

DIVAS OF THE DEEP

It's comeback time for old-school glamour. Fabled for their post-war pizzazz and film-star allure, the original superstar yachts are cruising back on to the social radar. ALAN HARPER tracks down the main players in the era of the romantic refit

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ir Bernard Docker was ahead of his time. The millionaire industrialist drove a gold-plated car, owned a magnificent superyacht and married a showgirl who dressed in mink, drank pink champagne and was banned from the French Riviera after a public spat with Prince Rainier. Lady Docker's dazzling metallic dress at the Paris motor show cost £5,000, at 1956 prices, and their Daimler was upholstered in zebra skin.

Fleet Street loved them. They were living the dream. The Midland Bank took a different view, booting Sir Bernard off the board for attracting unwelcome publicity. When the shareholders at the Birmingham Small Arms Company found that the couple had funded their lavish lifestyle with company cash, he lost his job as chairman there too.

The Dockers' star only shone so brightly in the tabloids because

everything else in post-war Britain was so dull. Then, their antics and lifestyle were lampooned as vulgar attention-seeking. Today they would have a hard time standing out from the crowd.

How extraordinary, then, that their yacht, the sainted *Shemara*, commissioned by Sir Bernard from the Thornycroft shipyard just before the Second World War, is such a model of demure, understated elegance. But those were the days when designers said things like "if it looks right, it is right", and yachts had a duty to be beautiful. In any case, if you owned a 212ft yacht you didn't have to try any harder to attract attention—especially not if she was designed by the legendary Charles Nicholson, who gave her perfect proportions and a profile with a serene sense of purpose, and also expansive interior spaces and long promenade decks worthy of the most opulent transatlantic Cunarder.

Shemara looked right, and thankfully she still does. Sir Charles Dunstone of Carphone Warehouse fame bought her in 2010 from property magnate Harry Hyams, and immediately began a complete, keel-up restoration. The litigious developer of Centre Point in London and "the pantomime villain of capitalism", according to the *Daily Mail*, had purchased the yacht from Sir Bernard Docker in the late 1960s for a knockdown price, and then tried to

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sue him for £100,000, alleging serious defects. He lost, and ended up hardly ever using the yacht. Sir Charles became *Shemara*'s third owner after a lunch on board with Hyams, high and dry in a derelict Lowestoft shipyard.

In a period of ever more outlandish modern megayacht designs, yachts like *Shemara* are increasingly regarded as icons of a vanished age of elegance. "The 1930s to the 1950s was the classic era of motor yacht design," says Paul Ashton, editor of *SuperYacht World*. "There is a perception of the glamour of that time, particularly the post-war period. Owners like the stories and the history as well as the design. They like to be able to explain it to their friends. Heritage is an important part of the narrative that they warm to."

Few yachts can claim a richer or more glamorous heritage than *Malahne*, another British-built classic from the 1930s which looks like butter wouldn't melt in her hawse-

pipe. She was owned by Sam Spiegel, producer of *The African Queen* and *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, and played hostess to the likes of Greta Garbo and Alec Guinness. During the filming of *Lawrence of Arabia*, Spiegel lived on board for the best



