MAKEROVER OF AMERICA’S QUEEN
281-FOOT CAKEWALK RE-EMERGES AS AQUILA

BERMUDA OR BUST
Sailing’s most exciting summer is heating up – get ready now!

TOP 101
THE BIGGEST YACHTS IN THE WORLD
Soaring Eagle

A grand yacht built in the U.S. is reborn as the modern Aquila after the biggest refit project ever done in the UK.

Words – Caroline White
Photography – Rupert Peace

ShowBoats International  February 2017
One year and an international team of craftsmen have transformed a landmark American yacht for new owners. Launched as Cakewalk at Derecktor in Bridgeport, Connecticut, in 2010, the largest yacht built in the U.S. since the 1930s (281 feet) has since become the biggest vessel yet refitted in the UK. Design and technology have evolved very quickly in the decade since Cakewalk’s design emerged in 2005 (the first steel was cut in 2007). The refit completed last summer reflects not only the taste and needs of new owners but also the tremendous changes that happened in areas as diverse as glass and lighting. So the refit was not just a cosmetic makeover but a deep rejuvenation, a Herculean effort due to the scope and the speed involved.

“No single job was that tricky,” says Stephen Hills, project director at Pendennis, who managed the refit. “The challenge has been the volume of the changes in the time frame that was set.” One year was all the time the Cornish yard had to convert the elaborate, traditional design of 281-foot Cakewalk into a clean, elegant yacht that could pass as freshly launched. The 3,000-gross-ton yacht entered Pendennis’ new dock stern first at the end of June 2015 and left in July 2016.

“No single job was that tricky,” says Stephen Hills, project director at Pendennis, who managed the refit. “The challenge has been the volume of the changes in the time frame that was set.”

Nine hundred people between England and Germany have been involved in this project,” says Tony Dixon, director of the design studio responsible for the refit, Redman Whiteley Dixon (RWD). Not to mention craftsmen from all across the U.S. “Something like seven hundred-fifty square meters (more than eight thousand square feet) of floor area has been gutted and rebuilt, similar to the total area of a fifty-five or sixty-meter motor yacht.”

Pendennis choreographed the work with military precision. The schedule was designed to prevent a carpenter from installing a cabinet before the electrician had finished wiring behind it, or a designer from placing a panel of silk while a carpenter could still get a dusty fingerprint on it.

“The way we’ve gone about it is to treat it as three distinct projects. Each area — interior, exterior, and paint and technical upgrades — had one dedicated project manager,” says Hills.

While no amount of organization can escape the unexpected that is inherent to any project, the yard had the owners’ trust to make decisions to keep the project on track. “They bought into the idea that it’s better to take a decision, move ahead and achieve the program, with the risks that involves,” says Hills.

One of the most substantial tasks was to reconfigure the sun deck to create a beach club scene higher up, says Toby Allies, Pendennis’ sales and marketing director. While the refit improved the lower-deck beach club, Cakewalk’s design precluded the sort of spectacular on-water area that you might find on a 281-footer launched today. The sun deck is divided fore and aft by a trunk of interior areas — the central staircase, elevator, dayhead and various technical and service spaces — which have remained mostly intact. As originally designed, a central spa pool, along with a step down to an aft row of sunloungers, further divided the aft portion of the deck space. The revamp relocated the pool to the deck’s forward section to make room aft for a backlit bar, central seating and loungers. A step was added, just a couple of feet farther aft of the original one, to give the upper space a little more sweep. This update required laying new teak over the whole area.

Above: The main staircase has been reimagined with new cladding, colors and finishes. The principal new space from the Persico armchair (below), featuring sustainably sourced woods and rubber pads to protect the 800 pieces of glass.

Left: A formal hall on the main deck starboard leads toward the new dining area. Opposite: A large study is one part of the totally revamped owner’s suite.
The transformation of the sun deck’s forward portion, with sunpads surrounding the pool and the addition of a bar and sofa required strengthening the bulkheads below. Inside, a pantry was converted to a massage and spa room.

The outdoor lifestyle also has been enhanced on the bridge aft deck below. Teak pillars were refreshed and the deck has been sparingly furnished with modern, low-slung furniture that includes circular seating around a fire pit. At the entrance to the bridge-deck salon, broad glass has replaced large wooden cabinets, flooding the lounge with light. The fresh décor is the polar opposite of Cakewalk’s homey tone, with cool off-whites, dark, smoked eucalyptus woods, taupe suedes, blue and gray velvets and nickel highlights. German superyacht stalwarts Metrica installed the new interior with the precision that the exacting nature of the project required.

