

# CUTTING A DASH

Boat designers are now combining vanguard technology with retro styling. The result: high performance with silver-screen looks, says Richard Donkin.



It's black, it's powerful and it's fast – with cinematic looks and classic lines, modern in almost every respect, but it wouldn't look out of place in Luchino Visconti's Venice, lending a brooding menace to the city's lagoon. The C-Boat is the latest version of a vogue for design that reflects retro styling without compromising on performance.

Classic styling in sailing and motor yachts has always enjoyed a select following. Yet retro appeal, evoking marks of the 20th century – from the J-Class yachts of the 1920s to the 1950s and 1960s Italian flair of Riva motorboats – is growing among a new generation of enthusiasts, designers and builders, who are seeking to combine a sense of heritage with modern technologies.

"I wanted something that was fast, but it had to look the part too, and it had to be big enough for weekend trips with

my girlfriend," says Jason Carrington, wedging himself behind the wheel of his C-Boat before we head across the Solent. "Hold on tight," he says, shifting the throttle as we motor alongside the shingle spit near Hurst Castle, overlooking the Isle of Wight. The boat lifts and surges ahead, its mirror-black prow trailing churning white foam as we bank into a set of tight figure-of-eight turns, throwing up curtains of spray.

Carrington, a round-the-world sailor, who has project-managed and crewed entries in three Volvo and one Whitbread round-the-world race, has turned his boat-building skills to powerboats with this prototype, which he believes has a promising future as a tender for some of the world's biggest superyachts.

"I've been getting strong interest in the superyacht market after taking the C-Boat to the Monaco boat show in September. The owners of these boats

The hull of the Aquariva Super is built in glass fibre rather than the wood that made the marque so famous.

AVAKIAN  
GENEVE

Time to dare...



Concept 1

"Limited Edition"

GENEVA LONDON BEVERLY HILLS MOSCOW

NEW YORK  
(Opening Soon)

watches@avakian.com

www.avakian.com



want something small enough to fit in their holds but stylish and practical to use when they're at anchor," he says.

For sale at €500,000, it's not the cheapest powerboat on the market, but that's down to the materials. The boat is built in carbon throughout to save weight. Its only concession to tradition is the teak deck and the deeply cut bow that gives it a classic look.

"There seems to be a market for retro styles just now," he says, "not simply because such boats look right, but because there is a strong connection between classic lines and seaworthiness. Well-made, well-designed boats do tend to look the part too."

His sentiments are echoed by Sean McMillan, co-owner and founder of Spirit Yachts, an Ipswich-based yacht design and building company. As the name suggests, Spirit Yachts look as if they belong to the age of F Scott Fitzgerald, with their spoon bows and tapered counters. The company makes motor yachts too. On a shelf to the rear of McMillan's office is a model of one of

**Above:** the "contemporary and beautiful" design of the Spirit 54 yacht. **Top right:** light but fast, the C-Boat's retro style comes with a speed of 45 knots. **Right:** each wooden hull of the Spirit yacht is hand-crafted by skilled workers.

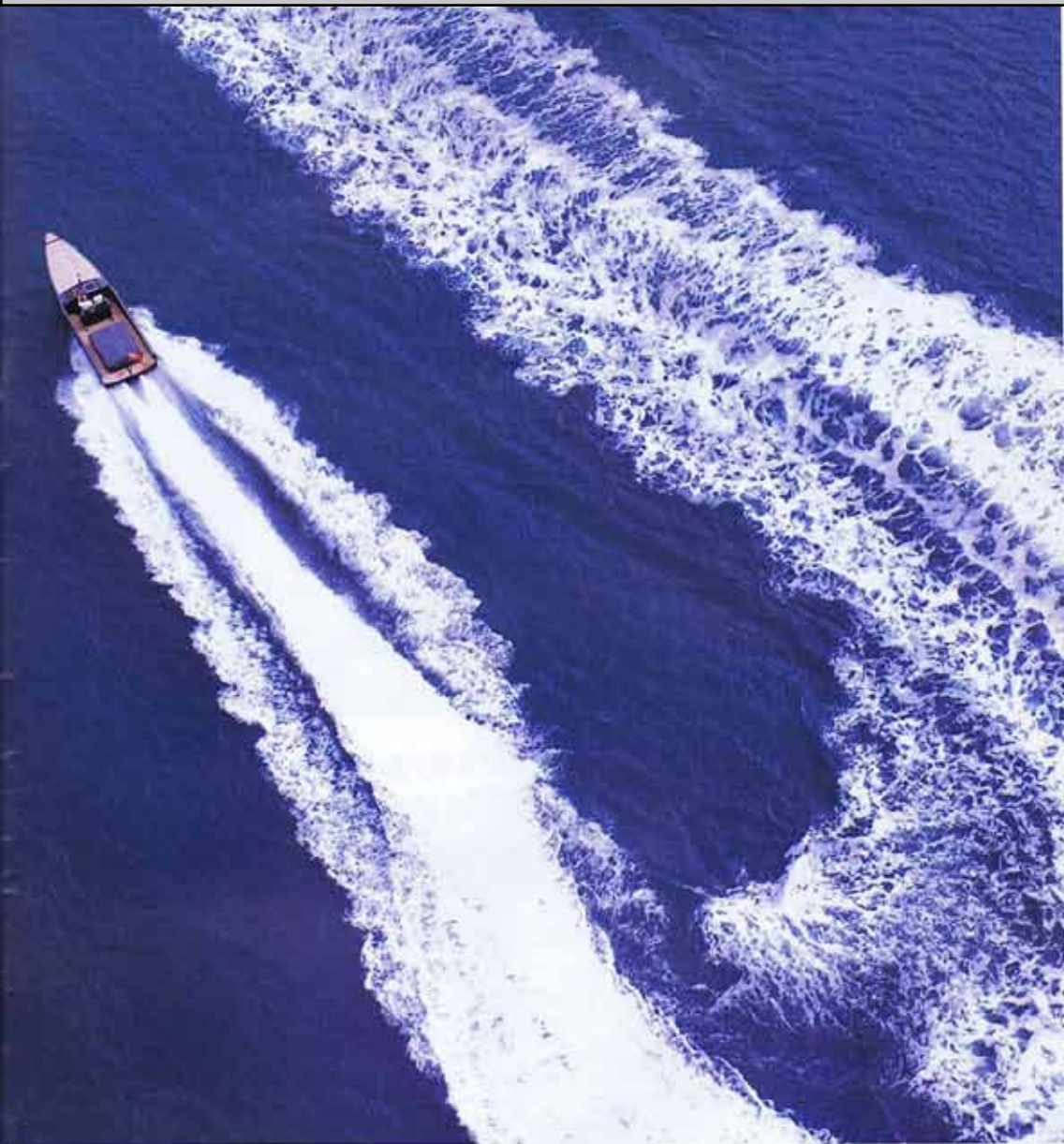
his concepts – a mahogany-hulled motor launch with a row of rakishly angled gleaming exhausts. "It should be good for 50 knots," he says.

