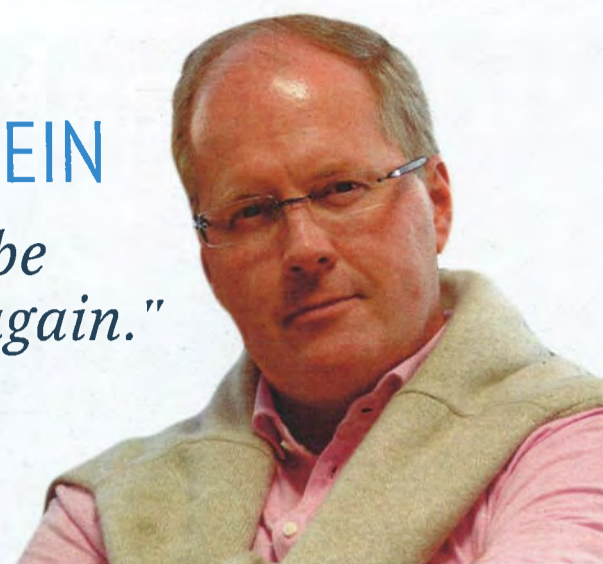


super yacht TIMES

RICHARD HEIN

"I will never be high profile again."

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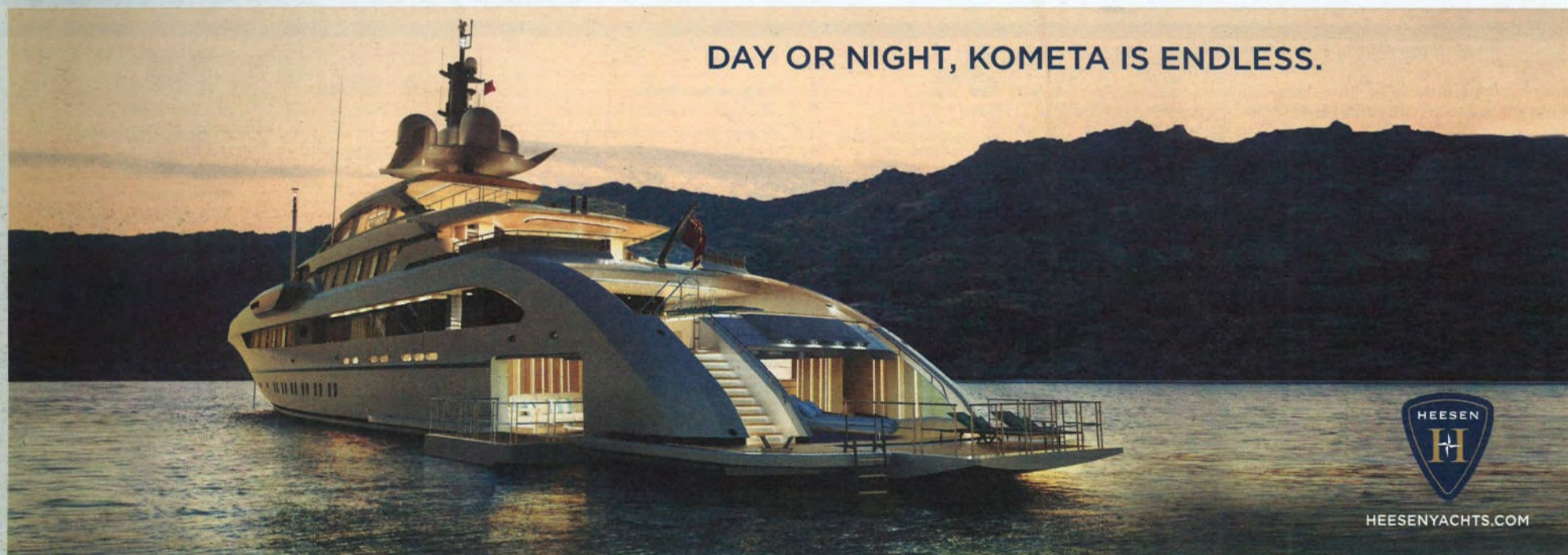
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Mulder Design, a family affair

Established in 1979, Mulder Design has enjoyed a successful career spanning over three decades, and don't show any signs of stopping any time soon. The past thirty-five years have seen over 500 of the company's designs come to life including the now famous high-speed yachts Octopussy, Moonraker, and The World Is Not Enough. The name of the family-run company has certainly become synonymous with high quality superyachts.

