

What's Out There On The High Seas

THE LATEST DESIGNS IN MOTOR YACHTS

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WHEN WE SPEAK OF CONTEMPORARY AND INNOVATIVE DESIGN, NOTHING FITS THIS HIGH AESTHETIC AS COMPLETELY AS YACHT DESIGN. EVERY DETAIL IS ANALYSED AND DESIGNED PERFECTLY TO MAXIMISE SPACE AND THAT ULTIMATE SENSE OF LUXURY.

Architects of large scale buildings like to, every so often, come back to designing something small, where every detail is meticulously examined and carefully thought through, something that applies to Yacht design. Inherently, these boats have less space than most interior living spaces on land, so every effort must be made to maximise space while providing a strong sense of amplitude and design luxury.

The place to start when trying to understand the motor yacht industry in Phuket is to speak with Josh Lee. He arrived in Phuket in 1997 and has been at the core of the growth of boating here. I sat down with him at the Phuket Boat Show at the Phuket Royal Marina to discuss where the Phuket boating industry was and is going. It was a hot day and we sat on the Pershing 80, a boat that he had on sale at the time. Josh Lee is a fit, intense man with short cropped hair that he kept covered with a baseball cap. As we sat, he tugged his hat on and off, seemingly in discomfort at having to put up with the interview we were conducting. A tri-athlete, he has the demeanor of a dealmaker, finding solutions quickly and seamlessly for his clients by an attention to detail that presents itself in his intense

gaze. He wore a white shirt, tight over his shoulders and blue jeans with boat shoes. During our chat, his attention level shifted back and forth from severe focus on the questions I asked to complete distraction, relieved by his Blackberry or his glances towards the dock, hoping for a client to release him from the torture of the interview. As he said various times, he was there to sell boats and help his clients, not promote himself, which was obvious in varying degrees during the several hours we spent talking.

Josh Lee arrived in Phuket on a boat he had purchased in Brisbane and had sailed to Phuket, planning to continue on, maybe towards Europe. During the last few months, I have met dozens of sailors with this same story, arriving in Phuket with plans to move on, but once landing here, finding a joy for the area and the cruising grounds nearby, they decide to stay and make Phuket home. Lee worked in Hong Kong from 1994 to 1997 and after buying his boat, decided to travel. After a few weeks here, he decided to sell his boat which would give him the liquidity to spend more time in Phuket. He asked around, looking for a good boat brokerage to help him sell his boat. He could not find one. One did not exist here, and the shock grew when other sailors he had met, mentioned their desire to also sell their boats, some desperately. Realising this market need, he decided to set up Lee Marine and in the years since, has built a business that thrives, based on reliable and twenty-four hour service and being able to keep up with market needs.

There was only one marina in Phuket at the time, Boat Lagoon, and with the infrastructure growth of marinas have come boats to fill the need of the well heeled visitor and resident alike. Lee mentioned that at the time, there was one exclusive private villa estate called Rayan Villa as well, not allowing for land

based residential infrastructure that boat owners wanted. All of this has changed dramatically over the years as Phuket grew from a backpacker point on the map into the luxury destination that it is today. Lee knew that with the tremendous natural beauty and great boating opportunities that existed, eventually, Phuket would be a fantastic destination for boating and luxury living.

After a while, we shifted the focus of our conversation to the state of the industry today. Lee feels that many international business owners had, at the head of the financial crisis, returned to rescuing their businesses and getting things stabilised and now, after this period of hard work, many were ready to get back to their passion for boating and enjoying time on the water. With this increase in business and the desire for new boats, comes the need for increased infrastructure in marinas, as all the current five marinas in Phuket are full and bursting at the seams. Lee was unusually passionate while describing the need for better on-water safety to be provided by the Thailand Government. He described issues such as overloading, broad based environmental problems, disposal of fuel, the way waste is not controlled correctly, and the licensing of commercial craft and crew that must be improved. Clearly with the increase in boat numbers, sizes and in opportunities for boating experiences, a need to control safety is paramount.