McMillan doesn't like to think of his boats as replicas or retro, although he acknowledges their

classic styling. "I'm interested in contemporary and beautiful yachts, and I don't think the two are mutually exclusive," he says. "I want to build boats of the best possible performance, using modern technology, hydrodynamics and engineering. I simply don't accept that all modern boats have to be fat, white, ugly and plastic." He likens the broad-hulled modern production yachts to caravans in the way that their design concentrates on finding the maximum interior space to fit economically within a berth.

"We're interested in the new classics, in the way they look, the way they perform and the way they maintain residual value. The high-fashion designs of today will date very quickly. This means that a modern yacht built only 10 or 15 years ago is already looking pretty dated, and its residual value

lucatosperlit.com



much so that a Spirit yacht was used in *Casino Royale*, the James Bond movie.

The company has grown its workforce gradually, often transferring skills from other disciplines. "You do need highly skilled people to make these yachts. It has taken me 15 years to put this workforce together and they are absolutely superb. Without them, the company would not be very special," he says.

The new-as-old appeal is beginning to spread to superyachts. Neil Taylor, the London-born computer games entrepreneur, commissioned a Chinese shipyard to build *Nero*, a 90m-long motor yacht, inspired by the series of Corsair superyachts owned by the financier J P Morgan during the 1920s and 1930s. *Nero*, available for charter through Burgess at between €350,000 and €420,000 a week, replicates the 1920s design right down to the smokestack that may look the part but, in fact, houses an emergency generator and an observation platform.

Similarly, Ray Catena, a US-based car dealer, has recently taken delivery of *Sycara IV*, a 1920s-style fantail cruiser made by the Burger Boat Company. Not everything on *Sycara* is built with the materials used in those earlier yachts. The bowsprit and mast may look like varnished wood but are made of carbon fibre and epoxy painted to look like wood. The mast is removable, allowing the boat to pass under low bridges.

Even Riva, the Italian boat builder, builds its classically styled *Aquariva Super* with glass fibre, replacing the wood on the hull used in earlier models that made the marque famous. During the 1960s, Rivas were the speedboat of choice for film stars such as Brigitte Bardot, Sophia Loren and Peter Sellers. "They're great boats, but I love to work on the older wooden models," says Peter Freebody, whose Berkshire-based boatyard is one of the few British companies still building traditional wooden launches.

His slipper stern launches might not be the fastest boats, but their varnished finish and sleek lines exude character. "I use a traditional design but try to improve on them," he says. Freebody points to a replica of a slender slipper boat – the original was built for Arthur Whittle Brown who, in 1919, partnered John Alcock on the first transatlantic flight.

"I've improved this one too. Whether Brown would have approved I'm not sure."

"We find that some of our customers live on lakes with moorings and want to have an attractive boat moored at the bottom of their gardens. But while our boats look the part,

we like to feel they work well too." He runs his hand across the decking of his latest creation. "When I have a piece of wood, I like to bring it to its end. I want to finish it well," he says.

