

P R O F I L E

MAN WITH THE

# PLANS

MALCOLM MCKEON SPLIT FROM THE NOW DEFUNCT DUBOIS NAVAL ARCHITECTS FOLLOWING THE FINANCIAL CRISIS. OFFERING REFRESHING NEW DESIGN IDEAS, HE'S NOW IN DEMAND AND HIS FIRST TWO YACHTS ARE AFLOAT. **DAVID GLENN** REPORTS.











Salperton III was the first Dubois yacht with a completely flush deck forward of the deck saloon, doing away with 'the pickle fork'

"Things became difficult between us and it was time to move on," says McKeon. But setting up his own design business wasn't really his intention because in some ways he was weary of the demands of the superyachting environment. "I thought about being a petrol pump attendant down at the Lymington Yacht Haven," he said through a grin, but once on his own a number of former clients moved quickly to employ him.

New Zealander Neville Crichton, who made a fortune importing cars and had built a string of yachts at the now defunct Alloy Yachts to Dubois designs, had worked closely with McKeon and was particularly keen for him the complete work on his latest yacht, the 46m *Feadship Como*.

Almost before he knew it Malcolm McKeon Yacht Design Ltd was up and running. Today, since the death of Ed Dubois at the age of 63 from pancreatic cancer in March 2016, McKeon's company has all but taken the place of Dubois Naval Architects (DNA) following the latter's liquidation earlier this year.

One of the contributory factors leading to the split with DNA was a reluctance by Dubois himself to break new design ground, according to McKeon. He said there was a mood of conservatism, perhaps not surprising after such a long run at the top. But in McKeon's new freedom he realised there were real opportunities driven by clients looking for individualism and clever design. In short, he was ready to break the mould.

Some of his thinking had, however, been evident while he was working with Dubois, the remarkable 66m *Aglaia* being a clear manifestation of McKeon's desire to use glass and further



This aerial view of *Salperton III* clearly shows the clean deck forward of the saloon superstructure



The 66m *Aglaia* demonstrates the effectiveness of using glass in the superstructure

streamline design. A photograph of her adorns an entire wall of his office in Lymington, McKeon selecting her as a stand-out yacht among the many he designed at DNA. The yacht's almost semi-circular superstructure windows allow occupants of the deck saloon to enjoy the seascape to port or starboard even with the yacht heeled hard.

He also identifies Barry Houghton's *Salperton III* and *IV* as breakthroughs in styling with a sleeker look, lower freeboard and a more sophisticated, integrated use of glass in the superstructure. *Salperton III* was the first Dubois yacht with a completely flush deck forward of the deck saloon, doing away with what was known as 'the pickle fork', the long systems housings which typically extended forward to beyond amidships. According to McKeon, they were ugly and they had to go!



## SUPERYACHT CATS

For most sailors brought up on monohulls, the very prospect of catamaran sailing, particularly catamaran cruising, is hard to accept. Malcolm McKeon felt the same until he went on a family holiday on a catamaran in the British Virgin Islands. He loved it!