After our meeting, I kept thinking about how much time Josh Lee had spent talking about safety and infrastructure. I came to realise that the key to his success is based on details beyond the sale of the boat itself. If he were purely a salesman who sells, then moves on, he would not have built the business →

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The Pershing 80.

Photo courtesy of Lee Marine.



and reputation that he has managed to over the years. Lee Marine does not sell you a boat, they sell their experience in the industry, one that has succeeded here for fourteen years. Lee spent time talking about how they “tropicalise” boats, finding solutions for boats that might have been originally designed for cooler climates like the Mediterranean. Here in Phuket, algae, extreme heat and other tropical issues must be dealt with during the design. Air Conditioning systems are beefed up to respond to the cooling load, extra shades and awnings are added and extra protections are added to the exterior shell to protect it from the extreme heat and sun.

Lee sees the future of boating in Phuket in very bright terms. New marinas will be built, new visitors will come and realise what a paradise this is. With new boats, yachts and super yachts arriving, the local economy will benefit tremendously from the growth, creating jobs and a better living standard over time. This is clearly important to Lee, an almost fluent Thai language speaker. He clearly appreciates Phuket and what it offers. He told me about the difference here regarding the service provided on boats in Asia, a much improved level of attention from Europe and America, something that adds to the allure of boating in Phuket.

The Pershing 80' superyacht named Cavallino, is one of the boats that Lee Marine introduced to Phuket. Josh Lee himself did a sea trial cruise before delivery to Phuket in late November, 2009. During the sea trial, new owner Anil Thadani, founder of one of Phuket's most prestigious resorts, Amanpuri, Cavallino cruised the Croatian and Montenogro coasts for just over two weeks with Lee, who was board constantly checking the boat for any faults and problems that needed fixing before final delivery. According to Lee, “I never like to jinx a boat but this Pershing 80' was incredible. Forty one knots cruising

speed and a level of comfort that was surprising to us all. Eight people for nearly two weeks cruising in complete privacy and no one wanted to get off.” Cavallino, continues to be the only Pershing 80' in Phuket, but several more are on the way.

Cruising at forty-one knots and encountering some seas up to three metres, the Pershing 80' performed as you would expect a boat of this pedigree and quality to—perfectly. Thadani, who had owned a Pershing 64' drove much of the way and was delighted with the performance.

He uses Cavallino for cruises off Amanpuri during the high season to The Andamans, Burma and Malaysia and then down to Indonesia for the low season. On this trip the Pershing 80' also paid a visit to Budva in Montenegro where the new Amanresort is under construction on the small island of Sveti Stefan, another property in Anil's high end hotel chain.

Built at the Marche, Italy Pershing boat yard, the interiors are by Fulvio de Simoni, one of the world's top super yacht designers who has worked on numerous Pershing designs for over twenty years. It features his famous minimalistic interior design. Elegant leather sofas and interiors by Poltrona Frau, the Italian international luxury furniture design group, enhance the spaces. Features include a large glass screen dividing the saloon from the cockpit which can be slid down into a recess between the crew quarters and the engine room, special SCRIMP molding for the fibreglass hull, a walkway that can be used as a swim ladder or gangway and an extendable hardtop. Pershing's motto is “yachting into the

future”. With the Pershing 80' they are fully justifying that optimistic outlook on life.

Another veteran of Phuket boating that I went to see was Vincent Tabuteau, A Frenchman, he has lived in Phuket for many years and been part of the founding and entrepreneurial spirit of the early days. His company, Asia Marine has developed a successful yacht charter agency with a portfolio of over thirty contracted yachts, with or without crew. Asia Marine manages the marketing, planning, bookings and administration of a fleet of ten charter yachts based at the Yacht Haven Marina, and is a clearing house of ten crewed boats and super yachts, while also acting as the central agent for two super yachts based here. They are also part of a traditional yacht charter agency network in Europe, Asia and Australia. The new internet yacht charter platforms worldwide, help to facilitate the ability to move yachts and focus on international chartering on a much larger scale. Obviously the more people see Phuket and what it has to offer, the better for the local boating industry in the long run.

