



Let there be light

Today's most beautiful yachts have sophisticated lighting "souls" at their core, as *Oliver Bennett* and *Charlotte Hogarth-Jones* discover

For many owners, getting involved in the design phase of your next yacht is all part of the fun. Whether it's mulling over various colour schemes, investigating the latest spa kit, dreaming of artworks to fill your wall space or even having a feel of fabric samples, it's these personalisations that heighten the anticipation and make a boat feel real and special. Now there's a new design element to obsess over: lighting. And not just where the switches go, either.

For today's yachts, lighting has become incredibly complex. Gone are the nondescript grids of halogen spotlights, often added as a functional afterthought and constrained by wires and space for units. Liberated from heavy lighting infrastructure, designers are now free to play with sculptural light, dramatic light (which gives a hard contrast between brightness and shadow) and kinetic light, devising elaborate systems that are tailored specifically to each owner, their yacht, their possessions and needs.





Lighting can create moods, unify spaces or even create new ones, helping to transform a reading lounge into a nightclub, for example

It's what Riccardo Di Bene, CEO of Tuscany-based Luce5 Yachting, calls a "lighting soul" – a sophisticated, precise system that may be "elegant and harmonious", as he created on a Benetti Delfino 95 with Giorgio Cassetta and Aqualuce, or that may take "technology and innovation" as its core principal, as was the focus on a recent 108-metre Benetti superyacht. Di Bene has also created bespoke programmes for two other 100-metre-plus Benettis, along with others for Baglietto, Persico Marine, Sanlorenzo, Rossinavi and Overmarine, all with "very different lighting concepts that have given us the opportunity to work alongside architects and designers appointed by the owners or the shipyard," he says.

Across most projects, grids have now been replaced with lights that focus on a specific purpose: they are angled or grouped specifically to light a sofa or an artwork, or "to create pools of light where it is most needed", Di Bene explains.

It might sound overly fussy, but getting the right system on board from the design phase has numerous practical applications – brilliant lighting can create different moods on board, unify spaces or even create completely new ones, helping to transform a relaxed reading lounge into a nightclub, for example.

It's a functional trend, but also a question of changing tastes. David Caddick, director of UK company Marine Light Corp, believes the younger generation "no longer wants the 'gin palace' effect". In line with other interiors, flashy is out and natural is in, although it's a fiendishly complicated look to pull off. "It's the most detailed project you can do," says Sally Storey, design director of Lighting Design International, entailing "unbelievable precision and attention to detail – just like lighting a jewellery box".

A first-rate designer is key then, if you want to transform your yacht from bright to beautiful. And take note of the following pointers too...



Ngoni (top), the 58m Royal Huisman sailing yacht launched in 2017, has an open-plan saloon that maximises natural light thanks to curved optically perfect glass windows built in Turkey by BCM.

Freestanding lamps and zonal lighting help create its warm atmosphere. Laura Pomponi installed hidden LEDs on board 48m Khalilah (above) to add further impact to an already stunning yacht

LIGHT YOUR YACHT LIKE YOUR HOME

"Yachts look more like homes than ever before," says Laura Pomponi, CEO and founder of Luxury Projects, so it follows that yacht lighting is taking a design cue from looks on land. Again, it's younger owners who are driving the trend. They want "the effect that they see in their apartments in London and Moscow, but in a marine setting", Caddick says. In practical terms, this means tables decorated with free-standing and floor lamps, assembled for atmospheric restaurant-style lunches and stowed when not in use – a scenario that happens on 51-metre Heesen *Irisha* and Royal Huisman's 58-metre sailing yacht *Ngoni*. The use of free-standing lamps on board 90-metre 1920s-inspired *Nero* also "helped to create a contemporary feeling in a more traditional vessel", explains Pomponi.

For these kinds of eventualities, Marine Light Corp has developed a handy device called the Sea Socket, which allows power to be accessed on exterior decks. The socket itself is permanently installed into the deck, item of furniture or a table top, while the plug part of the system is affixed to the base of a freestanding lamp – be it a table lamp, lantern or floor-standing lamp. The socket comes with an IP-rated cover that can be screwed into the socket when the lamps are not installed, so the whole system is waterproof whether the fittings are in use or stowed. This allows the crew to dress an area for an event or a dinner, but also allows delicate lighting to be stowed for long voyages. It also means no faffing around with battery power and limited charges.



LET LEDS LEAD THE WAY

Without a doubt, LED (light-emitting diode) technology is the single biggest factor that has transformed marine lighting in recent years. In the past, LEDs have had a reputation for casting cold, hard light and for being difficult to dim, but they have vastly expanded the possibilities of lighting design on board.

