

Big Fish

What happens when an owner with bold ideas commissions a 45-metre to venture where few have gone before? Diane M. Byrne





Below: A skylight forward of the sundeck dining area lets in plenty of light below. Left: The custom-built tender Triple Ripple rises out of its garage complete with crane and a large section of the foredeck. This page, far left: Fold-down balconies maximise usable space. Facing page, top left and right: The raised 'pod' is an ideal place from which to take in an anchorage. Bottom left: The sundeck and foredeck have plenty of room for relaxation.



You know, I'm the guy who's going to be hiding in the hyperbaric chamber when they arrive in Antarctica." So says Greg Marshall, principal of Gregory C. Marshall Naval Architect, regarding the 45-metre *Big Fish*. "Intensely involved" in her design and engineering, Marshall is quick with a smile when talking about the luxury expedition vessel that left him simultaneously exhausted and excited at the end of her three-year plan and build process.

He's kidding, of course, about hiding out in the hyperbaric chamber. But if he had his way, he'd be on board *Big Fish* for all of her ambitious upcoming trips. Besides the vast white continent encompassing the South Pole, these include the formerly impassable but no less challenging North East Passage. Warm-weather destinations like the Amazon are on *Big Fish's* itinerary, too – an itinerary that has seen her cover more than 10,000 miles to date of a polar circumnavigation.

To say that *Big Fish* is different from other expedition yachts is an understatement. She looks different, from her edgy styling to her unusual stone decks (yes, stone). She performs differently, from her miserly fuel economy to her ability to handle an impromptu party in any of several spots on board. Above all, she was commissioned to make her owner and guests feel different. They're meant to enjoy barefoot luxury, yet don't have to remove their shoes, and they don't have to hesitate putting a drink glass down on a piece of furniture. In sum, she's a yacht for the spontaneous, polo-shirt set, not for the 12-piece Louis Vuitton set.

Big Fish sprang from the imagination of Richard Beattie, a Hong Kong-based yachtsman who owned an 85-footer and had chartered a number of yachts. In researching existing superyachts a few years ago, he was disappointed. He felt there was a proliferation of wedding-cake yachts: level after level of white superstructure. Their styling simply wasn't distinctive enough, and while some permitted long-range cruising, none – in his estimation – stirred excitement or a sense of adventure. The same held true for the handful of expedition yachts on the market. Beattie couldn't find anything embodying what he wanted.



Guests are WELCOME to wear their FINEST hard-heeled shoes on deck

Exterior & interior photos: Neil Robinson

Thankfully, that changed upon meeting Marshall and his design team at the Monaco Yacht Show four years ago. Sympathetic spirits, they accepted his challenge of creating something that looked and acted special. It boiled down to a yacht capable of being independent for three months or more in the remote islands of the Pacific, where you're more apt to drop anchor with no one else and no fuel dock in sight. The yacht also needed to house a substantial tender, one sturdy enough for encountering the chop that so often accompanies exploring Pacific Ocean islands and reefs.

It took the better part of a year to finalise the technical and decorative details. Some styling elements were borrowed from *VvSI*, a 34-metre designed by Marshall. Like *VvSI*, *Big Fish*'s lines are more squared off than soft, making her look ready for a challenge. But *Big Fish*'s full-displacement hull is more stoutly engineered, given the intention to explore Antarctic waters ("near ice-floes but not in them," Marshall says). The yacht further carries 92,000 litres of fuel, which Marshall says is 40 per cent more than the capacity of other yachts this size. With twin Caterpillar 3508B mains, *Big Fish* is said to burn only 275 litres per hour at 15 knots, just shy of her 16-knot top end. At a leisurely 10 knots, she should burn 120 litres per hour with estimated ranges of 5,000 and 7,700 miles respectively.

