

Brave. Bold. *Bolide*

The Bolide project by Exclusiva Design and Tankoa Yachts is more than just a concept. Engineered and tank-tested, it represents something of a breakthrough by a studio completely new to large-yacht design. The Superyacht Report was given privileged access to Exclusiva's lead designer before the official unveiling of the 72m project at the 2017 Monaco Yacht Show.

BY JUSTIN RATCLIFFE

One common criticism levelled at radical yacht concepts is that they set out primarily to wow their audience with audacious styling. But aesthetic innovation for its own sake is of little value without technical and economic feasibility. Design – any design – is mostly about problem solving, requiring a delicate balance between cutting-edge and tried-and-tested solutions. This is the foundation of all good design and the reason Exclusiva partnered with Tankoa on its *Bolide* project.

“Designing a yacht is a bit like a love affair: you need two parties to make it work,” says Fabio Mazzeo, chairman and design director at Exclusiva Design. “As [it was] our first yacht project, we were well aware of the need to find an expert technical partner to give the whole project credibility. We approached four different shipyards in Italy before settling on Tankoa, a relatively young brand but with huge experience. Just as important for us was the fact that they were willing to listen and experiment.”

Exclusiva is a multi-disciplinary architectural and interior-design firm that has seen the size and complexity of its projects grow dramatically in recent years. Among other major commissions, it is the key contractor for the interior design of the public spaces of the Lakhta Center, a multi-purpose complex on the outskirts of St Petersburg due for completion next year that includes exhibition spaces, leisure facilities, an outdoor amphitheatre and a 462m-high skyscraper.

“As an architect, feasibility is part and parcel of what I do every day,” says Mazzeo. “We can design virtually anything but it has to be technically and economically viable. Beauty should not come at any cost. Instead, it has to be grounded in the nitty-gritty world of productivity, sustainability, cost, maintenance and so on. In the past, I found these limitations frustrating, but I’ve come to see them as advantages, especially when we took the decision to diversify into yacht design.”

“The walls of glass are a bit of a provocation”, says lead designer Fabio Matteo of Exclusiva’s Bolide concept.



Mazzeo spent a brief spell in academia and holds a PhD in Representation in Architecture – the study of the typologies and styles that give buildings attributes such as seriousness, elegance or confidence. To get inspiration for its first yacht project, the Exclusiva team turned to the themes of speed, technology and dynamism emphasised by the Italian Futurist movement and Bolidismo school of design (*Bolide* derives from the Latin for ‘missile’ or ‘meteor’). Mazzeo first floated the idea more than three years ago, driven by the desire to break the mould of conventional yacht design and explore new avenues. Like the Futurist artists who aimed to represent the dawning of a new era in the early 20th century, the fluid and dynamic lines of *Bolide* are intended to be a fresh expression of yacht design and the yachting lifestyle in the 21st century.

“When we first met with the Exclusiva people, we were all wondering about what sort of project they would submit as we all know designing a building, or even a luxury mansion, has nothing to

do with a boat,” says Euro Contenti, CEO of Tankoa. “Surprisingly, they didn’t provide us with a design but with a long list of what they considered the modern yacht of tomorrow *should* come with that cannot be found on the market today. Only after multiple meetings with our technical office did they come up with a visual design.”

During these meetings, the Tankoa team imposed their own series of parameters, and Mazzeo admits that the steep learning curve was formidable during the first six months. “At one stage I even considered abandoning the project and saying ‘sorry’ to our friends at Tankoa,” he says. “Given our desire to break down barriers and their insistence on technical rigour, the meetings were sometimes confrontational but always constructive. The important thing was that we were all pulling in the same direction.”

Despite her futuristic appearance, *Bolide* is based on the proven technical platform of 69.3m *Suerte*, launched by Tankoa in 2015. However, given the longer length overall and wider beam,



An early sketch of the Lakhta Center in St Petersburg inspired by the energy of water.

the hull form and appendages have been tweaked to optimise performance and seakeeping (tank tests in Vienna predicted a top speed of 18 knots, slightly more than *Suerte*, thanks not least to the longer waterline provided by the reverse bow). The decision was also taken, surprisingly perhaps given the innovative nature of the project, to opt for conventional propulsion with the same CAT 3516B diesel engines as *Suerte*, although a hybrid power package is also in the pipeline.

“We’re currently building a 50m project with hybrid propulsion based on diesel engines and drive shafts combined with electric motors that provide various operational modes,” says Andrea Parodi, technical director at Tankoa. “We’re now determining whether that system can be scaled up to 72m with the same returns and benefits in terms of flexibility, efficiency and comfort. Certainly, the layout of the technical spaces aboard *Bolide* would not require substantial changes.”

