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BIG AMBITION

Mario Pedol: the man who went from designing 7m sailboats to the world's largest yacht – 180m Azzam



TECHNICAL





Mario Pedol

...from Mini Tonners to Azzam

WHEN MARIO PEDOL WAS STUDYING ECONOMICS, HE COULD HARDLY HAVE PREDICTED THE PATH THAT LED HIM TO DESIGN THE EXTERIOR LINES OF THE WORLD'S LARGEST PRIVATE YACHT

'We've had a lot of compliments for *Azzam*,' says Mario Pedol coyly as we talk over coffee. 'They all talk about elegance and balance, that she doesn't look as big as she is, and I think this is a good achievement.' Such modesty is the mark of the man. Pedol may be responsible for the lines of *Azzam* – at 180 metres, the largest private yacht yet built – but he is still actively engaged in the design of some of the smallest yachts around. So how did this Italian designer find himself at the forefront of large motor yacht design? It all starts – as these things always do – with a passion.



words: Tim Thomas
photography: Courtesy of Nauta Yachts

Mario Pedol (above, second from right), Massimo Gino (far right) and their team discuss detail on a new design; the studio hit the headlines recently for the exterior lines of the 180m *Azzam*, in build at Lürssen (left)

'My grandfather sailed all his life on ships and liners as chief engineer,' Pedol explains. 'He'd sail three months on, then get a couple of months off, so he was around a lot in the summer when we were kids. We had a house on the Adriatic and a Riva runabout, and he'd tell stories of his life sailing around the world and from the war while teaching us how to navigate or read the weather. That's how the "virus" first got in!'

Pedol's love of the sea grew. By age 12 he had attended sailing school, and through his teenage and early adult years he'd go sailing and racing with friends, do deliveries, and spend time with friends who owned Half Tonners and One Tonners. He went to university to study economics and while there, quite by chance, had his first taste of the yachting industry. 'A friend who owned the Half Tonner suggested we do the new 23-foot

Superyacht Design



Mini Tonner class, that we should develop a project and try to build it. He had met a nice guy next to him in the marina on a chartered boat, and this guy said he would be interested in buying the first one.'

At that time, Italian designer Andrea Vallicelli had performed well in the Half Ton Cup in Trieste with his yacht *Ziggurat*, so Pedol and his friend took a train to Rome to meet Vallicelli and discuss the design of the Mini Tonner. 'It was 1976, and we were in the middle of university so 21 years old,' smiles Pedol, 'and after two years of university you start getting a bit bored with study and you want to do practical things... We only gave the brief to Andrea because we didn't have any design knowledge, so it was basically an entrepreneurial role, acting as a yard proposing the product to the market and taking care of advertising, sales and production.'

With Vallicelli's design in their hands, they found 'a crazy builder, who agreed to finance the mould. It started a bit like a joke', says Pedol, 'but it was very successful. We sold three off the plans, went to the Genoa boat show and sold seven in one week. Suddenly we had to produce 10 boats, to build an operation up! In two and a half years we had 40 boats sold and built.' And the guy his friend had met in the marina, who had bought the first one, was none other than Pier Luigi Loro Piana. It would not be the last time that Pedol and Loro Piana would work together.

The next step

In 1978, Pedol fell in love with the first Oyster, a Holman & Pye-designed 37-foot (11.2 metre) cruiser-racer. He contacted Oyster and flew to Colchester, UK, to meet Richard Matthews and Alan Brook to see if they would take on an Italian dealer. 'We went sailing,' says Pedol, 'and it was a bloody cold day with a freezing wind but it was fun. We started this relationship with a dealership

for Italy, so that was the second step of my career.' It worked well for three years, Pedol selling five of the Oysters, but the pound strengthened markedly and the pricing was no longer competitive for the Italian market.

The last two 37s Pedol imported in kit form, putting them together at the Castagnola shipyard in Lavagna. 'A Mini Tonner is very simple,' Pedol states, 'but when you work on something bigger you get eager to know more about the basics, the fundamentals.' Pedol took a year out, sailing to the Caribbean and back on his own Oyster 37. It proved invaluable in his design career. 'Living on board you get into it so deeply, you get the reaction and the feeling of all the positives and negatives, from the moving environment that is not always friendly to the beautiful sensation and motion from being immersed in that environment. It's a key attitude for any designer, to put themselves in the shoes of a prospective end user.'

