

## Yacht designer Joel Bretecher interview



Senior Designer at STIRLING DESIGN INTERNATIONAL, having previously worked on designs for FERRARI, **Joel Bretecher** is an official partner of **Compagnie du Ponant** for whom he has designed LE PONANT, LE LEVANT, LE BORÉAL, L AUSTRAL and now the company's new ship, currently under construction.

Passionate about his work and highly experienced, Joel Bretecher kindly agreed to answer our questions.

### **What do you do?**

I am an industrial designer. My professional life can be divided into three periods.

I spent ten years in the automobile industry, first at Pininfarina in Italy where I had the pleasure of designing Ferraris, then at General Motors in the United States.

I then had the opportunity to take on two new challenges, this time working on the interior design of aircraft where I was involved in converting an India Airlines plane into a company plane for Rajiv Gandhi. In total contrast, I then worked in the pre-perestroika USSR where I handled the interior design of Russian 400-seat jumbos, under the surveillance of the KGB.

Finally, I have been working on boats for 15 years, initially in the recreational sector and for Beneteau, then for Atlantic shipyards where I did plans and drawings to help sell projects to decision-makers.

### **You go back a long way with Compagnie du Ponant, how did you meet?**

It's a strange story. I spotted an article in a newspaper about a team of three people in a small office. They wanted to build a boat and seemed very keen to do it. I therefore grabbed the opportunity and offered my services for the interior and exterior design of a three-mast sailing yacht which would become Le Ponant. Since then, I have become almost part of the family, and played a role in developing Compagnie du Ponant's other ships.

### **Which of Compagnie du Ponant's yachts has been your favourite to work on and which gave you the most headaches?**

The most difficult was Le Ponant, as there were so many shareholders and decision-makers to convince. I had to walk a tightrope to stay on track without getting lost in all the different demands they were making.

**Which one are you most proud of?**

It's the customer who decides if a ship is a success, not the designer, owner or the journalists, but the passengers - even though Le Levant, L'Austral and Le Boréal have received several awards. Of course that gives me great pleasure.

**What is the first question you ask yourself before tackling a new project?**

I ask myself how far I can go within the budget and technical constraints imposed. I want to be able to give the maximum with the means I have at my disposal.

**What are the specific challenges when it comes to designing a cruise ship?**

A cruise ship is like a village - a floating village. Firstly it's a place for living in and sleeping in, a sociable place where passengers take their meals, amuse themselves and spend quality time together. It is also a village that is always on the move, where very strict standards for safety, security and the environment apply. It's an incredible challenge and very stimulating.

**Do you manage to sail or go on a cruise for pleasure?**

I am a workaholic. I find it almost impossible to separate work from holidays as for me work is my hobby and my leisure. The only way my wife is able to keep me with her when we are on vacation is to go into exile to an island!

**What is your next project?**

I am currently working on designs for my son's house, and I am working on a project for a ship for 1,500 passengers. But it's top secret!

**What would you say to a young person wanting to go into your profession?**

You must be passionate! Passion is the key word in this business - and don't expect to become a billionaire! It is also essential to speak English. The business is international, and it's very important to be able to sell yourself.

**Do you think there is any future in being a designer?**

India, Brazil and China lack good designers. There is a huge gap in emerging markets; one just has to be prepared to take on the adventure.

**And for my last question, where do you live?**

I live with my wife near Nantes on the edge of a forest in an eco-responsible house that I built. I used wood and added a large south-facing bay window.

**Thank you**