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Two virgins in St Barths

Every once in a while, the stars align at just the right moment and almost anything is possible. For one new owner, a fateful combination of chance and opportunity opened up the glorious world of sailing, and resulted in the creation of 46m *Christopher*. Editor-in-Chief **Martin H Redmayne** flew to this year's races, and spoke with her owner and the Pendennis build team about the challenges and successes of this remarkable project.







Amidst four days of dockside dialogue, drinking and fun, old friends and faces become familiar once more, as friendships are renewed. The atmosphere of the event makes this an incredible marketplace for both the industry and its players, who make yachting their private business.



Having sponsored the St Barths Bucket for several years now, it seemed silly to me that I hadn't actually ever attended myself, although I have flown other members of our team out to the event. In a quest to find out what all the fuss is about, and to make sure that my sponsor money is being spent wisely, I cleared my schedule and booked my ticket, deciding that the ideal year to go had to be the 25th anniversary.

So for me, it was a first time, and I was shy and nervous stepping off the small Winair jet onto the hot tarmac. What's it all about, this unique and exclusive gathering of superyachts and their entourages? The atmosphere is like no other event on the calendar, and there was a special emotion attached to disembarking the small aircraft. St Barthélemy is a heavenly place for the ultra high net worthy, and from now on, is definitely part of my own annual schedule. The timing is exquisite; it's at the end of the first quarter, when everyone needs some time in the sun away from the grey skies and darker greys of the cities of home. Amidst four days of dockside dialogue, drinking and fun, old friends and faces become familiar once more, as friendships are renewed. The atmosphere of the event makes this an incredible marketplace for both the industry and its players, who make yachting their private business.

The other Bucket virgin, although not a human one, had, like myself, travelled several thousand miles from the UK to participate for the first time in this remarkable gathering. The story is personal and worth telling. Some four years ago, a friend of a friend was invited to attend this regatta and spent a couple of days on a participant's yacht. He fell in love with the atmosphere, the feeling, the fun and the lifestyle. So much so, that within a few days, he began to think: 'I can do this too'.

A comment to a passerby of asking how he might get one of these for himself, while pointing to the yacht he had been enjoying the hospitality of, turned out to be a remarkable stroke of serendipity, as that passerby happened to be a broker. Duane

MacPhail of Palm Beach Yachts International's response would lay the foundation for the two to build a relationship, forging a yacht out of aluminium that would make its debut at the 2011 St Barths Bucket.

This event illustrates how there is often very little strategy or planning when it comes to buying and selling yachts. So many opportunities exist, and in many cases, it is just a matter of being in the right place at the right time. Duane was clearly in that place, and he discussed the process that followed with me. The 'new owner', as he will be referred to in this article to protect his privacy, had just enjoyed a breezy day on the water in 2008, and was about to reflect on the blustery blast, when he saw a fellow Bucketeer. The two sat on the aft deck, struck up a conversation, and the 'golden ticket' question arose: "How do you get yourself one of these?" The calm response led to a conversation that a good broker needs to go through in order to win the mind and money of a client; not too eager and very professional.

Further good fortune fell upon Duane when the next Bucketeer who walked past the passerelle was world-renowned yacht designer Ron Holland. After introducing the new owner to Ron, the rapport of the trio was struck and ideas and concepts became the flow of dialogue. It would not be too big, and have good accommodation for a family and charter, as well as a level of sailing performance that one would be proud of.

The team then made its way to Europe to inspect and select yards, and Duane explained that this happened in a very short period of time, as the use of the new owner's plane improved the efficiency of the process. The shortlist of sailing yacht yards was straightforward, and was shortened further when chosen for build quality and budget. In the end, the common denominator was the availability of build slots, bearing in mind that this was during a time when most yards in Europe had very little capacity and were busy delivering and finalising their order books prior to the market's stall in 2008/9.



The new owner found the personal touch of Pendennis endearing and charming, not to mention the location of the yard in the quaint Cornish town of Falmouth. With a signed contract and a realistic £20 million-plus budget, the new owner witnessed the start of the process, and from that point, followed progress excitedly. The aluminium first plates that would form the hull of S/Y *Christopher* came together, Ron's lines took shape and her sleek form evolved into a pedigree project. "I want to take delivery and enter the 25th Anniversary St Barths Bucket in 2011" was the new owner's decree. "That must be the deadline!" And so, the delivery date was set, and all hands were put to work.

At 46m LOA, *Christopher* became an uncomplicated affair, the team enjoyed the process and previously worked well together, even though the new owner brought in his personal interior designer who had worked on his houses, but had never stepped foot on a yacht project. Her style and brief was again simple, to 'create a space that is fresh and relaxed, perfect for a world cruise, so no one gets bored of over creative spaces'. The result followed some traditions, with white panelling and personal

touches making it homely and of a classical nautical taste, without being overbearing or complex. The in-house Pendennis design team worked hand in hand with the new owner's family. With an owner-to-be who knew what he wanted, but was also willing to listen to suggestions, the Pendennis team relished the project. The result of their combined efforts was evident for all observers at her maiden public outing in St Barths.

Having spent the first race day of St Barths on the Perini-built S/Y *Helios*, I was able to observe *Christopher* from afar, as she carved her way through the deep blue waters off Gustavia. On my second day, I stood patiently at the passerelle awaiting my orders to step aboard *Christopher*. While sitting dockside alongside the Pendennis management, it was wonderful to hear their pride and delight as they described their mission to test and hand over the yacht some weeks prior to her arrival. It must have been pretty close to the wire, as in so many pre-delivery phases. Yachts don't just come out of the shed, encounter a series of contracted trials in the gloomy February waters off Cornwall, for the project team to then say: "OK, let's go racing in St Barths".

