

Great escape

Her owners fled Communist oppression to realise their dreams. As Marilyn Mower discovers, nothing encapsulates the feeling of freedom quite like Vijonara

Photography – Stuart Pearce



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Fickle Cornish rain has turned *Vijonara*'s bare teak deck and cabin top a delicious gold, the raindrops clinging to brightwork impeccably finished with 14 coats of varnish. But not even the chilled grey skies can wipe the beaming smiles from the faces of the yacht's Swiss owners and their friends, gathered dockside at Pendennis's Falmouth shipyard. They have come here from across Europe, joining artisans from England, France, Holland and Germany who crafted the details, and a tent packed with tradesmen and women who built the yacht, all ready to celebrate their contributions.

For the yard's newer workers, *Vijonara* was a fresh experience. Although Pendennis sprang to life in Falmouth during 1988 as a custom new construction yard, of late it has become a powerhouse for complex refits. In fact, its last new build was *Hemisphere* in 2011.

While any project that sails away completed on time and on budget is a happy event, there is undeniably something special about the christening day of a new build. As speeches are made, hands clasped, cheeks kissed and backs slapped, the phrase "dream come true" is repeated over and over. Referring to a new yacht as the culmination of a dream is standard; when the owners of *Vijonara* say it, however, the words take on a whole new meaning.

The handsome couple – the boat's name is a partial anagram of their own – could once only dream of owning such a vessel. They met when they were university students in Communist East Germany in the 1980s and formed a bond over the dream of building a boat and



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sailing away. They researched and found a bare 10 metre hull in Poland and trucked it home. Over the course of several years, they finished it themselves in a car park and launched it on a lake. Outgrowing the lake, they battled red tape for permission to take their boat to the Baltic Sea, the only place they were allowed to sail, and then only within a mile and a half of East Germany's heavily guarded coastline. To get there they had to navigate a canal that crossed East Berlin under the scrutiny of armed soldiers. Yet such was the call of the sea that they endured this, summer after summer. It took a week to get there, passing all the checkpoints, and a week to return home, giving them one precious week of sailing, "Sailing," the husband says, "gave us the maximum dimension of freedom in that system."

Hatching a plan to escape their stifling life behind the Iron Curtain, he was permitted to leave for a business trip to the West but she was held as a bargaining chip, a hostage more or less, to guarantee his return. When he did not, the secret police were not kind. It took two years for her to escape the system as well, climbing the fence of the West German embassy in Prague in the autumn of 1989, the event seen live on TV. Their courage and grace are admirable.

The Hoek Truly Classic yacht bobbing at the Pendennis dock is the fifth *Vijonara*; their largest before her was 17 metres. It is their first yacht with crew. "Our daughter grew up sailing. I remember tying her to the table when she was little so I wouldn't have to worry about her when I was changing the sails," says her mother. The owners spent many years living in Asia and sailing in Hong Kong while his business grew. European holidays still meant sailing the now free Baltic coastline. Eventually they traded the Baltic's challenging weather for Mallorca, where they still keep a 12 metre Tofinou daysailer.

The inspiration for the newest *Vijonara* was an article he read about a Spirit of Tradition vessel named *Pumula*, built by Royal Huisman. *Pumula*'s classic lines and aft deckhouse that connected to the master cabin appealed to him. The two of them talked about the details of cabins and style, and how to ensure safety. To refine their ideas, close friends invited them cruising on their 43 metre sloop *Cavallo*, designed by Judel/Vrolijk, and they chartered the 32 metre cutter *Emmaline*, designed by Dykstra Naval Architects.



