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YACHTS

Why your tender is now as important as your superyacht

By Stewart Campbell



The 123m Al Lusail, designed by H2 Yacht Design, with a matching tender by Compass Tenders

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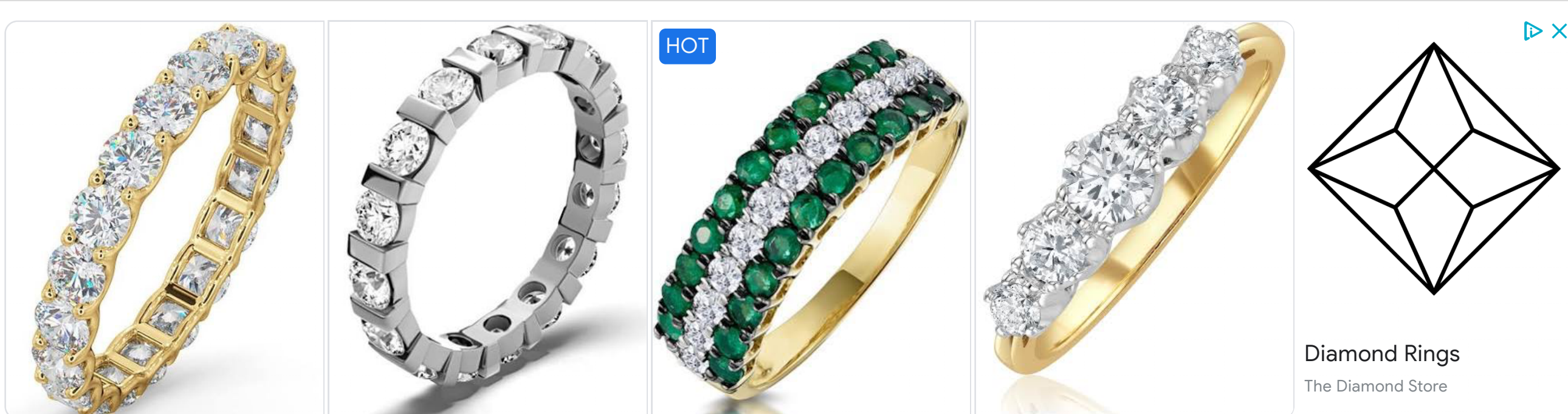
You may think that the design of modern superyachts starts with a “look” or profile, with a buyer demanding a certain sleekness, or – as is now more common – a reliable ruggedness, but you would be wrong. Increasingly, the first question billionaires ask is: “How big can my tenders be?”

It's an inside-out approach to design and means that the “working” parts of a superyacht are as prevalent in buyers' minds as the view from their stateroom. The biggest boats can carry a fleet of tenders. There's the limo tender for guests, the landing craft for the ATVs, the wakeboard boat, the centre console for fishing, dinghies for racing around deserted atolls and Zodiacs for nudging icebergs. The ultra-tough explorer yacht Ulysses, owned by Graeme Hart, New Zealand's richest person, is 116m long and carries a 21m tender on its bow. Not a bad way to be dropped off at a restaurant.

“What kind of tenders you want is one of the first questions we ask,” says Jonny Horsfield, the founder of H2 Yacht Design. “The requirements for a large tender will dictate the overall design and layout much more than clients sometimes realise.” But the big shift in recent years, Horsfield says, has been the level of customisation available, giving rise to “mini-me” tenders styled to mimic the mothership.

Some of the best are built on the south coast of the UK by Compass Tenders. “Superyacht owners see tenders as a way of completing their superyacht fleet and we're often asked to create a matching pair, which carry design features from the mothership,” says Richard Faulkner, the Compass Tenders chief executive. The result, he says, is that it “becomes very apparent who the tenders belong to when they're operating in separation from the parent superyacht”. Faulkner's company built the tenders for the 123m Al Lusail, designed by H2 Yacht Design, which mirror the parent ship's curves.

But why fork out millions for what is essentially a jumped-up water taxi? “The tender is usually the first impression of the incredible experience that awaits guests aboard a superyacht,” says Michael Leach from the design studio MLD, which is responsible for boats such as the 93m Lady S, owned by Dan Snyder, who also co-owns the NFL's Washington Football Team, and the 96m Palladium. “It's an integral part of the superyacht experience, so we start the tender design process concurrently with the yacht to give us the time to make something extra special,” Leach says.



This means levels of finish – and price per square metre – that are comparable with the big boat, so there is “absolutely no opportunity to make a bad impression”, says Ernest Menten, who founded Tenderworks to take advantage of the demand for highly customised support craft. “I always say we are building the highest-end boats in the world, because you're only ever 30cm away from every detail on our boats, so everything has to be perfect,” he says.

But not everyone wants a singular style across their fleet, particularly given the options available. Take J Craft's Torpedo model, a blend of old-world St Tropez charm and modern engineering that's built by hand on the Swedish island of Gotland. It takes six craftspeople more than 8,000 hours to build a single tender, guaranteeing the kind of exclusivity demanded by superyacht owners. Or you could opt for an Iguana, an amphibious tender that deploys tank tracks from its hull to allow you to climb up beaches.

Incorporating this new generation of super-tender into your new yacht is one thing, but what if you're buying secondhand? Then your answer is a support boat, which is a floating platform built to house all the goodies, from tenders and jet skis to helicopters and seaplanes. It's a market that has been growing rapidly in recent years thanks largely to Damen Yachting, which repurposes offshore workboats to serve as superyacht support craft.

“Our Yacht Support range has definitely been designed with tenders in mind,” says Rose Damen, the company's managing director. “We're also talking about big tenders, up to 15m or more, which are more like chase boats or day boats.” One of Damen's Yacht Support boats, the 55m Axis, is even bigger than its parent ship, the 50m Gigi; her owner uses both boats to hunt for treasure in the Bahamas. Other owners, meanwhile, use the support boat for purely recreational purposes and will send it ahead to make sure all the toys and tenders are in the water by the time the boss arrives, maintaining that seamless luxury experience.

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