Credit for *Big Fish*'s performance clearly also goes to her builder, McMullen & Wing. Marshall recommended the New Zealand yard, having known its principals for some time and feeling confident in the craftsmen's technical acumen. In the 1980s, McMullen & Wing was among the first yacht builders in New Zealand to use aluminium, for example, and has launched a number of innovative motor and sailing yachts. There's *Jariya*, a 45-knot composite-and-aluminium motor yacht delivered in 1985. There's also *Ermis*², an even speedier (55-plus knots) motor yacht from 2007 constructed of vacuum-infused carbon fibre. Both projects garnered International Superyacht Society Design Awards.

While *Big Fish* is outfitted with several innovations, such as floor-to-ceiling panes of curved glass along her superstructure, one of the biggest was the tender garage. Located forward, it has an overhead hatch that rises up like an elevator to reveal *Triple Ripple*, the 8.7-metre aluminium dayboat/dive-boat. *Triple Ripple* couldn't be stowed in the typical spot aft, since side compartments were already dedicated to kayaks and other toys. The foredeck hatch rises a few metres so that *Triple Ripple* can be launched with the assistance of a dedicated davit. (On a related note, in the event of an emergency the hatch can support touch-and-go helicopter operations when flush with the deck.)

Interestingly, *Triple Ripple* actually dictated everything about *Big Fish*, as Beattie commissioned her first. He wanted a tender that was the antithesis of the ones he'd ridden in on charter. Too many left him sore after a day of zipping around in a chop, or left dive bottles rolling around. Designed by Marshall and built by McMullen & Wing, the all-aluminium *Triple Ripple* has an enclosed head, stowage for 12 dive bottles and fishing gear, and seating for 12. A reported 200-mile range means she can stay out all day and then some. "*Triple Ripple* is a real SUV of the seas," Beattie says proudly, "the most magnificent tender." He laughs upon further reflection, adding, "I needed *Big Fish*'s LOA because I needed that bloody great big tender!"

So what is it about the rest of *Big Fish* that makes her so special? Try being the first yacht to feature stone decking. Longer-lasting and more environmentally



Left: Richard Beattie wanted *Big Fish* to offer multiple places for dining. **Below:** A master tub with amazing views. **Middle:** Note the depth and slight outward bow to the windows, which enhance *Big Fish*'s distinctive styling. **Bottom:** This is the first stone-decked superyacht. **Facing page top and below:** The lack of artwork in the master suite and elsewhere means that the ocean views are the focus.





responsible than teak, the quarter-inch square granite slabs require less maintenance, including no sealant. They're essentially impervious to impact, too. Guests are welcome to wear their finest hard-heeled shoes while walking on it. Marshall relates the story of an evening in Tahiti when traditional dancers performing on the foredeck hit it with a machete: while sparks jumped from the impact, no damage occurred.

That same granite decking covers the fold-down balconies off each side of the dining area and the fold-down 'wings' surrounding the transom. No mere places to stand and watch the sunset, these platforms can support a table and chairs when Beattie or guests wish to enjoy an incomparable dining experience.

And when's the last time you were aboard a yacht with a video wall rising up two levels? It's forward of a set of floating stairs that fold up via an electric winch to improve the viewing experience from the saloon and dining area. Beattie and guests can use it to watch a movie or their favourite sporting event, and even display photos and video footage from the day's dive. (The dive-master among the crew is an accomplished photographer and there is extensive video equipment is aboard.) No need to leave the memories on the screen, either; guests are given a DVD when they depart.

Many of the images rotating during the yacht's debut at the Fort Lauderdale International Boat Show featured the crew partaking in the fun. There were photos of them in New Zealand, in Tahiti, and elsewhere along *Big Fish's* first 11,000-mile journey. Beattie wouldn't have it any other way. He says it's essential to have the crew "be part of the family... it's not an 'us and them' situation". In addition, each crew was thoroughly



Top: Window seating adds to the saloon's capacity and allows the yacht to host larger get-togethers. Above: Sliding doors to each side of the dining table, plus the fold-down balconies, really enhance the on-board experience.