All the cushions in the upper saloon off the cockpit are by Hermès and the post to the left is wrapped in leather by the company. Below left: the artwork that looks like a photo in the guest cabin is a weaving by Sonja Weber. Below right: the owner's cabin with steps going up to his office





Top: the lower saloon, forward of the owner's suite to port, has a TV and library and features, as elsewhere, sapele panelling and Italian walnut floors.
 This picture: the owner's office area, which is above and open to the master suite. Between them and the aft cockpit, they give the owners in effect a private apartment



One of the benefits of this being a sloop is that there is room for Vijonara to have two cockpits with the helm in between. The forward of the two, below left, is also the spot for al fresco dining, while the aft cockpit, below right, is attached to the master suite and opens to the owner's office. Both have permanent awnings

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“We had clear ideas; now who would design such a boat?” the husband recalls. He began making enquiries and naval architect Andre Hoek suggested they meet at the Monaco Yacht Show in 2015. “Meeting aboard *Atalante*, a boat built by Claasen out of his Truly Classic portfolio, he introduced me to Peter Wilson and Nigel Ingram of MCM management. I’ve taken risks in my life but with Andre and Nigel, there was no risk. The chemistry was right.” Next, the couple chartered *Atalante*. “We loved the boat, but we had some different ideas about the interior and I wanted the helm midship.”

To say a Truly Classic of any size is a series boat is a misnomer. Hoek and his team, now co-directed by Ruurt Meulemans, have developed models of various sizes from 15 to 55 metres with very modern underbodies and fin keels but a traditional look above the waterline. The CFD testing on hull, rudder and spars is established, the weights calculated and the equipment determined, but, somehow, they don’t all turn out the same. Hoek is happy to accommodate owner tweaks as long as the profile and the structural DNA remain. The 38.8 metre Truly Classics *Atalante*, *Vijonara* and a third now in build differ in the number of cabins and placement of the lower saloon, number of crew cabins and location of the helm, even the number of deckhouses and rig types.

Vijonara began as an aluminium hull at Jan Hart’s Bloemsma shipyard even before the owners knew where the fitting out of the boat would take place, because they did not want to lose the build slot. Holland Jachtbouw was the likely finishing yard had its late owner, Chris Gongriep, not chosen then to exit yacht building. Claasen, meanwhile bought by Vitters, and Royal Huisman, changing management at the time, chose not to bid.

“It was a funny time in the Dutch industry,” says Ingram, “but I had recently completed two refits at Pendennis and was familiar with their trades. A yard that does quality refits gets to see a lot of different build techniques and that informs their ideas.” British yard Pendennis’s bid to fit out the boat was competitive, especially after the exchange rate changed following the Brexit vote, but what really makes *Vijonara*’s owner happy is that Hoek and Pendennis had never worked together and the pairing was an instant hit. Bloemsma finished its metal structure in 10 months. From the time the aluminium hull and deck arrived at Pendennis, it was just 14 months to completion.

For Mike Carr, Pendennis’s managing director, the completion of *Vijonara* was not just a fitting 30th anniversary launch but “the result of the close co-operation between the different trades and a trusting relationship with the owners built over their many visits to the yard.”







Hoek arranged the yacht's interior in concert with the owner's wife, who had a clear vision about opening up the master suite to the deckhouse and adding a gym convertible into a single cabin. With the helm relocated to the centre of the boat, the aft deckhouse and its cockpit are totally the owners' domain, so configuring it as an open two-level suite was a natural fit. She put considerable effort into perfecting the upper office area into a functional workspace so that her husband could remain aboard the yacht as much as possible.

And here the interior story takes a turn. During that sail on *Cavallo*, they happened to be sitting on the windward rail during a St Barths Bucket race and the man perched next to them happened to be the design director for Hermès' bespoke products, Axel de Beaufort. Through the course of the race, they talked about custom interiors for cars and aircraft and, perhaps, yachts. De Beaufort had previously been a yacht designer.

From that chance encounter sprang *Vijonara's* entire décor. Here, Hermès' furniture craft is showcased not only with a superb custom leather desk under the office's 270 degree windows, but with seating and décor throughout the yacht. A textile engineer by profession, the wife had strong feelings about a simple, dignified approach and this is achieved through the Hermès leather and woven fabrics.

