

matt jones

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Shape shifter

*Combining Stealth and Zen, the 118 WallyPower is giving modern art a technological twist. Text: **Matt Jones**.*

By his own admission Luca Bassani Antivari is no artist, but the 47-year-old Italian entrepreneur and former champion yachtsman will be making waves in the art world later this year when his latest high performance mega yacht goes on display at a California art gallery.

The San Francisco Museum Of Modern Art has selected Bassani's 36-metre 118 WallyPower fast motor yacht as the sole boat in its major architecture and design exhibition, "Glamour: Fabricating Affluence", which runs from October 9, 2004 to January 16, 2005.

"I don't believe I'm an artist, I'm more a rational but passionate conceiver of products," says Bassani, the President and founder of Wally, the Monaco-based company that has, in its first decade of operations, established an international reputation for fabricating innovative custom cruising boats for customers who are both glamorous and affluent. "But with team work we are sometimes capable of producing a masterpiece like the 118 WallyPower," he adds.

Any way you showcase it, mounted in a museum hall or framed in the bay of an enchanting Mediterranean port, the 118 WallyPower is a stunning portrait of design integrated with technology. Earlier this year it sped off with the Millennium Yacht Design Award at SeaTec, the yachting and shipping technology show organized by CarraraFiere, Italy. The judges hailed its design for contributing remarkably to the development of the concept of yacht layout.

"A boat has to move, it's not something steady like a building. That's why you need technology in any component of a boat," says Bassani. "When you then apply good taste, you obtain a fantastic and unique combination between design and technology."

Bassani compares the superstructure of the 118 WallyPower to a Stealth Bomber, its bow to a sail racing boat, the air intakes to a Formula 1 car or Tornado jet fighter, and he identifies a distinctly Japanese influence inside.

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“When you’re able to put together such different styles you’re really getting a new style more than taking references,” he says. “Plus, all these ideas have been put together for functional reasons and nothing else. The target was to draw and build a design resulting from different studies we did: Tank tests, wind tunnel, comfort and functionality studies. The result is something clean, aggressive and sexy by itself. The references are casuals.”

The inspiration for the 118 WallyPower came in late 2000 when a client requested a motor yacht resembling Tiketitan, a 27-metre sloop designed by Wally and German Frers. At the time, sailing boat-focused Wally didn’t make motor yachts, but the request prompted Bassani to consider what a Wally motor yacht would be like. He set out to design the first such boats – the WallyTender, a luxurious day boat, the WallyPower 88 and the 118 WallyPower – with a team of young engineers and architects.

“They are able to design directly on the computer, while I’m not,” Bassani admits. “I sit in front of the screen with them and they become like my pencils. We design and keep modifying together.”

When the new WallyPower line was announced in February 2001, it was acclaimed by international media as a revolution in the yacht industry. Not only did the projects take technology and design in an exciting new direction, but the traditional Wally principles of comfort, speed, safety and enjoyment were maintained in the new boats.

“The Wally mission is to constantly improve the quality of sailing by making it easier, safer, faster and more enjoyable,” says Bassani. “To reach this goal, since its inception the company has carried out research and development (R&D) and created sailing yachts that successfully changed the entire concept of the luxury yacht. The 118 WallyPower started from the same concept and was developed with intense R&D. The result is an innovative yacht that fits perfectly into the Wally concept.”

The extensive R&D programme included wind tunnel testing at the legendary Ferrari facility in Maranello, Italy. Smoke tests in the Ferrari wind tunnel enabled Wally to optimise the air inlets on the gas turbine engines, to verify any turbulence and back flow of the exhaust gas on deck and living areas, and to further confirm the geometry of the hull and superstructure.

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“Certainly we pushed the whole envelope to a new state of the art,” says Bassani. Innovations include a V-shape hull made of advanced composite materials that, while light, ensures the 118 WallyPower is comfortable and stable at speed. Wally has also achieved the perfect isolation of machinery noise and vibration from the boat’s three gas turbine Detroit Diesel engines, which generate 16,800 horsepower and 60 knots of speed, giving the boat a range of 380 nautical miles.

The feature that Bassani is most proud of, however, is the way in which the boat sails through waves at speed without slamming and spraying, something he says, “No other cruising boat could do.” Thanks to the shape of its bow, which allows for a 50 per cent reduction of vertical acceleration, the boat offers a softer, more comfortable passage through waves.

