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PEARL YACHTS CELEBRATES ITS 20TH ANNIVERSARY BY TAKING
ON BIG-NAME RIVALS AND STEPPING INTO SUPERYACHT TERRITORY.
BY JUSTIN RATCLIFFE



TROVE



In a competitive market, production builders are under constant pressure to differentiate their products. This is especially relevant for Pearl Yachts, a relatively young British company competing against homegrown rivals like Sunseeker, Princess and Fairline. The Pearl 95, its latest and largest flybridge model, follows the Pearl 65 and 80 and continues the successful collaboration with naval architect Bill Dixon and interior designer Kelly Hoppen. It also offers what is arguably the most powerful motivation to buy: Value.

“When I cofounded the company in 1998, we started with the Pearl 41 and 45,” says Iain Smallridge, managing director of Pearl Yachts and a former captain. “At that time I never imagined that we’d be stepping into superyacht territory with a 95-footer.”

Pearl’s early boats were built entirely in the U.K., but as their size increased and sales picked up, so did the logistics; to maintain its competitive edge the company decided to look further afield. China emerged as the most cost-effective option. Today, the tooling and manufacturing work is done in Xiamen, a short flight from Hong Kong on the Chinese mainland. The boats are then shipped to Pearl’s facility near Portsmouth in the U.K. for fitting out and finishing.

“The build quality is easily on a par with anything in Europe,” says Bill Dixon, who has a long history of building in China. “The lamination, systems and engineering are right up there. Put another way, you can’t tell where these boats were built.”

The Pearl range is fitted with much of the same high-end machinery and equipment—CAT or MTU engines, Kohler generators, TRAC or Seakeeper stabilizers, Lewmar deck gear, Gaggenau galleys and so on—as its competitors building in Europe, but at considerably less cost to its customers. With a base price starting at \$7,160,000 the Pearl 95 is priced to compete with rival models.

On top of its competitive pricing, Pearl throws in a comprehensive five-year warranty. While most new boat hull warranties run an average of two years, Pearl’s after-sales support reflects the company’s confidence in its products and provides an added incentive for owners looking for peace of mind.





An East-meets-West aesthetic with neutral tones and natural textures gives the 95's interior spaces a sense of tranquility.

Flybridge yachts with a raised pilothouse can sometimes appear top heavy and ungainly, but that was not the case with the streamlined Pearl 95 tied up at the dock in Mallorca, which looked positively impatient to slip her moorings and head out into the wide blue yonder.

"With the Pearl 95, we wanted to keep it sleek and sporty, but still have an on-deck master suite and seating on top of the forward coach roof, without resorting to an enormously high boat," says Dixon.

The master suite and foredeck arrangement is what marketing folks would call a unique selling point. The master is not full beam, but panoramic forward-facing windows and strip glazing on the sides certainly make it feel much larger and airier than others in her class.

The signature forward glazing, which extends over the leading edge of the coach roof, looks onto a protected seating alcove on the foredeck. Above the master suite is a foredeck lounge furnished with sofas and sunbeds that can easily accommodate a full complement of guests and be covered by a collapsible awning to escape the midday heat. (The composite poles for the awning, and all the fenders, are conveniently stowed in a large forepeak locker.) Pop-up LEDs set into the coamings provide ambient lighting and a touch of sparkle after sunset.

Whereas the Pearl 80 only had room for a PWC in the garage with the tender perched on the aft platform, the Pearl 95 has a transom

garage that can house both a tender and a PWC. When the tender and toys are in the water, the garage doubles as a beach club with a bar unit that rotates out and is fixed with locking pins. Moreover, the beach platform can be extended with hydraulic wings that fold out from the hullsides, leaving the main platform free for swimming while the tender is parked on one side and the jet ski on the other.

The open-air spaces continue with the aft cockpit that has three large skylights in the deckhead to provide that alfresco feeling without burning up under the sun. The flybridge is equipped with a Jacuzzi and sunbeds, a grill and the exterior helm station with central access to the raised pilothouse.