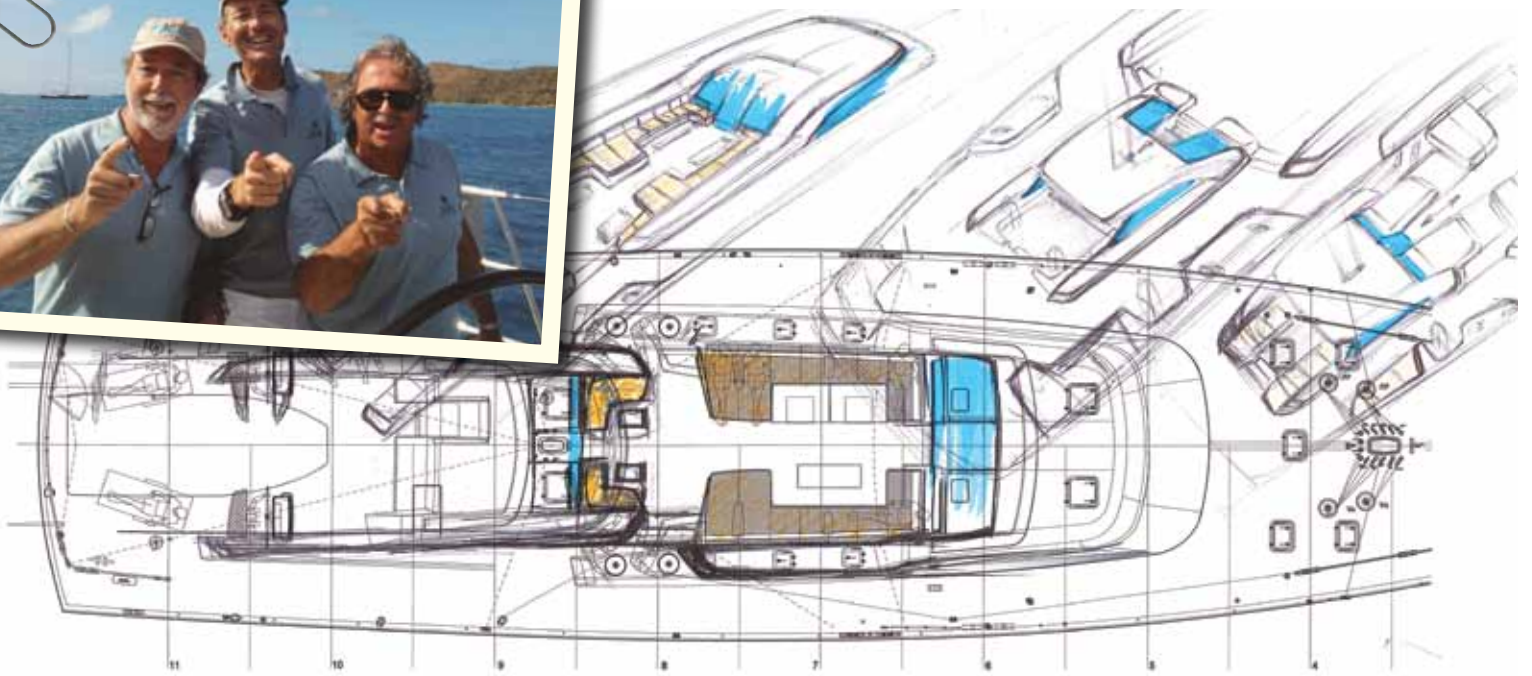
As chance had it, as Pedol returned from his voyages, an intensive one-year yacht design course had just been set up in Milan run by professionals from the industry. It seemed an obvious move for Pedol. 'It was run by real designers like Vallicelli and Fulvio de Simoni – all the best Italian designers were there. It was the real base for yacht design theory, and it was useful especially having already worked in the industry on the building side, of experiencing the problems on the production floor.'