The Lakhta Center overlooks the Baltic Sea and the shapes of its buildings were inspired by the energy and changing properties of water. Early sketches of the complex by Exclusiva reveal glass-walled structures emerging like icebergs from the deep-blue water. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the presence of the sea and diminishing the barriers between interior and exterior were central themes of the *Bolide* project from the start.

Besides devoting roughly two thirds of the available guest space to outdoor areas, the most striking feature of the design is the extensive use of structural glass, with glazing making up around 70 per cent of the exterior surfacing. Here again, Exclusiva did its homework by consulting leading glass manufacturers, and Tankoa is in ongoing discussions with Lloyd’s and RINA to ensure structural integrity and static stability. Classification societies are still wary of glass as a structural material, even though in certain cases it can be as strong as steel and its properties in land-based architecture are well documented.

“The walls of glass are a bit of a provocation,” admits Mazzeo. “Today, you can do things with structural glass that were never dreamed of not so long ago. If I’d had my way, I’d have used even more glass on *Bolide*, and I have no doubt that one day we’ll be able to do much more with the material on yachts.”

Established yacht designers only rarely indulge in concept projects, presumably because they don’t need to. Combined with the inherent conservatism of the yachtbuilding industry, this is one reason why aesthetics have been slow to develop and we see so many lookalike yachts. In this context – and as a newcomer to yacht design – Mazzeo relishes his role as agent provocateur. He credits figures such as Philippe Starck for having stirred up the discipline (while also admitting that the jury is

out on whether yachts such as sailing yacht *A* will stand the test of time), but is generally critical of the lack of imagination and verve.

“I certainly see a hesitation to take risks and a tendency to go with conventional styling solutions to reassure clients,” says Mazzeo. “But what has hit me most is the scarcity of awareness of the relation between the inside and outside environments. Why, for example, do we still see curtains on super-yachts when dimming technologies have made them obsolete? Comfort and luxury are important, but the most important thing is that a yacht is used in a marvellous outdoor context on the sea. That’s why with *Bolide* we wanted to empty the envelope and reconsider how the exterior is perceived from the interior.”

The interior of *Bolide* is as avant-garde as the exterior, with features that take their cue from Exclusiva’s land-based design projects such as a wine-cellar display case with an integrated Wi-Fi system for finding a specific bottle or vintage at the touch of a button, and a dining room with an adjacent kitchen for show-cooking. Together with Tankoa, care was also taken to develop a layout that provides smooth circulation flows through both the guest and crew zones, while ensuring strict privacy for the owner’s area on the sundeck.

Despite Mazzeo’s progressive ideas on yacht design, the evocative early sketches of the Lakhta Center reveal another bee in his bonnet: the decline of hand sketching in favour of photo-realistic digital renders. “The energy, dynamism and passion that you can transmit with a hand sketch is so much more than with a computer rendering,” he says. “I studied architecture at a time when the digital revolution was in its infancy. I now find myself working in reverse by reverting to designing by hand and encouraging the younger members of the staff to do the same. I want to go back to a design process that is in danger of being lost.”

A cursory Internet search reveals any number of whimsical, but far fewer worthy yacht concepts. As Exclusiva’s first foray into yacht design, *Bolide* reveals remarkable maturity and shrewd empathy with the changing expectations of the marketplace. Assisted by Tankoa’s technical know-how, this is no doubt in part thanks to the feedback gleaned from its UHNWI contacts in the world of land-based architecture and design. Mazzeo says that one Russian client, in particular, was a fundamental influence in this regard. “He doesn’t actually own a superyacht, but he knows what he would like to see on a yacht if he did.” JR

TANKOA AND EXCLUSIVA



Exclusiva Design was founded in 2008 by architect Fabio Mazzeo (pictured above) and Vito Taddei, who has a background in business management, as the “ideal match between creativity and process management”. Based in Rome, with offices in Moscow, Abu Dhabi and Shanghai, the award-winning studio specialises in bespoke public and private architectural projects. In the past five years, it has delivered 36 projects, representing nearly 300,00sqm of designed space, from corporate offices and public buildings to private chalets and villas. *Bolide* is its first superyacht project.

Tankoa Yachts in Genoa was set up by Guido Orsi, the former owner of Baglietto, and an experienced team of ex-Baglietto staff. The nascent brand began work on two 64m sister superyachts, but the projects stalled with the onset of the global financial crisis and the loss of its principal investor. After the intervention of yachting consultant Michel Karsenti, one of these projects, extensively redesigned, was delivered to a Russian owner as 69m *Suerte* and provided the technical platform for *Bolide*. Following the launch of 50m *Vertige* earlier this year, the yard has another 50m yacht and the 72m sister ship of *Suerte* in build.