Sam Spiegel Uses His for an Office

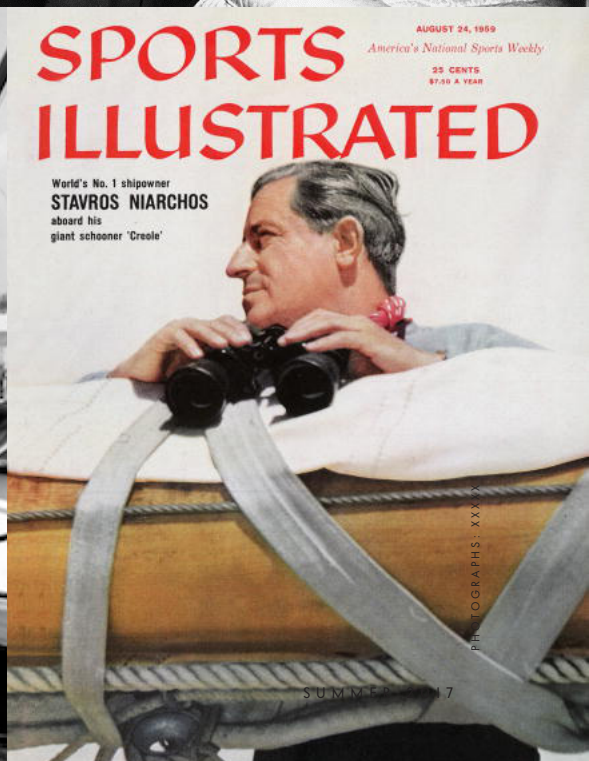
"I don't consider my yacht an extravagance," insists Sam Spiegel, producer of *The African Queen* and *Bridge on the River Kwai*. "I work on it to save time." His half-million-dollar timesaver is the 165-foot, 460-ton *Malahne*. Built in 1937, *Malahne* has had a series of owners, including an American, a Greek and a Belgian. During the war the British enlisted *Malahne* as a sonar test target for submarines. Spiegel uses yacht mostly to play host to luminaries like Garbo, Rubenso, Liz Taylor, Roni Schneider. While *Lawrence of Arabia* was being filmed in Jordan, King Hussein came aboard to be entertained by the producer on his floating office.





THE HULL SHEBANG

This page, clockwise from left: Sam Spiegel's Malahne; Lady Docker entertains guests on board Shemara, the yacht she owned with her husband Sir Bernard; at the International Motor Show, 1954; Stavros Niarchos profiled on board Creole in *Sports Illustrated*, 1959; Niarchos coming ashore in Cannes, 1955. Facing page: Sir Bernard and Lady Docker aboard Shemara, Cannes, 1952





SHEMARA
RTTC

part of a year, scouting locations in Jordan, Spain and Morocco. “I don’t consider my yacht an extravagance,” he told a *Life* magazine reporter in 1965. “I work on it to save time.”

Photographs in the magazine show the 26-year-old actress Romy Schneider snoozing on deck in a cane chair, and the 164ft yacht steaming out to sea from Porto Cervo, “the Aga Khan’s new resort on the island of Sardinia”. Her portly owner is seen strolling down the gangplank. The producer bought her in 1960 and owned her for more than 20 years, but *Malahne*, designed by Charles Nicholson, was originally built for William Stephenson, who wanted her as a tender for his graceful J-Class racing yacht *Velsheda*. Both yachts took their names from those of his daughters, Velma, Sheila and Daphne. On *Malahne*’s launch day in June 1937, *Yachting World* described her as a ship with “proportions so good that she will never seem dull or unattractive”.

For today’s superyacht owners, there are also practical considerations that make vessels of this era so attractive. “With classic motor yachts, interest generally starts in the 1930s,” says Mike Horsley, the head of Edmiston’s Classic Yacht Team in Antibes. “Earlier examples suffered from a lack of beam, and hence interior volume, as well as a tendency to roll and be relatively uncomfortable at sea.”

Formica covering up exquisite mahogany panelling, inappropriate superstructures added to increase liveability, rigs butchered to reduce the number of crew needed, and so on,” says Horsley. “Restorers go to great lengths to disguise the modern amenities which are now considered essential for life aboard.”

So with a cruising range of 3,500 nautical miles at 12 knots, *Malahne* not only looks as pretty now as on her launch, but also has some fearsome electronics fitted, and much better air-con.

The magnificent 214ft sailing yacht *Creole* was one of those whose original rig was reduced to make it more manageable. But not in the 1960s—the iconoclast in question was her first owner, American carpet heir Alexander Cochran, who found her towering, three-masted Bermudan staysail array so intimidating that he had it lowered almost as soon as he took delivery from Camper & Nicholsons in 1926. Another owner restored the masts to their proper height in 1937, but it wasn’t until after the Second World War, under the custodianship of Greek shipping tycoon Stavros Niarchos, that the teak-built yacht truly came into her own as an icon of the Côte d’Azur.