MAARTEN JANSSEN

Founder of the company, Frank Mulder, led a brief career in the yachting industry before setting up a company of his very own. Starting out in 1974 with Dutch shipyard Amels, he moved on after two years to work at another Dutch, quality shipyard, Damen. Three years later, Mulder Design was born. Frank observes that the superyacht industry today is almost incomparable to that at the beginning of his career, with absolutely no evidence of a real superyacht scene and most yachts being drastically smaller than the superyachts we see today. He says, "It was zero, absolutely zero. It was a lot of smaller boats, so it was an interesting time. Completely different from today."

Today, competition is fierce and luxury superyachts are seemingly constantly breaking the previously assumed boundaries when it comes

to technology, speed and size. Bas Mulder, Frank's son, and now owner of the company, explains what makes Mulder Design stand out from other superyacht design companies. He says, "I think one of the things that make us different is that we do a lot of composite boats, big ones, like the 46 metre we did at Vicem, and we're going to do a much bigger one now. We also start from the bottom up. Stylists are very good at making a yacht look good, but always need somebody to make it float. I think the total incorporation of all the design aspects makes a good boat and that's where we differ. We like to do the whole thing, styling, naval architecture and engineering. We also have a lot of knowledge of fast boats and that is actually very limited in our industry."

This knowledge of fast vessels is partly to thank for the success of the company today. With a referral in hand, the famous American mogul John Staluppi rang Frank in the mid 1980s. It was a conversation that would lead to the construction of

some of the most famous superyachts in the world, including the aforementioned Octopussy, Moonraker, and The World Is Not Enough. The first large yacht built for Staluppi was Octopussy. Frank talks about the birth of the project, saying, "It was a fascinating beginning. Monday afternoon the telephone rang. He introduced himself, 'My name is John Staluppi, you don't know me but I've got a reference for you and I have a question.' The question was can you build me the fastest motor yacht in the world. He had already bought the engines and gave me the information. I said I would need to call him back".

"In those days in 1986 I had a very small computer with my own programme on it for speed prediction. I looked at it and ran some calculations. I called him back and said, 'I think so.' The next morning he was at Schiphol airport." The yacht was built at the Heesen shipyard, a result of a blooming relationship between the design company and shipyard and a relationship that has produced

a number of fantastic projects, including the 36 metre Tropic C and her sister ships.

Frank and John Staluppi's relationship has grown to a friendship. "He is an interesting guy. Very impatient, which really suits the projects we do together. He's very loyal, a real family man, and a good guy", Frank says. Their friendship however does not automatically imply that all of Staluppi's projects end up on the drawing board of Mulder Design. "Whether or not he also lets other designers pitch against us, I don't know, you would probably have to ask him that... But he appreciates the fact that we know what we're doing".

The reputation Mulder Design generated in the early days of the industry for their ability to build quite literally the world's fastest private luxury vessels is something that still hasn't entirely faded today. As Bas explains, "Speed is still an important thing. Many people just want a displacement boat, however we decided from the input that we

received from the market that quite a lot of people actually want to go faster than displacement speed, so that's why we invested a lot of time researching hull improvements to create a Fast Cruising Vessel. That was done with the knowledge we have from ultra-fast boats; if we scale this down and make it a nice package, you're able to build a lighter boat without sacrificing on comfort and quality, but still go over the standard displacement speed, a win-win."

Starting at Mulder Design after studying naval architecture in Haarlem, The Netherlands, Bas insists that following in his fathers footsteps wasn't necessarily his plan from an early age, but his love of superyachts and intrigue in the industry drew him into the family company. Stepping into his father's shoes regardless of intent to or not, Mulder Design today faces a vision that may be slightly different to that of its original founder. Discussing the difference in vision between father and son, Bas states, "We sometimes have our discussions but of course you build a very solid base. I want to exploit it and try to move in different directions. We've really been focusing on some smaller boats in the last couple of years, which is very interesting. We didn't really do that that much before. The small boat segment is something that really has our attention."

On most projects, Mulder Design works on a fixed price model, Bas explains, "I think 90% of the time we do a fixed price, because we feel it's important to make a project a success. If you need to spend some more time on a project then we don't necessarily send out another invoice. On production boats we mostly like to work on a royalty basis, or we do an advanced payment and then a small royalty, or between those".

Frank briefly left the company in 2012, and accepted a job at the troubled Dutch shipyard Jongert. "Why you ask? Because Bas took over my company, at a time when it wasn't so busy. It allowed me to do something else. I was talking to the owners of Jongert and they said 'maybe you could be our advisor'. I thought 'sure why not', and joined them for a period of one year"

With both Bas and Frank Mulder back at the company, regardless of perhaps an inevitable yet slight difference in vision for the company, Mulder Design will surely continue to differentiate themselves from other companies with their 'complete package' approach to superyachts.



Octopussy, once the world's fastest yacht



Frank and Bas Mulder at their new office

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