



Nigel Ingram, left, and Peter Wilson recognise the many challenges of yacht construction

CAREER DETAILS

► **Nigel Ingram:** has spent most of his life involved in professional yachting, first as a racing sailor and subsequently as a yacht captain travelling extensively all over the world. British-born, Ingram settled in Newport, Rhode Island (US), and as captain he oversaw the construction of several sailing yachts which implanted the idea for MCM. During this time he also took over a small boatbuilding company in Newport, building and refitting yachts.

► **Peter Wilson:** Prior to the establishment of MCM, Peter Wilson crewed on yachts, working his way up from crew to captain, sailing tens of thousands of miles spanning the world's oceans. He raced in the grand prix maxi circuit and took part in seven America's Cup campaigns in roles ranging from boatbuilder and shore manager to technology and design director. He learnt the boatbuilding trade when he joined Newport Offshore as fabricator/welder building 12m yachts for the America's Cup and IOR racing yachts.

Photo: Carlo Draisci/ Anchovy Luxury

Nigel Ingram & Peter Wilson

Founders and co-owners | Marine Construction Management

The founders and co-owners of the Rhode Island-based yacht construction management firm MCM talk about the challenges of building yachts for owners worldwide

INTERVIEWED BY MURIELLE GONZALEZ OISEL

As they talk about the various yacht constructions both have overseen in the past 25 years at the helm of Marine Construction Management (MCM) Newport, the easy rapport between them becomes evident. Nigel Ingram and Peter Wilson, founders and co-owners of the company, share a passion for being at sea and the conviction that it takes a team's work to realise the owner's vision for a yacht.

They present the vigorous and enthusiastic face of the company and, in their smart chinos and casual pullovers, come across as businesslike, efficient and approachable.

Wilson and Ingram explain that they started in the early days of the superyacht industry, when new builds were in the 18m-21m range (60ft-70ft). These were complicated projects for the time and very quickly they realised that due to the busy schedule of owners there was a need for them to have someone to look after these boats while construction was under way. "I think we were probably the first company to be project managers for the construction of yachts," Wilson comments.

Few designers were very sympathetic to the idea of having a third party overseeing projects. Based on the know-how both gained from sailing and building boats, Wilson and Ingram could provide valuable input



**Ingram and Wilson
photographed by the
Thames in London**

appreciated by professionals in the industry. Bill Langam, who was working at Sparkman & Stephens at the time, but subsequently opened his own company, was very supportive of their venture to the point that he worked with MCM on various new builds, including *SV Spirit of Bermuda*, *S/Y Angel* and the motoryachts *Calliope* and *Cassiopeia*, to name a few.

Newport was a strategic location for these British-born entrepreneurs. Yachting was buoyant along the east coast, particularly from Maine to New York, and owners, yacht designers, naval architects and shipyards were all in the area. At that time Newport also served as the location of the America's Cup creating more buzz.

The company is now global. A staff of 11 people look after projects around the world, including clients in Australia, Germany, England, Italy and even Chile. A satellite office in Amsterdam and a location in New Zealand help handling projects worldwide a bit easier. Nigel Ingram looks after construction in European yards while Peter Wilson commutes to New Zealand where he oversees the projects in the region.

Fulfil expectations

Yacht construction management is MCM's core business, but a yacht management division, launched in early 2000, is also making waves in the industry. The unit,

boats go racing. Indeed both have been sailing onboard *Lionheart*, *Marie*, *Wavelength*, *Lady B*, *Marae* and *Heroina*. They have also been racing *Kokomo* a 59m sailing yacht whose construction was overseen by MCM.

It comes as no surprise that sailing boats feature prominently in MCM's portfolio. The company's sailing and boatbuilding background is well known in the yachting world and clients have always come from industry connections. However, having to find new clients by word of mouth is, at the same time, challenging. Owners' expectations are high and in order to fulfil the client's dream yacht Wilson and Ingram are fully devoted to delivering successful projects.