Ales Styblo, general manager of Lasvit, says that LEDs are the best choice for customised light sources because they have so many variable parameters. "We can adjust colour temperature [how warm or cool a light's colour is], spectrum, beam angle



and light power," he explains. Michael Vasku, creative director of Preciosa Lighting, agrees: "They are efficient and long-lasting, but it's what these attributes open up that's important: the potential for dynamic and interactive lighting, lights with 'hidden' technology that are intuitive and that people can play with, things that will surprise and delight guests." The company's Pearl Wave is an interactive light that comes to life when people raise their glasses in a toast – you can look out for its debut at the Monaco Yacht Show – and there's also Pearl Drop, a light feature that illuminates when users pick up separate "pearl spheres".

Pomponi is also experimenting with hidden LEDs that cast indirect light, creating bespoke LED devices for yachts including *Khalilah*, *Koji*, *Yolo* and *Her Destiny*, where a new anti-glare linear fixture was used to hide lights in small recesses in the ceiling to create a beautiful indirect glow. LED panels, Pomponi explains, are also exciting. "They can display almost anything and be used as a floor, a wall, a ceiling panel, a screen – the possibilities are unlimited."

Luce5, meanwhile, has developed a Flexi LED strip for yachting, which is used by Benetti in its 100-metre-plus superyachts, and has "a very low depth of 18mm", Di Bene says. Apure architectural lighting, from Studio FA Porsche, is also interesting: it's small enough to be applied to compact spaces, so even a tiny gap can now also act as a light source, and it can be used inside or outside as it's waterproof.

There are poor-quality products on the market, though, says Storey, going some way to explaining the bad name surrounding LEDs. "Choosing a good-quality one with a high CRI [colour rendering index] is essential," she says. And "when these lighting loads go down, so do air-conditioning requirements, so more space becomes available on board".

PHOTOGRAPHY: JEFF BROWN/BREED MEDIA; QUIN BISSET; PRECIOSA LIGHTING; STUART PIERCE; MAURIZIO PARADISI



Preciosa's SeAnne chandelier will light up any yacht interior, while elegant table lamps add to 90m Nero's 1920s charm (top left). LED panels used on Laura Pomponi's beautifully lit interior on 27m Yolo, now Rosey, (top right)





Left: free-standing table lamps in Irsha's al fresco dining area. Middle row, from left: light transforms JOY's cinema to a disco; lighting can transform the atmosphere of Brigadoon's open lounge; a selenite chandelier. Bottom: Dale Chihuly's three-storey glass sculpture on GO. Opposite page: Lasvit's chandelier over GO's dining table

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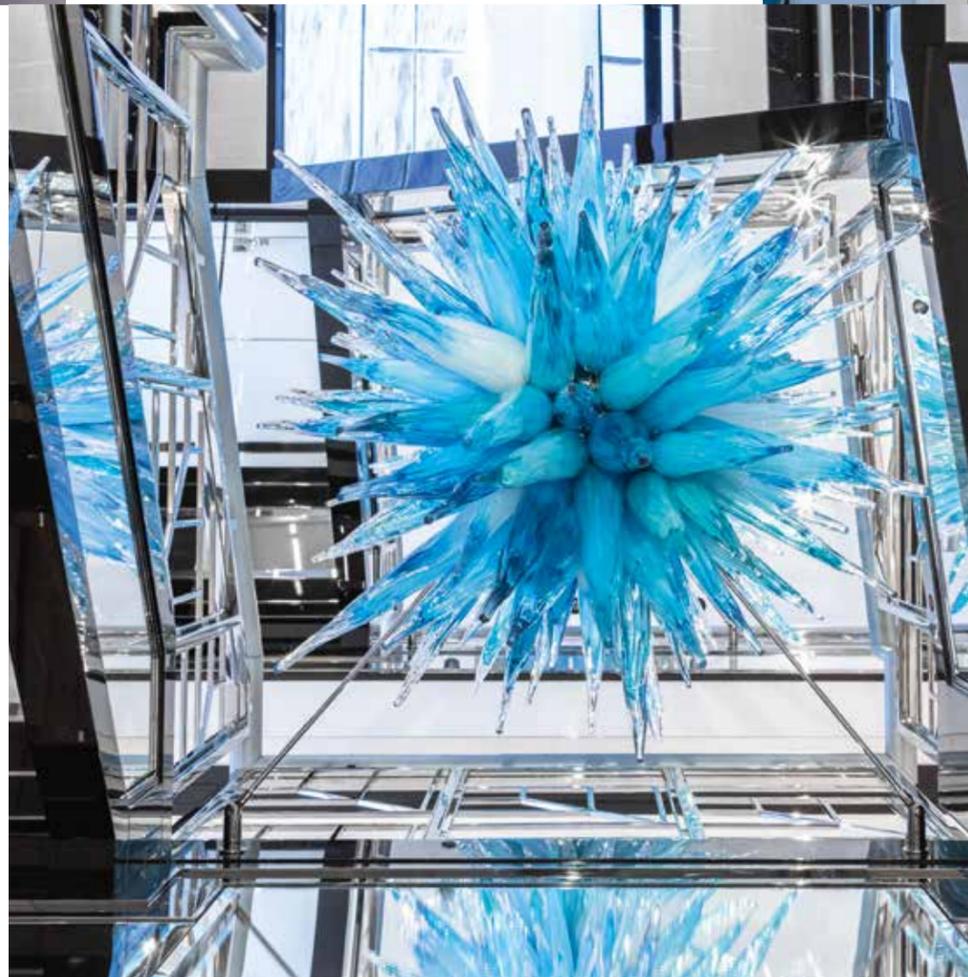
CREATE DUAL-USE SPACES

