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The Superyacht

TRUTH • OPINION KNOWLEDGE • IDEAS & SUPERYACHT OWNER INSIGHT



OWNER

BILL DUKER

Owner of 70m *Sybaris* in build at Perini Navi describes his unique 'spirit of agreement' contract.

NEW ZEALAND CALLING

Superyacht owners have another excuse to discover the country's unspoiled beauty.

MARTIN LANTING

The Dutch businessman has a provocative set of ideas, starting with owners taking command.

CHARTER GAME


Industry experts and yacht owners argue the charter-versus-private debate.



Sybaris

A yachting triptych

— WORDS BY ESTHER BARNEY AND
PHOTOGRAPHY BY LINDSAY VIRGINIA WYNN

To build a superyacht is to embark on a journey of trust, creativity and collaboration. Yet few are likely to have taken a more considered pathway than Bill Duker, owner of 70m Perini Navi S/Y *Sybaris*, due for launch in early 2015. *The Superyacht Owner* caught up with Duker in South Beach where he has recently completed work on his penthouse. 



For many owners, the construction process is as thrilling as the resulting vessel, but Bill Duker is immersing himself to such an extent that he is forgoing an owner's representative or build captain and is taking on much of the day-to-day decision-making himself.

"The process of the build project is as important as the result for me," explains Duker in response to the increased responsibility and involvement. "I would have been this involved even if I had a project manager, and in fact that person might have felt obstructive more than anything else. I like to be involved in all communications and decisions, even down to the smallest detail."

Duker has known the Perini Navi shipyard and its team for more than 20 years, so together they have experienced each of *Sybaris's* iterations since her conception. The first seeds were sewn over a decade ago when Duker's son West was sat aboard their previous vessel S/Y *Shanakee*, sketching out yacht designs. The shipyard created an original design soon afterwards but movement did not start on the current version, a significant departure from the previous Perini Navi series, until a few years ago.

In lieu of a representative at the yard, Duker has placed the onus on Perini Navi to create the best sailing yacht in its class by drawing up a 'spirit of agreement' contract, which is simple in words and concept. This agreement is based upon a paradigm with three elements, a yachting

trilogy: friendship, passion and sculpture. At the core of Duker's philosophy for the build is the desire to bring this trio into the construction experience.

"I wanted to build the most beautiful sailboat ever made and put the responsibility to them, the builders, to create a signature boat that is best in its class," he says. "I told them, 'build me the best boat you've ever built and be proud of it as your work of art.'"

There's not one central member of the *Sybaris* build team that Duker doesn't know well and consider a friend. He bought his first yacht, S/Y *Cocunut*, from Bruce Brakenhoff Jr in 1991, before Brakenhoff worked for Perini Navi, and he has been close with the broker ever since. Burak Akgul and Giancarlo Ragnetti, who led the business discussions for Perini Navi, have known Duker for well over a decade through regattas and events. Rob Tobin of Döhle Yachts, who is providing ongoing consultancy and represented Duker in the contract negotiations, has known the owner for several years.

"In yachting, nobody knows how to build relationships better than Perini Navi. I have been spending time with them for over 20 years and have grown a respect for them as people. Because of this, I felt I could trust Perini Navi better than a project manager who I didn't know and who could never understand my personality and preferences better than the Perini team could; someone who would not be able to argue my

