

Sailing on

# Che

Gibraltar to Malta



UNDERTAKING PASSAGEMAKING IS A GREAT WAY TO SEE EXACTLY HOW A YACHT FAIRS IN ALL CONDITIONS. SUNREEF'S 114 IS THE LARGEST SLOOP-RIGGED CATAMARAN IN THE WORLD, AND SHE COMBINES SAILING PROWESS WITH COMFORT AND STYLE

words: Kate Hubert  
photography: courtesy of Sunreef Yachts





This yacht is all about balance, as she connects wind with water and blurs the distinctions between exterior and interior



The nav station lies forward on the flybridge and affords fantastic 360 degree views. This is clearly an ideal position from which to manoeuvre the vessel and both engines, thrusters and prop pitch can be controlled from here. *Che* cruises easily at 12 knots on just 65 per cent engine capacity, and to conserve fuel she will make nine knots with one engine



The call came mid-week – could I be in Gibraltar by the weekend to hop aboard the largest sloop-rigged catamaran currently afloat? The sailor in me jumped at the opportunity to join *Che* on this final leg of her maiden voyage. During my trip, I was to be very well cared for by a close-knit crew, overseen by a captain who I'm glad to say comes from the quiet, composed school of ship's masters. Even with the teething problems you'd expect from a new yacht and in trying weather, there was always a sense of calm and control and that's even more important in a yacht such as *Che* where guests and crew will spend a good deal of time in each other's company.

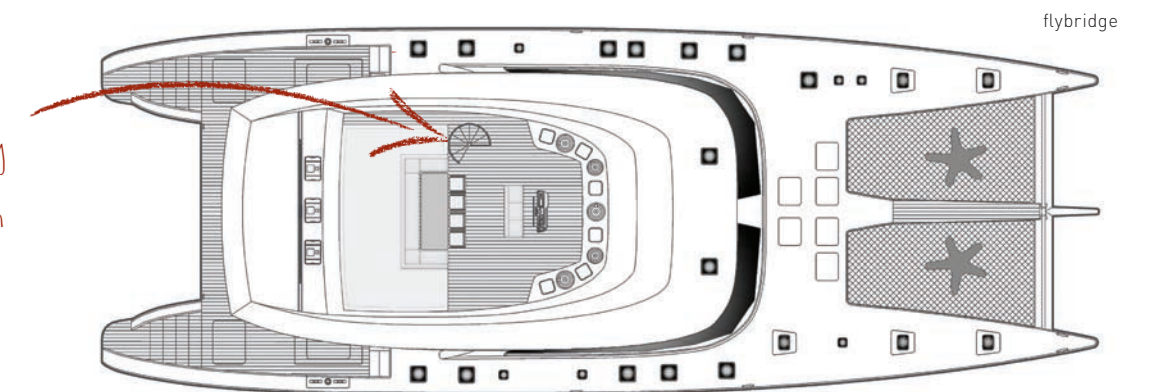
I also had the pleasure of spending time with the people responsible for the yacht's inception: Erick Verbeeck, chief executive of APE and owner of *Che*, and his wife Sacha, who designed the interiors. Within an hour of touching down in Gibraltar, I was watching the lights of the

coast slipping away astern. Ahead of us lay Malta, and a non-stop passage of a thousand nautical miles...

Lying at the far end of the marina at Sotogrande, *Che* showed few signs of her lively journey through Biscay where she encountered 50 knot winds. Just the loss of her starboard trampoline betrayed the pounding she'd received. Her faired aluminium hull and superstructure were still gleaming white, punctuated by smoked glass wraparound windows and a series of ports piercing her lean hulls. It is clear from first glance that this is a yacht designed to be sailed, not just to look good in the harbour alongside the other superyachts. That said, her size and the care that has been taken to consider both guests and crew means that this is a luxurious and handsome yacht.