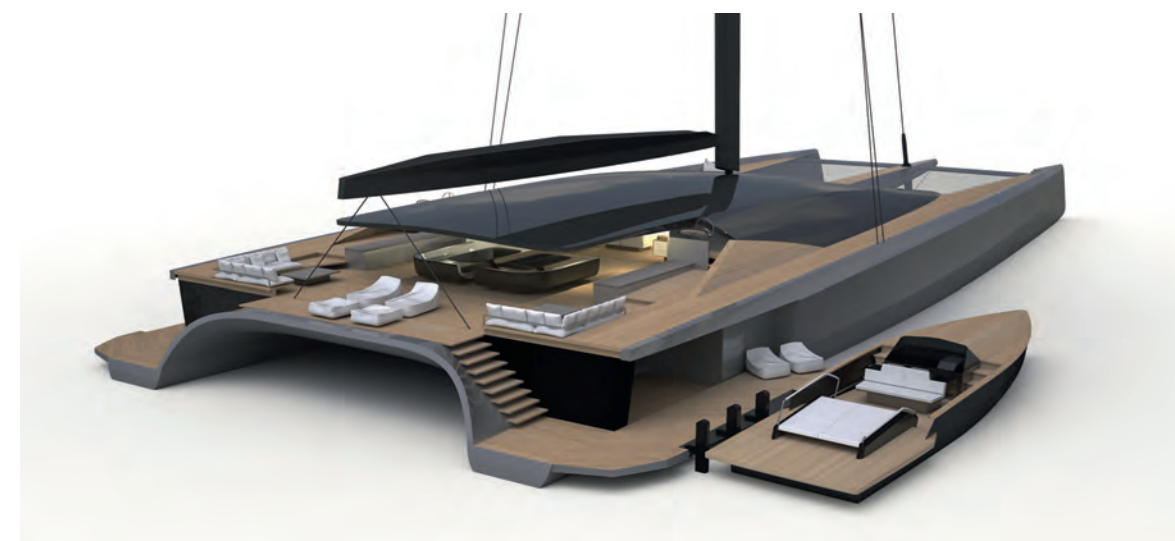
So the idea of a luxury multihull wasn't totally foreign when multihull guru and Olympic medallist Mitch Booth approached him with the idea of a super-cat. BlackCat is a project taking shape with well advanced 50m and 35m proposals.

The oft-quoted advantages of a stable platform, lack of

rolling at rest thus a wider choice of anchorages and potentially higher speeds, all apply.

At these sizes there is no alternative to building in carbon if performance is required, which it is for BlackCat, a design intended to reach 30 knots and fly a hull despite her projected displacement of 190 tons. In reality the yacht is designed to sail at more than 20 knots at just 6 degrees of heel.

The sheer space, comfort and high degree of luxury offered is genuinely appealing, although it comes at an eye-watering cost largely due to the scale of the carbon structure.



McKeon's first commission, the MM330 *Missy*, was for a European client to whom he was introduced at the Düsseldorf boat show in 2013. The client owned a Swan and wanted something larger, but was unable to find what he was looking for with Nautor.

*Missy* is designed exclusively for family cruising with a lifting keel, no bowsprit and an easily managed rig and sailplan. The semi-raised saloon is adjacent to a large galley in which the owner enjoys indulging his passion for cooking. The entire open plan area benefits from natural light provided by the curved glass deck saloon superstructure, or canopy. The glass extends to the deck saloon aft bulkhead including the companionway door, so the view from the saloon is panoramic. "It provides the connection between the accommodation and the sea," said McKeon.

An automatic, fold-down bimini, which stows in recesses in the canopy, extends almost to the aft end of the main cockpit. The owner insists that people sitting at the dining table must always be out of the sun, particularly their backs, a scenario many will recognise. The problem was solved aboard *Missy*, partly by the bimini and partly by positioning the table and seating as close to the centreline as possible.

Designed for cruising, *Missy* looks fast – her all carbon composite construction providing a weight advantage over aluminium. In addition her 90mm, extra thick carbon sandwich hull shell not only helps sound insulation, but because it forms an almost monocoque structure, the need for space hungry internal bulkheads is reduced, simplifying fit-out for the accommodation designer, in this case Design Unlimited.





Ribelle shows off the distinctive hull chine at her launch in Monaco. Her accommodation is finished in copper

Ribelle's most striking feature, apart from the de rigeur glass deck saloon canopy, is a chine running the entire length of the topsides

McKeon's eye for aesthetics is evident on both transoms of his first two boats. He extends the laid decking over the toerail and onto the transom in an attempt to break up the visual expanse of the wide stern. It's a neat detail, which has caught the eye of pundits and clients but has yet to adopt a name. We agreed that 'teak waterfall' didn't quite work...

His second yacht, *Ribelle*, has been built for an Italian client McKeon first met at DNA. Together they developed *Zefira*, a 50m sloop, at the time the longest Dubois design without a flybridge. She had a superb Remi Tessier-designed interior and the same team was duly assembled for *Ribelle*.

The project started as a considerably larger yacht of 51m and a full set of drawings and costings were submitted for a six-way competition to win the commission. McKeon's work was selected, but the client decided to scale down to something more manageable.