After the course, Pedol spent time at the studio of Silverio Della Rosa in Milan, then with ex-S&S designer

The first yacht designed by the newly formed Nauta Yachts in 1985 was the Nauta 54 (above right); this was followed by the Nauta 70, the first of which was built as the second *My Song* for Pier Luigi Loro Piana (above left). The studio's first motor yacht project was a modern take on the lobster boat – the *Toy 37* (below)



Superyacht Design



Scott Kaufman at his studio in Manhattan. 'That was really fascinating,' enthuses Pedol, 'and I was very happy as I was a fan of his designs. He had a special touch, and with him I found a scholarship of elegance.'

Nauta

Pedol returned to Milan in 1985, and with two friends for business partners – Massimo Gino and Enzo Moiso – set up Nauta Yachts. First came the Nauta 54, borne from a request from an Oyster 37 client who wanted to move up in size. 'It was the first yacht I designed,' says Pedol, 'and the first with the kind of teamwork we have employed for the last 25 years, meaning we do all the preliminary design work, the fundamentals, but then we like to team up with top names in sailing yacht naval architecture – the guys who are at the top level in the racing arena – in order to bring the best of both worlds, of both the racing and the cruising style.' The 54 used Scott Kaufman naval architecture and Nauta sold seven in four years – including hull number four, which went to Pier Luigi Loro Piana as the first *My Song*. A Nauta 70, in collaboration with Bruce Farr, followed with the first hull becoming the second *My Song*, and then came a 65.

All seemed well for seven years. 'We were acting not only as core designers, but also building and marketing the yachts so we learnt all the difficulties and problems of production,' explains Pedol. 'The yachts were built at the CNB yard in Fano (later purchased by Luca Bassani) with subcontractors building the hulls, CNB doing the interiors and mounting deck gear bought by Nauta, and more subcontractors doing the engineering and electrical installations. 'It is one of the aspects now

very much appreciated by high quality builders we work with such as Baltic Yachts and Southern Wind: they get plans and drawings almost ready to go to the floor because they're already thought for that purpose.'

But 1992 proved a seismic year, with a big economic and political crisis in Italy that literally stopped the market for two years. 'We stopped too,' says Pedol, 'and started from scratch with a different business model. We had learnt a lot in both design and construction, and put this knowledge on the market to sell a service, a skill rather than product. And that's the present configuration and activity of Nauta Yachts.'

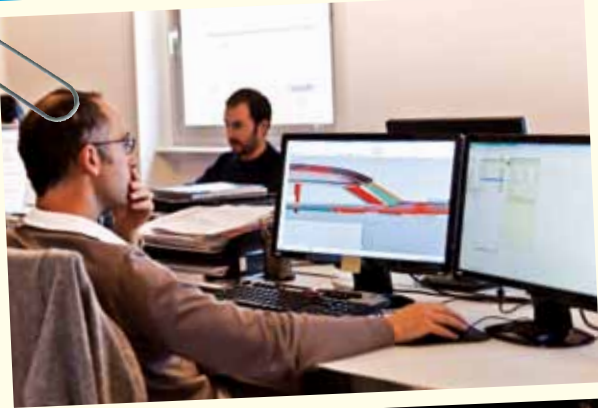
The new-look Nauta brought some old clients with it, resulting in the design of the 27.7 metre *Desirade II* and the third and current *My Song*, a 25.3 metre racer-cruiser designed with Reichel/Pugh and built at Cookson in New Zealand. This was followed by a burgeoning relationship with Southern Wind and other custom and semi-custom builders. It also marked the first forays into motor yacht work, Nauta taking on the interior redesign of six models in the Bertram range from 37 to 60 feet. The first true motor yacht design came from a commission by Toy Marine in 2003 to design a lobster boat for the Mediterranean, revisited in a contemporary way.

In 2005 Nauta knocked on the door of Beneteau to propose a tried and trusted

Top left: Pedol (left), Francesco De Angelis (middle) and Pier Luigi Loro Piana (right) enjoy racing on *Cape Arrow*. The third *My Song* (below), a collaboration between Nauta and Reichel/Pugh, is still winning silverware on the regatta circuit



Supernacht Design



design team of Nauta/Farr – the Farr office was already collaborating on the new range of Beneteau performance cruisers – and a few months later they were invited to see the group's HQ and have lunch with the directors, including the big boss, Madame Roux. 'It was a very positive meeting,' Pedol says, 'and she is very sharp with clear ideas. Two months later they called us to start the first two projects, the Oceanis 50 and 46. The 50 was very successful from the start.' Eight years later Beneteau has 20 models in production that use Nauta interiors, and a couple that use Nauta deck designs, too.