Once aboard, the first area you become acquainted with is the aft deck. Covered in wide, short teak planking laid in a relaxed non-symmetrical fashion it ends aft in a series of steps down to sea level, inviting you to get your toes wet. Between lies a huge grey vinyl

*The only access to the flybridge is via spiral staircase, which looks very open when viewed from below, but feels safe when climbing and has titanium grab rails*



cushioned relaxation area under which lies a tender; a second lies further aft beneath its davits. The starboard side is set up for alfresco dining, to port is a banquette and coffee table beneath a spiral staircase. Tinted glass sliding doors etched with *Che's* signature yin yang motif

lead to the main saloon. Almost at once you begin to appreciate the significance of this taijitu emblem, describing the harmony of opposites. This yacht is all about balance, as she connects wind with water and blurs the distinctions between exterior and interior, guests and crew.



## The couple who breathed life into *Che*

It's little wonder that Erick and Sacha Verbeeck have been so closely involved with *Che's* creation, as they intend to sail her frequently, including during her maiden Atlantic crossing. They have cruised extensively on the previous *Che*, a 74, and have used the lessons learned to refine her 'big sister'. Their input went far beyond soft furnishings; many of the novel structural ideas came directly from them – the spiral staircase and perhaps most noticeably, moving the galley to the main deck.

The 74 had no crew mess, and accommodation, as on many sailing yachts, was tight. By moving the galley, room was found for communal crew space, and allows guests and crew to share in the sailing experience. It is quite some achievement that they've created an environment where crew and guests do not get in each other's way yet can work or relax while occupying the same space. '*Che* is interactive in the true sense of the word,' explains Erick.

They were also instrumental in setting up the crew cycle of four months on-off – two crews rotate and each has the chance to enjoy alternate Christmases and summers off. This will become increasingly important as *Che* moves further afield, once she's crossed the Atlantic for the Caribbean season she's due to take the Panama route to the Pacific where she'll cruise for two years.

And it's Mrs Verbeeck who's leant her style to the interiors and beyond. The intention was to create a low-key yacht that was part of the environment. Exterior lighting is soft – LED 'stars' twinkle above the afterdeck, and blue LED strips mimic moonlight on treads and in recesses (these also work brilliantly on night passage as they don't destroy night-vision). She envisions that the vast majority of leisure and dining will take place outside, but even with the galley on the main deck, the saloon is more than large enough should the weather turn.

The uncluttered design is deceptively simple and extremely effective. The mood can easily be changed by coloured accent cushions and allows for elaborate place settings against the blank grey canvas. And you won't find a single vase aboard *Che* – Sacha believes that not only are they 'not practical on a sailing yacht', but also that one should use 'decorations of the sea, not the land'. So shells and corals decorate the tables and crockery, all of which suits a yacht that is destined to spend more time in secluded anchorages than tied up at a fashionable dock.

*Che* is almost the opposite of the large glossy motor yacht with its strict segregation between crew and guests. Although this is a sailor's yacht, great care has been taken to make her comfortable – she is a catamaran so you don't have to cling to your bunk on passage, and can ride comfortably in anchorages that set monohulls rolling. *Che* is indeed the harmonious solution to uniting the often conflicting yearning for adventure with the desire to enjoy luxury and comfort.



The saloon is dominated by the dining area to port; the large table follows the clean, modern theme – a simple, solid rectangle in shiny aqua

The galley runs the full length of the saloon. It can be accessed forward and aft and guests are encouraged to view the chef in action, or even to take cookery lessons. It's furnished in modern brushed stainless steel



I wake at dawn with light coming in through the ports right next to my bunk. It is a real pleasure to have the sports car experience – being low and close to the water, it feels much faster than the 12 knots the engines are providing. The motion of the yacht changes as we charged through short steep seas; the time constraints of this already delayed trip means we have to make best time, and cannot afford the luxury of sailing slowly.

Once you've had enough of lying in your bed watching the stars, with the push of a button the hidden blind moves down for privacy and darkness. Three of the four the guest cabins are twin; the bunks are

generous and comfortable with memory-foam bases so that you sink into rather than bounce around on if the yacht is moving. The fourth guest cabin has a single bunk athwartships plus a Pullman, so it's only really suitable in port.

The en suites are a good size – the shower is separated with double glass doors and the oval teak grille underfoot is a nod to sailing traditions. The cubicle is large enough to preserve elbows and heads but not so large that you can't brace yourself in a seaway. *Che* has been designed with ocean crossings and remote cruising in mind, she will rarely be tied up in dock, so these are important considerations.

