



Conquer the open ocean with classical elegance

With a contagious passion for sailing and a profound love for timeless classics, Olivier van Meer is one of the most prolific and outspoken naval architects in the Netherlands. Known for its sailing yachts that cross the world's seven seas, Olivier van Meer Design – or OVM for short – has much to offer to seasoned sailors who cannot bear to stay ashore for too long.

TEXT: MYRIAM GWYNNED DIJCK | PHOTOS: OLIVIER VAN MEER

"We attract people who really want to sail," explains van Meer. "Many want to be out on the sea for months on end, if not permanently, so our ships often end up going on long trips. Designing show yachts that only leave the harbour a few times a year is not quite our cup of tea."

A multifaceted skillset

Apart from completely new builds, OVM also does restorations, makeovers and refurbishments of existing ships. The emphasis is on classical design but its current portfolio ranges from small yachts to impressive, four-masted clippers. Their fleet even includes a polar expedition

cruiser, large aluminium luxury boats and everything in between.

"I personally have a strong interest in classic and timeless shapes and this is reflected in our customer base. While we

specialise in sailing yachts, some people will specifically ask us to draw them a motor yacht. Somehow, we always create a distinctive outline that mirrors our love for classical ships," he says.



Having sailed his whole life, it was a natural career progression for Van Meer to start his own company in 1985. In his late teens, he became a licensed captain and as soon as he hit 25 he had already clocked 100,000 miles out on the sea.

The youngest licensed captain in the Netherlands

"I was actually born on board a sailboat, as my parents lived on a ship. At 18, I became the youngest licensed captain in the Netherlands. This was quite unusual, but it was simply my way of making a living," he recalls. "In fact, until recently I still lived on a boat, but now that the family has expanded somewhat we've decided to move ashore."

Extensive sailing experience is a key requirement for everyone working at OVM. van Meer believes this is an important factor that sets them apart from the competition.

"We have a team of very skilled and experienced people, who are all very good at what they do and can work autonomously. Having a background in sailing makes it easier to understand and implement feedback from owners or captains so we can continue to improve our boats."

This drive to learn and improve also extends towards the production process. From start to finish, OVM closely monitors and directs its projects and always keeps a close watch during construction. "At the shipyard we act as the owner's representative so we're confronted with the way things are put together," van Meer continues. "I tell my team to imagine hanging upside down in the ship while putting the engine in – will there be enough room? We always listen out for advice from mechanics to help them speed up their work by adjusting our designs."

Functional ships with traditional elegance

One thing van Meer will never do is create a futuristic, hyper-fashionable super yacht – and he is not afraid to say it. "It just isn't something we're interested in. It's part of our company values to create functional ships with traditional elegance but using



TOP AND RIGHT: OVM is known for creating some of the most advanced sailing yachts around and prides itself on their gracious, classic designs. LEFT: Olivier van Meer (left) with his "right hand" Arjen Keer during trials of one of their recent projects.

the most modern materials and technical systems. The fact that most of them happen to have sails stems from our deep rooted passion for these ships."

Characteristic for an OVM design is their practical technical layout, so a ship can be used, maintained and enjoyed in the long run. Van Meer says: "Space is always limited. Some clients want us to squeeze in as many features as physically possible, but in terms of construction, or worse still, in case of emergency maintenance, this could lead to big problems. We build for intensive use so we keep it functional."

Work at OVM consists of three tiers; firstly it has its own production boats like the brands Puffin and Zaca. "Think of them like our house wines. These are a popular, tried and tested yachts that are ready to

go or alternatively can be customized on request."

Secondly, clients can come to OVM with their own ideas to design a bespoke ship. Van Meer comments: "I will almost always visit these clients at home so I can see how they live and what they're interested in. Usually, after only a few hours into the first conversation, I tend to have a very good idea what they're after."

Lastly, designs can be made following a fixed list of demands like speed, length, capacity and budget. "This may sound a little unromantic but that's how it works, mainly for commercial projects. When the design is finished, we'll pitch these to the client and hopefully they find a connection with our style and philosophy."

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