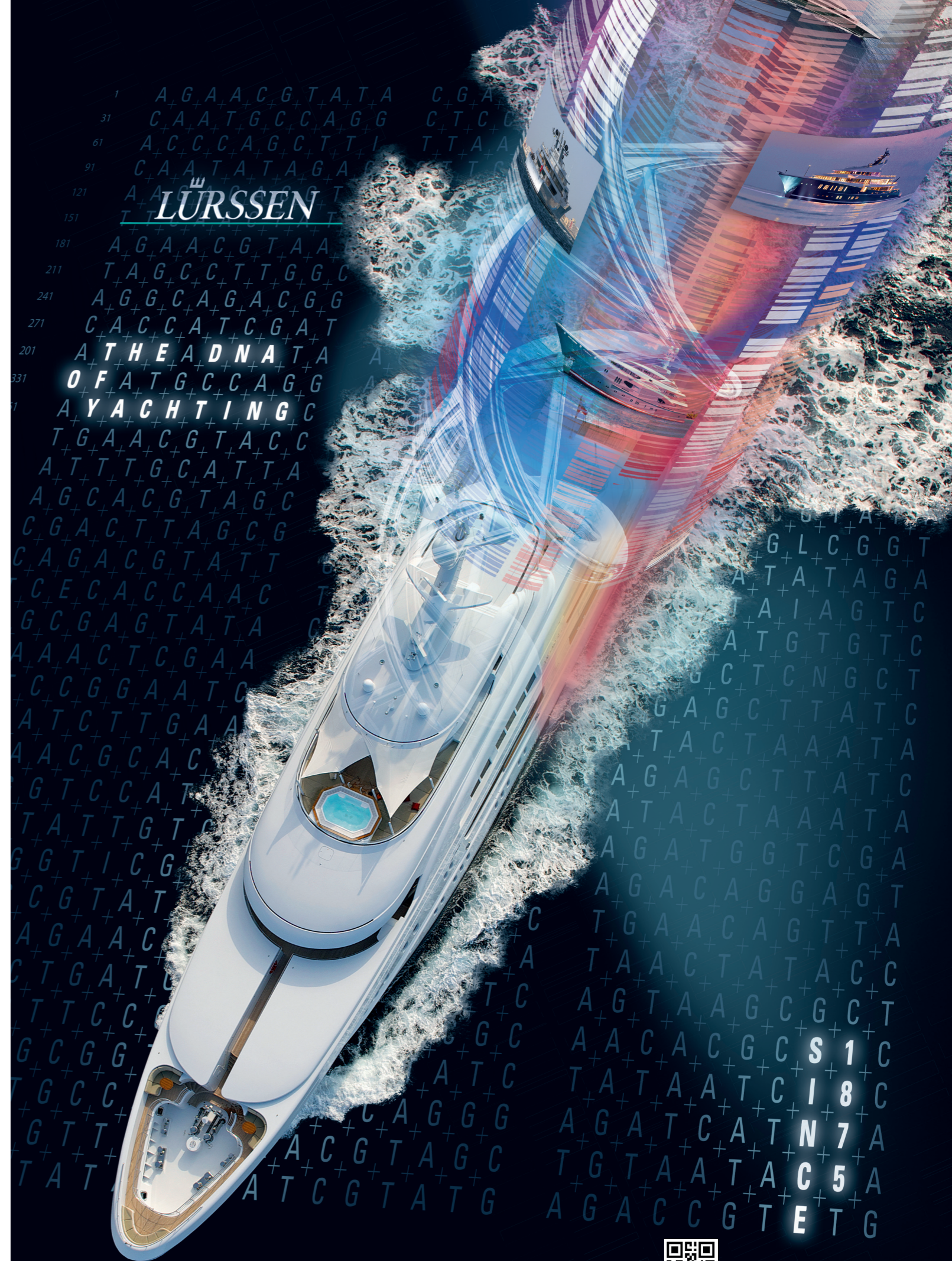
DUKER HAS PLACED THE ONUS ON PERINI NAVI TO CREATE THE BEST SAILING YACHT IN ITS CLASS BY DRAWING UP A 'SPIRIT OF AGREEMENT' CONTRACT, WHICH IS SIMPLE IN WORDS AND CONCEPT. THIS AGREEMENT IS BASED UPON A PARADIGM WITH THREE ELEMENTS, A YACHTING TRIPTYCH: FRIENDSHIP, PASSION AND SCULPTURE.

views in the everyday choices of a superyacht build. They would get in the way," says Duker.

The captain and engineer will not join the project until the hull has been hauled from Turkey to La Spezia to add the superstructure and rig. The rig will be provided by Rondal, which is owned by Royal Huisman. A long-time admirer of the company's work, Duker also considered the Dutch yard before making his choice of builder, and he did not take the decision lightly.

