

With his latest concept for super-yacht, **Lord Norman Foster** set himself the challenge of achieving harmony between interior and exterior space and a harmonious shared experience for owners. The result is a strikingly modern design and a radical departure for ultra-luxury ocean-going enthusiasts.

HIGH SEASON ON THE HIGH SEAS

ord Norman Foster is fast developing a reputation around these parts as a boys' toys aficionado. In our last issue, we reported on his work designing the interior and exterior of the Falcon 7X private jet. This time around he has taken to the waves with the launch earlier this year of Ocean Emerald, a 41-metre yacht boasting more deck space and interior comfort than any equivalent vessel of her size.

But far from becoming designer du jour for the world's oligarchs, sultans and playboy billionaires, such ventures have demonstrated a distinctively egalitarian bent. Having previously worked alongside fractional ownership operator NetJets, this new venture is undertaken in partnership with YachtPlus, purveyors of a similar concept for those looking to buy into the super yacht experience.

'The concept of shared ownership and the client's ambitions seemed quite radical, which is always appealing,' the architect explains. 'Using a yacht for just four weeks of the year, with all the associated maintenance, moorings and transportation costs, is far from efficient. Sharing ownership so that the boat is in use for 48 weeks achieves greater benefits, economically and environmentally, from fewer resources. Instead of eight boats with eight owners in the marina, there is only one.'

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Unlike his work on aircraft, this is not Foster's first foray into yachting design. In 1993 he designed Izunami for a Japanese client, following this up with Dark Shadow in 2003. However, this has not been a pursuit of luxury for luxury's sake; the 74 year-old has long been susceptible to the lure of the sea.

'As with flying, I have a passion for sailing,' he explains. 'For some years I chartered a traditional sailing boat in Turkey for summer vacations. Through this project I wanted to evoke something of the thrill of being out on the water.'

He has certainly been successful in this endeavour. Ocean Emerald has been designed with a strong emphasis on space and light, boasting five suites for up to 12 guests and seven different external decks across

a variety of scales. All furnishings and fittings are provided by renowned Italian manufacturer Cassina.

'When you consider the percentage of external and internal space on a typical yacht, only one-fifth is useable outside decking,' Foster explains. 'We set ourselves the challenge of redressing the balance, with almost equal internal and external dimensions. At the same time, we wanted to create a yacht on which 12 people can comfortably spend ten days together at sea. The decks provide areas where all guests can congregate, as well as more intimate, personal terraces. These are vital performance differences, so it is perhaps natural that the boat also looks strikingly different.'

Liquid assets

Such innovation does not come cheap. This is the first of four Foster-designed yachts being rolled out, each valued at €16 million. A one-eighth share costs a cool €1.9m, entitling the owner to 30 days of sailing a year.

Foster has already laid down an investment, with plans for a family jaunt around the Mediterranean well underway. He clearly draws great inspiration from time spent at sea.

'There is certainly a delight in living on the water,' believes the architect. 'Our London Studio is on the river, it is such a magical element and a constant source of inspiration. Too often connections to the water are eroded over time as cities evolve. Many of our projects have been about rediscovering a lost dialogue and celebrating the views and the sense of space that a waterside setting offers.'

It would seem that through designing this fleet, Foster + Partners has taken this philosophy to its extreme. While there are major differences between building on and in the water, Foster believes that prior experiences have led the practise to create something unique.

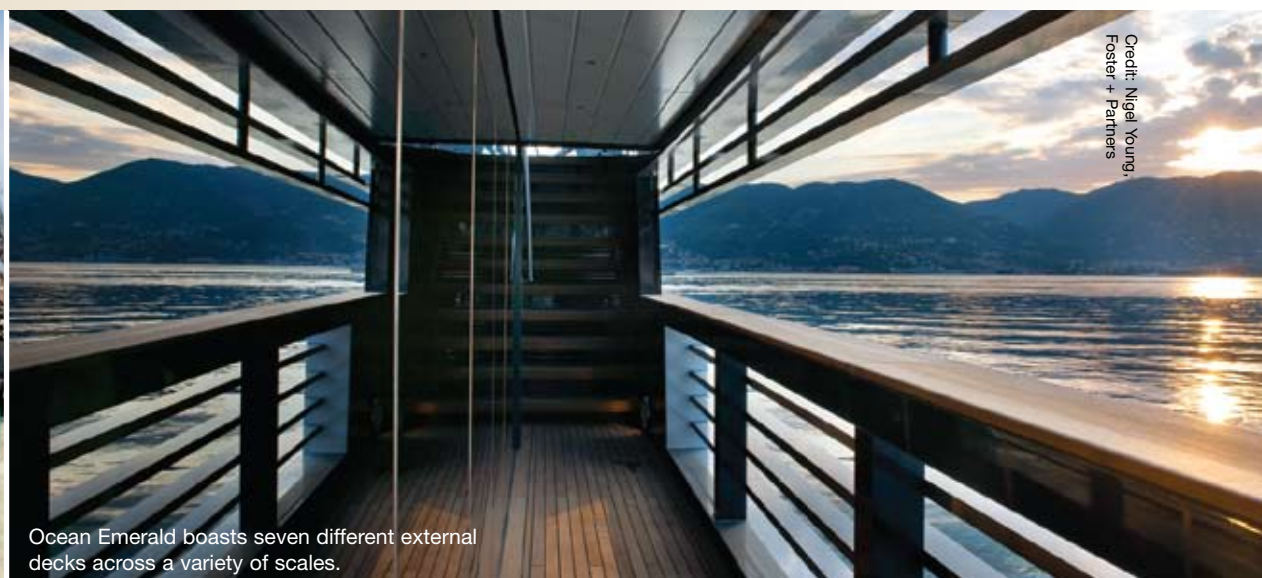
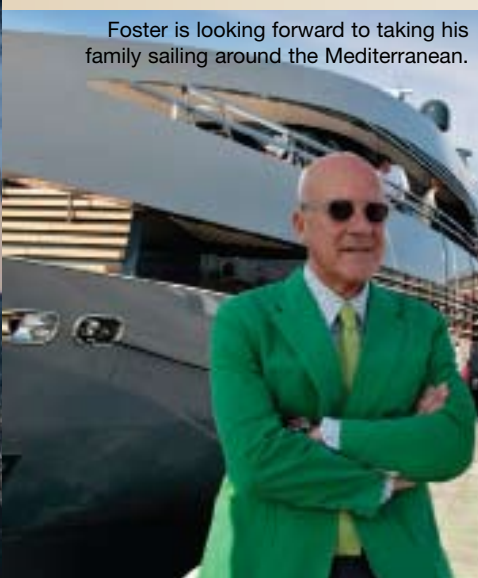
'Our experience designing buildings means that we are more accustomed to the human dimensions of design and the many issues that add up to a luxury lifestyle,' he begins. 'When you look at boatyards today, they can be quite traditional in their attitude to their customer and often follow a particular aesthetic. This is not to underestimate security, speed and safety, all of which are critical, but the lifestyle element is not as high a priority. For many owners, however, that is the primary concern.'

For yacht aficionados worried that such sentiments might indicate an excessive departure from traditional design values, Foster's clear passion for the industry should allay such concerns.

'Our aim was always to create something practical, safe, beautiful and, above all else, pleasurable,' he exclaims. 'This was never about being different for the sake of it.'

You will struggle to find many design critics or sailing enthusiasts willing to claim that he has not been utterly successful. ■

Foster is looking forward to taking his family sailing around the Mediterranean.



Ocean Emerald boasts seven different external decks across a variety of scales.

Credit: Nigel Young,
Foster + Partners