The magicians at Pendennis, Redman Whiteley Dixon and Susan Young Interiors have conjured a thoroughly modern 85.6 metre superyacht – from the remains of a 2010 Derecktor. Caroline White discovers how they pulled it off

Photography – Rupert Peace

AQUILA
Hulking in Pendennis’s 150 metre dry dock, 85.6 metre Aquila is an imposing refit project. When launched as Cakewalk in 2010 she was the largest yacht built in the US since the 1930s, and here she has become the biggest vessel yet refitted in the UK. But gazing up at her hull, and knowing how quickly she’s been transformed, it is the speed as much as the scope of this project that seems Herculean. “No single job was that tricky,” says Stephen Hills, project director at Pendennis, who managed the refit programme, somewhat surprisingly. “The challenge of this project has been the volume of the changes in the timeframe that was set.”

Indeed, one year was all the Cornish yard had in which to transform the elaborate, traditional design of Derecktor’s 2010 Cakewalk into a clean, elegant yacht that could pass as freshly launched. That’s 85.6 metres – in one year. “Nine hundred people between England and Germany have been involved in this project,” says Tony Dixon, design director at the studio responsible for the refit, Redman Whiteley Dixon. Not to mention craftsmen all across the US. “Something like 750 square metres of floor area has been gutted and rebuilt, similar to the total area of a 55 or 60 metre motor yacht.”

With an ambitious brief this project would involve major structural changes and gutting the interior. There was also a transformative design by RWD and Susan Young Interiors (SYI), making this the second yacht project on which the two studios have collaborated for this client. Layer upon layer of complex alterations had to be seamlessly choreographed to prevent a carpenter installing a cabinet before the electrician had finished wiring behind it, or a designer placing a panel of silk while a chippy could still get a dusty fingerprint on it.

Pendennis took a military approach. “The way we’ve gone about it is to treat it as three distinct projects,” says Hills. “So the interior is one and is run by its own dedicated project manager. The exterior paint programme and modifications are the second project, with a project manager on it. And the technical changes and upgrades, again with a separate project manager. So by being very clear from the outset that it’s split, with clear leads in each area, you start to break the whole project down into more manageable amounts.”

And then, of course, there’s the unexpected, which had to be expected. Crucially the owners trusted the yard to take decisions. As Hills puts it: “They bought into the idea that it’s better to take a decision, move ahead and achieve the programme, with the risks that involves.”

One of the most substantial elements of that programme was totally reordering the sundeck. It had always been sequestered into fore and aft sections by a trunk of interior areas – the central staircase, lift, dayhead and various technical and service spaces – which have remained mostly intact. On Cakewalk the aft portion of deck space was sliced up by a central spa pool, along with a step down to an aft row of sunloungers. The new configuration has removed the pool and placed it on the forward section of the deck. The now larger aft deck has a light-up bar, central seating area and loungers further aft. It’s a sign of the uncompromising nature of this project that the old step was removed and a new one added, just a couple of feet further aft, to give the upper space a little more sweep. This update involved re-teaking the clockwise from above: “The main staircase is probably one of the most striking changes,” says Stephen Hills, the project director at Pendennis. “There’s much more of a wow factor now.” The principal new come from the central chandelier made by Czech company Preciosa: a large study in one part of the newly arranged owner’s suite; the chandelier features millions of golden glass and rubber pads to protect the 800 pieces of glass looking on from the main deck starboard towards the new dining area.
whole area. The forward portion of the sundeck, meanwhile, places a large spa pool surrounded by sunpads at the more private forward end (they had to strengthen the bulkheads below), and there’s still room for a bar and sofa. A pantry has been converted to a massage and spa room inside, too.

While there is an improved beach club on the lower deck, Cakewalk’s design precluded the sort of spectacular on-water area that you might find on an 85 metre launched today. Therefore, says Toby Allies, sales and marketing director of Pendennis, “the whole idea of this deck is to create that kind of beach club scene, but on the higher sundeck area.”

On the aft bridge deck below, outdoor lifestyle has also been enhanced. Teak pillars were refreshed and the deck has been sparingly furnished with modern, low-slung furniture, the pièce de résistance of which is circular seating with a fire pit in the middle. Forward, at the entrance to the bridge deck saloon, large wooden cabinets have been removed. Now the broad glass flank floods the new interior with light. The décor throughout is the polar opposite of Cakewalk’s honey tones – cool off-whites and dark smoked eucalyptus woods, taupe suedes, blue and grey velvets and nickel highlights. It was installed by German superyacht stalwarts Metrica, whose precise methods fit well with the exacting nature of the project.