Previous page: Duker sits in his Tribeca apartment in New York.

This page: A rendering of 70m S/Y *Sybaris*, which will be delivered in 2015.





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– BILL DUKER, OWNER OF S/Y SYBARIS

Discussing the build at Monaco Yacht Show, where the model of the vessel was presented to the world, Akgul commented on how the “spirit of agreement” contract has both affected and not affected the way the yard approaches this project.

“Because we are all encumbered with the complexity of what we do and how we go about doing it, when someone like Bill turns the table, it is actually very simple,” he says. If the minds meet to accompany that simplicity, you can build a very special boat. This approach isn’t suitable with every yacht owner who walks through the door, but there is no reason why we can’t make it work.

“We take responsibility wholly, categorically, without any exception or exclusion [in every project] and Bill acknowledged that it was something we would be doing anyway. He has to make his decisions [throughout the build], but he put an even greater burden on us to execute and deliver the spirit of what we agreed in an eminently simple framework. That framework is very difficult thereafter,

when we are accustomed to working as we are in this business, to actually put something down on paper that we feel comfortably reflects the simplicity of the agreement.”

The client support department manager Susanna Corsagni is probably one of the shipyard’s managers that is most affected by the lack of owner’s representatives during the construction of the yacht. She explains that the increased direct communication with an owner has many positive impacts as well as presenting new challenges in how she works: “Every owner is different and every buyer’s team is different. There are some boats where the owner does not visit the yard other than for launching ceremony and delivery and only interacts with their representative, which creates less of a bond. What is nice about this arrangement is that Bill wants to be involved in every single feature of the project’s development and you become friends. On the other hand, you don’t have a buyer’s representative and sometimes for

small details you don’t want to have to disturb the owner for these, but he always likes to be involved. There will always be discussions during the process of building a yacht, but the important thing is to have trust, honesty, and transparency at the heart of the relationship as it is with Bill.”

For the interior, Duker brought in the designers from his land-based residential properties, Peter Hawrylewicz and Ken Lieber of PH Design Studio. Having collaborated on a wide range of projects, including a recently completed penthouse in South Beach, Duker feels the pair’s lack of yachting experience is no barrier in concert with the interior team at Perini Navi, and that their understanding of his tastes is more important.

“I want a team of people who will take my ideas and make them better. Peter has worked on refits before and I feel that as yachts have grown in size, the need to be specialised in yacht design and onboard storage space is less important. When there are concerns with the storage,

Franco [Romani, one of the senior designers at Perini Navi] helps with the sense of space.”

Duker’s tastes lie at the more modern, minimalist end of the spectrum, and his enthusiasm for art – and particularly sculpture – permeates his every living space. His South Beach apartment features two 3,000-pound, six-foot-high Perspex blocks by Dustin Yellin, an eight-foot-wide sculpture by Minolo Valdes, and two Jean Dubuffets. His Tribeca penthouse includes various three-dimensional artworks and canvases, ranging from a gargantuan Ron English to diminutive Dalis that fill the space with a sensory smorgasbord. And so, it is only natural that artwork will be a focal point for *Sybaris*, as the third element to the paradigm. Duker has worked with the designers to create an interior layout around the artwork, rather than vice versa. The main salon of *Sybaris*, for example, will feature suspended sculptures by Jacob Hashimoto and Frank Stella, as well

as others by Lynn Chadwick and Auguste Rodin. To help select the artwork, Duker consults with his friend and owner of Opera Gallery New York, Eric Allouche.

To complement the diverse collection of artwork aboard, there will be a pared-back interior of white American ash, with floating furniture on high-tensile titanium strings, complemented by titanium-sheet ceilings and titanium vault locks on the doors. “The design is minimalist and slick to emphasise the quality of the craftsmanship and the artwork on board,” comments Duker. “This is going to be a combination of yacht and floating gallery on which I want to sail around the world and entertain guests. In the first year we will cruise the Med as there are so many places to see and it’s easy for my friends to come and visit me. I want to invite local academics on board to discuss local history and culture, to host my friends and have a learning experience like no other.”