Bassani also highlights, “The level of comfort and peace you feel on the boat in any moment of the day, running at 60 knots or enjoying a meal with friends at anchor in a beautiful bay, looking at the glorious theatre of nature surrounding you.”

The experience is optimised by the Wally concept of inside-outside living spaces. Bassani points out that on the 118 WallyPower guests often don’t realize if they are inside or out. Shelter is available when needed and privacy isn’t compromised, but the Stealth-like superstructure, built in carbon fibre and covered by laminated glass, offers a 360 degree view of the surrounding environment. At the same time, it’s also able to withstand huge loads brought by waves at high speed. The overall deck layout, says Bassani, provides a new way of living at sea.

Accommodating six guests and six crew, the 118 WallyPower has four main living areas designed by Wally with Lazzarini Pickering Architects: The aft deck, the aft saloon, the forward saloon and the front cockpit. The interior has three levels, with the aft cockpit and saloon inside the glass superstructure at one level; the dining, navigation and steering area, and forward social cockpit on a slightly higher level; and, on the lower deck, the guest rooms, crew and service areas and engine room.

The teak-finished deck is flush. The superstructure design, which features flat surfaces for maximum transparency, is accessed through a sliding door aft or lifting door forward. Inside, the atmosphere is that of an airy New York-style loft decorated in a minimalist Japanese style, with furniture by World Wide Woodcraft (WWW).

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The saloon has a bright, relaxed ambience: The 90cm high bulwarks along the superstructure drop down to increase light and open up the view from inside. The teak planes are covered with cushions to serve as sofas, while the spaces between them contain various functions such as additional seating, tables, storage and technology. The teak soles are a continuation of the deck teak, enhancing the inside-outside living concept of the yacht.

The carbon fibre dining table seats eight and is made of two identical halves that split and manoeuvre over the teak storage cabinets on both sides, transforming the area into a large clear space. Alternatively, the dining chairs can be locked to the soles, creating underway seating. Underneath the table, a skylight gives light to the lower corridor.

The lower deck features, from bow to stern: The owner's stateroom, separated from the rest of the lower deck by a double door compartment; double en suites forward; two double guest cabins with en suites; three crew cabins with en suites on the port side; and, on the starboard side, the galley and crew mess.

The owner's stateroom features a king size bed, plenty of storage space provided by side cabinets and a 20" Panasonic plasma screen mounted on the aft bulkhead. A top skylight ensures the cabin has plenty of natural light. The two identical guest cabins feature queen size beds and a 15" Panasonic plasma screen on the aft bulkhead. The colour scheme throughout the night area combines natural teak with ecru linen, white lacquered veneers and silvery fibreglass.

The spacious galley encloses the crew mess, which has a 15" Panasonic plasma screen. The galley is equipped with a professional Gaggenau oven and Miele electrical stove, a Miele combination oven and microwave, plenty of fridges by Miele/Frigomar and a Miele dishwasher. The stainless steel top is from Boffi. The vast engine room, which takes up almost a third of the lower deck is accessed via the galley.

The boat's air conditioning unit is by Frigomar, while Hi Fi and radio throughout is supplied by Linn.

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On the exterior, also styled by Wally with Lazzarini Pickering Architects, the pure lines of the 118 WallyPower are enhanced by the absence of visible cleats, mooring winches, radar antenna, TV dome and anchor system: Everything is perfectly and neatly concealed without sacrificing functionality. Large open areas have been designed for comfortable and safe movement around the deck when at anchor. The chameleon-like paint finish, using Dupont AwlGrip paint, is metallic dark green and changes reflections and colour depending on the light and landscape.

Built by Rodriquez Intermarine, Italy, the 118 WallyPower is a captivating sight, but as you would expect it doesn't come cheap. The three gas turbines version has a price tag of Euros 20,000,000, while the two diesel version costs Euros 14,000,000.

According to Bassani, the boat's owner profile is still to be defined but, he says, "For sure it's a person with courage who understands the importance of innovation as well as integrating design with technology."

With the first 118 WallyPower now on the market, Wally expects interest from Europe, Asia and South America. Currently the company, which was represented at the recent Dubai International Boat Show by Capital Yachting, has no Middle East customers but is confident this will change as Wally's profile is raised outside established yachting circles – something the San Francisco Museum Of Modern Art exhibit will help to achieve.

"For sure it will help to market the brand and establish it as a signature of design and technology outside the yachting world, which is very important," says Bassani of the upcoming exhibition. "It could be that the exhibition itself brings contacts interested in this yacht or the other yachts we produce."

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