




## QUIESCENCE OF CHE

The owner of the 35m catamaran *Che* is a Belgian shipowner and businessman who, with his yacht, sought to achieve a sense of peace and opportunity. His ideas on new builds, design and running a crew offer insights into his harmonised thinking on both business and pleasure.

– WORDS BY DON HOYT GORMAN, PHOTOGRAPHY BY SUNREEF / EXMAR

I first stepped aboard the 35m sailing catamaran *Che* as she lay placidly at anchor in a quiet bay along the Turkish Riviera. Her Sunreef design – the banks of domino-like portlights conveying that this is a precision-made superyacht – stood out in the sleepy harbour, and as I approached, the serenity of the vessel beckoned.

Aboard, the calm, competent crew were preparing the yacht for the arrival of the wife of the owner pair, and some of their friends and family. But even amid their work and bustle, the yacht felt peaceful and warm, like a Six Senses spa, or a luxury retreat. It was an impressive feeling, especially for a yacht writer who more frequently reacts to the more technical elements. *Che* as a balanced, quiet, calm yacht remains the lasting impression of my brief visit.

A few weeks later, I had the chance to speak with the owner, a Belgian businessman whose style and demeanour were clearly reflected in his yacht. I wanted to know how he'd come to the decision to build. 





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### BUILDING CHE

“I’ve had boats all my life,” he told me. “My father had motor boats and I had motor boats. The first sailing yacht I had was a Sunreef 74ft catamaran, which I chartered for three weeks in Saint Barths. Later, she went up for sale and I bought her. That was the first *Che*, which I had from 2005 until 2009. We cruised the Mediterranean Sea, went to the Indian Ocean and did the Seychelles, Maldives, Madagascar, Andaman and Nicobar and Burma and Thailand. It was a very nice journey, and we were happy with the boat, but I wanted to do a circumnavigation, and she was a bit small with our crew of four. So I decided to build a new one.”

After considering designs from other firms, he turned to Sunreef to see if it could build to both his demanding specifications and his firm budget. With extensive experience in complex real estate deals, he knew how to negotiate for what he wanted. “In my business, we always use contracts that make the builders, architects and engineers co-responsible for the budget,” he said. “The focus is on competence and quality at this stage, not pricing. Once the team is assembled, we say, ‘Here’s what we want to spend. Design to suit that price.’ And then use a contract with huge penalties for exceeding the target price, so everybody sticks to their bid. You know, it’s not fun when you are over budget, in business as well as in pleasure.”

Working with Belgium-based Exmar Ship Management and the naval architect Leo Cappoen, *Che’s* owner

approached Sunreef Yachts in Gdansk, Poland, confident that the yard would be able to deliver the yacht he wanted for the price he was willing to pay. “I was very, very happy with Sunreef and the co-operation with Exmar. It wasn’t easy – like all construction, it is always complicated. But I started by writing down what I wanted in the yacht. She needed to make a world tour; she had to be steady and comfortable; and I wanted my crew to be comfortable. I came up with the design plan and they turned that into drawings and descriptions. Owners must be responsible for this part of the design.”

*Che* was Sunreef’s first significant superyacht build and its first over 30m. The yard subsequently maintained a substantial after-sales service, which continued until the end of last year when the yacht went into a shipyard in Barcelona for some final adjustments. “She’s running very well now,” says her owner, clearly content.

### BUSINESS DECISIONS

Now happily cruising the world, *Che’s* owner has had time to reflect on the superyacht business in general. With concerns in both real estate and shipping, he sees the difference between his business and that of shipyards as a matter of maturity, and of global scope. “Shipbuilders and real estate developers are building companies and most of them know exactly what they are doing,” he says.

“In the yachtbuilding business, they are all fantasists. I bought the best



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**Previous page:** *Che* under sail, flying her iconic electric pink spinnaker.

**This page:** (Top) *Che* is the second-largest sloop-rigged catamaran and the third-largest sailing multihull in the world; (Above) The saloon shares the main deck with the galley, a bold design reflecting the idea that a kitchen is the heart of the home.

“I would not hesitate to recommend Quentin and his team to anyone looking for first class advice regarding any superyacht related project.”