The space that was formerly a cozy salon was merged into a new elegant dining room. Right and below: The interior of the bridge-deck salon and owner’s-deck salon was installed by German company Metrica. Tai Ping, Shiir and Holly Hunt carpeting add to the luxurious feel. Opposite: The main-deck cinema has a fiber floor and awning at the rear structure below it to provide excellent sound insulation.

The main deck is now a family haven.

A semi-closed dining salon was demolished and a high-end cinema put in its place.

The transformation of the sun deck’s forward portion, with sunpads surrounding the pool and the addition of a bar and sofa required strengthening the bulkheads below. Inside, a pantry was converted to a massage and spa room.

The outdoor lifestyle also has been enhanced on the bridge aft deck below. Teak pillars were refreshed and the deck has been sparingly furnished with modern, low-slung furniture that includes circular seating around a fire pit. At the entrance to the bridge-deck salon, broad glass has replaced large wooden cabinets, flooding the lounge with light. The fresh décor is the polar opposite of Cakewalk’s homey tone, with cool off-whites, dark, smoked eucalyptus woods, taupe suedes, blue and gray velvets and nickel highlights. German superyacht stalwarts Metrica installed the new interior with the precision that the exacting nature of the project required.

The space that was formerly a cozy salon was merged into a new elegant dining room. Right and below: The interior of the bridge-deck salon and owner’s-deck salon was installed by German company Metrica. Tai Ping, Shiir and Holly Hunt carpeting add to the luxurious feel. Opposite: The main-deck cinema has a fiber floor and awning at the rear structure below it to provide excellent sound insulation.

The brief was to transform it into a really elegant, modern yacht, within the existing framework,” says Dixon. The owners, a couple, have different tastes. “He likes a traditional style, with paneling, and she prefers the more modern treatment,” says Dixon. “By using flat panels and a lot of fabric on the walls, it doesn’t look like a study anywhere; that’s not supposed to. Dark paneling in interiors with white look really crisp and sharp.”

The transformation of the sun deck’s forward portion, with sunpads surrounding the pool and the addition of a bar and sofo required strengthening the bulkheads below. Inside, a pantry was converted to a massage and spa room.

The outdoor lifestyle also has been enhanced on the bridge aft deck below. Teak pillars were refreshed and the deck has been sparingly furnished with modern, low-slung furniture that includes circular seating around a fire pit. At the entrance to the bridge-deck salon, broad glass has replaced large wooden cabinets, flooding the lounge with light. The fresh décor is the polar opposite of Cakewalk’s homey tone, with cool off-whites, dark, smoked eucalyptus woods, taupe suedes, blue and gray velvets and nickel highlights. German superyacht stalwarts Metrica installed the new interior with the precision that the exacting nature of the project required.

The space that was formerly a cozy salon was merged into a new elegant dining room. Right and below: The interior of the bridge-deck salon and owner’s-deck salon was installed by German company Metrica. Tai Ping, Shiir and Holly Hunt carpeting add to the luxurious feel. Opposite: The main-deck cinema has a fiber floor and awning at the rear structure below it to provide excellent sound insulation.

The brief was to transform it into a really elegant, modern yacht, within the existing framework,” says Dixon. The owners, a couple, have different tastes. “He likes a traditional style, with paneling, and she prefers the more modern treatment,” says Dixon. “By using flat panels and a lot of fabric on the walls, it doesn’t look like a study anywhere; that’s not supposed to. Dark paneling in interiors with white look really crisp and sharp.”
Before and after: Cakewalk (left) and Aquila (right) offer contrasting seating and furniture on the main deck aft.

Before and after: The owner’s deck hallway has been rethought from floor to ceiling.

Before and after: Stainless steel has replaced the wood in “his” owner’s bathroom, fitted with new marble.

The owner’s deck has received a lot of attention in Redman Whiteley Dixon’s redesign. The bed in the owner’s stateroom, below, was moved to create a sitting room to starboard. The owner now also has direct access to a Portuguese bridge-style deck from private work area and the side door (above). Left: New stairs replaced an exterior ladder that bisected the owner’s windows, which allows more light into the cabin.

