The 75.2-metre Mirabella V launched in 2004 with a big splash down a traditional slipway at Vosper Thornycroft's yard in Southampton, UK. Built for Joe Vittoria, who famously identified the world's then 497 billionaires as potential charterers, noting he needed 'just 20 of them' to be a success, the yacht was groundbreaking in many ways. A Ron Holland design, she was – and still is – the world's largest sloop and even now is one of just a handful of sailing yachts with the owner's cabin on the main deck.

In June 2011 Vittoria sold her to a Texas oil and natural gas entrepreneur who streamlined her name to M5.

An experienced owner of motor yachts, he had first considered a large sailing yacht when he had chartered, and almost bought, the 64-metre Felicita West. With a view to commissioning a new boat 'about the same size as Felicita

In sea trials after her refit, she demonstrated her awesome power by almost touching 18 knots on a close reach.
Redman Whiteley Dixon (RWD) were appointed to redesign the interior. The owner's brief contained no fixed ideas, but rather features of other boats he liked – he would trust in their experience. RWD staff, including partners Justin Redman and Toby Ecuyer, built up a picture of the owner and his wife's tastes by spending time with them on board MS in the Caribbean, at their homes in the US, and on board his planes, another of his passions that would influence many of MS's details.

Mirabella V originally had two separate staircases between the saloon and the guest corridor on the deck below, but no direct access from the saloon to the bridge. One of RWD's first proposals – and, as it turned out, the only major change to the layout – was to remove the forward spiral staircase, build a new flight of stairs up to the bridge and double the width of the sliding glass doors between the saloon and the aft deck. From outside those doors it is now possible to see all the way to the wheel, which has made the bridge much more inviting to guests and satisfied the 'open concept' the owner wanted to encourage throughout. Near the bottom of the bridge stairs is a new games table which includes a World War II-themed Monopoly board and a version of Snakes and Ladders called Planes and Parachutes.

The side deck entrances to the superstructure were previously mostly unused, according to Romcke, and their roles have been redesigned: the port one is now a private

deciding that the exchange rate and the yacht's labour costs would be favourable, MS arrived at Falmouth docks in the UK during March 2012.

The yacht would have been a tight fit in the inner half of Pendennis's dry dock anyway, but the problem was exacerbated by the fact that a key part of the refit was to extend the stern. The solution? Chip out a two-metre chunk of the dock's inner granite wall. The 2.4-metre stern extension reversed the angle of the transom to a more traditional counter, and this allowed the flying bridge and cockpit to be extended as well.

'When I bought the boat I never really liked the way the stern looked,' says the owner. 'It was too bulbly, and there wasn't enough room on deck for the guests'. The new stern was designed by Holland, who left the backstay chainplates in their original positions 'to save money by utilising the original structure', he explains. The composite work was carried out by Green Marine. Few would disagree with the owner's view that the boat is now 'sleeker looking'.

but a little more modern looking' he approached her designer, Ron Holland, who produced some initial proposals but suggested he should charter Mirabella V before finalising anything. Until he got on board, he didn't think he would want to take on a boat that big. Then: 'I could see there was no comparison with Felicita West on the amount of room and I liked the fact that she was built in fibreglass.' The decision and the deal were made.

'We almost immediately started on the idea of a refit but I felt that we needed to get to know the boat first', the owner says. For the next nine months he and his family spent a lot of time on board 'using the boat pretty aggressively', mainly in the Caribbean and on the east coast of the US. He regularly conferred with the people who knew the boat best: her captain, Rocka Romcke, who had already been aboard for two years; Vittoria, 'about the kind of things he'd run into with the initial build', and Holland, 'because I wanted him to help me with refit'.

Although the owner would have preferred the work to be carried out in the United States, there was no shipyard that could handle the mast and put the boat in a dry dock and do everything they needed at that time. So, after consulting two friends whose boats had been built at Pendennis, and

THESE PAGES: THE Stern EXTENSION REVERSED THE TRANSOM TO A MORE TRADITIONAL RAKE.
INSIDE, A NEW LIGHTING PLAN, GLAMOROUS NEW SURFACES AND LEATHER FLOOR INSERTS DEFINE MS
owner’s entrance, while to starboard a new pantry provides a functional link between the saloon and the galley stairs, and both have direct access to the bridge. Elsewhere, the gym-cum-sauna has been converted to a treatment room, and seven guest baths with inadequate headroom have been replaced by showers. The owner’s suite now has larger his-and-hers bathrooms and dressing rooms with considerable storage, including a slide-out panel for the owner’s collection of leather belts, according to Ecuyer.

Mirabella V’s original interior featured teak panels throughout. Modernised to be more harmonious with her profile, the new décor makes extensive use of high-gloss Macassar ebony, mainly up to dado height, but also as framing for doors and other panels. In the guest areas the Macassar’s dramatic stripes are clearly visible, but in the owner’s suite, where there is more natural light, most of it has been stained to a more subtle appearance. In the saloon, where Macassar has been used more sparingly, the panels below the windows are bleached wenge.