Below: How many superyachts boast a full-beam galley? *Big Fish* has a designated preparation and serving area (below), a cooking area (bottom left), and even a country kitchen area perfect for breakfast (bottom right), where guests are encouraged to spend time. Not for nothing is *Big Fish's* chef one of the happiest you'll meet aboard a superyacht.



"The crew is part of the FAMILY. It's not an 'us and them' situation"





interviewed to ensure “each one of them brings plus, plus, plus” – extra skills, personally and professionally. “The crew is excited about Antarctica and the Amazon,” Beattie says, pausing for a moment before laughing and adding: “Well, who the hell wouldn’t be?”

Given how intensely personalised and detailed *Big Fish* is, it’s hard to imagine that Beattie planned to be mostly hands off during the design and build process. His enthusiasm likely got the better of him, as he ended up becoming far more involved – even more than most owners previously encountered by the build and design teams. “It was my greatest thrill to walk around and see it after talking about it for three years,” Beattie says of *Big Fish* and her amenities. The thrills aren’t done yet, as Beattie will be aboard for various parts of the polar circumnavigation, and he even has a sistership, *Star Fish*, in the works – which is, like *Big Fish*, overseen by the team at Aquos Yachts, a company formed to create the next generation of explorer yachts.

Sadly, there’s someone of great importance in Beattie’s life who will never have a chance to see *Big Fish*. The late Dan Wallace, an import/export businessman, was a friend and mentor. A backlit plaque located opposite the yacht’s dining table relates their friendship and how Wallace was “the entrepreneur, the traveller, a joker, a big man who touched everyone he met”. Wallace inspired his son, the novelist Daniel Wallace, to write *Big Fish: A Novel of Mythic Proportions*. The book, which also became the Tim Burton-directed movie *Big Fish*, tells the story of a dying father recounting fantastical stories of a fantastical life.

Oh, the stories he could have told if he’d encountered this yacht. **SYW**



Top: Beattie’s dislike of clutter translates into phones being hidden behind the lacquered panels in guest staterooms. **Top:** Since spaces had to be versatile, sliding walls mean that staterooms can become suites.



*She looks DIFFERENT.
She makes her owner and
guests FEEL different*



Left: The backlit TV screen opposite the steps tells the story of Beattie’s mentor and friend Dan Wallace. **Above:** *Big Fish*’s video wall rises up two decks.

THE SPECS *Big Fish*

Length overall 45.00m (147ft 7in)
 Waterline length 42.90m (140ft 9in)
 Beam 9.00m (29ft 6in)
 Draught 2.56m (8ft 5in)
 Displacement 470 tonnes
 Engines Twin 783kW (1,050hp)
 Caterpillar 3508B DI-TA diesels
 Berths Owner: 2. Guests: 8. Crew: 9
 Fuel capacity 92,000 litres (24,200 US gallons)
 Fresh water capacity 11,400 litres (3,000 US gallons)
 Hull/superstructure steel/aluminium

Naval architecture/exterior/interior
 Gregory C. Marshall Naval Architect
 Classification Germanischer Lloyd's 100A5,
 Motor Yacht, MC

