

'WE'VE JUST DELIVERED a 109m motor yacht,' Jonathan Beckett tells me over the phone from his office in Mayfair. He's just off a night flight and is about to take another later that day, but his voice doesn't show the slightest hint of weariness. When your job involves visiting a clientele that has included Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan and Donald Trump, there's no time for tiredness.

Beckett is CEO of Burgess, widely regarded as the world's most prestigious superyacht brokerage house, founded in 1975 by single-handed yachtsman Nigel Burgess. The company's story is almost the story of the superyacht industry. Indeed, it was in business before yachts became 'super', before they got helipads and beach clubs, and before the likes of Philip Green and Roman Abramovich got their hands on them.

'I joined Nigel Burgess in March 1981 on the salary of £3,000, and thought that was terrific,' Beckett recalls. 'It was really a small business – the whole yachting community was a small industry in those days and yachts were selling for somewhere between \$100,000 and \$1 million. The largest deal ever was about \$4-5 million.'

How times have changed: deals of £40-50 million are the firm's bread and butter these days. On a superyacht in 1980, 'Guests would have been sharing multiple bathrooms and the builds smelt a bit of diesel,' Beckett explains. 'It wasn't super-luxurious.'

ROCK AHOY

Somewhere between then and now, the superyacht came to signify the luxury zeitgeist. More relaxing than a private jet and offering more privacy than anything on land, superyachts are the choice of retirees and rock stars. 'Money can't buy you happiness, but it can buy you a yacht big enough to put up right alongside it,' Van Halen singer David Lee Roth once said.

For Beckett, things began to change in the industry when Burgess dealt with Trump in 1987 on the sale of the 86m *Nabila*, which 'in its day looked like a flying saucer'. Trump purchased the yacht from Saudi arms dealer Adnan Khashoggi for \$30 million – 'the largest deal by a nuclear mile' at



Sun, sea and spans

Yachts are getting longer, more luxurious – and, yes, greener, according to the world's biggest brokerage

by Arun Kakar – Spear's junior researcher



the time. Beckett describes dealing with Trump as a 'real learning curve' and 'quite intimidating'. He was 29 and Trump was in his early forties: 'He's just like he is today,' he says. 'He's very matter-of-fact.'

Beckett took over as CEO shortly after the death of Nigel Burgess in 1992. It was 'still a hand-to-mouth business', he recalls, but today it has 13 offices worldwide and a staff of almost 200. It's a complete one-stop

shop: as well selling, purchasing and chartering vessels, it also offers services in yacht management, crew and technical matters.

Burgess has been integral to the growth of yachting at the top end, as vessels have gone from 'glorified camping' to 'luxury palaces', as Beckett describes it. There are now more than 10,000 megayachts (yachts over 24m long), with roughly 150 delivered every year. According to Coherent Market

Insights, the global superyacht market will surpass \$35.5 billion by 2026.

The firm has evolved along with its clientele. It's 'always tried to be the first at trying things out', says Beckett. The industry has grown thanks to a newly international class of elites, where superyachts can function as much like an office as an accessory.

'Communications is a very big thing, being able to stay 24/7 in touch with your business and video conferencing from the boat, being able to fly in and out of the boat on helicopter to your private jet that's standing close by,' he says of the evolution in yachting. 'Now business is much more mobile.'

Beckett highlights two yachts – *Azzam* and *Dilbar* – that best signify the changing landscape. They're also among the most significant in raising the firm's profile. The former, rumoured to be owned by UAE president Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, is the largest private motor yacht in the world, at 180m. Details have been kept fiercely private



Top and middle: Oceanco's 109m *Project Bravo* uses hybrid technology to minimise fuel use. Bottom: at 180m, *Azzam* is the world's largest private motor yacht

since the \$600 million yacht was delivered in 2015. The 157m *Dilbar*, owned by Russian billionaire Alisher Usmanov and delivered in 2016, cost roughly the same, with interiors designed by UK firm Winch Design.

How big does Beckett think superyachts will go? 'I'm going to take a stab at it because no one knows – 250 metres.'

One vessel Burgess has just delivered – Oceanco's *Project Bravo* – has attracted a lot of attention, and not just for its size (at 109m it's the third largest yacht manufactured in the Netherlands). There's also the integration of environmental concerns into its design: it uses 'advanced hybrid propulsion incorporating significant battery capability' and a single tier engine room which delivers efficiency without compromising on luxury.

GREEN MARINE

This is something that Beckett is noticing across the industry. As the urgency of climate change takes centre stage in the political sphere, superyacht owners and manufacturers are paying attention.

'People are much more careful' about the environment, he says, noting examples such as 'reusing heat from hot engines and generators to heat the vessels and heat hot water and catalytic converters'. He adds: 'There is now a new system to make sure poisonous gases aren't released into the ocean: everyone is prepared to spend the money and make it a better environment.'

As he nears 40 years at Burgess, Beckett is not slowing down. 'I'm very much at the front line of the company, meeting clients, visiting boats, solving problems,' he says. 'People request a cinema, but then they might request a cinema for the crew, for example, because there's a lot of crew and they want to make sure that the crew have good facilities,' he notes. 'We've had boats with a helipad that [has been] incredible, now we have yachts with two helipads and possibly a yacht with three helipads. Who knows... it's all possible.' 📍