

DESIGN



COURTESY OF WINCH DESIGN



Abeking & Rasmussen Excellence

MICHAL BAGINSKI

DESIGN

As Luck Would Have It

STORY ALAN HARPER

ANDREW WINCH MADE IT TO THE TOP TIER OF SUPERYACHT DESIGN WITH HARD WORK, SUPERIOR SKILLS AND A FAIR BIT OF FATE.



MICHAL BAGINSKI

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Winch (center) doing what he does best: working with his design team, translating the client's wishes and aspirations into three dimensions.



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When exceptional people claim their success boils down to luck, it's usually modesty, false or otherwise. In Andrew Winch's case, it might actually be true. He is undoubtedly exceptional as one of the most recognized faces in global superyachting, but his big breaks as a young designer came in such a roundabout way that there doesn't seem to be any other plausible explanation.

Most people in the yachting community know that Winch served his design apprenticeship in Jon Bannenberg's yacht design studio, but not many people know how Winch came to be there.

At Kingston School of Art, Winch wanted to submit a yacht design project for his final year exhibition. "They said, 'We can't teach you that, you need to find a tutor,'" he recalls.

Winch didn't know anyone who would fit the bill, but his parents' next-door neighbor happened to be filling in for Bannenberg's secretary. Introductions were made, and Bannenberg took on the unpaid role of part-time tutor. That was Winch's first lucky break.

"Jon was an incredible mentor," Winch says, more than 20 years after Bannenberg's death. "One afternoon he taught me how to draw a boat with weights and splines and create true curves, and to understand how every point on the side of a hull is three-dimensional."



MICHAŁ BAGIŃSKI

The Old Fire Station, Winch Design's Thameside home for many years: quaint and characterful, but recently outgrown

Winch is triumphant aboard *Polar Bear*, his Jeanneau 64 (which he designed, of course), transiting the Corinth Canal in 2021.



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Feadship Madame Gu

JEFF BROWN | BREED MEDIA

'We had a £35,000 overdraft at the bank, and I woke up to the fact that we were going to be out of business,' Winch says.

Then came lucky break number four.



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TOM VAN OOSSENEN

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Bannenberg dutifully attended Winch's degree show at Kingston, but when the newly minted designer asked for a job, Bannenberg turned him down. "He said he didn't need a new young graduate from Kingston," Winch says. "He told me to go and get some experience on yachts, so I did."

Winch, who had spent his childhood sailing, signed on as skipper for an American owner who wanted his yacht delivered from the Mediterranean.

"The owner found me a navigator, and my girlfriend came too," Winch recalls. The fourth crew member was a friend of the owner's—who fell overboard in the mid-Atlantic. "We turned back and found him after about 20 minutes, and he was drowning, so I jumped in and pulled him up, and we winched him back on board," he says. "The first thing he said was, 'Don't tell my wife!'" More than 40 years later it makes a lighthearted tale, but if they hadn't found him, things might have turned out very differently. As it was, it was another lucky break: The young design graduate enjoyed his season skippering in the Caribbean, and when he came back, still mad about boats, Bannenberg was waiting for him. He eventually did six years in the famous studio.

It was 1986 when Winch decided, with his wife, Jane, to strike out independently. Winch Design operated from the spare room of their house in southwest London. Lucky break number three was that the Bannenberg studio had been working on a yacht called *Garuda* for the Finnish yacht-builder Nautor. The Finns asked Bannenberg, a superyacht designer, if he would look at their Swan 36 production sailboat, and Bannenberg sent Nautor to Winch.

"The 36 kept us alive," he says. It was a groundbreaking boat. "They built a hundred, they sold for a hundred thousand, and we had a one percent royalty," Winch says, lamenting that the naval architect Germán Frers got 2 percent.

After that, interesting projects ensued for multiple shipyards—Windship in Florida, Alloy Yachts in New Zealand, and Jeanneau in France. But it was overwhelmingly sailboat work and, as Winch began to realize, the market was tilting increasingly toward powerboats.



MICHAL BAGINSKI

CRN Cloud 9

'You need luck in business.'

ANDREW WINCH

The fledgling firm had six employees when the early 1990s recession hit. "Sailboat orders were very thin on the ground," Winch recalls. "We had a £35,000 overdraft at the bank, and I woke up to the fact that we were going to be out of business."

Then came lucky break number four: a headline-grabbing project for the Dutch builder Feadship that set Winch Design on the road to superyacht stardom. *White Rabbit*, which would launch in 1995, was 162 feet (49 meters) long. It was a huge yacht for its time, beyond the wildest ambitions of Winch's studio—but the owner's son-in-law worked at Nautor. "He knew my Swan designs and

liked the way I made use of space," Winch says. Everything fell into place. "You need luck in business."

Today, Winch Design has outgrown its picturesque Old Fire Station premises on the Thames at Mortlake, and now occupies a vast office and studio complex a few miles downstream, with a view of the river from the roof terrace. Winch is now 69, and his firm employs more than 160 people. It has been responsible for exterior styling and interior design of some of the most remarkable yachts of recent years, including the 262-foot (80-meter) Abeking & Rasmussen *Excellence*, the 262-foot (80-meter) Heesen

Genesis and the 324-foot (99-meter) Feadship *Madame Gu*.

Winch obviously had a hand in making all this luck happen. He is personable, smart, determined and supremely good at what he does. He even regards his dyslexia not as a hindrance, but as an asset.

"I look at everything as a shape, and think about everything in 3D," he says. "I see a picture. I can understand what somebody aspires to pretty quickly. I can probably finish their sentences and see what they want within 24 hours of that meeting. Not go off and decide what I want, but understand what it is that they are after."



Sea dogs: Winch sailing his Jeanneau with Truffle the spaniel as crew.

COURTESY OF DAVID WINCH

When it comes to managing people, he reckons he learned about leadership from sailing and racing with crew. "I had to learn that I needed to tell them what to do, and they had to understand exactly which rope to pull. So you start to describe everything a bit better and to listen when you're being criticized."

There are downsides to dyslexia, of course. "I'm difficult to manage," he concedes. "When I have an idea, I have to action it straight away. I have trained myself to write my thoughts in a notebook and look at it when I can."

He has also learned the importance of professional business management at Winch Design, having seen more than a few eminent yacht designers go bust because they tried to be their own CEOs. Early advice from his businessman father was also invaluable: Charge every new client a commitment fee, before anyone lifts a pencil. "We went at that moment from being £35,000 overdrawn to never having an overdraft again," he says.

Today, Winch is semi-retired, and Winch Design is owned by its employees. He serves on the firm's board of trustees and looks forward to having more time to sail his 65-foot Jeanneau. It's his own design. We were building *Dilbar* at the time," he says of the 512-foot (156-meter) Lürssen. "The office said, 'Why do you want to do a 65-footer?' And I said, 'I want to. It's a sailboat, and it could make us a lot of money.'" As indeed it has.

The company is in good hands. Winch recalls a book he admires, *Legacy* by New Zealand rugby coach James Kerr. It's about why the All Blacks have been the most successful rugby team ever. "It's because the captain sweeps out the locker room and leaves last," he says.

"The All Blacks are very good at recognizing they're a team. Winch Design is a team with a capital T, and has been from day one." ♦