

SAVVY SERVICE REAPS SUCCESS

Asia Yachting dealership's CEO Olivier Besson offers insights into his attention-to-detail focus on serving the region's specific needs.

By Mavis Au-Yeung

SINCE IT WAS FOUNDED in 2007, Hong Kong based Asia Yachting has quickly become one of the most well-established yacht dealerships and brokerages in the region. Not even halfway through 2019, the company has already celebrated many milestones, with many more to come. On the grand opening day of the newly expanded Aberdeen office, founder and CEO Olivier Besson discusses the company's keys to success.

Passion pour la mer

"I love this city," enthuses Besson about Hong Kong, his home of 15 years. The first thing he did when he arrived was to buy a boat: "a very fast 32-foot speedboat!" He appreciated Hong Kong as a fantastic location for boating. At the young age of seven, Besson began sailing in Optimist dinghies in the South of France where he grew up, and waterskiing at 10. "I developed a real passion for water activities and fascination for the sea," he recalls. "Being out on the water is a great way to escape. Being in an open space gives you a real sense of freedom; you can just jump on a boat and go anywhere you want. You create your own environment too, with friends, music, food, drink ... you can't do that by jumping on a plane."

The start of Asia Yachting

Soon after arriving in Hong Kong, Besson wanted a change from his previous career as an automotive engineer, and thinking he could bring something different to the yachting scene, he founded Asia Yachting. "It

was just me and myself. 12 years later, we are an almost 50-strong team, spread between Hong Kong and the Philippines. Over this time, I've been working with different shipyards and brands, and it took a while to find the ones I'm comfortable working with." The criteria? They must share his values: products and services provided need to match the owners' individual usage needs and preferred styles, rather than being prescribed to them by companies. "Some brands would say, 'No no – in the US or Europe, everyone uses their boats this way, and so should you.'"

Serving distinctly Asian preferences

"Unlike in Europe and the Med, distances in Hong Kong are very short, so people usually go on one- or two-day trips. Europeans take several days, sometimes two weeks, and they prefer to stay in small groups of family and a few close friends. Here, people are more social and invite more guests," observes Besson on Asian owners' yachting styles.

Asia Yachting represents Nautique, "one of the best wakesurfing and wakeboarding boat brands on the market". Monte Carlo Yachts is a yacht builder it fully endorses for the comfort and sociable spaces indoors and out. "Take the MCY 86, it's huge, with many social spaces to choose from, including its new and unique foredeck lounge area." Groups have their pick of different areas of the luxury yacht to socialise in privacy. And Prestige, offering entry-level boats in the 40- to 70-foot range, is another brand Besson backs with confidence. "They offer good value – lots of space – for what you pay and are designed to be comfortable and easy to manoeuvre; great for first-time boaters."

Curation and focus is important to Asia Yachting. "I don't want to carry a lot of brands – we're not a supermarket!" He says. "I want to have a close partnership with the right people and builders, and we want to know the product, being able to offer the right ones to clients." Being French gives Besson an advantage, since it enables better communication with certain brands and their shipyards. The Beneteau Group is French, and the country is a dominant player in the industry. "It gives me access to the right people and the right products."

How does Asia Yachting differentiate itself?

Besson declares, "We are not here to sell you a boat. We are here to make your dreams happen." The company positions itself as a bespoke, boutique-oriented yachting expert. It recommends the right brands based on individual needs and uses, and then customises the boat to the client's

desires. For every purchase of an MCY through Asia Yachting, the designer will personally fly in to meet the client to draw up the layout and interior – a standard inclusion in the price.

Full management service is arranged





on behalf of first-time buyers, who are guaranteed by Asia Yachting a berth at market value, crew recruitment and management, and concierge service – arranging for catering, entertainers, and other extras clients may want.

“We put a lot of resources into having a quick, capable after-sales department,” continues Besson. Many Hong Kong companies rely on third-parties for repairs, but yacht components come from a great range of manufacturers. “We have a special partnership with Hong Kong companies, so we can provide most services in-house, making us faster than our competitors. For purchases of MCY, we even provide two years of free maintenance on top of warranty, matching customer service to the level of luxury commanded by the brand.

“Something else that no one else is doing, is that we offer clients the opportunity to first enjoy their new yachts in Europe (where most of our boats are built) before bringing them back to Hong Kong. We provide a full crew, and design a full itinerary for them. I was recently in Italy delivering a new MCY to a Hong Kong owner. Over the entire summer, he will be flying back several times to enjoy different parts of Europe: Croatia, Greece, Italy, the south of France and then Spain. We also offer this [multi-stop experience for new purchases] in Asia, as well.” Owners can thus enjoy all the possibilities their yacht has to offer.

Expansion in APAC

“We wanted to position ourselves as leaders in Hong Kong, first and foremost.” This led to the opening of Asia Yachting’s second Hong Kong office at Club Marina Cove, to be closer to the clients and the yachting scene in Sai Kung. “We’re the only dealer in Hong Kong to have two offices,” says Besson proudly.

Asia Yachting has also established itself in another important



Above: CEO Olivier Besson and Chairman Franklin Heng with the rest of the Asia Yachting team.

Left: Monte Carlo Yachts CEO Fabrizio Iarrera, Nuvolari Lenard designer Dan Lenard and Olivier Besson on the MCY 86.

Facing page: Olivier Besson.

yachting locale, where it currently has three offices. “The Philippines and its unpolluted, preserved waters and islands provide great playgrounds for diving and boating,” the Asia Yachting CEO explains. “Filipino culture is also very intertwined with the water. And thanks to the proximity, Hong Kong is a convenient base for transporting yachts.”

Milestones of 2019 and beyond

2019 has been busy for the luxury yacht dealer. In just five months, it has opened its third Philippines office in Manila, launched the Fountaine Pajot brand there, organised Prestige and MCY boat shows, flown in professional wake athletes for a Nautique event, and blew the candles for MCY’s 10th year in Asia with high profile celebrations.

During this interview, the Aberdeen office was buzzing with staff, caterers and guests for the opening. The company was also in midst of preparations for the July launch of MCY 66, 70 and 76 in Venice, Italy.

So what’s next? “We can hardly be more established than we already are in Hong Kong”, admits Besson. “We want to keep our client-oriented, boutique experience and we are looking at other expansion territories in Asia, but it’s too early to say which ones.”

For now, though, it’s time for the Asia Yachting team to celebrate their successful journey thus far.

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