This joy in craftsmanship runs through all builders who remain wedded to classic designs. It infects the owners too. David Murrin, chief investment officer of the hedge fund Emergent Asset Management and commodore of the British Classic Yacht Club, cannot imagine parting with his restored 1955 Bermudan sloop



reflects that. In our yachts, speed is all about water-line length."

The clients for these yachts, McMillan says, are found scattered all over the world. "Ordering a boat like this is not simple. People think about it for a long time. We can be talking to someone for years before they take the plunge. That's why building a relationship with a

**The results are both practical and eye-catching... a Spirit yacht was used in *Casino Royale*.**

prospective owner is important. The more input we get from them, the better we can understand what it is they want. Often people don't know themselves what they will do with a boat as they haven't thought about it much."

The yachts may look as if they were designed in the 1930s but they're built for speed. "We're building them half the weight of glass fibre, less weight than carbon fibre, and we're building them from wood," says McMillan. The results are both practical and eye-catching, so



It's just a shower, isn't it?

You could say that. Or you could say it's a Samuel Heath 'Fairfield' shower. You could point out that it's been meticulously formed from the purest European brass; then hand polished and chrome-plated in up to 34 individual processes. You could say it's manufactured entirely in the UK and it's passed over 500 hours of salt spray and humidity testing. You could say it'll last a lifetime. Or, of course, you could insist that it's just a shower.

Discover more about what goes into the most impressive range of classic and contemporary designs at [www.samuel-heath.com](http://www.samuel-heath.com) or call 0800 0191 282

**SAMUEL HEATH**  
for a life less ordinary

TAPS • SHOWERS • ACCESSORIES



**Nero replicates the 1920s design down to the smokestack that may look the part but houses an emergency generator.**

Cerewayo, but he says that he understands owners who opt for modern builds on classic lines.

"Our club was founded just nine years ago and we had a long hard think about the modern classics. We think they resonate with traditional designs and welcome them in our membership and events. These will be classics in 50 years' time, ensuring that our membership continues," he says.

Owning a modern classic, he points out, gives the owner access to regattas such as the Régates Royales de Cannes and Les Voiles d'Antibes. The growth in popularity for these events was confirmed when the watchmaker Officine Panerai was named the sponsor of the BCYC regatta at Cowes this year. This means that the Cowes regatta will be brought in to the Panerai Classic Yachts Challenge that runs each year between April and September.

Competing yachts are divided into three categories: Vintage, launched pre-1950; Classic, built between 1950 and 1975; and, lastly, Spirit of Tradition yachts, built recently to classic designs. Among these new builds often entered in the spirit class are *Eleanora*, built in 2000, an exact replica of the 1910 schooner, *Westward*; and *Savannah*, a 1996-built modern-classic sloop, inspired by the J-Class boats that competed in the great prewar years of the America's Cup.

Hugh Morrison, co-owner of *Savannah*, emphasises the technology used on modern classics. He often sails on her with just his girlfriend, fashion designer Amanda Wakeley, on board. "It doesn't take a whole lot of effort to sail her," he says. "She's a baby J; 30m long, made of Kevlar and E-glass (a type of glass fibre) with a carbon mast, but you wouldn't know it. We have a bath, we

**Above: the sundeck of Nero, a 90m-long motor yacht, which replicates the 1920s design of the Corsair superyacht series.**

have a wood-burning stove and a dining table, but even with all that, this yacht is fast. These modern classics go like stink. They carry big

sail plans and because of their carbon rigs they are relatively light.

"The real appeal of these yachts is that you have ultra-efficient water-makers, electronics and power winches. A friend of mine restored an 1895 classic ketch and raced that with 24 people on deck pulling ropes. With *Savannah*, we can sail her with maybe five or six. In terms of logistics and ease, it's much simpler to have this kind of yacht, and she's built to last 100 years."

The J-Class itself is undergoing a revival at the same time, and a number of additions to the fleet are currently under construction – new boats built to original designs over 70 years old.

David Murrin believes there is little to match the classic sailing experience. "I was conceived on a wooden boat, brought up on one and bought a wooden boat before I bought a house. I truly love my classic boat. It's a real experience to be on and around her. My soul is there. I think there is something about the economic cycle that is taking people back to value systems that reflect better times and the interest in classic boats, and their modern interpretations is part of that." \*

**RETRO RACERS**

**British Classic Yacht Club**, 01159-465 467; [www.britishclassicyachtclub.com](http://www.britishclassicyachtclub.com). **Burger Boat Company**, +1920-684 1600; [www.burgerboat.com](http://www.burgerboat.com). **C-Boat**, 07710-444 926; [www.c-boat.co.uk](http://www.c-boat.co.uk). **Nero charter details at Burgess**, 020-7766 4300; [www.burgessyachts.com](http://www.burgessyachts.com). **Peter Freebody & Co**, 01628-824 382; [www.peterfreebody.com](http://www.peterfreebody.com). **Riva**, +39035-924 0111; [www.rivaboats.com](http://www.rivaboats.com). **Spirit Yachts**, 01473-214 715; [www.spirit-yachts.co.uk](http://www.spirit-yachts.co.uk).

IMAGE: COURTESY OF SAMUEL HEATH; ABOVE: COURTESY OF NERO YACHTS