



Reshuffling *the* deck

With female wealth on the rise, might the male-dominated world of superyachting be ripe for a shake up?

Words: Dominique Afacan



There are now almost 300 female billionaires in the world, compared to a paltry 11 back in the year 2000. More still sit in the ultra-high-net-worth bracket, making them totally capable of buying or chartering a yacht. And yet, superyachting can still feel like a man's world. Flick through the glossy marketing brochures, where girls exist only to model on deck in skimpy bikinis, or listen to the sales patter, which invariably speaks of the 'owner and his wife' – and this whole industry appears to revolve around the boys and their toys. »



Happily, there is evidence out there to suggest that times are changing. For starters, more and more women are opting to charter superyachts, among them many well-known faces. Victoria Swarovski, heiress to the famed crystal brand, spent her honeymoon cruising around Sardinia in a 26m San Lorenzo. Cindy Crawford, meanwhile, recently chartered Aria Amazon for an exotic family holiday and fellow supermodel Naomi Campbell is frequently spotted on board charter yachts all over the world, with the 56m yacht Galaxy a personal favourite. In a world where anonymity is highly prized, many more fly under the radar.

Rose Damen, commercial director at leading yacht builder AMELS, agrees that the future looks bright. "Even though it's still a male-dominated market, things are changing – from owners down to crews and management firms," she says. The family-owned shipyard, which recently launched the 83m Here Comes the Sun to great fanfare, claims that many of their yachts are owned by women already. "I'm sure we will see more and more," adds Damen. "Partly just as the result of more of us becoming successful entrepreneurs."

Damen herself knows a thing or two about being a female in a man's world, thanks to her background in finance. "Before joining the family business I worked as a fund manager in London which is pretty male dominated. At any work event there was never any queuing for the ladies' toilets," she jokes. Now, with mainly men reporting in to her at AMELS, she is unphased, although she does offer some sage advice for the wider industry. "I do feel it could do more to make sure that top women entrepreneurs feel welcome on the yachting scene," she says. The question is, where to begin?

Tammy Darby, whose family owns and operates St Kitts' exclusive Christophe Harbour and is herself a superyacht owner, thinks the answer begins with marketing. "Pick up any yachting publication or advertisement, and it's clear who the target market is," she says. "More family-focused stories are being written, which is a plus, but it would be a welcome change to see more articles about women owners specifically and how they've risen to the challenges of ownership. The perception can change, but not without a focused effort by yachting media and industry leaders."

Yacht brokerage Edmiston are one such industry leader, with the recent €47.5m (£42.5m) sale of 75m Enigma to show for it. Carl Richardson, the company's head of communications, thinks there's a yacht ownership issue that goes beyond gender. "Women have always played a central role in yachting. It might be portrayed as a male pursuit in certain quarters, but the truth is different. One of our most recent and high-profile new build projects was undertaken by a woman. The industry needs to reach people who are less experienced in yachting, full stop," he says. "It's not about gender: it is about people, family, and friends." »



Here Comes the Sun

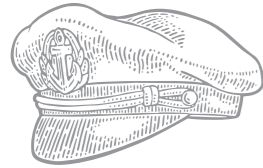


Rose Damen



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Sherron Hemsley, owns both a motoryacht and a sailing yacht with her husband, and is a perfect example of the family-style ownership Richardson is talking about. "Owning a boat has always been something that Stephen and I have done together and as a family," she explains. "A boat to me is a sanctuary and my happy place to spend time with our family and good friends. I have always found the superyacht industry really supportive of females." A recent girls-only charter trip to Mallorca, however, did raise some eyebrows. "I do think that some people were trying to work out who we were and where the men were!" she jokes.

Emmeline Payne, a captain at British yacht builders Sunseeker, is further evidence of an industry that is beginning to be more inclusive. When she trained at the Warsash Maritime Academy 12 years ago, she was the only girl in a class of 25, but on a recent trip back, she was surprised to see a big jump in the number of female students. "Even though I grew up in a seafaring town, the possibilities of a career at sea were never highlighted to me," she recalls. "Instead, we were told about nursing and secretarial roles. Seeing more girls there gives me hope that things are changing."

Now fully established in a senior position at Sunseeker, she encounters no discrimination at all, but she recognizes that barriers do definitely exist for women trying to climb the ladder in the industry. "Many of the more senior jobs advertised are for males only due to cabin arrangements," she explains, "so there is always the stigma that when someone sees a young female on a yacht, they assume she is a stewardess." These assumptions may be relatively short-lived; the number of females enrolling on flagship courses is higher than ever, which in turn will affect cabin allocations.

Similar assumptions, of course, apply to female superyacht owners. But with women predicted to control \$72.1 trillion globally by 2020, perhaps the tides are turning. 