydraulics. Now you can have an owner of a certain age race his boat for 10 hours, moor

up and go out for dinner. He might need a masseuse, but it’s all about designing a better boat. Some people like to rebuild J-Boats, but they’re never going to have the same ease of handling as a yacht like *Esense*.”

Bill Tripp spent his childhood on the water sailing and racing boats that his father, William H Tripp, had designed. He studied Naval Architecture at the University of Michigan—“following the path of least resistance”—and joined up with Doug Peterson right out of college, working on designs that would win regattas such as the SORC, Admirals Cup, Sardinia Cup and Southern Cross series. He has also worked as a construction engineer on the *Kialoa* and *Condor* Maxis, as well as a brief stint at Baltic Yachts. Racing is in his blood and he still competes today on the team racing circuit at home and occasionally abroad. “We want a yacht of ours moored at the dock to look like it’s built to go—it’s all about moving,” he insists. This passion for performance has come to define his work as a naval architect—not always with the results you might expect.

“We’ve lost some prestigious contracts because we’ve been told we only do race boats,” he admits. “I’d rather be tarred that way than people saying we

only do clunkers, but usually our clients come to us because they want high performance and clean aesthetics. *Alithia* was originally seen as aggressive, but she is now the norm. In fact, *Mystere* came along a few years later and won the awards that *Alithia* hadn’t. If a client drives in here with an Aston Martin or Maserati, we have concepts that will appeal. You don’t race such cars down the road, but you have the performance there if or when you need it. Similarly, you don’t have to race your yacht, but the fact that it performs well in all conditions will always appeal to some owners.”

While it would be hard to spot a Tripp in-house style, his projects do share a familial strand of DNA, reflected in traits such as clean lines and light displacement, comfortable handling and high performance—all achieved through the rigorous application of technology. *Mystere*, launched by Vitters in 2006, was a development of *Alithia* with its low pilothouse on a flush deck with hidden captive winches, under-deck leads for added safety, uncluttered walkways and a sunken cockpit inside a protective coaming. ▶

**ESENSE  
WALLY**

**“I look at  
*Esense* as one  
big cockpit;  
others see it  
as an open,  
unprotected  
yacht.”**





GILLES MARTIN-RAGET



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# SAUDADE WALLY



CARLO BORLENGHI



# MYSTERE VITERS

TOM NITSCHE

# ALITHIA ABEKING & RASMUSSEN

COURTESY OF ABEKING & RASMUSSEN



# BLACK PEARL BALTIC YACHTS

ED HOLT



*Black Pearl*, the 23.4-metre carbon-on-foam sloop launched by Baltic Yachts in 2008, was conceived for trans-oceanic sailing, world cruising or Café Racing. Once again, technology was a fundamental element of its design: “Technology is what permits the Café Racer concept to exist, and design is what brings it to life,” says Tripp. His second collaboration with Wally, 45-metre *Saudade*, was launched the same year. The yacht combined contemporary good looks with lightweight carbon honeycomb construction and outstanding sailing performance. “The simple result: speed and plenty of it, at all points of sail and in the lightest of winds,” announced project manager Jens Cornelsen.

“Part of what I enjoy most about working with Bill is that we don’t like doing the same thing twice; we always try to move forward and give the client something that is truly personal,” says Stephane Leveel, the young French naval architect who worked for Ed Dubois and spent a year crewing aboard the Perini-built *Squall* before joining Tripp Design, where he is now managing partner. “This is why owners with strong design ideas come to us, or we encourage them to have strong ideas. Very often we will show them something that has been done before to

establish a base and make them feel comfortable; then we up the ante or they ask to see something else more avant-garde. So we’re always pushing the aesthetics and every other aspect of the boat.”

According to Leveel, it is this 360-degree perspective that distinguishes large yacht design from any other creative discipline. It also places extra responsibility on the designer, who is required to be knowledgeable across a broad spectrum of fields:

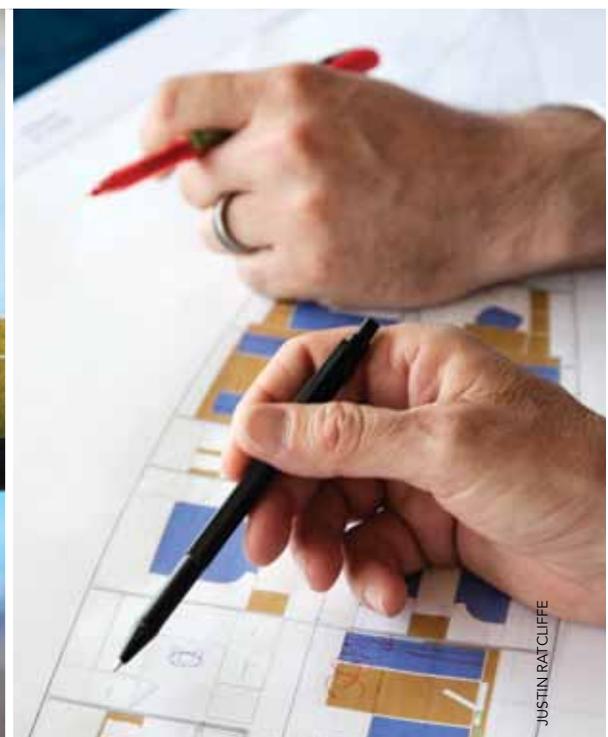
“I’ve changed my mind completely on this point,” he explains. “Before I thought it was best to hire specialists, but the electricians always want bigger cables and batteries, the engineers always want bigger hydraulics and machinery, and so on. We have to be able to talk with these specialists, but also have the knowledge base to keep their recommendations to the quintessence. In turn, this means we need to dedicate more tools and resources than I would have ever imagined years ago.”

David Egan, an authority on Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD), is one such specialist resource that has been brought in house. A New Zealander by birth who began his career in the aviation and automotive industries before working for various

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America’s Cup campaigns, his specialty subject is increasingly relevant as a cost-efficient complement to the expensive towing tank, much like CFD and wind tunnel testing in airplane design. In fact, Egan is further developing CFD software together with colleagues in the aviation industry to enhance its application in yacht design.

“It’s not just performance oriented,” he pointed out. “We can also study how much breaking water you have around the boat, which creates hull noise. I’ve even been asked if you can sit on a certain part of the deck and drink a Martini without being blown away or breathe in exhaust fumes—we can predict those kinds of



JUSTIN RATCLIFFE

questions with CFD. In the future I see a lot more of that happening.”

It is perhaps surprising that it has taken a North American naval architect to help define what are arguably some of the most cutting-edge European sailing yachts. “I find I can drink the Cool Aid,” was Tripp’s amusedly laconic response, but it is all the more surprising when you



consider that the big boat culture is largely a European phenomenon that does not always sit well with the more puritanical yachting mentality across the Atlantic. In Newport a 18-metre yacht is considered a large boat; owners may

take on a captain, but they balk at the prospect of hiring half a dozen or more permanent crew. In contrast, 42-metre *Sarissa* was due to be launched by Vitters in the Netherlands as this issue of *SuperyachtDesign* went to press, while in Italy the 50-metre pilothouse project with Wally is back on track following a difficult couple of years for the Italian builder in the wake of the financial crisis. Indeed, all Tripp’s current design work is for European builds and he is planning to open a studio in Amsterdam to boost his European presence and cut down on transatlantic travel time.

For a man who considers himself a naval architect first and a designer second, Bill Tripp has some progressive opinions on design. He very nearly partnered up with Martin Francis in the late 1980s and was overawed by *Eco* (now *Enigma*) when it was launched in 1991—“Hell, Larry Ellison was once an owner, so he must have got something right.” At one point in our conversation he took down a slim volume from a bookshelf entitled *Geometry of Design* by Kimberly Elam, a lecturer at the Ringling School of Art & Design in New York. The book deals with the visual relationships that have foundations in the “essential qualities of life” such as human proportions and the growth patterns of shells, which are embodied in the concept of the Golden Section

or rectangle and its related forms. Apparently, the pilothouse aboard *Black Pearl* was inspired by this natural geometry and, more specifically, the gentle ‘golden ellipses’ of the restyled VW Beetle.

“If we’d gone to design school in Switzerland, we’d have got there twenty years ago,” jokes Tripp. “But we have learned over time that there are natural shapes that unconsciously appeal to the human eye.”

When asked, however, to define his own brand of creativity, Bill Tripp was typically reserved and self-effacing: “It’s about putting together a combination of technology, existing ideas and dreams into a workable package. Sometimes it’s unique; sometimes it means standing on the shoulders of those who have come before. Original ideas are very hard to come by—you might think you have one, then you realise that Herreshoff thought of it way before you. I think it was Einstein who said he had had just one great idea in his life... And I’m no Einstein.” ■

