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On board with **STEFANO BARBINI**

Showing off is a thing of the past, Stefano Barbini tells Cecile Gauert. He offers his yacht guests a different kind of luxury.

AFTER YEARS IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY, MOST RECENTLY AS A TOP EXECUTIVE of luxury brand Escada, Stefano Barbini has identified a troubling trend – sameness. Wherever you go, whatever you do, everything begins to look alike. St. Barths to Porto Cervo or New York to Tokyo, you find the same bags, belts, shoes – in the same storefronts.

He speaks fast and convincingly as we move around his yacht, which has brought a small corner of Italy to the dock in Antigua where I met him. “Globalization in the end means mass market. If you are able to find the same product at the same moment all over the world, this is not luxury anymore. Luxury is uniqueness,” he says. “Now, in my opinion, luxury also is simplicity. People who have known what luxury is for years don’t need flashy things, they need authenticity.”



PHOTOGRAPHS: JIM RAVCROFT (LEFT), PAOLA & MURRAY (RIGHT)



Barbini credits his extensive background in fashion for these ideas. “When I decided to, let me say, be reborn in this new life, I realized how important it was to offer authenticity, uniqueness, simplicity. These things make the difference between real and fake luxury,” he says.

By this point in the conversation, we have reached the lower deck of his 74-foot Sunreef catamaran *Blue Deer*, which he also calls the San Lorenzo Sea Lodge. *Blue Deer* is the sistership of Barbini’s father-in-law’s yacht *19th Hole*. Both were delivered in summer 2015 and while they have similarities, they are not the same. *Blue Deer* is Barbini’s pride and joy and the second asset in his nascent hospitality portfolio.

“In luxury, details make the difference,” he says. “At the end, what stays in the clients’ memory are the simplest things. And another point is that we love Italy and we like to be ambassadors of Italy.”

As he talks, Barbini opens a closet door to reveal shelves filled with pasta imported from his home country.

He did not travel light when he came to the Caribbean for *Blue Deer*’s first charter season here. Aside from pasta, he shipped 400 bottles of wine, Italian of course, stewed tomatoes and wheels of Parmesan.

Crafted with care by a 65-year-old cheese maker who only makes about four a day, this aged Parmesan is the real thing. Unlike the cheese produced in factories that make more than 10,000 wheels a day kept in a sterile, air-conditioned environment, this Parmesan is kept in a naturally ventilated room. When it’s ready, the wheel has an oily sheen on the outside and sounds like a drum when you hit it. My mouth begins to water as Barbini speaks. Finally, I get a bite. The taste is incredible, pungent and delicate all at once.



How did this 54-year-old Northern Italian who went directly from studying economics at the university in Milan to the fashion industry become so knowledgeable about food? “I like to eat and I like to drink. It’s a good starting point,” says Barbini. “My wife, Giorgia, is an incredible cook, *Mama Mia!* Giorgia’s family is crazy for food; the most important room in their house is the kitchen. Giorgia’s father is crazy for the right ingredients. Also we were trained by our parents to find the right producers.”

After my mini lesson in Parmesan cheese, he turns his attention to a wine bottle that has started to sweat in an ice bucket. It’s a bubbly with a lovely blush color that would look great on a satin gown. It comes from Arunda, one of the highest wineries in Europe with grapevines



Stefano Barbini (top left) brings a piece of Italy aboard *Blue Deer* (center with *19th Hole*). The yacht did her first charter season in the Mediterranean.

PHOTOGRAPHS: CECILE GAUERT (TOP LEFT), JIM RAVCROFT (CENTER), PAOLA & MURRAY (TOP AND BOTTOM RIGHT)

Giorgia and Stefano (far left with their children) went from the fashion world to hospitality. Blue Deer (far right) is the pendant to their exclusive lodge in South Tyrol.



back whenever Google approached him to help promote the lodge, as privacy is another very important component of their brand of luxury. The closest pin will place you somewhere in the woods. "Luxury is not to be able to be reached by any Google map," he says.

The house, a historic hunting lodge built for the local bishop in the 16th century, is in the Dolomites. It was the Barbinis' vacation home until, one day, they had the idea of making it a lodge in the woods where people can discover or rediscover what has been lost in the rush of modern life: how to find mushrooms (porcini, of course) or chop wood and build fires. Kids enjoy learning how to milk goats and make butter. There is skiing in the winter, golf and hiking in the summer.