Once the contract is signed the task of putting the pieces together begins. Chances are that either the owner is very knowledgeable about sailing and has a clear vision of what he wants or quite the opposite, in which case Ingram and Wilson's expertise play a vital role. "The key thing is that no matter what their

TO THE POINT

What has been the most challenging project to date?

Wilson: There have been many, but I would say the 59m *Kokomo*. At the time it was the tallest carbon fibre mast and the biggest spinnaker in the world, with a 130t lifting keel, so there were a lot of world firsts and technical challenges. The build time-frame was fixed in the contract, but to develop the systems and features in a way that suited the owner was challenging. The result was a spectacular sailing boat, a very happy customer and a shipyard that survived along the way.

What is your ideal yacht?

Ingram: We see a lot of performance cruiser projects. If I was an owner I would build myself a nice cruising boat that wouldn't go racing, or a race boat that wouldn't go cruising. I

think it would be an interesting approach, but nobody wants two yachts. There are compromises between what must go on down below in terms of luxury and comfort, weight and so on, and what must go on deck in terms of performance. They are very expensive, complicated projects and I wonder whether we would be better off building a race boat.

Which boat shows are your biggest priorities?

Wilson: We always exhibit at the Monaco Yacht Show and we make quite a big presentation there. We also go to the Fort Lauderdale show as it's quite a big event and because we're an American company, even though we have a European presence. We also visit the METS trade show in Amsterdam every year.
Ingram: When we have boats that we've been involved in the build

on display at the Monaco show, that is helpful. It gives us a more meaningful idea of what we can do to a very good audience.

What stage of the construction excites you the most?

Wilson: There are two things that excite me. One is when the boat is launched and you go sailing and motoring for the first time. It's an emotional moment and it really gets to me. Following on from that is having a satisfied customer; you can't beat that, that's a complete reward.

Do you have a particular yard that you favour?

Ingram: I don't think so. It would be very exciting to work with a yard that I haven't worked with before, but it's not about what we prefer — it's about matching a project to the yard and an owner. It's not like five years ago

knowledge level is, time availability or whatever, you need to involve an owner in a project as much as you can and keep them interested, enjoying the prospect of the boat slowly coming to them,” explains Ingram.

With over 25 years of experience at sea they have learnt to navigate in rough waters and consequently know how to stay cool under pressure — particularly when dealing with any issues that might arise in the middle of the construction process. The MCM partners confess that there are situations where the owner has a vision of something he wants that may not be easy or practical to realise, but as project managers they have to come up with a solution. Ingram explains: “We understand what the owner wants and we need to explain what the constraints are, not to hide anything, but to be very clear about the challenges. Building a boat is very much a team’s work, so we try to develop a way to give the feature the owner wants in a way that’s going to work for everybody.”

Preventing projects running into major issues is really a case of picking the right team, including designer, naval architect and shipyard, but also a fair amount of planning and experience. “Yachts have grown in size, sophistication and complexity, so we have grown along with them to a point where we can bring planning and experience to each project,” Wilson notes.

Owners have also become more environmentally conscious and that has changed the way yachts are being built. In the early days it was barely given a thought, but eco-friendly features are coming up more often during the design stage. Peter Wilson explains: “In

the selection of wood, for example, owners want to make sure that it’s a plantation timber in many cases, not cutting down old teak trees. In terms of the horsepower, we’ve been forced (by regulation) to change anyway but owners want engines that have controlled emissions. I think they are becoming much more concerned about their yachting and sensitive towards the environment.”

Safety onboard is a feature that owners have also started to look at beyond regulation despite compromising costs or weight. “If we can provide safer working environments for our crews working on ever cleaner and greener yachts then clearly that’s of great benefit whichever angle you look at it from,” says Wilson as he explains that projects are matched to the LYC3 and the latest MLC rules. “Once we all understood

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the implications for new-builds the adherence to them is not too onerous and most aspects get incorporated at the design stage. Owners typically don’t like crew turnover. A happy crew working on a well-founded yacht will stay longer,” he notes.