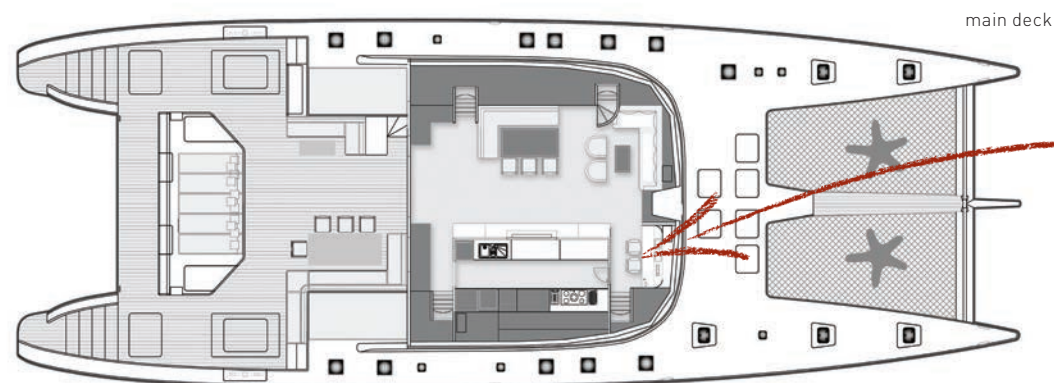
The cabins boast a vast amount of built-in storage: hanging wardrobes, racks, shelves and drawers run all along the inside of the hull, from cabin sole to roof. There's also a large unit in the corner at foot of the outer bunk that provides a wide fiddled surface with drawers below. A flatscreen television is mounted above this, complete with Bose speakers for the 321 home movie system – the guts of which are housed within a recess above the inner bunk. A final drawer unit between the two bunks completes the ample stowage.

Perhaps the only slight disadvantage is that there is just one door between the cabin and the open saloon/bridge area – night passages





In terms of décor, bamboo veneer covers the walls and built-in furniture, a modern twist on classic panelling found throughout the yacht. The cabin sole panels are pleasantly irregular, giving a relaxed, beach house feel



The bridge forms part of the main saloon, so guests can observe the passage... wonderful for guests who are keen sailors themselves

The grey tones are a clean, retro palette which may seem curious at first, but really does grow on you as it allows the colour of the sea and the sky to shine

CHE Sunreef Yachts

**LOA** 34m  
**LWL** 31.74m  
**Beam** 12.8m  
**Draught** 2.5m  
**Displacement** 115 tonnes  
**Engines**  
 2 x 455hp Cummins

**Speed (max/cruise)**  
 Sail: 25 knots / 14 knots;  
 Power: 14 knots / 11 knots  
**Range at 11 knots**  
 2,500nm  
**Thrusters**  
 Max Power CT 325, 23 kW  
**Generators** Kohler  
 40EF02D Diesel 40kVA

**Fuel capacity**  
 2 x 9,000 litres  
**Main sail**  
 390 m<sup>2</sup>  
**Freshwater capacity**  
 2 x 2,650 litres  
**Owner and guests** 7  
**Crew** 5

**Tenders**  
 Zodiac with Yamaha  
**Construction**  
 aluminium structure/  
 carbon mast and boom,  
**Classification**  
 Bureau Veritas and MCA  
**Naval architect**  
 Sunreef Yachts

**Exterior styling**  
 Sunreef Yachts, plus  
 owners' input  
**Interior design**  
 Sunreef Yachts, plus  
 owners' input  
**Charter broker**  
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 web: www.sunreef-  
 charter.com  
**Builder/year**  
 Sunreef Yachts/2010  
 web: www.sunreef-  
 yachts.com

can be noisy. Also, the aft cabins are adjacent to the engines, however I found the thrumming 'white noise' didn't stop me from dropping off, especially after a good supper with a little wine.

The following morning I am woken as the motion of the yacht changes once more; white horses fleck the sea. I am glad of the design of the shower as I lurch about, all the while feeling quite secure. As with dinner the night before, breakfast is laid at the main dining table which lies to the aft of the main saloon. At this point my body decides I am really a monohull girl and I'm afraid to say I retreat to the comfort of my bunk...