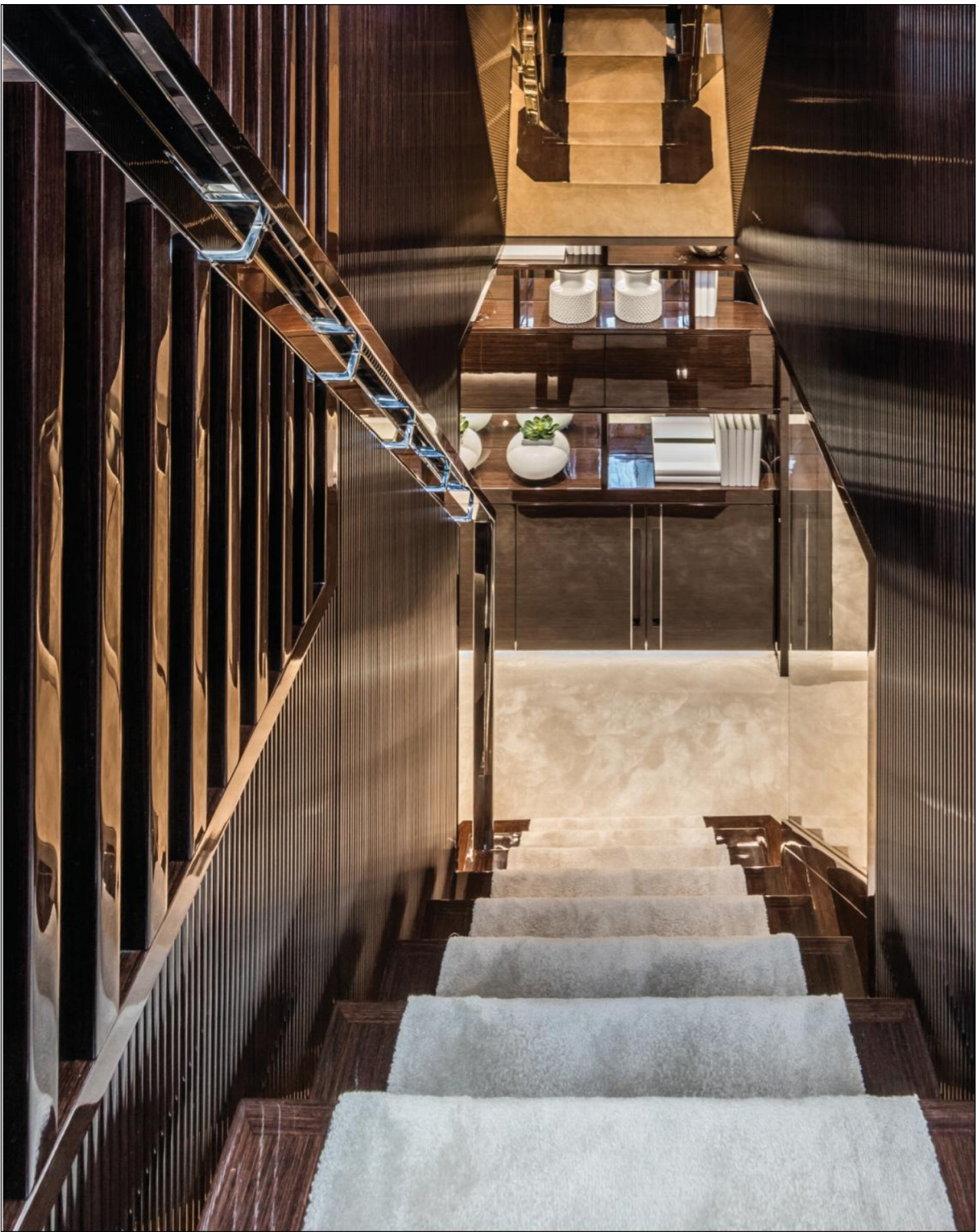
Kelly Hoppen's contribution to raising Pearl's profile cannot be overstated. Having appeared as a panelist on the British version of the television show *Shark Tank*, hosted her own show and designed for celebrities such as David and Victoria Beckham, the South African designer is now something of a celebrity herself. For Pearl, Hoppen has devised three basic interior themes that can be customized to owners' tastes—Studio, Taupe and Luxury—that draw on an East-meets-West aesthetic with neutral tones and natural textures for a sense of sanctuary and calm.

