There's no doubt that owners are becoming more sophisticated in their approach to refit. We have seen numerous examples of cruising enthusiasts who have come to like a particular charter yacht after spending time on board and are then inspired to buy and refit it to their requirements. However, it is equally possible to manage the process the other way around by first defining personal requirements and then looking for a suitable yacht to convert. This is what happened in the case of Elisabeth F, and an important consideration was that the result should cost a worthwhile amount less than a newly built yacht.

This story involves a London-based couple and their six children, who love cruising and spend as much time on board yachts as they can manage. In addition to chartering, their previous experience came through ownership of the 40 metre CRN motor yacht Elisabeth F, which enabled them to gradually define the type of yacht they would like to own in the future. Not only did they need more space to accommodate the family and their friends but their intense involvement with watersports of all kinds called for a modern layout with excellent access to the sea and good storage for boats and equipment – the type of yacht that is most in demand and therefore expensive, either to build new or to buy second hand.

As a solution to this conundrum, they decided to consider a refit project, the idea being to find a sound but dated motor yacht in the 40 to 50 metre range that could be bought for a reasonable amount and then refurbished to their exact requirements. A key player in this story was to be Vesa Kankonen, who had been captain of the CRN but wanted to 'come ashore' and set up a management company with his brother. It was agreed that he would search for a suitable yacht and manage its conversion.

He began by searching through the details of literally hundreds of yachts for sale and looking over about 50. After exhaustive analysis, the best buy seemed to be the 46 metre Feadship Avanté F, built by De Vries in 1979 and originally named Doria. Apart from
Refit work included a stern job, providing extra space for a roomy lazarette with a door leading out directly to the new bathing platform (top and far left). The top and upper decks were also revamped, receiving completely new deck flooring, while the upper deck now has Deltan sunbrellas for guests.
Mindful of the owners' wish not to spend money unnecessarily; the drive train and steering were not touched and the old stern cut off just behind the rudders.

Little had been done to her since she was built and she was overdue for a full modernisation. After buying her in Florida, the first step was to hire a crew and to take her on a seven-week cruise with Kaukonen as captain, enabling everyone involved to get a feel for the yacht and the work that needed to be done.

Kaukonen then settled down to the crucial task of writing a specification that could be distributed as a bid document. As usual in these cases, the owners did not want to miss out on a whole year of cruising, so they were looking for a team that could turn the job around in a maximum of 10 months.

An easy decision was to return to the yacht’s original naval architect De Voogt for the technical design and exterior styling, while a more major decision was to entrust the interior to Design Unlimited (DU), the company founded by Mark Tucker that specialises in contemporary styles. The DU team worked alongside London-based interior consultant Peter Mikic to create a stunning new contemporary look for Akata IV’s well-worn interior, and DU also took on the task of project managing the interior refit, including re-arranging sub-contractors and buying furnishings and fittings. Mikic is a friend of the owners and has a wide experience of interior design, including yachts, so he was able to interpret their wishes accurately and sympathetically.

The final piece in the jigsaw was the yard, and here, an excellent reputation, plus availability and the fact that it is based in England worked strongly in favour of Pendennis Shipyard, which has carried out several refits of this type and scale on a tight schedule.

On the technical side, the major task was the now-familiar ‘stem job’ to replace the transom with a boarding/bathing platform, reached via a staircase from the main deck. Mindful of the owners’ wish not to spend money unnecessarily, the drive train and steering were not touched and the old stern was cut off just behind the rudders. The new stern added five metres to the overall length and has provided room for a spacious new lazarette with a door from the platform. It has been divided in two, with one side given over to...
To open up the original upper salon (left, centre), the aft bulkhead was removed and real decking ran through for an integrated feel (top left). With the tenders launched, this deck provides the ideal spot for viewing films which are projected on to a screen that rolls down over the salon entrance (top). The main deck below (above), provides space for formal dining and further relaxed seating.
technical equipment and storage and the other to a walk-in 'sports room', where everything to do with watersports can be found. A wet/dry changing room also means that guests do not need to return to their cabins in wet swim suits.

The new stern has certainly been exploited to the utmost. Out of sight underneath is a new anchor that retracts into a stainless steel pocket. Although unusual in a yacht of this size, it makes it possible to position the new Elizabeth F accurately in difficult anchorages. There is also an extending passerelle that emerges from a 'letter-box' slot, while a more unusual piece of equipment is a proper diving board that fixes to the aft platform. Keen divers can also dash up the new spiral stairs to the upper deck, where there is another board about 5 metres above the water.

