

LOW KEY STUDIO WITH BIG AMBITIONS

The hot topic at Monaco Yacht Show this year was Adam Lay's imaginative interior aboard the Baltic 107 *Inukshuk*. David Glenn visited the designer in his Hampshire studio to find out more about a surprisingly low-key operation that is quietly celebrating ten years in business

“ ‘What can you do that is unique for me?’ is the question he hopes to answer for any potential client, and to do that he needs to be in complete control of every design detail ”

Adam Lay working in his Kings Somborne studio. Sketching is his forte



Above: his sketching skills were honed while working for John Munford.
Right: *Inukshuk's* saloon, with weathered timber and foam boulders

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There’s an unusually rich vein of talent running through Britain’s yacht interior design industry. So, it was no surprise for keen watchers of the industry when the man behind the stunning treatment of the *Baltic107* sloop *Inukshuk*, the talk of September’s Monaco Yacht Show, was revealed as Hampshire-based Adam Lay.

Nevertheless, you’d be forgiven for asking: “Who?” Legendary naval architect German Frers, who designed the yacht and recommended the Adam Lay Studio for *Inukshuk’s* interior, has described him as ‘the most low key of the low-key interior designers’. It would be logical to suggest that with all the plaudits for *Inukshuk* this perception might change. Actually, it is unlikely to do so and for good reason.

Lay takes on no more than two or three projects at a time and wants to keep it that way. ‘What can you do that is unique for me?’ is the question he hopes to answer to the satisfaction of any potential client, and to do that he needs to be in complete control of every design detail.

Current market conditions are in tune with Lay’s way of working. The speculative superyacht builds of the boom years, which often produced impersonal interior design, are currently few and far between. Instead, there’s much more emphasis on unique design for individuals who want their private yacht to be an expression of their ideas. This suits Lay’s philosophy down to the ground.

One-man band

“I’m a control freak,” he reveals when I meet him in his Hampshire studio. “I need to know every detail of a yacht’s design.” This explains why his ten-year-old company, which he owns jointly with his wife Kelda, has avoided the temptation to expand. “I don’t want to spend my life on a plane chasing business to keep a large team busy,” he says. His hands-on approach is the key to his success. Nonetheless, it is punishing in terms of the workload involved.

Unlike more familiar, highly successful names like Bannenberg, RWD, Disdale and Winch, all of whom run substantial, well-staffed studios, Adam Lay is a one-man band, his only assistance coming

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Inukshuk's accommodation design features a subdued, neutral background, allowing her bright fabrics and artefacts to stand out boldly

Interior styling was influenced by stone, weathered timber and other natural elements from a park in North America where the owner regularly holidays



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Adam and Kelda Lay in their back-garden studio, October 2013

form Kelda and his office a small, but immaculate oak-framed building in the back garden of his thatched house in Kings Somborne near Winchester. When the workload demands they employ trusted freelancers. When I suggest that I can detect a style common to *Inukshuk* and Barry Houghton's *Salperton III* and *IV*, also designed by Lay, he is surprised, stressing that rather than offer clients what he thinks will work, he helps them to evolve their vision to produce a better result.

Boulders in the saloon

Inukshuk's most obvious and unusual interior design feature is the positioning of three 'boulders' in the main saloon. In fact, they are made of high-density foam, spray-painted to look like weathered granite. They are certainly realistic, but why are they there? Lay explains that the owner, whose identity must be restricted to North American businessman, wanted the interior to reflect the natural features of a parkland he visits on holiday, a place to which he returns regularly to completely relax. Weathered timber, stone, lichens and even a sand-blasted tree root were provided by the client as examples of the sort of natural effect he wanted. Lay came up with the boulder idea and the owner decided that as long as they were of use as something other than design features they would be acceptable. So, they are carefully designed to be comfortable seats and footrests for anyone sitting on the adjacent settees. One doubles as a table.