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Michael Fenton,  
the Marber Partnership LLP



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equipment for my yacht, but when I have a problem, I'm told I have to wait for six months for a replacement. It's unbelievable. So this sector of shipbuilding is not mature – they are not performing.” While he sees the larger German and Dutch shipyards who build yachts of 80m and up as professionals equivalent to shipyards that build gas and oil tankers, the smaller yachtbuilders, he says, are not proper organisations yet.

“Since we built *Che*, Sunreef has become a much better organised company,” he says. “And it makes good yachts. *Che* is well made, and she performs – she reaches speeds of 16 and 17 knots under sail.”

#### CHARTER & TRAVEL

*Che* was built for a world tour, though with an eye on charter. She carries 18,000 litres of fuel and she produces six tonnes of water a day. Because she's a catamaran, her living space is enormous and highly stable. The owners aim for six to eight weeks of charter a year. Still, *Che* is an owner's yacht, and if charter clients want to experience her, they need to meet here where she is. “Most charter guests want to go to the Mediterranean and the Caribbean, while I want to go to remote areas,” he says “Chartering is a nice income because it makes your costs a little bit lower, but for me, the whole idea is that I do the world tour and if clients come, they join the yacht along its journey.”

On the next voyage, the owners will start in Hiva Oa in the Marquesas Islands in the



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**Top:** Vava'u, Tonga, *Che*'s next stop.  
**Left:** Belgian businessman and the owner of *Che* will cruise to Tonga this month.  
**Right:** The Marquesas Islands is on the list for the owner's next voyage.

South Pacific, then transit the Tuamotu Archipelago, calling at Tahiti. If there's time, they'll raise Bora Bora. In September, *Che* goes to Tonga. The owner wanted to do the Cook Islands, but the islands are notorious for their steep coral walls close to shore that make anchoring a particular challenge. Around November or December, she goes to New Zealand where she'll spend the winter undergoing minor works and will be available for charter during the Christmas and New Year period. “In the next three years, I hope to spend the winters in Asia, and the summers in Fiji, Vanuatu, Tuvalu and the Solomon Islands,” the owner says. You can hear the sense of freedom in his voice.

#### CREW

One of the owner's unique approaches to managing his yachting experience is the investment he puts into his crew. *Che* has two full sets of six-person crew, which he swaps out about every four months.

While under way, the owner continues to use Exmar Shipmanagement as shore-side contact so that if the captain on board has a problem and cannot sort it right away, he can contact the office in Belgium so it can manage the shore-side solution.

“It's a system that requires a little bit of courage because it costs a little bit more to do,” he says. “But a yacht is operational all year – it has no holiday time. With this two-crew approach, I don't have strange crew on board, the maintenance is better and the

**This page:** (Below) *Che* at anchor in Göcek, Turkey; (Right) Cruising the Mediterranean Sea.



handover isn't complicated because we provide two days of overlap for handover from one crew to another."

He also believes it is good for the crews themselves. "On a sailing boat you need young people," he insists. "They all want a life after sailing, because it's good sailing around when you're young, but then they get married and have children. So with this four months by four months system they are able to have a life alongside the life aboard *Che*."

"I finance courses for the crew as well because I want them to stay with me," he explains. "I think it's better to have a captain with a master 3,000 than a captain 500 on board. And they're happy because they're busy: they take a month or a month and a half off and then they have a month and a half of courses and then they come back on board. It's perfect."

After speaking to her owner, it wasn't hard, then, to grasp how both the yacht and her crew comes across as a picture of halcyon sailing, and how it left such an impression on me. The idea of both tranquillity and adventure conjoined in a single experience – and in a gorgeous catamaran – is in fact the two components of *Che's* personality, her shadow and her light, and how she connects to the world around her. Her travels will continue to take her owners and charter guests, in peace and comfort, to the far corners of the Earth. □

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**“SINCE WE BUILT *CHE*, SUNREEF HAS BECOME A MUCH BETTER ORGANISED COMPANY, AND IT MAKES GOOD YACHTS. *CHE* IS WELL MADE, AND SHE PERFORMS – SHE REACHES SPEEDS OF 16 AND 17 KNOTS UNDER SAIL.”**  
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