Before and after: The owner’s deck hallway has been rethought from floor to ceiling.

Before and after: Stainless steel has replaced the wood in “his” owner’s bathroom, fitted with new marble.
bridge-style deck that provides a neat private enclave for fresh air.

If the owner's deck got the biggest dose of glamour, the main deck one level down has become a family haven. The design moved the dining area aft to where there used to be a cozy lounge with a fireplace. The original semi-enclosed dining salon became a high-tech cinema with a 98-inch widescreen and professional-grade 7.2.4 Dolby Atmos surround-sound system. A Crestron system controls the seven in-wall Genelec speakers and four overhead speakers, plus two Artcoustic subwoofers with powerful 1kW amplification. “The inside of the cinema has its own false floor,” says Hills, “with a resiliently mounted deck, so that it’s independent from the steel structure underneath it and you reduce structural-borne vibration into the cinema. And when the [sound] is in full blast, there is as little as possible transmission of the noise out of the cinema.” On top of this, there are heavy doors with acoustic seals and special insulation in the bulkheads.

Forward on the main deck, flooring, hardware and en suite bathrooms have been upgraded throughout the guest cabins. Where pieces of the original boat remain, they have been used in impressive ways. “The main staircase is probably one of the most striking changes,” says Hills, who worked to enhance and modernize the grand structure in accordance with the new décor. “You would not have thought that just changing wall claddings and colors and finishes could have such an effect.” Gray silk has replaced the floral carpet and the balustrade is now stainless steel bars instead of wrought ironwork. They kept the wooden base, but it was stained darker. And the central chandelier by Czech company Preciosa is, as Hills puts it, “quite a piece of engineering in its own right.”

On her lower deck, Cakewalk already had a spectacular tender garage that opened on both sides — with a Riva Aquariva and a Vikal Limousine tender, both fully serviced in the refit. It was said at the time of her launch that the owners had wanted the whole boat designed around it. This area has remained largely unchanged, but the beach club aft has been reconfigured and a skylight was built in. A stairwell was added to starboard and the watertight door from the tender garage was moved to that same stairwell, to create access without infringing on the beach club. There’s also a top-notch gym in place.

The crew and officers messes have refreshed layouts, with better seating and counter space, and there are new A/V systems and showers in all crew cabins. Functional improvements were also made in the main-deck galley. The factory-sized engine room had a five-year survey and gained a Hug exhaust filter system. Aquila also has new air-conditioning, a lighting/blind control system by Lutron and has been rewired for LEDs, upgraded UHDTV, high-end audio and state-of-the-art WiFi.

Outside, the finished article was given a suitably cool-toned repaint by Fimar with a midnight-blue hull and ice-white superstructure, electrostatic paint guns ensuring a super-even finish. It’s one of a mass of jobs undertaken with a thoroughness that has resulted in a superyacht that feels every bit as fresh as a brand-new boat.
Aquila – Pendennis refit

LOA: 280' 8" (85.6m)
LWL: 246' 4" (75.1m)
Beam: 46' 9" (14.3m)
Draft (full load): 13' 8" (4.2m)
Gross tonnage: 2,998 GT
Speed (max/cruise): 18/15 knots
Tenders: 1 x 33’ Riva Aquariva; 1 x 37’ Vikal Limousine; 1 x Intrepid; 1 x Lancer 390p
Owner and guests: 14
Crew: 26
Construction: Steel, aluminum
Naval architecture: Azure, Pendennis, BMT Nigel Gee
Refit interior design: Redman Whiteley Dixon, Susan Young Interiors
Builder/year: Derecktor/2010
Refit/year: Pendennis/2016
Falmouth, UK
t: +44 1326 211344
e: info@pendennis.com
w: pendennis.com
For charter: Burgess
t: +377 97 97 81 21
e: charter@burgessyachts.com
w: burgessyachts.com

Get down: There’s a disco bar aft to replace the spa pool, now forward.

Hot seat: A fire pit on the aft bridge deck is a focal point.

Look out: The owner has a 650-square-foot foredeck for private use.

Onward and upward: The main-deck aft is redesigned with a new staircase.

Pump it up: The beach club is reconfigured to include a gym.

Rooms with a view: Six staterooms on the main deck host guests; the lower deck is given over to crew.