Subdued hues for most of the upholstery and bulkhead finishes allow the startlingly bold cushion cover design and other artefacts to make a statement. It also means the design can be returned to neutral, so that another owner can apply his or her own personal style. *Inukshuk* is an Inuit word for a man-made stone landmark or cairn found in the Arctic Circle. They carry directions or mark the presence of features like fishing grounds or food caches and aboard *Inukshuk* the striking symbol of the stone structure, subtly interpreted by Lay, is carried throughout the yacht. He has enjoyed the *Inukshuk* project for several reasons. First, the owner took a keen interest in the design's evolution and although he only visited the project twice, email and images exchanged via Dropbox allowed him to stay intimately involved with Lay's design progression. "We had a scary meeting at the beginning of the project when I presented a lot of ideas based on samples like rough wood finishes, limed wood and things like that, but then he went downstairs with his broker to buy a load of magazines and I thought that was it. When he returned he put them aside and said: 'I want your design.'" It was a big breakthrough. Lay also revealed that he wasn't entirely confident that Baltic Yachts would be able to reproduce an interior which was so far from what they were used to building. "They had to understand that having knots in wood and for some of the finish not to be immaculate was OK," Lay says. But Baltic only had one project at the time and they

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These are the crew quarters of the J Class Endeavour, which Lay was involved with in conjunction with John Munford. Lay has always regarded Endeavour as the finest of the Js and one of the greatest yachts ever built

were determined to prove their in-house versatility. The result is spectacular and Lay believes *Inukshuk* is a turning point for Baltic. The project was managed by the highly experienced MCM of Newport, Rhode Island. Simultaneously, *Inukshuk* has arguably enabled Lay to shed that 'low-key' tag and helped him to establish what he hopes will be a growing portfolio of sailing yachts.

Makings of a designer

Born and brought up in Maidenhead, Adam Lay, now 41, was educated at Furze Platt comprehensive school, where he spent most of his time drawing, resulting in him taking his Art O Level two years early. "I worked in a Peugeot garage and was obsessed with cars, so I spent a lot of time drawing them," says Lay, who went on to study Industrial Design (Transport) at Coventry University.

He was the go-to man for any performance detail about a car. "For instance, I remember in 1962 the AC Cobra could do 0-60 in 4.2 seconds," Lay says, while admitting he was a car nerd. "But there were 50 other nerds like me [on the course], so I wasn't different any more."

He also decided it would take too long "to make it" in the car industry and that "designing heater control knobs and hub caps" was not for him.

In 1993 in his second year, he was offered a yacht design project and tasked with redesigning a Fairline 36 Turbo Aft Cabin. "Basically it was a caravan on water and we had to re-design it and make a model," said Adam. "But I decided boats were good."

Sailing aboard a Bénéteau 235, becoming a windsurfer instructor and having a part-share in a Dart 18 at Netley Sailing Club ("which we totalled in a collision") cemented his interest in yachting, so after graduating from Coventry he "wrote to everyone in the yachting industry – at least it felt like it!" A spell with Laurent Giles in Lymington was useful more for the opportunity to delve into archives from another age of yachting than anything else. He was fascinated by the magnificent overhangs and twin Rolls Royce engines of *Blue Leopard*, the 20-knot cold-moulded motorsailer, and later used her lines for a concept design.

His first proper job was with motoryacht builders Princess in Plymouth, but the real catalyst for his career came when he secured a job with John Munford, whose eye for an interior remains a standard by which others in the industry are judged.

The power of the pencil

The two shared an appreciation for the power of pencil-sketching and Munford's attention was raised by some classically styled drawings Lay had done at Laurent Giles: "I think it was one of the things that got me the job. They caught his eye; I think he spotted the potential."

In his eight years with Munford, Lay was involved to various degrees with stand-out projects like the 39m J Class *Velsheda*, the 43m Baltic built *Canica*, Sensation's *Mari-Cha III* and the Dubois-designed sailing yachts *Timoneer II* and *Tiara*. There were also a number of motor yachts including the 70m Benetti *Reverie* and the 46m Feadship 

T ROBERTS



Far left: the lobby detail onboard the Ed Dubois-designed *Inmocean*. Below left: *Salperton IV*, Barry Houghton's Fitzroy-built sloop. Left: motor yachts are important to the Adam Lay Studio. This is a detail from *Blue Attraction*



Northern Light. Each project taught him something new. The seven-decked *Reverie* required 400 supporting sketches at A3 to communicate the detail to the owner and lasted more than five years.