"The Pearl 95 was set to be their largest vessel to date, so everything was amplified to a much larger scale," says Hoppen. "What I always aim to do with each yacht design is inject a little bit of vibrancy and maintain a level of neutrality within the scheme in order to steer away from the expected."

The 95 I tested in Mallorca featured the Luxury interior with



The commodious, on-deck master stateroom is bathed in light from huge, forward-facing windows and strip glazing along both sides.



Mission accomplished: Designer Bill Dixon's goal was for the Pearl to look sleek and sporty, not an easy task on a tall, 95-foot motoryacht. Below: There are plenty of social areas aboard, including the two distinct spaces on the foredeck, flybridge and beach club.

high-gloss dark wood cabinetry, light upholstery and textiles and gray-veined marble in the bathrooms. For the joinery, Hoppen uses a sustainable composite wood from Italian manufacturer Alpi, whereas the satin-finished sole is made of a durable synthetic product that looks and feels like real wood underfoot.

"The problem with real wood is that it fades at different rates," says Smallridge. "On a door, for example, a veneer façade will lose its color faster than the hardwood edging. Alpi is a reconstituted wood that is dyed after slicing and retains its color. The same goes for the flooring, which doesn't crack or wear and will look exactly the same 10 years from now."

To optimize flow through the single-level main deck, Pearl introduced a wide walkway into the main salon that leads from the aft deck all the way forward to the master suite without having to re-condition furniture. The first unit also features optional, full-height sliding glass doors on both sides.

Belowdecks there is the choice of a four or five-cabin layout for up to 10 guests. The forward crew's quarters has four berths (with a separate cabin for the captain) finished to a high standard and is even carpeted.

Hull No. 1 is fitted with 2,400-hp MTU engines, but other engine options are available, from the standard pair of 1,925-hp CATs to more powerful 2,600-hp MTU units, for a top speed of up to 29 knots. The deep-V hull performed smoothly and predictably underway, tracking comfortably throughout her speed range even in the choppy swell, and slipped back into her berth without a fuss using the toggle controls on the aft deck.

The second Pearl 95 in build is destined for an American owner upgrading from a 65-footer. He initially requested a hybrid package for power sharing and Pearl put in the R&D, but when it emerged that adapting the engines would delay delivery, the owner opted for the standard CAT engines, which still provide good fuel economy and long range.

"We tend to sell to clients who may be dissatisfied with the mass produced boats or want something more individual and unusual," says Smallridge. "We like to push the boundaries a little without adding stuff just for the sake of it." This balance of luxury and value will be put to the test on the American market. An initial look suggests it could be a winning combination. □

RPM	KNOTS	FUEL	RANGE	dB(A)
600	6	12	2499	66
1000	9.5	43	1105	68
1200	11.3	74	763	69
1400	12.8	122	524	71
1600	14	160	438	71
1800	16.2	230	352	72
2000	19	318	299	72
2200	22.5	375	300	73
2450	27	455	295	73

TEST CONDITIONS: Seas: 2 ft.; wind: 5 knots; fuel: 500 gal. load; water: 350 gal. Fuel and speed taken from MTU display. Range is based on 90% of advertised fuel capacity. Decibels measured at the lower helm. 65 dB(A) is the level of normal conversation.



LOA: 95'10"
Beam: 21'12"
Displ.: 209,439 lbs.
Fuel: 2,641 gal.
Water: 422 gal.
Standard Power: 2/1,925-hp CAT C32 Acerts
Test Power: 2/2,400-hp MTU 16V 2000 M96s
Base Price: \$7,160,000