The big milestone in motor yacht design for the studio came in 2006. 'Project Light was a big jump into a new world,' smiles Pedol. 'At 80 metres it's a yacht but you're talking ship language, which is quite different. Doing that with a partner – Fincantieri in this case – has been a useful learning process, a deep scholarship, but it worked out well, in part thanks to our attitude of being always aware of how actually to construct things.'

Azzam

The studio has recently been working on an expedition yacht that has just grown to 74 metres, and a 90 metre, 2,999GT version of project Light. But the big news, and one of the best-kept superyacht secrets in recent times, is of course *Azzam*. It has become, in more ways than one, the elephant in the room.

'*Azzam* came out after the experience on the 80 metre Light, and when we were first called by the client (in 2008) we only had Light as a reference,' Pedol explains. 'I like to think that we had a good result from that first meeting because Light was quite innovative and clean in her lines. Like so often in life she came about because of "common friends". They were looking for an exterior designer, and one of the people they asked for advice knew us professionally and knew we were working on Light. We were contacted by *Azzam*'s interior designer and soon after the client asked us to visit them.'

The studio's first foray into big motor yacht design was the 80m Project Light, which is now proposed as a 90m version (above). It was the original Light that helped secure the contract for the styling of *Azzam*. The studio continues to sketch other large motor yacht concepts such as this 160m (below)



Superyacht Design



CARL GROLL/THEYACHTPHOTO.COM

The project was in its early stages but the general concept and the drive system was already specified so the brief was quite clear. At the time, it was just 145 metres. 'The need was to address the concept and the general layout with the exterior design and architecture, also in terms of function, windows, contact with the outside, paths and boarding routes that had not been thought through much,' says Pedol. 'So we started working as a team, also giving thought to the interior layout. We started with a 2D profile view, where you put down the basics, the fundamentals, the main features and characteristics. Then it's another big step to get that into 3D, which we did for the shorter version. At that point she was already very much defined in terms of stylistic language.'

'There then followed a standby period of eight months,' Pedol continues. 'We were kind of worried because we had a similar experience with Light, which was stopped in 2008 because of the GFC. But fortunately, things soon started again on Azzam, and at the bigger size. It was one jump to 180 metres, and I don't know why! We had to redo everything – it's not a simple stretching process. You have to re-adapt the style language to a different technical brief, but from a good starting point as the main signs and language were already defined and both we and the client were happy with it. The major creative step was already done.'

Building Azzam

'Then starts the next chapter – after the kick-off meeting with Lürssen – to really put the hands figuratively to the engine like a mechanic: first you look at it and then you have to get your hands dirty! That means doing all the 2D and 3D detail work, and combining it with the structural needs and all the work Lürssen is doing in terms of noise, vibration, structural engineering, aerodynamics

and the rest, together with all the interfaces with the interior design: windows, detailed dimensions, heights...

'Our first involvement was in September 2008 when we got the commission to act as exterior designers. The kick-off meeting with the final design and size was 1 December 2009. We had to agree a very tight schedule with Lürssen and at first we were a little scared. When you start a new project you have white page panic! But with the previous part of the project already done for the 145 metre version, we accepted the schedule and started working hard to match it.'

The rest is history. When the yacht emerged from the Lürssen sheds earlier this year, countless rumours were at last proven true, and the world's media greedily gobbled up every last detail they could glean – which was not much. What is evident, though, is that she does indeed carry that balance and elegance of line, and this became even more apparent as I took the chance to walk alongside her on a recent visit to the Lürssen facility.

Versatility is obviously a watchword for Mario Pedol and his Nauta Yachts team – working on everything from high-tech custom cruiser-racers to small production boats that a virtual client will enjoy two years later, and from small tenders like the Maori 37 and Toy 37 to the world's largest yacht – Azzam. Not bad for an economics student who caught the yachting virus as a young child, and never got cured. 🏠

The 180m Azzam (above) – which will be the world's largest yacht to date when she is delivered at the end of 2013 – on sea trials. 'People talk about her elegance and balance,' says Pedol. The current Nauta Yachts team (below)