An area in which Duker’s passion

for the vessel is most overtly represented is the transformation of the exterior lines and layout. The Dukers have challenged every exterior feature, which must flow seamlessly into the interior from PH Design, and the outcome is a look unlike any other in the Perini Navi fleet. In particular, this change has been led by West, who his father says is incredibly detail-oriented and has a strong eye for aesthetics. Romani particularly enjoys working so directly with the owner and his son because they challenge him to provide the best in every detail, he says, such as with the flush, smooth lines of the dashboard on the sundeck and the wavy steps in the cockpit. 

This page: (Left) Duker sits in his Tribeca penthouse in front of a piece by Jacob Hashimoto, one of the artists whose work will feature on *Sybaris*; (Right) The owner’s tastes lean towards the minimalist, with a focus on his collection of sculpture and paintings.



One of the greatest metamorphoses of the design came four years ago when Philippe Briand was brought in as a consulting naval architect for the project. Briand worked with Romani to change the sail plan to improve performance and efficiency, moving the mizzenmast back and introducing a plumb bow. Velocity prediction models expect *Sybaris* to reach 17 knots as a result, and she should be a serious contender on the superyacht racing circuit. "I think this will be one of the fastest superyachts in the world," says Romani.

There have been challenges of working within the framework of the agreement, too, that brought financial impacts to the project. A significant change to improve performance was to introduce carbon fibre masts and rigging, which increased the build cost by many millions of euros. The argument Duker made was that this material should have been included originally in order to create a yacht that is best-in-class. Although he has agreed to front the increase in cost for the change order, he feels that some of the financial responsibility should fall to the yard. The rigging itself will be produced by Rondal, rather than Perini Navi, which has less experience with such a big project in carbon fiber. Friendship aside, Duker is pulling no punches for the project.

"They need to get it right the first time," he says. "If I finish *Sybaris* and find out that another boat has any elements that are better, then I will make them change it on their dollar. Of course, I want the yard to make money on the build, but I also want them to be proud of the boat, to know

VELOCITY PREDICTION MODELS EXPECT *SYBARIS* TO REACH 17 KNOTS, AND SHE SHOULD BE A SERIOUS CONTENDER ON THE SUPERYACHT RACING CIRCUIT.

that this will show to the world that they can create a yacht that is nothing like any they have built before. And every time we have had discussions, they have embraced this concept and the spirit of the agreement."

It has been a collegial event thus far.

Cristina Bernardini, from the Perini Navi marketing department, concludes: "This boat is a step ahead in terms of the project; it's a milestone. Thanks to the trust of the owner, we have been able to really push everything that comes from more than 30 years of skill and knowhow. A boat is always a compromise in terms of what you would like to do as a yard involving your product, and what the designers and the owners want. In this case, we have been able to create a yacht that involves a compromise in terms of project management and commercial platform, but in terms of design we have been allowed to create the best product we think is possible."

It is certain that *Sybaris* will be a remarkable superyacht because the process of creating it is. She is the result of a collaboration of people

who are passionate about the project and each other.

The project brings together two of the leading sailing yacht builders: Perini Navi to carry out the overall project, and Royal Huisman to build the carbon fibre rigging. She combines the talents of Philippe Briand, Franco Romani and PH Design to execute a beautiful yacht. And she knits together the artistry of PH Design's interior with pieces selected by the Dukers, with the guidance of Eric Allouche and the Opera Gallery.

Moreover, *Sybaris* blends a sleek and unique form with the high-performance engineering genius of Briand, who stretched the yacht, refined its hull, and tuned its rigging so that it is a truly high-performance work of art.

For any doubting the value of build involvement, the *Sybaris* project, incorporating the owner's triple-faceted vision, proves that each new superyacht project can be an exciting, unique and a truly enjoyable experience incorporating family and friendship, passion, quality and taste. □



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