As you'd expect from such a large catamaran, the main saloon is wide

and airy; but there is one major difference from most other layouts. Instead of languishing in the starboard hull, the galley runs nearly the full length of the starboard side. The hustle and bustle can be viewed by guests through glass either side of the saloon's huge flatscreen television. Conversely, blinds can be easily drawn for privacy.

The main saloon is dominated by the dining area to port; the large table follows the clean, modern theme – a simple, solid rectangle in shiny aqua supported by steel columns. As elsewhere, 'Che grey' vinyl sofas take up two sides with grey mesh chairs making up the numbers. Scatter cushions in the now-familiar aqua and sea-green palette add

comfort and break up the sharp lines making the area more welcoming. The theme continues forward with a low aqua coffee table and sofa.

It's my third morning aboard and once more we are motoring hard into short, choppy seas – the bows bury quite frequently with no sails to lift them. I've abandoned trying to eat at the dining table as the design seems to conspire to make me feel queasy – all the beautiful shiny surfaces, reflective glass and windows throw my head into total confusion as we appear to move in seven different directions at once! But all is well on the flybridge, the wind now blowing warm from North Africa as we close on Malta and swallows cross the bows flying determinedly south.

Aft, a vast U-shaped area of loungers surrounds a large central table. Flanked by comfortably angled backrests guests can sit or lie in almost any orientation to make the most of the view, sunbathe, or enjoy the breeze. The grey tones used throughout are a clean, retro palette which may seem a curious choice at first, but really does grow on you as it allows the colour of the sea and the sky to shine. Similarly, the grey lifelines and matte titanium stanchions seem to melt away, adding to the impression of an open, close relationship with the sea.

Our fourth sunrise at sea, and Malta rises before us, low and golden over a flat, calm sea. The entrance into Valetta is one of the great





All cabins are simply furnished. The grey faux leather coachroof contrasts with the natural timber, and the bamboo panelling echoes *Che's* long, lean lines. The ceiling is studded with bright halogens; simple white-shaded side lamps add a homely touch in guest suites



hull deck

Down on the hull deck is a pantry with extra refrigeration and wine cellar, as well as the crew mess



harbour approaches and a history lesson all rolled into one. Passing crusader forts and more recent fortifications you are reminded of Malta's strategic location. Ships have made this landfall for millennia, but never a single-masted catamaran as large as *Che*.

*Che* is definitely a sailing yacht that happens to be a superyacht, rather than a luxury craft that happens to have sails. The dizzying raked mast is steadied by four PBO shrouds and its self-flaking battened main rises from the huge cradle of the boom... and weighing in at 1.6 tonnes with no vang it seems prudent to stand to one side! The main sail does not have the strong roach that catamarans often utilise, but with a 47 metre mast and three headsails she's hardly underpowered. The genoa and solent fly from separate fractional forestays, with the gennaker loose rigged right at the bows. Under main and genoa, in a decent 15 to 20 knot breeze, she can make nine to 10 knots without really trying. Her long, sleek hulls with carbon mast and boom make her nice and slippery.

All sheets are led back to the flybridge and with Harken 1111 and 1135

winches she is straightforward to handle despite the almost excessive girth of the sheets. The main sheet traveller runs aft of the seating area, and the Magic Trim operates this rather than the main sheet itself. Tacking is far from sluggish and the yacht definitely comes alive under sail. The decision was made not to have in-boom furling to cut out unnecessary complications and make sails easier to drop in an emergency. It does take time for that big main to come down, and flaking is actually achieved by the first officer climbing the mast steps and scampering up and down inside the boom. However, the crew are very competent sailors and the passage from the yard in Gdansk, Poland, has thrown just about the worst conditions they are likely to face at them already.

As I bid goodbye to Malta's winter sunshine and head back to chilly old Blighty I can say that I've thoroughly enjoyed my passage aboard *Che* and admire the passion and sense of harmony that has created her. She is a sailor's superyacht, strong enough to cross oceans, soft enough to be a home to the guests and crew who will share her adventures.