"With the latest technology, a single room can be turned into a space with multiple functionalities," says Pomponi, who is currently working on a new 91-metre concept with Oceanco that does just that. James Kandutsch, joint MD of Studio Indigo, also has plenty of examples to show what can be done. "We're working on a 135-metre yacht with an open deck that acts as a bar, games room, cinema, beach club and nightclub," he says, "while on *JOY* we created a 'winter garden' style indoor-outdoor space with fibre-optic lighting integrated in the teak floor to show the star sign of the owner". On *Brigadoon*, Kandutsch adds, lighting also helped an open lounge act as a reading room, family entertainment area and bar at different times of the day.

"A beach club or saloon can have a secondary lighting system behind a mirror, and LEDs or fibre optics embedded in the deck to create a disco atmosphere and transform the space from day to night," Storey says. This was the idea on 93-metre *Feadship Lady S*, where "you can lift up a rug to find lights beneath and transform a relaxed lounge to a nightclub", she says. *Aquila*

was also remodelled to include disco lighting. Pre-programmed lighting is a great way to create responsive moods, Storey goes on. "For example, you can set it to white during the day, a warmer cream at night and colour for a party." Studio Indigo is developing a spa and wellness concept that simulates an "underwater cave", integrating lighting with architectural forms and shapes.

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GO FOR THE WOW FACTOR

If a full lighting overhaul seems a bit daunting, then a specially commissioned chandelier in the heart of your yacht can still deliver real impact. "The staircase is the place to wow," says Storey. "Chandeliers and eye-catching feature lights are in vogue – and LEDs have brought them to life with colour-changing options."

Companies such as Lasvit, Crystal Caviar, Swarovski and big designer names from the art world like Dale Chihuly are popular – and big lighting statements have been specified on *Atessa* and *GO*, the latter of which has a Chihuly chandelier. They should be thought of as artwork, rather than a light. "Looking at their history, chandeliers were never meant to light a space, but simply to illuminate themselves," explains Vasku. "This understanding is now coming back."

"Chandeliers often create more impact when dimmed so that they don't glare," adds Storey,

"and are best when supplemented by discrete architectural lighting."

Of course, any big piece has to be installed with marine conditions in mind. "The trick is to make a real skeleton for them," says Caddick. "They need to be really rigidised and anchored well, while looking just as light and free-hanging as land-based chandeliers."

"For a 43 metre we created a special dining chandelier in selenite stone," says Pomponi. "We really engineered the solution for a proper aesthetic result, as well as looking at how it was fixed on the ceiling."

Styblo believes the trick is to gather "lighting designer, interior designer and engineer" in one room. "When they all meet, they find the optimal solution faster," he says. "You have to marry the client's dream with the type of glass, the density, the size of the room and so on."





Left: Crystal Caviar created this extraordinary artwork made of glass balls on stainless-steel rods, with hanging fibre-optic strands, for 70m Talisman C. Far left: glass as you've never seen it before on Nobiskrug's 80m Artefact. Below: LED light strips illuminate a dining area on board 35m Botti. Bottom: another Crystal Caviar creation for Kismet



INCORPORATE NATURAL AND ARTIFICIAL

It's refreshing to note that while high-tech engineering and advanced LEDs are leading the way, it's natural light that's seen to be the future. "Glass, illuminated glass and innovative see-through materials that let light in" are also on designers' radars, says Pomponi, explaining how natural light can help interiors "feel warm".

Marrying natural light with artificial light is the aim of the game, creating a system that works in harmony with daylight to feel soft and effortless. "Some yachts, such as [36-metre] *Friendship*, have a big percentage of architectural glass and light fixtures, and the combination makes for an integrated interior," says Ramon Alonso, of Radyca, providing views, light and flow. The recently launched 80-metre *Artefact* also has a large amount of structural glass as its defining feature, while Studio Indigo is investigating ways to artificially transmit sunlight via a large glazed dome over an entrance lobby.

Lighting yachts has become elegantly finessed, and also infinitely more challenging to put into practice. Downlights might continue to be common in yachting, but increasingly they can

be seen as "naïf or old-fashioned", Vasku says. Talented designers who have the expertise to double up as lighting artists are rare and highly sought after. Lighting design "must be incorporated into the concept", Pomponi says. "It's a vital component of interior design today."

"It's more demanding in all aspects," Styblo agrees. "It takes a lot more effort - but as you can see, it's worth it." ■

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