



REFIT, CONVERSION OR NEW BUILD?

The conversion of 85m Delma into 91.5m Queen Miri by Amico & Co is one of the most extensive yacht refit projects ever attempted. It was completed in a record 17 months and required a dedicated team of nine in-house superintendents working in close collaboration with the owner's representative team headed up by Paul Gillcrist. Here, he passes on the lessons learned from his first yacht project.

Although *Queen Miri* is the first yacht my principal has owned, he had chartered *Delma* several times in the past. The main appeal was the fact that she could accommodate 36 passengers, as the limitation of being able to carry only 12 passengers just wasn't interesting to him.

The desire to finally own, rather than charter, was based on having a yacht that looked the way the owner wanted with the amenities and features he wanted: it's as simple as that. You're never going to find the perfect charter boat and the same goes for something that is already in build. But you can refit one that is close to that ideal if the project is directed properly.

We looked at all the options, including a new-build, but refit was the one that made most sense. It was a more a question of time than anything else. When you are designing and building from scratch, you could be looking at five years from concept to completion.

When selecting the yard, there were several things about Amico & Co that attracted us. One was their enthusiasm, which is always important. Also, as we examined the project more closely, they didn't find anything too scary, which can happen. In other words, they didn't 'big deal' it; they were very focused and never said, "We can't do this".





There are some small things I would have done differently, but that's all part of the learning process that I can translate into other jobs.

Once the project began, the 'to-do' list did begin to grow. It expanded in different ways, but mostly they were sensible ideas from Amico & Co or Wim Koersvelt [the owner's project manager] to make the boat better. For example, we decided to install heat exchangers from the generators to warm up the pool and Jacuzzi. These were logical ideas that made sense. Having been involved in lots of construction projects in other fields, I can say that almost all of them expand at some point and this was no different.

My principal is a knowledgeable guy and in terms of building things he's one of the most experienced in the world. It's always better to deal with someone who has that kind of knowledge, as trying to overcome a lack of understanding can be a big issue. Having an immediate grasp of the fundamental principles makes life easier for everyone, and there's a lot of what he's done elsewhere that carried over into the *Queen Miri* project.

But it was still a challenge to get it done as efficiently and quickly as possible so we weren't throwing money away. We had Amico & Co, Wim, the interior designer Alessandro Massari and others to handle the technical side. My job was to keep the project moving in the right direction and to turn my principal's aspirations into reality. This also meant not pretending to know things I didn't know. Instead, I drew on the technical expertise of other people and tried to turn their knowledge into something that made sense.

Looking back, it was an enjoyable experience. But it's never enjoyable when you're in the thick of it. As I had no experience of boats, I had my doubts

when my principal asked me to represent him, but he told me I'd enjoy it and, in the end, he was right. It's rewarding when you look at the finished product and you see tanned, smiling people getting off the yacht.

I've never done anything where I haven't made mistakes and I stay with things knowing I will make new mistakes. There are some small things I would have done differently, but that's all part of the learning process that I can translate into other jobs. I'm very good at working out what we're trying to achieve – that's my strength and I don't have to be very technical to do that. But it's nice to know the basics as you'd hate to get halfway through and then find you can't get something approved. It's easy to bamboozle people when you're working with very technical things, and I've seen that happen, but that wasn't a problem with *Queen Miri*. I didn't lose much sleep because I trusted the people involved.

In the end, it's all about having the right yard, the right team and being able to pull everything together. Refit is a gutsy, freewheeling way of doing things, but as long as you keep on top of it you can have a quality product at the end. We were designing while we were building, which carries risks but cuts down on time. It's easier to spend years working out the details in advance, but it's usually more expensive and takes much longer. How many times have you bought a car, for example, and they say delivery will take three weeks? That almost kills me, especially when you've already written the cheque! It's about instant gratification: we want to enjoy our stuff and it's hard to wait.