

The Owner's Brief: From design to launch



PHOTO - DAN BAUM

The task of the designer is to translate the wildest dreams of their clients and turn them into objects of beauty. Germán Frers likes to meet his owners in their own environment to gauge their personal tastes and preferences. Often, owners call in a specialist interior designer to work in close co-operation with the Frers team. The builder too becomes an integral part of the design team, helping to select the finest woods and other materials. Often a complete tree is purchased, then left to season (right) to ensure that grain patterns and texture remain uniform throughout the yacht.

PHOTO - ROY ROBERTSON/AL HUISMAN

By Germán Frers

There was a time when great designers dictated to an owner or builder the type of yacht they should have. Even with my father, clients more often than not sought his advice on a future yacht rather than decreeing details. If they did, then Father would invariably spend endless hours recounting personal sailing experiences to reinforce his arguments. This resulted in a lot of orders for near sisterships or different sized versions of his own boats.

Today, the brief for a racing yacht is invariably quite simple. An owner or project manager will provide a brief suggesting optimum size and the type of races in which they intend to compete. Budgets are invariably a secondary consideration. Also included will be a delivery schedule and assistance during construction, sea trials and later on, fine tuning and upgrading the yacht for each race. The secret of success in this trade is being able to meet not just the brief, but to realise an owner's dreams and expectations. These are not always the same and become more complicated as size increases and more people get involved.

The owner, project manager and builder are often a manageable and coherent group. The problems begin when free advisers, looking for a niche within an owner's closed group, get involved. It is these people who invariably object in principal to any idea or proposal, whether good or bad, just to make themselves appear important.

No one brief is alike. They can vary from one ideal extreme - 'The boat will be black and called *Stealth* and I wish to simply have fun and pleasure from sailing her' - to endless pages of detailed notes, meetings and recommendations.

Just like my Father, I am always trying to 'defend the boat'. Because of my racing background, or perhaps simply because of the way I am, I like boats to be

gracious, fast, simple and efficient with the minimum amount of gear and superfluous equipment or shiny metal on deck. I like to keep weight to a minimum, the rig clean and draft deep. I appreciate that some of my ideas for a cruising boat do not meet everyone's ideals, but all too often good ideas get buried under a myriad of metal, anchors and multiple level superstructures.

I like to see clients in their own surroundings to obtain a greater understanding of their personal tastes and preferences. This meeting of minds invariably helps owners to develop a clearer picture in their own eye of the type of boat they want, and resolve any conflicting issues such as overall length, displacement, interior volume and potential cost.

Usually, a yacht becomes a dream within a person's life. It is my task after receiving the design brief, to steer the project towards what in my opinion is the best possible compromise. I am always very honest with owners when presenting the pros and cons of each possible solution. In the end, I am guided by the fact that nothing gives the owner more pleasure than a beautiful but functional object that performs well and fulfills all expectations. Sadly, I see all too many yachts around where these principals got lost along the way. This is particularly so with some large sailing yachts which appear to have been planned to stand upright. When they find themselves in rough conditions and start to heel more than 10 degrees, the scene quickly turns to nightmare. Then, all I see is an owner and family who just as quickly become totally disenchanted with their dream.

The brief from production builders are invariably very different. They are knowledgeable people and when they decide to go ahead with a new model, it is usually as a result of detailed market research. There is also a defined budget to work to, thus limiting the latitude for fantasy and deviation from the very clear initial brief.

On motor yachts, things can be very different but no less interesting. One brief we received recently for a 20 metre yacht was remarkable for its simplicity. 'I like the wipers and windshields to look like the one on my Mercedes Benz, and I want the boat to be as tall and wide as possible in order to impress people when she is moored at the dock!'

The Frers design team in the studio at Buenos Aires (Left to right back) Juan Gadea, Fabian Conte, Germán Frers, Sebastian Carlini, Nestor Fourcade, (Front row) Pilar Miguens, Martin Billoch, Elsie Lutz.



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