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Essentially, though, that is exactly what happened, and after a smooth and fast crossing, *Christopher* arrived with a couple of days to spare, prior to the start gun of the 25th Anniversary Bucket. This gave the crew and the Pendennis team a chance to shake her down a bit, do some racing trials, put some air into her sails and stretch out the sheets. It's hard to imagine what must have gone through the minds of joint MDs of the shipyard, Mike Carr and Henk Wiekens, when they realised that the new owner was going to race his yacht so soon after handover. Nail-bitten fingers must have been crossed, but on the day of my embarkation of *Christopher*, they were all smiles, and after their first day of racing, they were understandably feeling a little more at ease.

The most notable aspect of *Christopher's* maiden voyage was that the new owner felt so pleased and proud that he had completed his voyage of discovery inspired by the Bucket some four years earlier that he invited all of his friends to share in his latest adventure. The Pendennis team turned from yacht builder to logistics and vacation experts, as over 70 of

the owner's friends flew in to enjoy time onboard *Christopher*. A military operation ensued, with 12m chase boats chartered, villas rented galore and minivans hired.

This act of sharing the experience of yachting with other people, especially if, like the new owner, one or two of his friends choose to follow in his footsteps and join the world of ownership is what it's all about. It was fun to witness the spirit in which all of the relative novices entered the event during the day's racing. Everyone was colour-coordinated in bright red race gear, all emblazoned with the symbolic red-hot chilli logo.

The buzz and banter in the vast guest cockpit were as loud a farmer's hen house as a fox climbs into the coop. How much the guests understood what was happening didn't really matter, as they were here with great friends and incredible memories unfolding around them. They were also in good hands as this was one of the first years that Ron Holland's S/Y *Avalon* was not in St Barths, but enjoying some local hospitality in New Zealand. Therefore,



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Ron had brought together the original *Avalon* Bucket crew of racers and faces that the sailing world respected and admired.

The *Christopher* crew and the old guard under Ron's helmsmanship were also aided by the management team of the shipyard, with Henk, Mike and Toby Allies all running the aft deck. The spirit was superb; laughs, sweat, wincing, frowns and concentration all fought for their position on the yard managers' reddening faces. Tailing winches, calling shots and watching telltales and their rivals became their new career, and one that was relished.

With sailing in the blood of all the participants, they all had a handle on the process, but really, it was a baptism of fire for all of them. However, while navigating the Bucket's famous 'not so wiggly' course, they held their own, and performed extremely well in the perfect conditions. All had an eye on their Falmouth rival, S/Y *Rebecca*, a yacht they built some years earlier, and even though she beat them in the overall standings, pride was on the Pendennis team's faces as they saw two of their majestic fleet race in this idyllic setting. Perhaps if they hadn't been so pressed to get *Christopher* to the event, they could have arranged a pre or post PR tactical match race between the two almost identical yachts.

With the race complete on day two, after rounding the various rugged volcanic outcrops off St Barths, the cold beers were passed around and the vast gathering onboard continued to gas about life, loves and their experiences on *Christopher*. While a trio of classical planes performed overhead as a finale to each day, and we anchored off Gustavia, with the exhausted sun slumping below the horizon, the Pendennis team, Duane, Ron and the new owner all smiled in lots of different directions, with probably similar thoughts of 'Wow, we did it'.

The new owner was proud and at ease with his new toy, and he made it clear to me that he had been lucky; that the stars had aligned, and he that he knew it was rare for it all to fall into place so well. He said that every owner should enter a yard with their eyes wide open and listen to lots of advice, taking onboard what makes sense. He added that they should ultimately go with their gut, and if they find people they trust, then chances are, it should go well, particularly if they have a fair idea of what they want. Wise words indeed.

This is a romantic saga of yacht ownership and one that is worth remembering, but very rare in the market. It is a tale of opportunity, luck, passion and success. A very successful individual is invited sailing with a







friend four years ago, he likes what he sees, meets a broker who resists the temptation to bite off an arm or two, and instead takes him on a journey of partnership and progress. The yacht itself is exciting for many reasons; a well balanced hull and rig with a vast centre board make her stiff and perform well, and twin rudders allow the lazarette to house a serious tender, but equally make her responsive at the helm. Ron was proud of his latest project and was clearly at ease with her wheel, taking her through the course. The result of a great meeting four years ago brought everyone together for a fantastic day on the water. It shows that if an owner chooses wisely and makes friends on the way, there is no reason why ownership cannot be the most incredible journey to culminate one's life and career with.

Recognising how many owners were at the Bucket in 2011, to celebrate the 25th anniversary, all of whom had a myriad of guests in tow, and bearing in mind the perfect conditions they encountered, perhaps in four or five years' time we will see the results of more opportune meetings. Now I have lost my virginity alongside and onboard *Christopher*, I can only extol the virtues of large yacht regattas and the handling of stunning machines under full sail, in the most beautiful location in the Caribbean.

Sailing is fun, interactive and exciting; in fact, as we returned to Gustavia harbour, we passed by a 70m-plus motoryacht, where the lone and seemingly bored owner was spotted looking down from his seventh apartment deck onto these sleek craft filled with crowds of laughing and joking people who had an amazing day on the water.

I have already reserved my villa for 2012, and look forward to many more to come. The 25th Anniversary St Barths Bucket was a triumph, and our congratulations to all who participated. It's not about the winning, even though everyone takes it incredibly seriously; it's about giving owners a reason and acceptance to own, and is an opportunity to expand the minds of their friends who perhaps one day will take the same leap of faith as this owner has done, with such success. Bon voyage *Christopher* and congratulations Pendennis and Ron. Another wonderful day in my global office.

Images: Esther Barney, MHR and Corey Silken

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