



Lady Candy

# ONE-STOP SUPERYACHT SERVICE

Based in Hong Kong, but with a keen eye on mainland China and Taiwan, Central Yacht is the sum of all career parts of its founder, becoming a bespoke superyacht provider to be reckoned with.

By Mavis Au-Yeung

PAUL BRACKLEY WENT FROM crew to captain of the *Ambrosia*, then became designer, project manager, build-supervisor and charter operator for some of the world's major yachts and largest yacht builders. He eventually decided to combine his diverse repertoire of skills to found Central Yachts in 2010, the only point of contact clients would need to connect with for all their superyacht requirements.

Central Yacht occupies a unique position in the Asian market, as well as the world, because of its ability to provide comprehensive, integrated services for superyachts. For custom yachts, it includes following a project from beginning to end: from designing and building to project management and operations, in order to help bring a client's ideas to life. Central Yacht is currently expanding its charter and broker services, a natural evolution given its wealth of experience and breadth of knowledge of the industry.

## Earning stripes

In our November/December 2018 issue of *Asia-Pacific Boating*, Central Yacht was involved with

10 per cent of our annual ranking of Asia-Pacific's Top 50 Superyachts: Benetti 56-metre *Lady Candy* (concept, design), Admiral 54-metre *Sea Force One* (brokerage), Benetti 65-metre *Ambrosia III* (project management and owner representation), Benetti 56-metre *Genesis II* (build project management), and Jade Yacht 52-metre *Jade 959* (interior design and surveying).

*Lady Candy* was what affirmed Central Yacht's status as a top designer from the get-go. She won *Asia-Pacific Boating's* Asia Boating

Awards in 2014 for Best Custom Yacht, and was also finalist in all three categories of the *Boat International* ShowBoats Design Awards, rubbing shoulders with the likes of Andrew Winch, Raymond Langton and Hot Lab. "For our first yacht to get such recognition was quite fantastic," says Brackley proudly.

Meanwhile, *Xanadu* was named *Robb Report's* Best of the Best – Charter Yacht in 2009, thanks to Central Yacht's rearrangement of the interiors to create dual master cabins. Also a factor was the thoughtful redesign of storage, pantry and crew areas for an efficient service



Paul Brackley and Andrea Manco.





**Ambrosia, now listed for sale with Central Yacht.**

and improved crew welfare, something Brackley understands and cares about, having had hands-on experience for years himself.

## Relationship with Azimut-Benetti

Central Yacht's connections with Benetti were established by serendipity. "It all began 20 years ago when I was an engineer, studying to be a captain," Brackley explains. "I took a big job on a yacht called *Ambrosia*. Here I was, in the crew mess on a Saturday afternoon by myself, and the telephone rang – it was the owner Ambros Young, king of yachting in Asia. I began working for Mr Young in 1999, when he was major shareholder in Benetti. After I got my licence, I came back as captain on *Ambrosia II*, and then followed the build as owner's rep for *Ambrosia III*, and ever since then he has been a teacher to me and a great influence. Then I went on to other Benetti projects, like *Genesis II*, *Lady Candy* and *Xanadu*."

Central Yacht has been involved with five of the Italian luxury shipyard's most significant yachts over 50 metres. Having a close understanding of Benetti's design and build processes allowed the company to fulfill the owner's wishes for *Lady Candy*, which was constructed on a standard Benetti platform. Completely different aesthetics on the inside and out were created without changing the basic structure, something not many can accomplish. To this date, the two companies remain closely linked; Central Yacht's interior designer, architect, and principal surveyor Andrew Manco is currently helping Benetti with interior design issues on their biggest project to date.

## Asian roots

For Brackley, it was never a question to establish Central Yacht in Hong Kong. Since his relationship with Young, he has remained

in Hong Kong since 2003, in between visits to clients in mainland China, Italy to supervise builds or to attend Benetti launches, and Taiwan to kick off the first meeting of the Marina Lobby Group fighting for superyacht facilities in the less-developed marine industry of Taiwan.

"In Asia, Hong Kong is the place to be, as the seafaring hub," he claims. "But the future for me is in the mainland. I'm learning and improving my Mandarin. I'm looking to work more in China – I've always found everyone very friendly, helpful, and compassionate."

Central Yacht is certainly exactly where it needs to be. According to Brackley, Asian owners are more knowledgeable, use their yachts much more, like to be very involved in the whole process, and know exactly what they want while also being very receptive to ideas. Its full range of integrated services is particularly useful, being offered far away from most of the world's major yacht manufacturing places. "In a growing market, it's easier for people to be more receptive to the way we do things, which is the way I believe things should be done, instead of just following what has always been done."

## One fluid process

The ideal for new builds is to see through the entire process. From the beginning, Central Yacht works with an owner, who usually comes to the company through word-of-mouth, to come up with a concept and design. Afterwards, Central Yacht negotiates with the shipyard, building specifications, signing legal contracts and other necessary paperwork. From then on, the build commences and undergoes supervision, for purposes of quality maintenance, problem solving and integration of ad hoc owner requests. Once construction is complete, the yacht is delivered and a test cruise is conducted. "It makes no sense to separate the parties involved," emphasises Brackley. "It really needs to be one team."



