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YACHT & CRUISE

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PHILIPPE BRIAND: A CAREER OF CROSS-OVERS

"To be a yacht architect is to find the magic balance between Science and Art." This short and simple quote aptly sums up the ideas and approach to design of Philippe Briand, a yacht designer and naval architect, who has made over 12,000 vessels over his long career

His first design was at 11 years old, and then he entered the world of races, winning two championships as helmsman and skipper. He ended up creating the very boats that are his great passion. Spurred by curiosity to investigate, discover, and find new ways of innovating the industry, he ranges from sailboats to superyachts. Each time, they are designed as unique pieces, the fruit of harmony between engineering, architecture, and aesthetics. His two studios – one based in London where he lives, and the other in La Rochelle, where he is from – and many collaborations with leading shipowners and shipyards (such as CNB, Wally, Jeanneau, Royal Huisman, Sanlorenzo, and Perini Navi) do not exhaust his never-ending creative ebullience. Now he is looking to the future of the boating industry with a powerful push for sustainability.

author: ***Veronica Orsi***
portrait photo: ***Guillaume Plisson***
projects photo: ***INOUI (Gianfranco Forza), Jeanneau 65 (courtesy of Jeanneau 65), Shinkai (courtesy of Feadship), Vitruvius N10 (courtesy of Vitruvius Yachts)***

From sailing boat design to designing megayachts, your story is long and interesting. Let us hear your version of it. How did it all happen?
I like to discover. That's why I started in this field, being a seaman. I personally designed a sailboat for the America's Cup. Then I developed interest in other kinds of boats, like big sailing yachts, and, from there, big motor yachts. Moving from one scale to another lets me enhance my skills because I always learn something from every field. Sometimes what I learn helps me to design something else. It's a kind of cross-over. That's my story. What drives me is my curiosity. I love to develop new concepts and new designs. This is what has happened over my career.

This story is also about the pursuit of the 'perfect yacht,' whether a sailboat or motor boat. So how does 'a' yacht become 'the' perfect one?
I think that nothing is perfect. No design, no life is perfect. But it's a goal, and when you have this goal, of course, it helps you to make progress. This is what we're doing every day. We want to constantly make better designs, now just as we did in the past. I believe we will do the same in the future, and we'll be even more advanced. This is a kind of life guided by progress and the pursuit of perfection.

Which efficient, long-range green technologies help yachts become more 'perfect'?
Being sustainable is one of the elements we consider when we start designing. Design is a matter of aesthetics, architecture, functionality, the taste of our client; all these pieces of information must be carefully considered and put out on the table to make this jigsaw puzzle. Now sustainability is a new piece of information, which affects several parts of the boat. Of course, it must be considered throughout our project. Now all industries are looking for a sustainable approach. We need to produce more, help the economy, but all with a new concern for the impact on the planet, which affects everybody. To me, sustainability means measuring the impact our ideas, creativity, and actions in the industry.

What value does aesthetics have in your design process?
For me, aesthetics is the endpoint. I know that some designers start with aesthetics, but we essentially arrive at aesthetics. Before we create the concept, we must bring all this information together in a nice, complementary way. Design is what essentially defines this jigsaw puzzle. It is what defines how it is assembled and its architecture. When we have the architecture, the final step is to add some nice colors and nice contours to get a good-looking boat. But that is the last step of the design process.

Would you tell us the story of the Vitruvius N10, which was a collaboration with Tankoa Yachts? What stage of the design are you in?
It is finished! Right now we're delivering the engineering and the project to the shipyard, and soon we're going to start building the boat. I have been working on this project for more than two years. Starting with the first contact with the client, we developed a concept step by step with him, going into detail for a complete design through to the aesthetics at the end. It's a very good project because it fits the client's expectations. This is our mission, that our design match expectations.

Philippe Briand designed the Vitruvius N10, a 52-meter custom superyacht built by Tankoa Yachts, (this page); the 33-meter Inoui by Vitters Shipyard and the 55-meter Feadship Shinkai explorer (opposite page)

What kinds of challenges have you faced?
We always have challenges, in every project we have done. Because all our projects are one-offs, that means we have very few reference points and we have to invent everything from scratch every time.

