

## **INTERVIEW - Vincent Haegel, Project Manager for Outremer catamarans at Darnet Design: “What makes them so successful is the passion that goes into them”**

**Following on from the Outremer 49, 5X, 4X and 55, the Outremer 52 has been voted “European Yacht of the Year 2024” by 11 industry journalists. This created an opportunity to meet Vincent Haegel, who has been at Darnet Design for 10 years now, designing these fantastic catamarans, among others. We take a look at a rich career, and that passion for the sea and sailing boats that has remained with him always.**

### ***Vincent, what led you to becoming a boat designer?***

I grew up by the sea, spending my youth from Rabat in Morocco to Toulon in the South of France. My dad used to windsurf, and we sometimes rented Caravelle dinghies and Hobie 16s. Then my grandfather's Zodiac MKII was handed down to us, and we went across to Porquerolles and Port Cros. I got my boating licence at 17, just before I got my driving licence! But I've always been more attracted to sailing than motorboating. I wasn't particularly academic, and wanted to stick to some short studies, so I did a course in boatbuilding at St Nazaire. What attracted me was the sailing world of my childhood, but get into it, you had to be bilingual in English. So, after my BTS course, I spent two years in the United States. A friend of my father's took me on at his water treatment company in Raleigh, North Carolina. It's a 3 to 4-hour drive from Cape Hatteras, which is one of the best spots in America for windsurfing. I visited 26 states in total and during my night shifts I kept sketching boats. I sent them to several naval architects and designers. Espen Oeino contacted me and I joined him in Antibes 3 months later, in August 1998. In two years working with him, we launched Octopuss (126m) and Skat (70m). I then moved on to Martin Francis, for whom I worked for three years, again on large yachts, including the superyacht A (119m), for which I designed the plans based on Philippe Starck's sketches. But when Martin Francis left for London in 2003, my wife and I decided to move to Nantes, on France's Atlantic coast. I went back to work in water treatment and then building architecture. I enjoyed that because I was learning something new and I'm always curious to meet new people and learn new ways of doing things. But I was missing the boating scene more and more, and in 2013 a friend told me about Franck Darnet, whose agency was growing. I went to see him and a year later he called me back. I've been working with him as a designer for 10 years now, so things are going really well and really quickly, because the projects are all different and new each time, so there's never an opportunity to get bored!

### ***How is your work organised at the agency?***

The first contract Franck entrusted me with as project manager was for the Allures 45.9. My speciality, because of my experience as a sailor, is obviously sailing projects, or ocean cruising projects with a particular technicality because of the limited volumes involved. I'm assisted by one or two people, but we're really at the heart of the project, working between the shipyard and the client. Franck and I meet with them to listen to their wishes and how they want to position themselves. It's up to us to translate their wishes into reality. The process starts with a 2D layout,

which we also discuss with the naval architect. Then very quickly, we work in 3D from the first hull and deck shape designed by the architect. As we go along, we refine the details, first in centimetres and then in millimetres. We call this “the design loop”.

***What's been the impact of IT in your work?***

In 1998, I was 24 years old, and 3D design was in its infancy. When I was studying, we were working in 2D with Autocad, and at Espen Oeino we were starting to be able to model in 3D with very basic renderings because computers were limited. I'm part of the first generation that very quickly did everything in 3D.

I work mainly with software called Rhinoceros. In previous agencies, I've also worked on Archicad, AutoCAD and Microstation. That means I can switch from one software package to another quite easily. Some software such as Autodesk or Catia is more geared towards engineers, with very heavy databases that, in my opinion, get in the way of design. It's important to continue to draw on the software as if we were still drawing with our pencil. A very important part of our work today consists of producing presentations using Indesign. Our communication with customers is increasingly meticulous, because we want them to feel fully confident and involved at every stage of the creative process.

***How would you define the Darnet Design style?***

When I first met Franck in 2013, I was seduced by the interior style he was proposing, being both functional and timeless. Franck takes great care to ensure that his designs are aesthetically pleasing, but above all that they fulfil their function and are also timeless. It shouldn't be a passing fad and I'm totally in tune with that. Particularly since 2014, we've been working more and more on the exterior style, not just the interiors. We work on a boat in its entirety, from the exterior lines to the furniture. I like this idea of not separating interior and exterior, because whether you step aboard a boat, or go into a house, or a car, there's nothing worse than if the interior doesn't match the look on the outside. I don't like that dichotomy of expression. In fact, since the 90s, the designs have had a total continuity between the interior and exterior.

***You were project manager for the Outremer 55 and 52. Both these boats, like their predecessors, were voted European Yacht of the Year. How do you explain this exceptional success?***

What makes these projects so successful is the passion that binds the teams together. Somewhere along the line, we all dream of being able to afford an Outremer one day. As a result, everyone that's involved – from the naval architects at VPLP to the technicians in the design office at the shipyard - wants these boats to be the most accomplished, the most appropriate for their market. We spend a lot of time on every detail. The slightest curve in the furniture is scrutinised, because we know that aesthetics is what you see first. Everything is close to our hearts, so much so that when there's something on our minds, we don't stop until we've found the perfect solution. As they, themselves, are passionate about their boats, they have a very well-defined demand, so we know exactly what we ultimately want in a boat. I also think that the contribution of Patrick le Quément, who has an outside view of the whole thing, is a great help. He knows how to think outside the box with other references, and how to take a step back given the many years he spent in the design department at Renault. He also has the end product in mind in terms of its shape,

functionality and perceived quality. His experience pulls us upwards. It sometimes forces us to question ourselves. And that's very stimulating!

***How does performance influence design?***

That's very simple: weight. Whatever we design, we ask ourselves how we can optimise that weight. This is what we call "Design to Weight". Do we really need a drawer there? Is it really necessary? What's more, with Outremer we go deep into the technical side of materials because of the weight constraint. It's an adjustment to make it acceptable, even if it means proposing solutions that will save weight elsewhere. The choice of materials, the shapes and the thickness of the elements all play a part. This requires a very broad and in-depth knowledge of materials (facade veneers, joinery, etc.) It's a job that can get a bit schizophrenic in a way, because you can't let yourself get bogged down by these constraints. Sometimes I carry on making sketches, freeing myself from the technical side, materials and feasibility, because that's what allows me to create something really new, which will stand out from the rest in terms of form, ergonomics and look. At Outremer, for example, we're looking to introduce shapes that are a little more fluid, a little more organic. We seek inspiration in all of life's activities. I get my ideas from travelling, by going to small, original hotels, and from airports too, which have always fascinated me.

***Have there been any other projects that have particularly impressed you over these past ten years?***

Yes, absolutely. First off, there was the 64-metre *Atomic*, which took 3 years to complete, with many trips back and forth to the Viareggio yard in Italy, where all the spaces had to be designed in 3-dimensions down to the millimetre and where many different people had to work on site. On that type of major project, the demand for final quality is immeasurable. In a completely different vein, I really liked the Explocat 52 catamaran, working with the wonderful team at Garcia who are also passionate about their sailing boats, so communication was very easy. And then there have been some the more original projects, such as the Black Pepper Code 2 and the Kayflô, a highly innovative floating home concept.

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