“The brief was to transform it into a really elegant, modern yacht, within the existing framework,” says Dixon. “He likes a traditional style, with panelling, and she prefers the more modern treatment. By using flat panels and a lot of fabric on the walls, it doesn’t look like a study anywhere that it’s not supposed to. Dark panelled interiors with white look really crisp and sharp.” The owner’s deck saloon, one level below, has a gentlemen’s club feel with a spectacular bar that RWD and SYI coated with tobacco leaf to give it a rust brown patina, backed with ripple-faced mirrors and metalised fabric wall surfaces by Silverlining, which also made the dining table and bubble-glass doors in the bridge saloon. Sliding glass panels backed with a mirror-like coating were installed behind the bar to create a dramatic full-fight feature. They slide to reveal two TVs, transforming the use of the space. These panels were designed by SYI and fabricated by Peter David Studio.

Forward, in the owner’s cabin, the design was also fundamentally reimagined. An exterior ladder ran from the bridge deck to the foredeck, cutting down the centre of the owner’s cabin’s forward windows. That has been removed and a proper floating staircase has been created, set apart from the superstructure, allowing much more light into the large master suite.

Inside, things changed substantially, too. “The whole owner’s deck was reconfigured,” says Dixon. “We moved the cabin bulkhead aft, opening the whole boat up at the front.” The cabin now takes in part of what was a broad lobby-cum-sitting room that covered nearly as much space as the cabin itself, but offered far less functionality. And there’s still room for a grand entrance hall in grey veined marble and leather panels, two spectacular bathrooms to either side, his-and-hers dressing rooms, a hairdressing and massage room, pantry and large study.

With the enlarged cabin and the bed moved to port – “having a bed on the centreline, you waste a lot of space because you end up with essentially passageways on either side,” says Dixon – there was space –
Before and after: Cakewalk, left, and Aquila, right, offer contrasting seating and furniture on the aft main deck.

The owner’s deck has received a lot of attention in Redman Whiteley Dixon’s redesign. “The owner’s cabin was tiny, a really odd layout,” says Tony Dixon. So the bed, before, was moved from the centreline to port to allow a sitting room to starboard.

The owner now also has direct access to the foredeck, a “Portuguese bridge-style deck that offers a welcome and private outdoor area. A central exterior ladder from the bridge deck has also been reconfigured to allow more light into the owner’s cabin.

Before and after: the transformation of the owner’s deck hallway shows the clean, modern approach of Aquila, right.

Before and after: the dark wood paneling and colourful marble on Cakewalk have gone in the “his” owner’s bathroom.
Clockwise from above: the lower deck beach club has been reconfigured and made more private with a new staircase that gives sheltered access to the main deck; the spa pool has been moved forward to forward on the sun deck; the bridge deck forward; the splendid rear view of the 85.6 metre Aquila, which has left Pendennis in Cornwall, UK, like a brand new yacht after her 12 month refit.
**SPECS**

**AQUILA PENDENNIS**

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- **LOA**: 85.6m
- **LWL**: 75.08m
- **Beam**: 14.3m
- **Draught (full load)**: 4.2m
- **Gross tonnage**: 2,998GT
- **Engines**: 2 x 3,306hp MTU 16V4000 M71
- **Speed max/cruise**: 18/15 knots
- **Range at 15 knots**: 5,000nm
- **Generators**: 2 x 660kW MTU 8000; 2 x 350kW S60
- **Fuel capacity**: 367,185 litres
- **Freshwater capacity**: 92,400 litres
- **Construction**: Steel hull; aluminium superstructure
- **Classification**: LR *100A1-SSC Yacht (P) Mono G6*
- **Naval architecture**: Azure; Pendennis; BMT Nigel Gee
- **Refit exterior styling**: Redman Whiteley Dixon
- **Refit interior design**: Redman Whiteley Dixon; Susan Young Interiors
- **Builder/year**: Derecktor/2010
- **Refit/year**: Pendennis/2016
- **Staff room**: crew cabins and mess have had a makeover too
- **Hot seat**: a fire pit on the aft bridge deck is a new focal point
- **Spread out**: the main deck aft is redesigned, with a new staircase
- **Glass act**: a four-deck 11.2m chandelier takes pride of place
- **Back up**: there’s a new disco bar aft to replace the spa pool, now up front
- **Bask force**: the beach club is redesigned as a gym and a light well added
- **Hush hush**: the cinema has a false floor to aid sound insulation

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