Ararat IV's upper deck had not been particularly user-friendly, as it was dominated by two large and ugly tender cranes, while the entrance to the upper saloon was unimpressive. To improve this, the back of the saloon was cut off and left open, and the teak deck planking run through into this area to increase the open-air feeling. If the weather is bad, however, the saloon and part of the deck can be closed off using translucent screens. Meanwhile, the bulwarks around the deck were fitted with a raised handrail to make everything look smarter, while smaller, neater cranes from Nautical Structures, which do not project above the bulwark, have taken over the task of tender launch and recovery.

For passage-making, there is a fair amount to store on this deck: two RIB tenders, three jet skis and an assortment of sailboards and dinghies. When cruising, however, the jet skis can be moved to the foredeck, where there is another small crane, while one of the RIBs is usually kept in the water, and the boards on the main deck, ready for launching from the platform. This leaves a nice big open area aft with seating and sunshades against the aft rail. From here, guests are well-placed to watch videos on a large screen that rolls down across the entrance to the saloon, which receives the image from a back-projector inside. A new teak surface has totally rejuvenated this deck, and, in all, 160 square metres of new teak deck was laid.

The top deck was also turned into a much more useful space, a special attraction being the all-teak Japanese-style hot tub by William Carvey, which is flanked by Dedon sunloungers and armchairs. For those who are interested in toning rather than tanning, a selection of gymnasium equipment is available on the other side of the mast, and the whole deck has been enclosed with a bulwark and handrail so its appearance matches the upper deck.

Down below, engineers embarked on a full refit, as much of the machinery was out of date. The main engines and the generators were taken apart for a complete rebuild carried out in situ, while the boilers, valves, wiring and switchgear were all upgraded. New systems including a Furuno chart-plotter have improved the yacht's navigation and communication suite, while the entertainment system
Although the layout of the main salon and dining room is much the same as before (centre), these areas have had a major facelift. A beautiful custom wood floor, hand-painted wallpaper and silk wall panels now provide the perfect foil for free-standing chairs and sofas upholstered in white leather, creating a modern and uncluttered look.
The overall impression is of a relaxed but sophisticated waterside home – an effect that is surprisingly difficult to achieve convincingly.

has had a much more comprehensive makeover, including installation of a top-quality Sonos sound system. A facility that charterers particularly appreciate is the ability to download from satellite, and print, a wide selection of newspapers.

Inside, Design Unlimited achieved a remarkable transformation considering the brief was for more of a makeover than a total rip-out and rebuild. Having said that, the main saloon and all the cabins and their en suites were refurbished, but without drastic changes to the layout. The main saloon was given a beautiful custom wood floor and its walls decorated with hand-painted de Gournay wallpaper, contrasting with white leather Venetian blinds and silk wall panels. Its white leather sofas and chairs with black legs are strikingly modern but at the same time deliciously comfortable.

The black-and-white theme has been carried through to other parts of the interior, including the upper saloon, where the furnishing was kept simple to increase its apparent size but does include a cozy bar set forward to port. The overall impression is of a relaxed but sophisticated waterside home – an effect that is surprisingly difficult to achieve convincingly. White lacquer, white marble and glass-walled showers give the en suites a light, clean, modern look that is both practical and easy to clean, while for dramatic contrast, the dayhead is completely black, with drilled panels over the lights to create interesting streaks of light down the wall panels.

Ararat IV’s exterior paint was also in rather poor condition, so it was redone from scratch rather than being over-coated. A contractor blasted the whole hull to bare metal, after which it was primed, faired and painted in Awlgrip white by Rolling Stock of Majorca, which has carried out several paint jobs for Pendennis.

In 2008 Elisabeth F was entered for the refit section of the Superyacht Awards and was highly commended by the judges, who felt that a run-down motor yacht had been transformed into a thoroughly attractive, up-to-date vessel in excellent condition in all departments. All this was achieved without breaking the bank, which was what her owners set out to achieve in the first place.
The original cabins (centre) have also been completely refurbished to give them a more modern look, but like the rest of the yacht the layout has not been altered, and a spacious feel has been achieved with the use of neutral tones and an uncluttered approach to furnishings. Bathrooms and shower rooms all feature white lacquer, white marble and glass-walled showers.