Bigger and faster

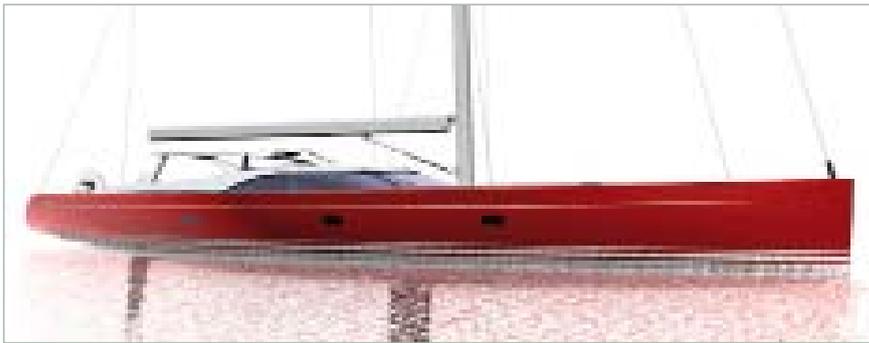
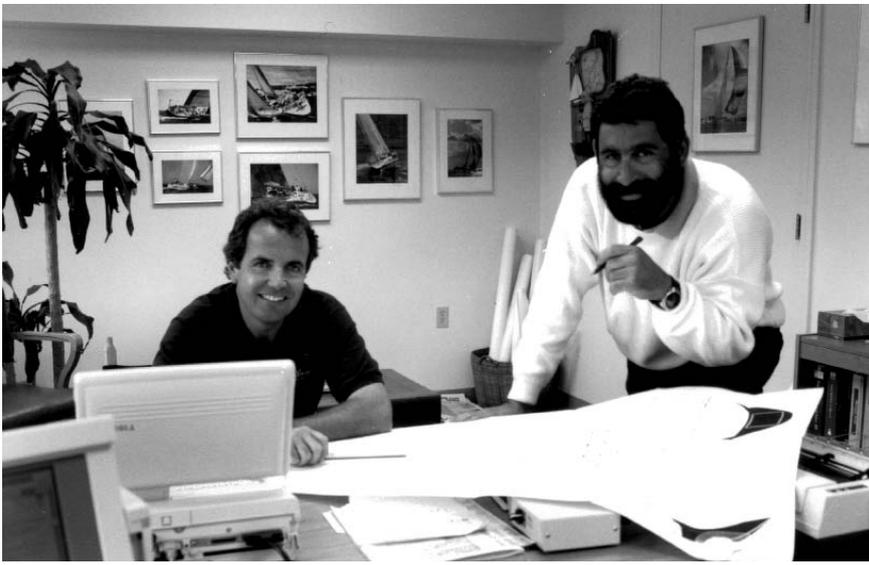
Certainly the size of the boats is one of the biggest changes in the industry. A 60- or 65-footer was considered a pretty big yacht when MCM started, but building a 60m yacht is relatively routine nowadays especially in the motoryacht market. However that’s not so much the case in the sailing yacht market. Ingram comments: “The size of sailing boats is stabilising or getting a little bit smaller. There was a period of time when each project seemed to be bigger than the other. I think maybe for financial reasons and also because maybe with smaller boats you get a slightly better feel of sailing.” Ingram adds that today’s trend is for boats in the 100-125ft size range where owners want to build in carbon fibre. “There was nothing like that 25 years ago. Although it is a more expensive way to build, you certainly get more performance, and I think that trend is coming steadily.”

Construction in composite material has found its place in the industry since performance has been a trend. Traditionally, motoryachts have been built with a steel hull and aluminium superstructure and sailing yachts in aluminium, but that’s changing thanks to the lightweight and speed qualities it provides. “There is definitely a trend towards composite materials, which has taken longer than I anticipated that it would,” comments Wilson. “There are quite a few motoryachts that are now built out of fibreglass and composites compared to a few years ago. I think that trend will continue for many reasons, one of them is maintenance — obviously there are corrosion issues with steel and aluminium that you won’t have with composite materials,” he explains. 



Ingram and Wilson: a project management partnership

when you couldn’t find a place or a good yard, so you looked outside the mainstream to yards with slots available. Now the industry is getting a little bit smaller, so you tend to go to the same yards. But as I said, it’s not about our preference at all; it’s about what suits the project the best.