Creole was featured in the same issue of *Life* magazine as *Malahne*, and the writer was disappointed to note just the one Toulouse-

ONASSIS USED HIS YACHT SHAMELESSLY TO CHARM THE RICH AND POWERFUL, FROM ROYALTY TO CHURCHILL

Malahne has just emerged from an immensely ambitious 30-month restoration at Pendennis Shipyard in Falmouth, which not only saw the installation of all modern comforts and technologies, but also undid the damage inflicted on her by previous refits.

“There are many examples from the 1960s through the 1980s of ‘modernization’ of old yachts:

Lautrec hanging in the deck saloon: art experts had advised Niarchos that the sea air was bad for his Renoirs, Van Goghs and his Gauguin. Now owned by the Gucci family, *Creole* is on the charter market and a favourite at classic yacht regattas.

In the shipping business, in the gossip columns and in the fashionable yachting hotspots of the Mediterranean, Niarchos’s great rival was his sometime brother-in-law, Aristotle Onassis, whose 325ft motor yacht *Christina* was, quite deliberately, considerably bigger than *Creole*. An ex-frigate bought at a bargain price from the Canadian Navy after the War, she was converted into the most luxurious superyacht of her day, filled with expensive and exotic furnishings and Impressionist art. Onassis used her shamelessly to entertain the rich and powerful, from European royalty and Winston Churchill to Maria Callas and Elizabeth Taylor.

Richard Burton said of *Christina*: “I don’t think there is a man or woman on earth who would not be seduced by the pure narcissism shamelessly flaunted on this boat.” He clearly had a taste for it, and would soon have a yacht of his own in which to hang his Impressionist art. *Christina O*, as she is now known, remains a regular charter fixture in the harbours of the South of France.

That *Life* article was entitled “Really the Way to Live: Yachting in the Grand Style”, and even when it came out it must have seemed like a glimpse into another world. Among the millionaires’ yachts featured, *Radiant II* made a particular impression. “The galley has an electric bread cutter, and enough china to serve two dozen people,” the magazine reported. Jackie Kennedy had joined her for a cruise with Texas oilman Charles Wrightsman and his wife, who were friends of the owner, Lon-

Carmaker Goes Out for Speed

Carmel Agnelli does not like to waste a minute. So the next evolution of his 30-foot, 4,000-hp motor yacht, the *GA-35*, is how up, wide flying, engines revving at her side. A strong breeze in a port roundal rocks. Designed for speed rather than big splashes, the *GA-35* cost \$500,000, has a light-weight hull of mid-species and oak.

Intended to go 40 knots, Agnelli’s boat is theoretically a gallant. In fact, because it can go only 30. Though large for a speedboat, it might seem reaching into the wind. It has, for instance, a crew of only six.

A 44, Agnelli is well-known as a carmaker’s son and a finance, vice chairman of the Fiat car company and head of a family firm which has holdings in 100 other companies. “He is always in a hurry,” explains his captain. “We must even skip dinner. The *GA-35* wouldn’t be there when the divers came back up.”



HOT YACHT

Clockwise: a refitted Christina O; Gianni Agnelli and his wife Marella, 1965; Grace Kelly and Prince Rainier disembark in Monaco, 19XX; Niarchos on board Creole with his Toulouse-Lautrec. Facing page: Agnelli in Life magazine, 1965



don-based Greek shipping tycoon Basil Mavroleon. At 190 feet, *Radiant II* was the biggest yacht built in Europe since the War.

The Mavroleons had her built in 1961 in the family shipyard in Sunderland, and had already ventured in her as far as Leningrad and the Black Sea before *Life* caught up with them. The yacht's interior was nothing if not eclectic, with futuristic Saarinen furniture competing for attention with a Louis XVI desk, chairs upholstered in tiger-patterned French silk at "\$100 a yard", Chinese *objets d'art* and Spanish carpets. She had a different colour scheme for every stateroom, and a Napoleon-themed master suite.