The outcome is the MM325 *Ribelle*, a fascinating looking yacht of which the most striking feature, apart

from the *de rigeur* glass deck saloon canopy, is a chine running the entire length of the topsides. McKeon explains that the forward section is purely aesthetic to break up the visual effect of the considerable expanse of freeboard.



## THE EARLY DAYS

Born in Edinburgh while his parents were home on leave from East Africa, Malcolm McKeon enjoyed an unusual, globetrotting childhood with his brother and sister.

After leaving Africa and abandoning a search for a family farm project near the Mediterranean, his father, a civil servant, was posted to Fiji where Malcolm attended Suva grammar school and learned to sail in a P Class, the popular New Zealand training dinghy. "I remember I couldn't sail upwind because no one told me to pull in the mainsheet, but I ended up messing about in dinghies which I really loved," said Malcolm.

His mother, a keen artist who painted wherever they travelled and became well known internationally under the name Kitty Burns, inspired Malcolm, taught him the importance of proportion and always encouraged the children to paint.

Their next posting was to Hong Kong, a total change and a shock to the system. Malcolm soon started sailing at the Royal Hong Kong Yacht Club where they raced a fleet of Dragons. He remembers being in awe of the city's dramatic, new architecture, much of it in glass.

It was here as a teenager that he first encountered Ed Dubois through local lawyer Bill Turnbull, who owned the Bob Miller/Ben Lexcen designed 48-footer *Ceil V* aboard which Malcolm crewed. At this point Hong Kong businessman David Lieu, who was later to own a number of yachts called *Vanguard*, came onto the scene announcing he wanted to take part in the Admiral's Cup. Ed Dubois got the job of designing his first yacht.

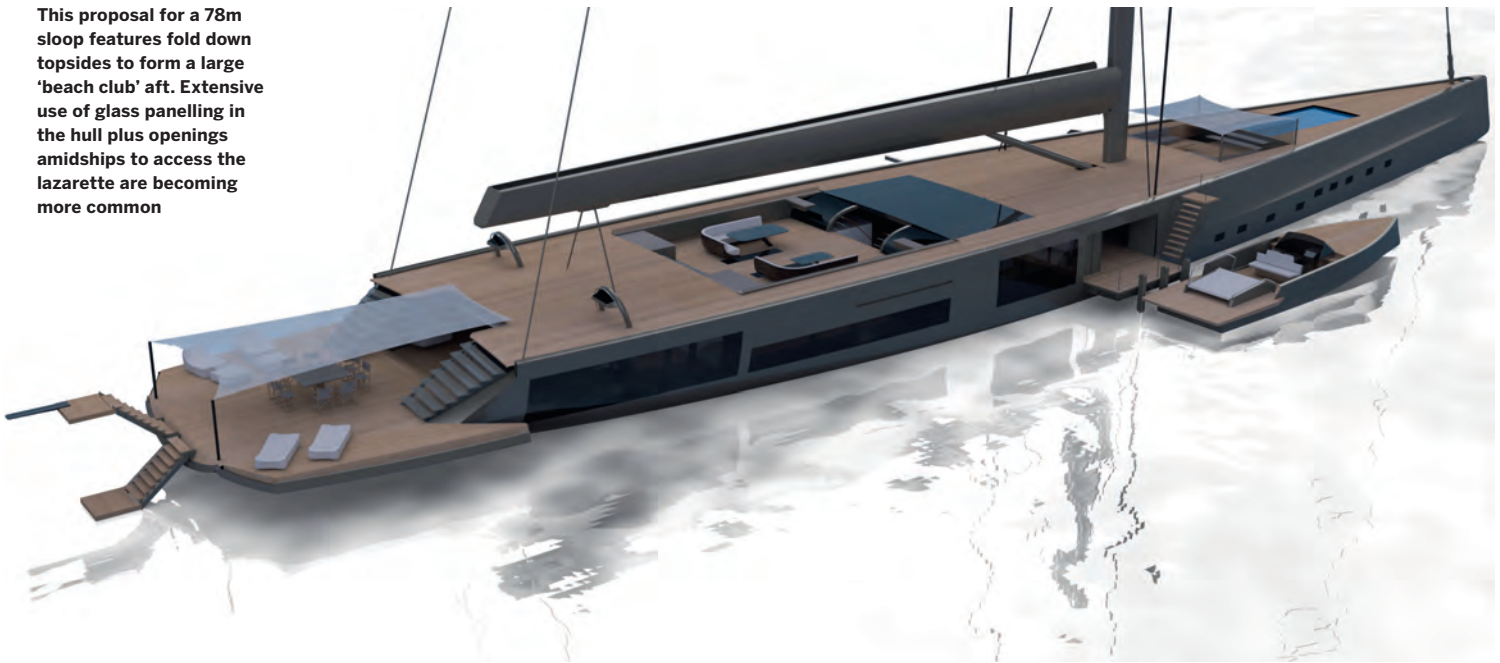
On the day that Malcolm finished his last A Level in Hong Kong in 1977, he flew to England for the first time in his life to take part in the Admiral's Cup aboard *Vanguard*. He was 18.

