

## Social & Personal



# STARCK CONTRAST

Philippe Starck is a name that became a brand. From the habitation module on the new international space station to Steve Jobs' yacht, the Paris-born architect's list of achievements speaks volumes. However, it's his superyacht fleet that is arguably the most monumental tribute to his talents and his enduring passion for the sea

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**T**here was a sharp intake of breath a few years ago when the late Sir David Tang turned his critical eye to the state of superyacht design. He decried the discipline's lack of "originality and elegance", which had been lost in favour of "size and whiteness". He wrote of "giant meringues of white boats" filling the ports of the Mediterranean.

One German yacht was a "messy block of council flats jumbled together in five storeys". Ouch indeed.

He clearly wasn't talking about the work of Philippe Starck. The French "starchitect" might be best known for his plastic Louis Ghost chairs, Time Square's Paramount Hotel and the world's most famous lemon squeezer, but he has also been shaking up the world of superyacht design for more than 20 years with a handful of projects that are anything but "meringue".

The best known is Motor Yacht A, the 119m, missile-like creation Starck designed for Andrey Melnichenko, the Russian billionaire. When it emerged from the giant sheds of Blohm+Voss in northern Germany in 2008, no one had seen anything quite like it. Beyond an idea of length and the number of cabins he wanted on board, Melnichenko gave Starck free rein.

"I asked him many times what he wanted, but he said to make it 'like it was for you'," Starck says. "And that is what I have done. This boat is very precisely one face of me."

When Starck presented his ideas for the project, his client took one look and immediately gave the OK.

"He never interfered in the design," Starck says.

The success of the project would lead to an even bigger commission from the Russian, for the 143m Sailing Yacht A, launched in 2017. If the world was shocked by Motor Yacht A, it was utterly unprepared for this enormous, three-masted silver sailer. The brief this time was a little more complete.

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In all his designs — whether yacht, electric car or toothpick — Starck says he tries to reach the ultimate "dematerialisation". He can't abide the unnecessary.

"All my boats I try to make look like a computer design, like it was at the beginning when there were no details, no 3D," he says.

"When you design a boat for somebody, it's not aluminium, glass, or engine, it's just building a dream and trying to give the best dream possible."

Despite being huge boats, the profiles of two projects he designed for Melnichenko are largely uninterrupted by windows or detailing that snags the eye. The yacht he designed for Steve Jobs, the 78m Venus, was intended to be "invisible by transparency".



TOP LEFT: The luxurious jacuzzi in the owner's stateroom. TOP RIGHT: The tender garage on Motor Yacht A. CENTRE RIGHT: The spacious salon. BOTTOM LEFT: The owner's stateroom comes with rotating bed and comfy white loungers. BOTTOM RIGHT: Philippe Starck has been designing superyachts for over 20 years.

**I** think it would be really, really difficult to make a boat like that now, mainly because it [Venus] was created by two maniacs. Steve was the emperor of maniacs and I was the king of maniacs. Now he is dead, I am the emperor," Starck says.

The pair spent almost six years designing the yacht, and Starck recalls long days sitting with the Apple boss poring over plans spread out on his coffee table.

"We refined it millimetre by millimetre. You have to go on that boat to see what is meant by 'God is in the details'."

There was one class of superyacht of which Tang was fond — classics such as the Gettys' Talitha G, on which he was a frequent guest.

"I only pine for those old grandes dames of the oceans: those with funnels! Yes, the funnel which gives me an immediate sense of comfort and unassailable sense of the high end," he wrote. Here, he and Starck are aligned. Not enough yacht designers are striking the balance between "intelligence, elegance and humanity — like it was on the old boats, which were warm, simpatico and full of harmony

and history," Starck says. He agrees that there is an issue with replication: "If high fashion was all the same, it would collapse in two minutes! I do not understand how people [in the yacht world] can reproduce and reproduce and reproduce."

The future will require a little more humility from yacht owners — and a little more creativity from designers, he predicts.

"The thing which is a must to this industry is humanity. When you see a yacht today, 40 per cent of the materiality is completely useless. Be intelligent, ask for the right product. Don't just push your designer to make more and more. Be more humble and choose the right size of boat because of the number of superyachts that are completely empty."

This is not the sermonising of an outsider: Starck spent his childhood racing boats on the Seine and later taught sea survival in the cold waters off Brittany. His fleet includes a 4m plywood sailing yacht that he designed with a simple philosophy: "I tried to reach the minimum of the minimum of the minimum." 📖

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