

# Multihull MODE



Two Oceans 82. Credit: Dale Staples of Staples Productions

## South Africa's multihull production blooms and new-to-boating clients enhance growth and design cues, says GMBA chairperson Veda Pretorius

South Africa has a long and well-documented history as a multihulls manufacturing giant. It is the second-largest manufacturer of catamarans worldwide and the largest manufacturer of power catamarans. This is mainly due to the volume of power catamarans manufactured by Robertson and Caine, South Africa's largest boatbuilding company, although there are many other manufacturers in the region including Two Oceans Marine and Phoenix Marine that contribute to the sector's status.

The last decade has seen a significant rise in the popularity of catamarans globally, not only in the cruising and charter market but in the superyacht sector. Recent superyacht launches include the magnificent 47m Perini Navi S/Y *Art Explorer* and the 43m Tecnomar M/Y *This Is It*. The 80 Sunreef Power, owned by Rafael Nadal, has boosted the popularity

of Sunreef, and its new Sunreef 43 Eco shares significant sustainability credentials. Locally, Southern Wind Shipyard has also embraced the trend of multihulls. The concept design SWCAT90 is a 27m sailing catamaran constructed of carbon composite, matching its monohulls' design aesthetic with the multihull's space and comfort.

Space is a primary advantage of multihulls, with expansive areas above and below the deck. Multihulls boast roomy saloons and cockpit areas while enhanced stability increases their appeal by making them accessible to newcomers to the yachting lifestyle. The minimal heeling allows for a lifestyle akin to being on land, while the shallow draft of multihulls facilitates easy access to beaches and secluded areas.

### Cape Town boatbuilding

The boatbuilding industry in Cape Town is mirroring international

trends, with a general consolidation in the market over the last 15 years. Although the number of yachts being built in South Africa has increased, the number of boatbuilding yards has decreased – reflecting a natural consolidation as efficiencies across departments and processes are realised. The companies that remain are doing exceptionally well.

The industry does have its challenges, though, as outlined at a recent industry stakeholder meeting hosted by the City of Cape Town, South Africa. Factors including ageing infrastructure, water access problems and the need for more professional artisans and skilled labour need to be addressed.

One of the successful South African companies that mitigates these risks is Xquisite Catamarans. The Xquisite X5 Plus sailing catamaran has won *Cruising World* and *Sail* magazine's Boat of the Year Award

and is manufactured in Cape Town at the Phoenix Catamaran factory. The factory is also building Xquisite's new 60ft sailing catamaran, Sixty Solar Sail, which is due to launch in March 2024.

Xquisite Yachts has experienced an increase in the demand for power catamarans – popular with older couples, new entrants to the yachting market, and even owners of traditional power trawlers. Xquisite's new 60ft power catamaran includes a kite – easily deployed and retrieved – to reduce fuel consumption and increase speed on long voyages.

The vast majority of Xquisite's yachts are made for export and thus Xquisite plans to manufacture its new range of power catamarans in Aveiro, Portugal, to be closer to the end market and reduce shipping costs. Another reason for this manufacturing strategy is that





Rendering of the Two Oceans 870



Xquisite Yachts' Bahamas base

**The boatbuilding industry in Cape Town is mirroring international trends, with a general consolidation in the market**

the South African boatbuilding model of doing everything in-house means there is a significant lead time involved in getting a factory up and running. With the more decentralised model in Europe, the brand can quickly get subcontractors on board and outsource entire departments, such as cabinetry or marine electronics.

Xquisite Yachts has also adapted its sales model. It has a dedicated base in the Bahamas and operates a concierge service, giving a two-year warranty to the client, with a paid service plan available following that term.

Like the car industry, Xquisite follows up with suppliers and component manufacturers on behalf of the client. This has meant the boatbuilder can monitor the after-sales service of its suppliers firsthand to see if they are providing quality service and whether they honour their

commitments (warranties). The boatbuilder also tracks which suppliers cost the company the most money in terms of direct costs and time.

**Specialised labour**

The expansion of a specialised sector inevitably encounters challenges. Since the 1980s, South Africa has been at the forefront of composite catamaran construction, but the workforce skilled in this domain is ageing. A critical shortage of proficient artisans persists, particularly in attracting younger individuals to occupy factory floor positions within the marine sector.

Recognising the industry's significance, most factories have initiated in-house training initiatives to assimilate unemployed school leavers and equip them for careers in the field.

**Xquisite Yachts has experienced an increase in the demand for power catamarans – popular with older couples and new entrants to the market**

**Next gen multihull owners**

Anton du Toit, from Du Toit Yacht Design, is South Africa's foremost multihull designer and naval architect. In terms of trends, he highlights the increasing popularity of power catamarans, performance cruising multihulls and larger catamarans.

Many changes have been made in catamaran hull designs to improve efficiencies and performance and the industry has witnessed a significant increase in demand for larger catamarans as they lend themselves to more customisation.

As younger buyers enter the market, they are spending money on additional performance enhancing extras such as carbon fibre, rigs and expensive sails. Shifts in interior design trends also dovetail with the rise in younger owners and new entrants to the catamaran market with many of these customers desiring the yachting experience to meet the same high standards as shore-based lifestyles.

**Multihull legacy**

As a nation adept at overcoming challenges posed by power blackouts, port inefficiencies,

**South Africa is resolute in advancing its multihull legacy, with catamarans firmly established as the cornerstone of the boatbuilding industry.**

or the ageing demographic of skilled artisans, the South African marine industry remains poised to innovate and discover solutions.

South Africa is resolute in advancing its multihull legacy, with catamarans firmly established as the cornerstone of its boatbuilding industry.

South Africa currently stands as a dominant force within the burgeoning segments of the global multihull market – charter yachts, power catamarans, and performance cruisers. ■

Veda Pretorius is the GMBA chairperson.

[www.gmba.blue](http://www.gmba.blue)