Doing the general arrangement drawings for *Velsheda* taught him that when the client requests a certain design it was probably not a good idea to get too argumentative. "As John said to me, what the client wants is what the client gets," Lay says. *Tiara*, the Dubois-designed 54.3m super-sloop built by Alloy in New Zealand and owned by a young businessman, involved a vast amount of travelling between New York, Verbier, Paris, then Auckland. At the time it suited Lay's lifestyle and it taught him how to work closely with a client.

His time with Munford taught him how to do interior drawings and about joinery, construction and finishes. "I was like a sponge and he was a great teacher," Lay says.

He left in 2002 to go travelling with his then-girlfriend Kelda, but even while they visited the USA, Australia, New Zealand and Fiji they weren't far from a project he had been involved with and there were visits to Alloy in Auckland and *Invader*, a Burger motoryacht he had worked on in San Diego. Kelda, an environmental psychology graduate who had left Channel 5 to travel with Adam, stepped onto her first superyacht in Auckland and was clearly intrigued with the burgeoning industry. She's now fully engaged with the business.

Launched with a £1 computer

When they returned to the UK they set up in the back bedroom of a two-up two-down in Winchester with a computer Kelda bought for £1 from Channel 5. They had £1,000 between them, no leads and no work before Kelda saw a small ad in the local paper for some house restoration design. This lasted for a year and led to further work for the same client's house in France.

It gave the couple time to make further contacts in the superyachting world, which led to the London yacht-broking firm Burgess asking to see Adam Lay's portfolio. They selected him to help with the refit of the 36.6m Amel motor yacht *Blue Attraction*, which involved entirely hand-drawn designs, with no use of a computer.

An approach by Ed Dubois followed. He had been impressed by the way Lay had handled the *Tiara* project and asked him to pitch for Barry Houghton's *Salperton III* in 2005. Despite being up against three residential designers Lay got the job and this led to him being employed by Houghton for *Salperton IV* in 2007.

In 2006 he won the interior design contract for the 41m sloop *Inmocean*, again designed by Ed Dubois and built like both *Salperton*s by Fitzroy in New Plymouth, New Zealand. Despite travelling and business pressures getting intense, Adam and Kelda still found time to get married in 2007, move to King's Somborne and build their new office.

Step up to Endeavour

Two other projects appear to have been a big influence in recent years, the contract to design the interior of the 61m Lürssen motor yacht *Lady Kathryn V* and the opportunity to at last get to work on *Endeavour*, which Lay has always regarded as the greatest J Class yacht.

To win a contract working with Lürssen was a recognition of Lay's attention to detail and ability to be involved with a large complex project which required excellent planning. The interior he designed was built in Dubai and the clients were heavily involved attending every design meeting. "Lürssen are a very well-oiled machine and you have to keep up!" Lay says. It was a four-year project completed in 2011.

The studio's direct involvement with the *Endeavour* was limited to the crew accommodation forward of the mast, but one senses this project meant more than many others simply because it was an opportunity to work on a yacht Lay regards as one of the finest ever built.

It also brought Lay and John Munford together again. The client wanted Munford's involvement for continuity, following the original 1984 reconstruction. So, while John produced a hand-drawn plan of the crew quarters, Adam handled the design detail, taking his cue from John's original details. Once again the affects are stunning.

So, what can we expect next from the Adam Lay Studio? He's working on a 46m motor yacht in Turkey in conjunction with a new builder in Antalya called Sarp Yachts. The naval architect is the well-respected Tanju Kalaycioglu. "This is not a pop-up, pop-down yard. I would like to see them succeed," Lay says.

He has also produced a proposal in collaboration with brokers Edmiston for a 67m Feadship and reckons there are three or four new sailing yacht projects going out to tender all around 100ft plus. He's very keen to win more sailing yacht contracts.

In the meantime Lay is deservedly enjoying the critical acclaim for the interior of *Inukshuk*. In a very low-key way, of course.

www.adamlaystudio.co.uk

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