One of the boats that Vincent Tabuteau introduced me to was the Integrity 55. Built in Dubai, this boat constitutes an intelligent design, very sleek exteriors and state of the art technology to make cruising a real pleasure. In the boating industry, experience goes a long way. The name ‘Integrity’ represents the signature series of Riviera Boat, which began building pleasure-crafts in 2004 and has thirty years of experience in building commercial boats. Riviera products are built with the latest quality →

materials and technology. In the Integrity Yacht line, each boat is inspired by a particular element – earth, water, air and fire. Luxury, speed and excitement are guaranteed aboard the Integrity yachts. The Riviera design team conceptualised the interior design, their work on the first hull is well done as the joinery and details are excellent. The modern colour scheme on hull number one is based around beige with heavy use of light maple wood and dark wenge accents. The buttery interiors are somewhat monochromatic with light coloured materials covering the sofas, windows, and carpet combined with light maple wall panels of the same beige hue. The interior is streamlined, with stripes and accents in wenge running throughout the boat. Little stainless steel is used, and this absence of metal and profusion of wood create a warm feeling.

Hybrid propulsion for ships is what Sunseeker, with their Phuket office will be introducing in the near future. This will be a very exciting development for the future of our planet. Winding one's way out of the harbour using electric power, then deploying the diesel engines to whizz at full speed across the water in time to relish the romantic atmosphere and peacefulness of the bay late in the evening is what the future holds. What sounds so tantalising will soon become a real scenario for yachts. The British yacht manufacturer, Sunseeker and their development engineers at MTU, are soon to test a hybrid propulsion system as part of a research project. As with hybrid rail traction, the crankshaft starter generator (CSG) is coupled with the diesel engine. However, on the yacht this generator is separated from the diesel engine by a clutch. With the clutch disengaged, the CSG can take the ship from the harbour out into the open sea. At this, the electric motor showcases all its advantages: it is quiet, produces no emissions and reaches its maximum speed immediately. At a maneuvering speed of six knots, two batteries can provide the motor with

energy for almost one hour. "That's enough time to depart from even the world's largest marinas", explains Dr Gerhard Filip, applications engineer at MTU. If the captain then decides to go at full throttle, he will deploy the full power of his diesel engines. The coupling will engage and the combustion engines take over the ship's propulsion. During this phase, the CSG, in its role as generator, will recharge the batteries so that they will be available for their next task: to provide power for the electric motor as a short-term back-up for the diesel engines so that the yacht may accelerate even faster. When the boat is anchored in a bay, the captain can revert to the batteries for his on-board power supply and switch off the on-board power generator. This not only means less noise but also prevents the emission of pollutants. Another advantage of the marine hybrid system: in order to save fuel, the yacht captain may shut down one diesel engine when cruising at moderate speed and drive the second propeller using the electric motor (e-shaft mode). "One third of the time, yachts only move with one third of their rated power output. One diesel engine is enough to do the job, saving the fuel for the second engine", adds Dr Filip.

I had a couple of beers with Iain Davie, of Sunseeker-Phuket, and we chatted about the hybrid boat on the horizon.

He also showed me the latest boat in the Sunseeker portfolio, the Manhattan 73. This boat features a design and deck plan that creates spacious luxury in a sociable, open plan environment. Closed off lower helm and closed galley option allows the owner privacy normally associated with much bigger and more expensive yachts. A super-sized stateroom along with two double guest suites and a twin cabin are offered within the accommodations deck. The location for the galley is either below deck or as a completely self-contained space with further options as an open plan within the saloon deck. The fly-bridge has options for a spa tub, jet ski →

Image below.
Interior of the Pershing 80.
Photo courtesy of Lee Marine.