De Beaufort was intrigued by the project and the opportunity to design all of the furniture pieces. "We showed them a variety of leathers as we continued to talk about their philosophy," he says. "She picked a fantastic leather from a family of leathers used for vintage cars. It will do well in a sea environment, and for the woven material we used our signature wool tweed." The styling is more automotive than residential; individual and highly tailored.

Hermès has its own technical and engineering teams within the same building as the designers, so a sketch can quickly be evaluated



Top: the owners were keen to incorporate a gym into the layout so space was found forward of the owners' suite on starboard. It can convert for use as a spare cabin. Above right: the galley area, forward to port on the lower deck



Each year the leather chart will be sent back to Hermès to have *Vijonara's* travels stitched on to the sea

for possibilities. “Having our own technical team is what allows us to push boundaries,” says De Beaufort. Hermès was involved with the entire design plan. Built-in furniture and railings were crafted at Dutch interior outfitter Ruiters but the final fitting and leather stitching was done by hand by Hermès artisans on site. One of the yacht’s eye-catching interior features is a wall-size leather map of the world (*see opening page*). Every continent and island is laser cut and set into a leather field of navy blue. Each year the chart will be sent back to Hermès to have *Vijonara's* travels stitched onto the sea.

“The clients allowed us to try some new things, something I had as a vision. To make the face of the desk we bonded layers of leather to look like wood and we used this on the base of the desk and a table that reveals an underwater viewing port,” says De Beaufort. “What was important to these clients is the authenticity of craft.”

The joinery is primarily European walnut in a matt finish with gloss accents set off by white walls and channelled overheads supplied by Ruiters, which has worked on several Hoek projects. The beautifully planked floor is left clear of carpets, partly for aesthetics but also because it has many hatches to access systems hidden in the bilge.

“This boat has a very nice engine room with a separate control space entered through the dayhead,” Ingram says. “The systems space elsewhere is a bit difficult because Andre fights very hard for his aesthetics. The owner is quite tall, and we weren’t able to lower the deckhead even a centimetre.” Outside, the bulwarks are 10cm higher than on *Atalante* at the wife’s request to increase deck safety.

Another special feature is the yacht’s rudder, which is attached to a large skeg. “It is a more conservative approach than a spade rudder but it will enhance tracking. It is the right choice for a boat designed to sail around the world,” says Hoek. And since quiet is an essential luxury, the interior of the hull was painted with a noise-dampening paint before insulation even started and the rock wool insulation has a rubber interlayer. Between efficiencies and batteries, the boat is designed to run for up to five hours in silent mode.

