



by estir Alfa

Created for an owner with an aversion to busy patterns, Benetti's *Alfa* is an exercise in design that excels in subtlety, says *Risa Merl*



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Left: three strong horizontal bands of panoramic windows add interest to Alfa's profile by Benetti. Below: an axe-bow gives her a strong demeanour



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"You have to sit in this chair," says Laura Pomponi, CEO of Luxury Projects. The interior designer of the 70-metre Benetti yacht *Alfa* beckons me over to the 14-seat dining table where I relax into a high-back leather chair that is soft yet surprisingly supportive. Pomponi designed it to be the ideal seat for dining, as she explains, "Even when you lean closer to the table to eat, your back is still supported."

Our tour through the yacht, in the middle of the busy Monaco Yacht Show, has been delightful and full of moments like this. It's giving me time to soak up the unexpected materials, custom-designed furnishings and thoughtful details that helped earn *Alfa* the 2021 World Superyacht Award for Displacement Motor Yachts Between 1,000GT and 1,599 GT.





Material girl

Thinking outside the box also means looking at materials a little differently. For example, using a special extra-thin stone finish proved helpful in carrying the owner's wish for a grand staircase with a glass lift in the middle. "The owner wanted stone or marble in the staircase walls, but the problem is you would lose 10 centimetres of space from the stairwell, making it feel very tight," says designer Laura Pomponi. So she resolved the issue by choosing a flexible stone veneer instead (it's made with a special process that pulls off particles from natural sandstone and binds them in a layer that is only millimetres thin). This flexible stone was then applied to metal walls as a fire-safety precaution. This solution avoided the stairwell feeling "like a chimney". In addition, Pomponi designed the handrails to be recessed into the walls by cutting into the metal to save space. The result is a streamlined stairwell with floating steps highlighted by under-lit LEDs and covered with a 5mm-thick leather tread so they feel good underfoot.



Above: the stairwell is one of Alfa's several statement features. The bridge deck is an ideal space for entertaining, with a cosy upper saloon (right) opening onto an aft

deck with huge alfresco dining table. Opposite page, top: Alfa has an award-winning exterior, but her most essential elements are invisible to the naked eye



"EVERYTHING HAD TO BE HOLISTIC AND INTEGRATED. THE OWNER WANTED THE YACHT TO FEEL LIKE A HOME"

The yacht owes her exterior design and naval architecture to Benetti, who used three strong horizontal lines of panoramic windows to add nuance to the profile. Pomponi and her Luxury Projects team created the calm, contemporary interiors inside the strong-looking envelope using a pleasing earthy colour palette. What makes this yacht extra special, however, is the wealth of well-considered features that you don't see. The project's most essential elements are invisible to the naked eye. For instance, the owner didn't want to see any air-conditioning grids or sources of light. "He didn't want any spotlights," Pomponi says. "Everything had to be holistic and integrated. He wanted the yacht to feel like a home."

The Luxury Projects team and the shipyard went to great lengths to hide the air intakes behind Alfa's cabinets. Also, the designer spent a lot of time on the lighting plan so that the only visible spotlights are those mandated for emergency purposes.

Everything, including the carefully selected engineered materials that adorn the interior, blends harmoniously. You'd never guess that most of the stones and woods are fabricated.

But as we walk through the boat, Pomponi points out the engineered wood made to look like teak and the stone veneers that appear as natural as solid stone. The designer, in collaboration with her client, chose them because they are long-lasting and a more eco-friendly choice, which also helps to offset the real teak used on the exterior decks.

"The engineered woods are easier to maintain, and they don't change colour as they age," Pomponi says. The trick to making it look real is to balance the composite wood with other elements, such as fabric panels on the walls, or laying the wood in a chevron pattern rather than as one full piece. "You have to break it up, or it looks artificial," she says. Despite being engineered, the materials used on Alfa read as natural. There is a warmth from the balance of white stone, teak-coloured woods, white leather ceilings and purposefully restrained use of colour. Nothing is overtly shiny; the only glimmer is in what appear to be bronze details, made from liquid metal.

The private client who commissioned the yacht had worked with Pomponi on residential projects. He had a 50-metre yacht before Alfa and

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“THAT COMBINATION OF BOTH INFINITY POOL AND BEACH CLUB IS STILL PRETTY RARE, EVEN TODAY”



Above: the beach club doubles as a relaxed television lounge. Below: Alfa's uppermost deck features a spa pool, while the main deck aft (opposite page, top) has an infinity pool

he knew what he wanted down to the smallest details. “He was very involved in the general arrangement – he would send me videos of him sketching layouts,” she says. “He really challenged the use of space.”