Throughout, as a marked contrast to the Macassar, light upholstered panels float above dado height with ‘about 500 different types of fabric’, according to Ecuyer. Although the cabinets all have the same detail, there are subtle colour changes which give each cabin its own feeling and identity. The floors are generally light in colour – bleached limed oak in the saloon, light cream wool carpets with slightly differing textures and patterns in the owner’s and guest areas – but, to continue the aeroplane theme, a dark leather ‘runway’ courses through the middle of the saloon up to the bridge and down into the guest corridor, visually connecting the areas.

Small ceramic tiles lining the ensuites have been replaced with 10 different types of marble, and various leathers such as shagreen appear on shelves, door panels and door handles, handrails and shelf fiddles. Each cabin is named after a seaplane: Martin Mars, Sunderland, Mallard, Catalina, Walrus and Carbon Cub. The captain’s is called Kingfisher and the owner’s is Spruce Goose, after Howard Hughes’ enormous flying boat.

In the wheelhouse, original white-painted and varnished window surrounds have been replaced with grey leather. Initially no work was planned for the galley, but the owner, who says he ‘likes to be down there and cook sometimes’, decided he wanted guests to feel comfortable in that part of the boat. While the layout is essentially the same, industrial finishes have been replaced with bleached oak and white-painted panels and Silestone Kensho worktops.

The refitting of the main deck spaces was subcontracted to Superyacht Interiors New Zealand, but when the guest cabins were added to the work list, this was taken on by Pendennis’s own joinery department. Throughout the boat there is now an impression of more space and, as Ecuyer puts it, ‘it’s much less of a shock going from outside to inside’.

The two 1,250hp MTU main engines were replaced with Caterpillar V12 CE20s, which added 500hp, and two new 295kW Northern Lights generators were installed. A third generator in a locker at the forward end of the superstructure, previously just for emergencies, has been replaced with a new 130kW unit that will also have general harbour use. It will be run about three times more than those in the engine room but will be considerably easier to remove and replace. Most of the engine room piping has been renewed in a manner that is ‘more organised, with space for access and servicing’, says Rumble, along with about half the boat’s wiring and 80 per cent of the navigation equipment. Upgrading the HVAC system included an elaborate ducting
of plenums around the perimeters of cabin overheads for lower noise levels and a more even, and more subtle distribution of cold air. Five new units under the new flying bridge extension serve the cockpit area.

New captive reel winches for the MPS sheets were supplied by Seaway Powell Marine, which also serviced the existing sheet, halyard and running backstay winches. While doing so, the technicians discovered that, unknown to Romcke, the winches had a faster speed that had been disabled at some point before he joined the boat. It has now been reinstated.

Various deck alterations included a new furniture layout and the addition of a barbecue on the extended flying bridge. The side deck overhangs were raised to accommodate the owner’s tall friends. Reorienting the seating area in the small cockpit forward of the mast integrates better with the spa pool and a pool that doubles as tender stowage.

While original spars were retained, Marine Results replaced the stainless steel standing rigging and aluminium houndsails with carbon fibre by Carbo-Link, and a new Ocean Yacht Systems titanium toggle system at the lower ends of all the intermediate shrouds means that turnbuckles are now needed only at deck level. This resulted in an astonishing weight saving of 18 tonnes in the rig.

‘While the original stability was just fine’, notes Holland, ‘this allowed the large bulb at the bottom of the centreboard to be replaced by a shoal with the same profile as the board – 200 millimetres deeper, 50 tonnes lighter and with considerably less drag. The only other below-waterline modification was to the rudders. Holland admits to being ‘very conservative’ on the rudder size originally.

‘But we decided that the control was much better than was needed, so I’ve reduced them [the rudders] by about 18 per cent for a little less drag.’

MS’s first sailing trials took place in Falmouth Bay on a brisk January day, and for a short time she demonstrated her awesome power by almost touching 18 knots on a close reach. Romcke felt that she was ‘more sprightly and light on her feet’, while Holland pronounced that ‘the smaller rudders have a bit of feel now.

The refit was expected to take about a year but because the work trebled it eventually took almost two. ‘More [issues] could only be identified once we got into it’, explains Stephen Hills, Pendennis’s project director, ‘and as the client got into the project and saw the potential to further improve the boat, he felt that he wasn’t doing her justice without going that extra mile.’ The owner agrees: ‘It just kind of kept going.’

Hills describes the refit as a complete demonstration of everything Pendennis strives to deliver: ‘It’s used the full range of our in-house capabilities.

MS left Falmouth in April 2014 bound for the Magellan Straits, where the owner joined her to explore the Patagonian channels before heading to the Pacific. There, her cruising programme fits in with the owner’s passion for planes. MS is able to moor up to 500 miles from a commercial airport courtesy of his Turbo Mallard seaplane, while his two-seater Carbon Cub float plane is transported around the world in a 12-metre container: it’s relatively straightforward to lift it on to the newly-extended aft deck.

The owner is clearly delighted with MS’s refit. ‘I love it’, he says. ‘This is the largest project I’ve ever done, and unless I build one I probably won’t do anything like this again on a boat, the ultimate as far as I’m concerned. But I’m a project guy – you never know.’