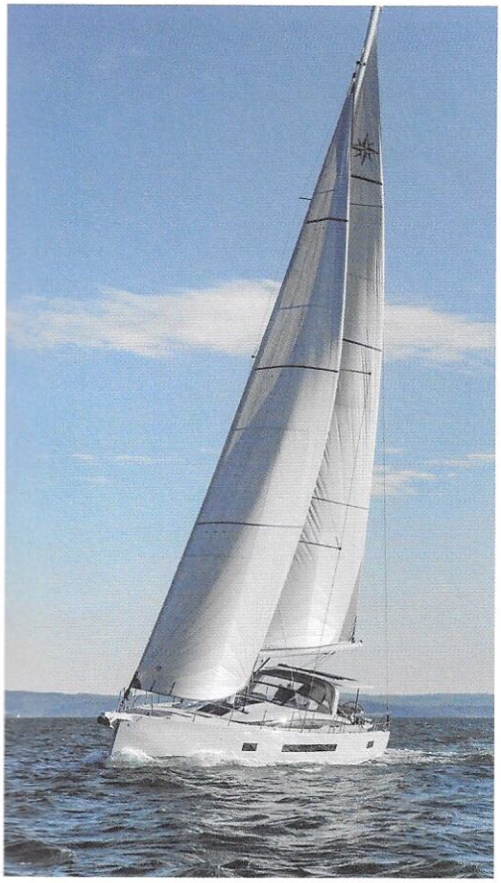
You're always looking for a balance between tradition and innovations. Where does true innovation come from in yacht design?
There is some very good engineering in the industry, especially in the sailing racing business, such as America's Cup. I can't think of any other industry that has made so many developments as it has over the last 20 years. It is an incredibly innovative field. We are closely involved with this, using these developments in cruise, motor yacht or other areas. In the business of motor yachts or luxury big superyachts, I am not sure there is so much innovation. They are quite traditional sectors because a lot of money is involved, and a lot of attention goes to marketing. Unfortunately, marketing now influences price and design.

Yacht design is also deeply influenced by the idea that clients have about "journeys," which has led to evolving yacht types as well as a kind of hybridization of types.
Yes, this is a current trend. Again, marketing is targeting new consumers, a younger generation, people with money. If we want to sell a houseboat to them, we must create a boat where they can grow over their lifetimes. We must take care to adapt to their lives on the boat. They have a lifestyle.

For example, the Feadship Shinkai can be considered both a lifestyle superyacht and an explorer.
The explorer is a very particular industry for enthusiasts. In this case, the owners were very well informed, with precise ideas and clear specifications in mind.

Speaking of sailing yachts, tell us more about your latest Jeanneau 65 and your long collaboration with the French shipyard.
This is a totally different field. We design for the brand, and for the client only indirectly. But it lets us demonstrate the different approaches we take.

The Vertigo sailing yacht, built by the New Zealand shipyard Alloy Yachts, is 67 meters long. Exterior design by Philippe Briand, interiors by Christian Liaigre



I started to collaborate with Jeanneau in 1977, designing the Symphonie, so I am very familiar with their ability to build and their process for making boats. I have designed more than 45 Jeanneau boat models over 45 years.