**Paul Brackley**





**Top: Main saloon of Lady Candy.**

**Bottom: Under construction – Lady Candy between fabrication and outfitting sheds.**

Independent groups of people means different ideas, conflicting interests, and less consideration taken for what happens after one group's involvement is over. This fragmentation can create costly pitfalls: less care for accessibility, maintainability, safety, and function; and changes to the specifications adds to build time, eating into subcontractors' profit margins, making them cut corners.

It's also important to minimise problems for these contractors and that they work well together, so Central Yacht also assumes the role of coordinator, which is rare and usually not allowed by shipyards, but which Central Yacht excels at: "Some subcontractors for *Genesis II* refused to return until they heard we were the ones supervising the build, because they knew it would be well-coordinated and on time." In fact, *Lady Candy* (and its copy, *Genesis II*) was delivered ahead of schedule and had no changes to the specification – rare in superyacht construction – thanks to thoroughly researched and well-designed plans.

## Design

In Brackley's experience, Asian owners usually refer to hotels when coming up with design ideas, from the likes of Four Seasons to the The Peninsula, as they travel often and take inspiration from environments they like. European owners, on the other hand, tend to want what they see in boating magazines and existing yachts. In the end, conservative styles are the

ones most commissioned: comfortable, with high-quality furniture and fittings. Brackley's preference is for minimalist styling, where form follows function. "No matter what it looks like, it must be practical, easy to clean and maintain, and safe."

This means designing from the inside-out. Exterior style lines on *Lady Candy* have a purpose (as foot supports for maintenance crew) and Brackley stresses the importance of square, ample-sized windows to look comfortably out of. This is often neglected by studios that design beautifully flowing lines on the outside that, from the inside, may leave windows a metre from the floor and only 20 centimetres high.

Attention to detail is a point of pride and principle, which can also be seen in other design-related decisions of Central Yacht: for safety reasons, there are no lights on the back of wheelhouses, and window panes are angled a near-imperceptible five degrees inside the mullion to minimise reflection. Beauty is not lost amid practicality, as both are combined in Central Yacht's capping rails, made of mahogany instead of the conventional teak. This beautiful wood, the traditional material for capping rails, is more sustainable, and the company has designed a new way of installing the rails to make them more easily removable and varnished by maintenance crew.



## Charter

Brackley explains the motto "Excellence from Experience" that represents the core of Central Yacht, which applies to everything the company provides, including its charter services.

"I created *Xanadu* from bare steel. Every aspect of the build, crew selection and training, toys and watersports inventory, massage menu, AV system and charter operation was my



**Top: Jade 959**

**Bottom: Interior of Jade 959**

responsibility. Having real hands-on experience is the key to a great charter experience.”

Location-wise, most clients prefer hotspot destinations: in the south of France and the Caribbean. Brackley prefers Fiji and quiet, unspoiled little islands that are accessible only by yacht: the Aeolian Islands, Ponza in Italy, as well as those in Hong Kong. He compares the geology in areas south of Lantau Island to the rocks found in Girolata, a very remote coastal beach in western Corsica, Italy: “When the sun is setting, the rocks grow red, which is really quite amazing.”

## Developments in Taiwan

Central Yacht is hoping to turn Kaohsiung into a base for superyachts. “Our refit facility is now open for business, and along with local citizens we’re now lobbying the city for a proper superyacht marina.” This does not exist in Asia, and Central Yacht was able to halt the city’s plans to build a pontoon and piling marina, which would be flimsy, vulnerable to typhoons, and not suitable for larger yachts.

Brackley chose Kaohsiung as a place for refits and repairs because of the facilities it has for maintenance and provisioning, the easy visa-free access, the ability to import foreign crew, the many skilled craftsmen, and the availability of high-quality complex components that are purchased by top shipyards in Europe, all within a short distance of five kilometres from the proposed Tainan marina. “It’s an investment into the future,” he explains. “Our full-time employee will lobby for a marina and dry dock facility, which will be available to anyone. A superyacht marina would attract wealth and beautify the city, but it’s important to lobby from the grassroots because they’re the ones who live there. It would

be perfect for owners in China, where superyacht facilities do not exist yet and definitely owners from Hong Kong (an overnight passage), where we’re running out of berths. There’s not enough maintenance, the infrastructure is overloaded, and there are no dry docks for yachts over 60 metres.” Eventually, Brackley would like to find a beautiful place, like the renowned Viareggio in Tuscany, in the mainland or Taiwan to build a shipyard for quality yachts. “But it’s a project for next year, so we’ll see”.

## Planning with passion

Central Yacht’s future also includes developing its brokerage side with highly-experienced new partner, Greg Dagge, within its existing network of China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, Vietnam and Thailand. Ninety per cent of its clients are Chinese, and Brackley’s business partner Kenny Xi will be developing the brokerage and new build side in Shanghai. He elaborates: “My passion is in new builds. When you’ve been working for three years on a project, and it rolls out of the shed and you see what you’ve created ... Can you imagine? It’s

been wrapped in plastic and scaffolding all this time and you’re not quite sure what the whole thing looks like. Then one day, a beautiful sunny day if you’re lucky, it’s finally revealed and everyone can see it for the first time – that’s your baby. For the owner, it’s his yacht while he owns it, but eventually he’s going to sell it. In my heart, however, it’s always going to be my yacht.”

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