The Luxury Projects team designed the yacht's GA based on the owner's exacting brief, which included having six cabins on the lower deck, an extra cabin for his bodyguard and butler on the main deck, a dedicated owner's deck and a private beach club. The beach club is an important feature. Rather than opening at the stern, it has balconies unfolding on either side, allowing guests to enjoy a cross-breeze off the water. With its comfortable sofa and a huge television, it can even be used as a water-level cinema. Accessed both by guest corridors leading from the stern and via an internal stairwell from the main deck, the space can also be enjoyed as a cosy lounge while under way.

This enclosed-stern beach club layout allowed space for an infinity pool occupying the aft section of the main deck above – and all of its required machinery on the lower deck. An electric system allows raising the floor of the 1.2-metre-deep pool halfway to form a shallow water feature or kiddie pool, or further up to meet the deck and become a dance floor or a sunbathing area.

“That combination of both infinity pool and beach club is still pretty rare on superyachts even today – most yachts offer either one or the other,” says Vassilis Fotilas, the Fraser sales



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broker with whom *Alfa* is, at the time of writing, listed for sale.

The main deck layout is relatively traditional, with a wide foyer entry that serves as a transitional space from the aft deck and leads into the welcoming main saloon, furnished with white sofas and plush stone-grey armchairs. White suede covers the recesses in the wooden ceilings, a contrast that gives an extra dimension to the room. However, the galley, pantry and dining room arrangements are a bit different. The formal dining room is where one might expect to find a master cabin. A starboard-side balcony opens onto the sea, preventing the dining room from feeling stuffy and giving the illusion of dining at a waterfront terrace.

For authentic al fresco dining, there is another 14-seat table on the sundeck, which on *Alfa* is really a bridge deck. True sun-soaking can be enjoyed one level above on the sky deck, which has a spa tub and loose outdoor furnishings by Summit, which provided all the exterior deck furniture. “The owner’s idea for the outdoor space was to have a lot of loose furniture,” Pomponi says. “While there is no way to sea-fasten it, there is a way to stow the furniture safely while under way.”

The owner’s deck takes over the upper deck. It is a spectacle of an entrance as Pomponi slides open a set of doors that lead to the owner’s private foyer, complete with a balcony over the glittering sea. Past the owner’s bathroom, spacious closets and a glass-enclosed office is a private panoramic suite. The design is such that you can see the water from the bed.

“The owner’s deck is superb,” says Fotilas. “To wake up in the master stateroom to 180-degree views forward over the ocean and take a few steps onto your own private terrace – that’s an experience and a way to start the day that every owner dreams of.”

Other amenities on this deck include a gym, massage room and upper saloon/cinema leading out onto the private aft deck. The upper saloon has a structural, architectural feel with an imposing grooved, white lacquered wall with a large television niche cut into it. Pomponi, who designed and oversaw the fitting of the furnishings and lamps on board, designed the room’s L-shaped sofa with a bronze base. “I wanted the base of the sofa to be sleek while still maintaining structure,” she says. The deep sofa is also ergonomically designed for optimal comfort, and Pomponi again invites me to sit down and try it out. While comfortably seated, I notice there are no Roman blinds; instead, the sky lounge has sheer drapes to allow outside views.

The most challenging aspect of the GA, Pomponi says, was fitting six good-sized cabins on the lower deck, especially



The entire upper deck is dedicated to the owner, with a forward-facing suite opening out to a bow lounge and featuring an on-water balcony (far left). All of the furniture on board, including the comfortable, ergonomically designed dining room chairs (bottom left), were penned by Laura Pomponi

considering that *Alfa* has a narrower beam of 10.6 metres. This contributes to her elegant exterior but reduces the overall volume to 1,442GT. “She’s a very sleek boat, with a beam more like a 65 metre,” she says. “Generally, a 70-metre yacht would have around 1,800GT.” Yet nothing feels cramped, a feat that the designer achieved in the lower deck cabins through little tricks, such as enclosing the wardrobes in smoked-glass doors to give the illusion of more space.

Alfa doesn’t have any carpets or even rugs on board, except around the foot of the beds. “It was a challenge to make the interior feel homely without the use of rugs,” Pomponi says. So she used other details, such as leather headboards created with strips of leather woven into a chevron pattern. An Italian artisan who usually makes women’s haute couture sandals created them. In general, Pomponi turned to local craftspeople from Italy’s Marche region to bring her custom-designed furnishings to life. “Everything was built within a 60-kilometre radius from Marche, from upholstery to the furniture,” she says.

It was one way to work around supply-chain issues during the Covid-19 lockdowns, but it also reduced *Alfa*’s ecological footprint since materials and furniture travelled a much shorter distance from the source to the shipyard.

Though the original owner intended to use *Alfa* privately, it would be easy to convert her to a charter yacht. There is space for 18, including staff. The crew accommodation is for 15, although the supernumerary cabin could be converted for extra crew.

While finally attuned to her commissioning owner’s tastes, *Alfa*’s ethos of calmness, simplicity and comfort – as well as her use of low-maintenance materials – gives her broad appeal. And that’s a testament to her thoughtful design. ■



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