Above: Ingram and Wilson in 1989 in the early days of MCM. Below: a 35m performance cruising sloop designed by Judel/Vrolijk

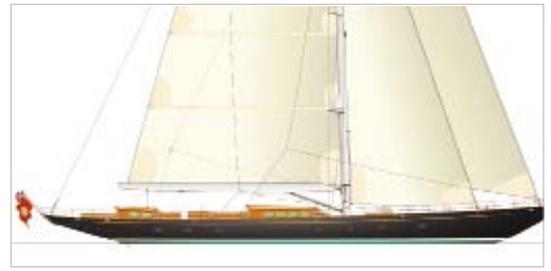
The matching game

MCM is currently overseeing five yachts under construction and performance is a recurring specification in at least three of them. It seems that owners want to have a better yachting experience and fun onboard, but that also comes as a result of what superyacht regattas like the Bucket tour have done to the market. "There are a lot of superyacht regattas around the world and these owners are successful people, most of them are leaders in their field, and they also like to be leaders when they go racing. So there is a trend towards performance, not just for racing, but I think people realised that performing in a nice sailing yacht is a lot of fun," Ingram says.

Choosing the designer and the shipyard to build a

It's not about wanting to become big, it's about having nice projects with good people and hopefully happy clients at the end of it

yacht is also part of the role Peter Wilson and Nigel Ingram play as project managers. The task follows quite smoothly once the vision of the yacht has been agreed. There are a small group of yards that have the capacity to build a certain type of project. "There would be a small group of shipyards building a 60m sailing yacht around the world that have the availability to do it, let's say five. Two of them might be too busy or the owner wouldn't be able to have the boat in the time he wants it, so then we would be talking to three," Peter Wilson explains. The shipyard would compete for the work and MCM would pick the best one, which in some cases is not necessarily the cheapest. "It might be the one that the owner has a good feeling about or the one that had built that type of boat before and the yard acquitted



The Andre Hoek designed 47.6m sloop Wisp, MCM's first collaboration with Royal Huisman

itself with that kind of project very well. It is quite an interesting process," he explains.

Royal Huisman had been on MCM's shortlist for quite sometime but had not been signed until the construction of *Wisp*, a 47.6m classic sloop designed by Andre Hoek, came into Ingram's hands. "It's a fabulous looking boat and the first sailing yacht for an experienced yacht owner" he explains. "The project went down to several different yards and in the end the contract was signed with Royal Huisman. It was really the owner who wanted to build the boat with them." *Wisp* features a carbon composite Rondal mast and her interiors are designed by Rhoades Young. She was launched in February.

A 35m performance cruising sloop designed by Judel/Vrolijk with interiors by Nauta Design is under construction at Baltic Yachts with delivery later in 2014. The brief is for a cruising boat with emphasis in comfort and safety. Ingram, who is overseeing the construction, explains: "The boat has been setup with a big safe cockpit and all of the sailing action happens a little bit away from that. It has captive winches, which are normal on slightly bigger boats, but is a bit unusual on boats of this size, again with the idea of safety in mind. She is going to be a special colour; the owner is a car enthusiast so the yacht is going to be painted in an Alfa Romeo red."

Expansion plans

Every new build signed by MCM is spearheaded personally by either Ingram or Wilson. Both like the relationship with the owner to be on a one-to-one basis and that's why the yacht construction unit of the company is not likely to expand. "If we could have more project managers we would be managing them and not managing the projects, so it's not about wanting to become big, it's about having nice projects with good people and hopefully happy clients at the end of it," explains Wilson. He adds that they do have expansion plans for the yacht management division. The aim is to manage all of the boats that have been built with MCM. As time goes on there are more and more of these yachts coming in to that part of the company, but also the number of yachts under management that have been built elsewhere is increasing.

"People ask why we haven't got bigger, but we turn the question around. I think that's the strength of us and it's probably what sets us apart a little bit," Ingram concludes. **S3**