He later went on to complete an HND course in naval architecture at what is now Solent University and in the holidays did occasional work for Ed Dubois, who had by then set up on his own. It was the beginning of a relationship that lasted more than half their lives.

Today, Malcolm and his wife, Joanna, who have six children including four from Malcolm's previous marriage, manage to find time to race their 1932 Westmacott gaffer *Windflower* (pictured top) out of Lymington.



**This proposal for a 78m sloop features fold down topsides to form a large 'beach club' aft. Extensive use of glass panelling in the hull plus openings amidships to access the lazarette are becoming more common**



As the chine runs aft its purpose becomes more practical working in conjunction with what is a relatively narrow waterline beam right aft. From the waterline, the hull flares outboard to meet the chine. McKeon explains that a narrow waterline beam aft is desirable to stop the stern being pushed up and the yacht taking on a bows down attitude when sailing, something not uncommon in older, large sailing yachts. The flare is then designed in to maintain what he calls 'real estate' – valuable hull volume and deck space – before meeting the chine and taking the line of the topsides up to deck level.

A reverse or 'dreadnought' stem angle maximises waterline length for speed and a great deal of time has been spent refining deck detail including a carefully recessed self tacking working jib track and locating the jib furler almost entirely below the deck. A bridle-style sheeting system for the blade jib avoids the need for expensive and unsightly tracks and cars. A foldover anchor system and a lift keel reducing draft from 6m to 4m are other notable features.

The MM341 is a new *Liara* for Micheldever Tyre Services founder and experienced yachtsman Tony Todd. The yacht will be an all carbon sloop for global cruising and is slightly more conservative in style, Todd eschewing extensive use of glass and not opting for the decking treatment on the transom.

The yacht is currently building at Baltic Yachts in Finland which together with the Vitters subsidiary Green Marine in the UK, and YDL in Auckland, are the only viable options for those

**The new *Liara* is currently under construction at Baltic Yachts. Her owner has specified less glass than many recent designs**



who want to build in carbon fibre. McKeon says he needs no convincing of the benefits of building in the material but warns of a potential shortage of yard space.

Currently out to tender are an aluminium 40m sloop which has an all-glass fixed canopy and a lift keel, and a 68m aluminium flybridge ketch which has an infinity pool built into the 'beach club' formed by a fold out stern platform and hinged panels in both topsides which lower to the horizontal.

This and other features are evident in a 78m proposal for another client who followed McKeon from DNA. Although it has since been decided to reduce the yacht's size to 72m, the 78m version (above) shows what can now be achieved in a large sloop.

Three completely separate relaxation areas are available on deck. The stern platform with its topside extensions can be equipped with a diving board, a full blown dive centre including a decompression chamber and an array of other watersports equipment. The only restriction on 'toys' is space.

The main cockpit forms another comfortable area in which to relax and the foredeck can be designed with a large tender well which converts to a pool when the boat has been launched. Awnings, cushions and mattresses can turn it into a sunbathing area, work-out space or a mini-dining area.

"Owners are getting younger and increasingly designers need to cater for children," points out McKeon. It's a prospect which demands a different approach to yacht design. McKeon and his team are clearly leading the way.