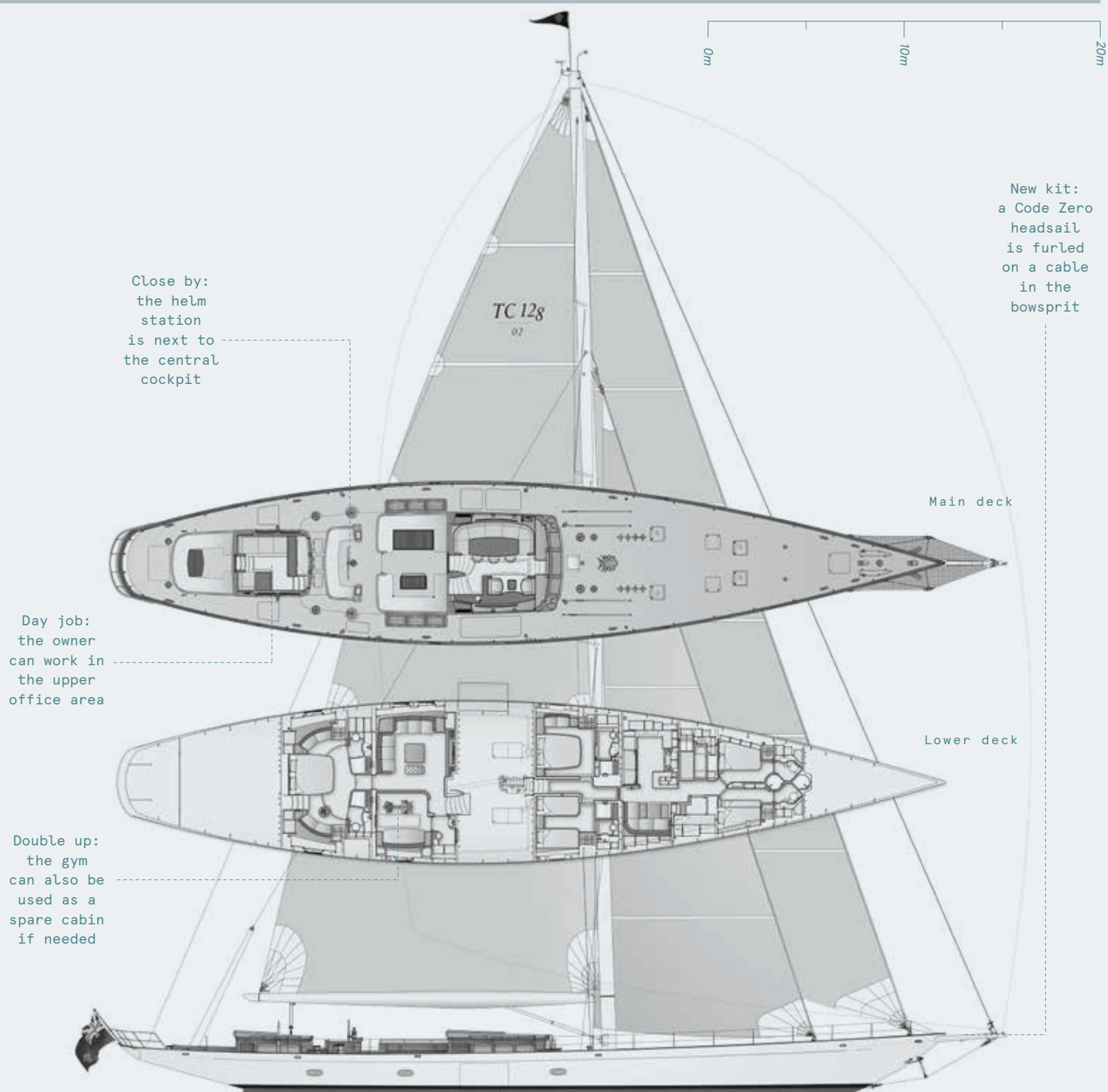
The evening of the christening, the owners and their daughter hosted an intimate celebration in Pendennis Castle, Cornwall, which has been looking out to sea since the time of Henry VIII. There were many speeches and toasts but perhaps the one that rang deepest was a toast to the freedom of being on the sea. ■



S P E C S

VIJONARA

PENDENNIS



LOA 42.25m
LWL 27.96m
Beam 7.72m
Draught (full load) 4.5m
Displacement (light)
150 tonnes
Engine
Scania DI13 355 kW

Generators
2 x 32 kW Northern
Lights
Rig
Southern Spars
Sails
Doyle Sails

Sail areas
Main 404m²; yankee
319m²; staysail
156m²; A2 1,153m²;
A0 730m²
Fuel capacity
12,000 litres
Freshwater capacity
4,660 litres

Tender
1 x Williams
Dieseljet 505
Owners/guests 6
Crew 4
Construction
Aluminium
Classification
ABS

Naval architecture
Hoek Design
Hull construction
Bloemsma
Exterior styling
Hoek Design
Interior design
Hoek Design;
owners; Hermès

Builder/year
Pendennis/2018
The Docks, Falmouth, UK
t: +44 (0) 1326 211344
e: info@pendennis.com
w: pendennis.com