"Our clients have everything. They can buy everything. What they cannot buy are priceless experiences," says Barbini. "Chopping in the woods is a priceless memory for men. Or for kids, milking a goat could be a memory forever. It's luxury now."

Giorgia and Stefano toyed with the idea of bringing the same concept of hospitality to the sea. They thought of a seashore villa, but Stefano really wanted a boat, although he is more of a "sweet water" sailor himself, as he says.

Growing up near Lake Maggiore, his first boating experience was with a 420 sailing boat, and after that he sailed only in lakes. "I am not

a sea guy. I am a sort of category B sailing guy," he says. He may be new to saltwater, but he liked the privacy that a yacht offers.

One day, he went to Sunreef Yachts in Gdansk, Poland, where his father-in-law was building 19th Hole, his first sailing yacht and first catamaran. When Barbini saw the space the boat had, it was a nearly immediate decision, the San Lorenzo Sea Lodge would be a catamaran. The 74-foot sailing cat model was a new addition to Sunreef Yachts' lineup a couple of years ago, starting with the first 74, *WildBerry*. While Sunreef Yachts builds both motor and sail catamarans, "sail is absolutely much better for our philosophy than a motor boat," says Barbini.

He guided the construction with his special attention to detail, seeking advice from expert sailor Rocco Sisto for the sail plan. Sisto insisted on a special-order spinnaker, which makes *Blue Deer* better able to perform in the Mediterranean when the wind is mild. It's a beautiful sight in a sea where catamarans are far more rare than the deer around the Barbinis' mountain lodge.

The catamaran has four guest staterooms for eight to 10 guests (including children). "I told the yard no master stateroom," Barbini says. The cabins are all nearly identical in size and most definitely in comfort. Feather pillows and silky lightweight sheets make a



QUICKFIRE
Stefano Barbini

SPEED OR STYLE?
Style

CHAUFFEUR OR CHEF?
Chauffeur

IDEA OF LUXURY?
Simplicity and uniqueness

FIRST THING YOU PACK?
My camera

FAVORITE BEACH?
No beaches, please!
My preferred place is the seagulls' bay in Palmarola (Italy)

HOW MANY WATCHES?
One

FIRST BOATING MEMORY?
My first 420 when I was 14 years old in Lago Maggiore

FAVORITE CAR?
Aston Martin



3,937 feet up in the Dolomites. The volcanic terrain of South Tyrol does wonders to filter out any acidity. The bubbles are small and delicate. The wine has held its own against Champagne, Barbini says before cutting an ultra-thin, almost translucent slice of ham. It's not prosciutto, he corrects me, it's speck. This ham comes from a pig smaller than the typical pig of Parma and it eats mostly potatoes, he explains. The process to turn a pig leg into this delicate and fragrant slice is complex and lengthy, far more involved than the making of prosciutto. About 17 herbs go into the marinade, and each farmer has a different secret recipe. It is basted slowly and finally smoked over a wood fire, Barbini adds.

All of it — the Parmesan, the wine and the ham — rests on a corner of a large counter in *Blue Deer's* open salon. The galley is part of life on board. It's open and long and accessible from several sides, so people can be together, talking, tasting or helping make food if they wish. There is an herb garden along the starboard-side windows because what chef worth his or her salt can cook without them?

Blue Deer did her first charter season in the Mediterranean and, in December, came over to

the Caribbean as an ambassador of the *dolce vita* and the Barbinis' brand of hospitality. "This may not be for everyone," says Barbini, "but this is what we do." By "we" he means Giorgia and himself. Giorgia, who also was a top manager at Escada, grew up among the famous people her grandfather, the founder of men fashion powerhouse Brioni, invited to his home.

“Our clients have everything. What they cannot buy are priceless experiences.”

"We are talking prime ministers, presidents, actors, very VIP people from all around the world," he says.

The couple, who are raising three teenage children, left the fashion world to open San Lorenzo Mountain Lodge, a hospitality concept so exclusive that you won't find the right location on Google maps. Barbini pushed

PHOTOGRAPHS: PAOLA & MURRAY

PHOTOGRAPHS: JIM RAYCROFT (TOP RIGHT), PAOLA & MURRAY (TOP LEFT AND CENTER, BOTTOM), ISTOCK/ROBERTO GENNARO (CIRCLE)