PERFORMANCE NOTES
 Top speed 16 knots
 Range @ 13 knots 6,300 nautical miles

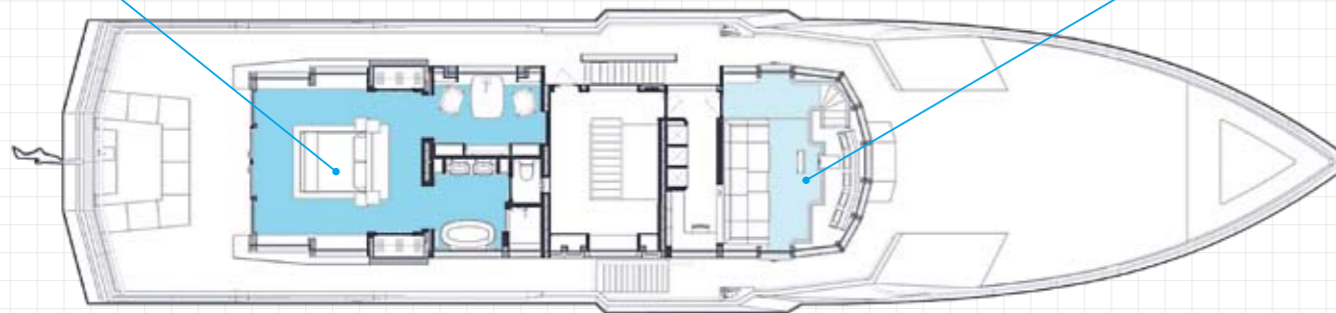
EQUIPMENT
 Tenders 28ft custom McMullen & Wing
 dive-boat *Triple Ripple* with a shower, toilet and

barbecue, and a top speed of 17 knots; 14ft Nautica RIB rescue tender.

BUILDER/CHARTER
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 www.37south.co.nz Charter rate \$195,000pw

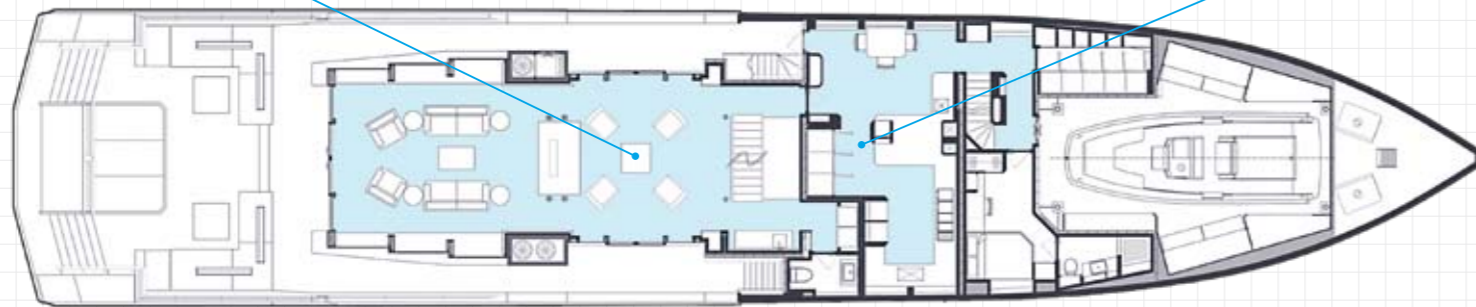
OWNER'S SUITE: Aft-facing bed ensures a spectacular panoramic view.

WHEELHOUSE: Five large PC screens display navigational information.



DINING TABLE: The day's footage can be played on the video wall during meals.

GALLEY: The chef is thrilled with the full-beam layout of the galley.



ENGINEER ROOM: A Seakeepers monitoring system collects data on the ocean's health.

GUEST SUITES: Adjoining staterooms can transform into full-beam suites.



FLYING BRIDGE: Seating and sunpads forward – perfect for lounging on a lazy afternoon at anchor.

SKYLIGHT: Daylight filters down through the decks to spectacular effect, creating a connection with the outside.

THE POD: A great spot for a small group to get away from the action when *Big Fish* is under way.

OWNER'S AFT DECK: Private alfresco dining and relaxation are steps outside of the master stateroom.



FOREDECK: The expanse of stone decking makes this adaptable space much more than just a technical area.

SIDE DECK WINDOWS: Floor-to-ceiling on the main deck, with seating nestled right up alongside them.

LOW BULWARKS: Contrasting with the big windows, these enhance *Big Fish*'s profile and the view.

SQUARED-OFF CORNERS: These add to the yacht's rugged exterior and convey a go-anywhere spirit.

Photo: Tim McKenna