The years since then have not been kind to *Radiant II*. Successive refits saw her streamlined wheelhouse and funnel replaced by extra upperworks and, eventually, after various changes of name and ownership, she found herself marooned in Monaco and owned, not altogether willingly, by a bank. Now known as *Lady K II*, she has for the last few years been in the care of Allan Foot of Solent Refit, who was called in to help dispose of her. In spite of her neglected appearance he was impressed by her condition, and brought her up to Southampton from the Mediterranean under her own power: "She was very well built," he says. "The steel in those days was good stuff." A restoration was begun and Foot is currently courting a potential owner to finish the job, which according to his admirably precise, itemized estimate, will cost £3,361,196. For that money, it would be silly not to.

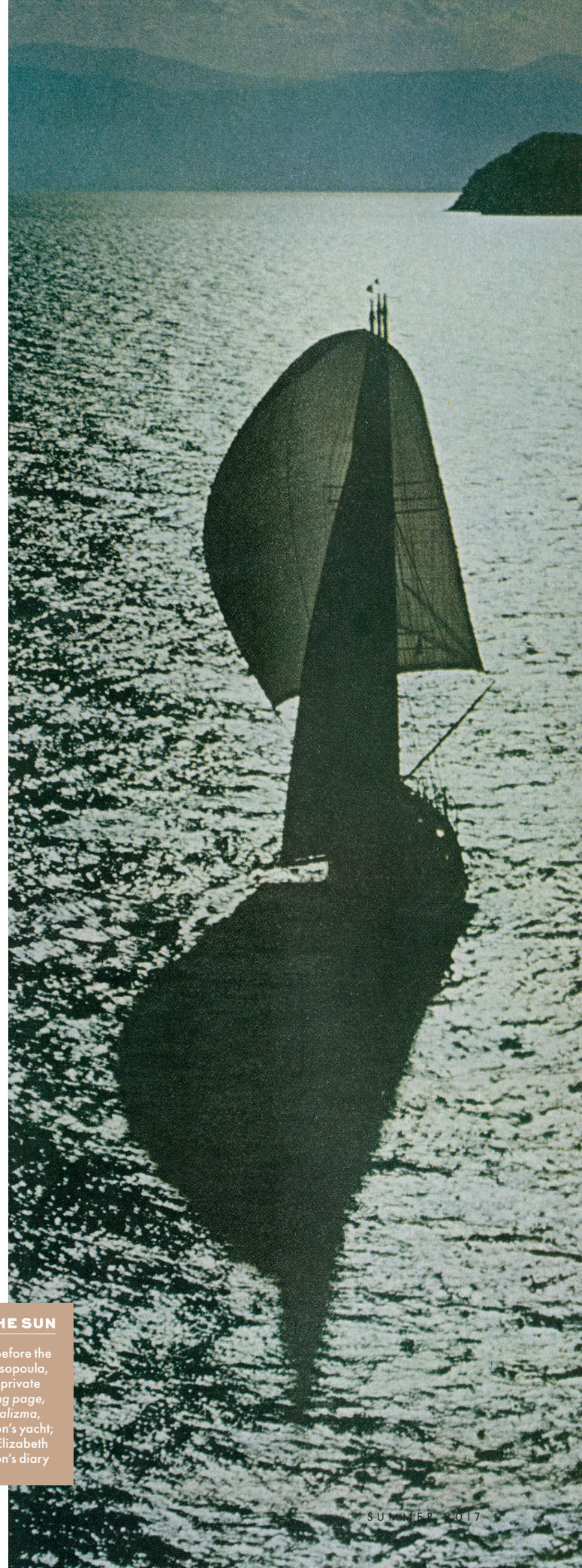
So *Radiant II* might live to cruise again. Not all yachts are so lucky. *Life* also went boating with Gianni Agnelli, the Italian industrialist, playboy and lover of all things fast, whose mistresses allegedly included Pamela Harriman and Anita Ekberg. The magazine found life aboard his 90ft, 30-knot, 4,000hp motor yacht exhausting: "Designed for speed rather than lazy opulence, the *GA-30* cost \$500,000," the magazine reported. "Gianni Agnelli does not like to stand still: 'He is always in a hurry,' explains his captain." Even his wife lived life at speed. "Ranked high up on the international best-dressed lists, Mrs Agnelli is—like her husband—always on the move, dashing around the world," *Life* explained. She is pictured in the water, powering towards the camera as if in an Olympic freestyle final.