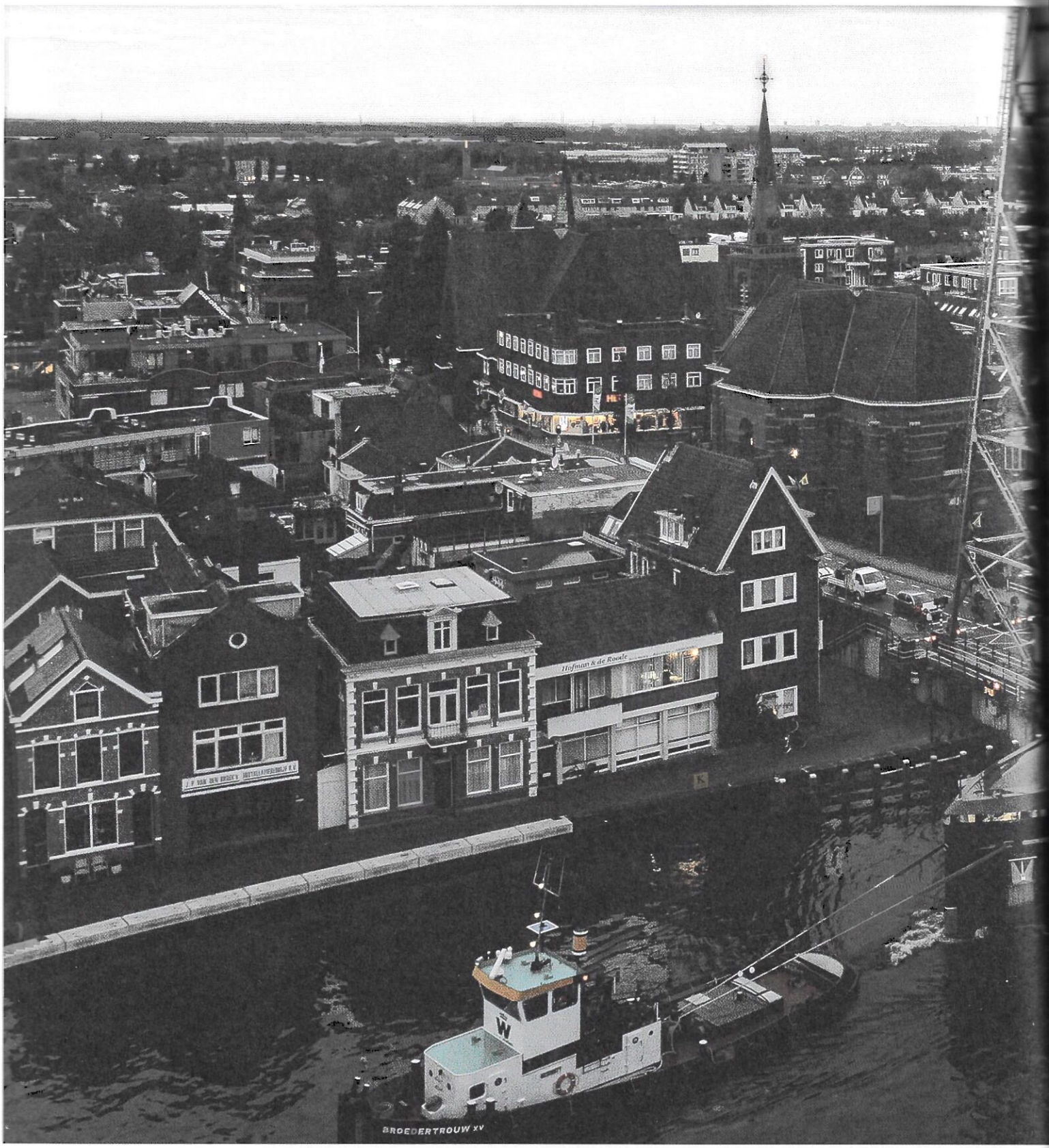
You are one of the founders of Water Revolution Foundation. What are its aims?
One of the Foundation's key values is promoting sustainability. It aims to study the development of the superyacht industry, which is not changing enough. Through the Foundation, we'd like to promote moving towards sustainability as the necessary direction for the industry to develop in.

Lastly, what new concepts are you working on?
We have several projects of different natures. We are working on a catamaran that is going to be announced soon by Bluegame, a 65 m superyacht that Rossinavi will launch next year, and another 75 m superyacht for another brand that unfortunately I can't yet announce. We will also attend the Cannes festival in September with three boats: Prestige 48, Jeanneau 65, and Sanlorenzo SD90.

His ten-year collaboration with Jeanneau Yachts continues with its 65 flagship: 20.7 m long for a yacht for sailing with the whole family

WONDER. AALSMEER, THE NETHERLANDS | SHINKAI | FEADSHIP | VITRUVIUS YACHTS

Shinkai, the Japanese for 'deep sea'. The 55-metre explorer leaves Aalsmeer, the shipyard's seat in the Netherlands, for the first sea trials in November 2021. A striking mast and the yacht's very own submarine:



these were just two of the specific requests by an owner who has enormous experience of discovering the world by sea.

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