The *Life* crew might have enjoyed their assignment more if the Agnellis had invited them aboard one of their other vessels—perhaps the beautiful, Stockholm-built sailing yawl *Agneta*. Designed by Knud Reimers and launched in 1950, the yacht's fabulous looks and superb sailing performance soon caught the eye of the acquisitive Italian motor magnate, who bought her in 1956. He kept her for more than 25 years. Successive owners have continued to lavish attention on her, and she remains popular on the classic regatta circuit in the Mediterranean, where her lustrous varnished mahogany hull melts hearts in the sparkling sunshine.

She has been luckier than her high-speed, triple-engined stablemate. With its lightweight wooden build and complex machinery, a boat like *GA-30* needs kid-glove treatment and constant maintenance. One neglectful custodian and a couple of seasons can be enough to start the rot. There then might follow a succession of brave owners eager to take it on, before costs mount, work stalls, and it is no longer a yacht but a project. A fast 54ft cruiser belonging to Prince Rainier and Princess Grace, *Carostefal*, has also fallen off yachting's social radar. She was one of a succession of boats owned by Monaco's first family, and *Life*'s photographer was given extraordinary access on board.

CHASE THE SUN

Creole runs before the wind to Spetsopoula, Niarchos's private island. Facing page, from top: Kalizma, Richard Burton's yacht; Burton and Elizabeth Taylor; Burton's diary



Even those yachts that seem to vanish sometimes reappear on the far side of the world. The 147ft *Deo Juvante II*, on which the royal couple spent their honeymoon in 1956, was presented to them as a wedding present by Aristotle Onassis but soon sold. She has recently resurfaced as *MY Grace*, a luxury charter vessel in the Galapagos Islands. And *Kalizma*, once the most famous superyacht of all, now operates far from the spotlight of the Côte d'Azur, plying the waters of the Seychelles.

Like *Grace*, she now sports an extra deck which does nothing for her looks, but other modifications have been undone to restore her original Edwardian profile. She was built in Leith in 1906 as the 165ft steam yacht *Minona*, and bought by Richard Burton in 1967 to celebrate Elizabeth Taylor's Oscar for *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* She cost £80,000—nothing to Burton, who went on to spend \$1.1million on a diamond engagement ring—and they renamed her after their daughters, Kate, Elizabeth and Maria.

Burton loved his yacht. "I am longing to see it again," he confided to his diary in October 1968. "Saturday 12th, St-Jean-Cap-Ferrat: aboard the *Kalizma*... We didn't go to bed until 3:30 because we were so excited at the joy of the boat. I can't stop touching it and staring at it, as if it were a beautiful baby or a puppy-dog. Something you can't believe is your very own." Cruising up the Thames to London he spent an idle hour observing all the ships that passed, entranced by the evocation of their names: *Ya Falaheen*, *Queen of the Islands*, *White Sapphire*, *Billet Doux*. "And they say the world lacks romance," he wrote.



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Of course they said no such thing. The tabloids were selling the Burton and Taylor story to their readers as a great love affair, and *Kalizma* was a worthy successor to the Dockers' *Shemara* as a source of salacious Fleet Street gossip. But while press interest in Sir Bernard and Lady Norah verged on the satirical, steeped in class snobbery and gleeful mockery, it was as British as Benny Hill. A decade later, Burton and Taylor's glamour was real, and their fame was global. The attention was relentless. Not for them the gentle genuflection of *Life* magazine.

Burton dreamed about retiring. They had enough money. "We'll spread our time between Gstaad, the *Kalizma* and Puerto Vallarta," he wrote. They would "nip over to Paris to give a party for the Rothschilds", take a trip on the Trans-Siberian Express, and visit Kashmir. They might cruise to Spain, the West Indies and the Amazon. "We'll revisit Dahomey again and look at the washing on the line at the Palace—we can slide down the coast there in the *Kalizma*."

Escape takes many forms. Like all good yachts, *Kalizma* helped the actor break free from himself, even if only in daydreams. □

