

# Yachting World



JUNE 2016

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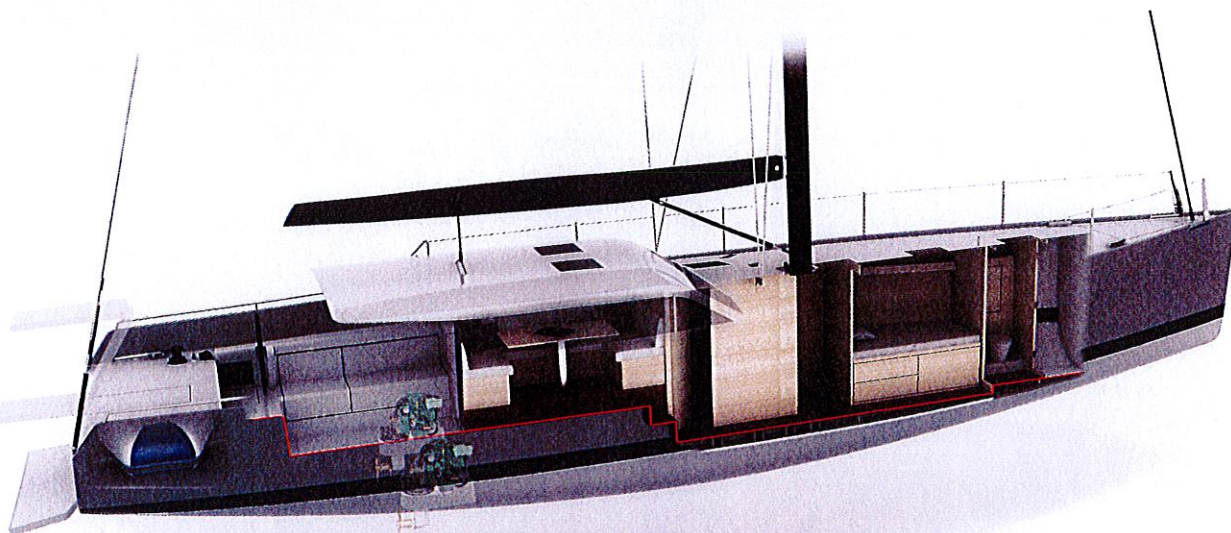
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# THE VISION OF VISMARA

AFTER THREE DECADES OF PRODUCING LIGHT AND INNOVATIVE CUSTOM YACHTS, THIS ITALIAN YARD IS DEVELOPING A NEW 'PRÊT-A-PORTER' CONCEPT. TOBY HODGES TESTS THE V50



Vismara Marine has always been an exciting, fresh and different company. Its yachts are fast, light and inspirational designs. To look at the history of this Italian custom yacht specialist is to track the timeline of the modern cruiser-racer.

And looking at its models today offers insight into where yacht design is headed. Here is a firm that is consistently ahead of its time.

Over the past three decades Vismara Marine has launched over 130 custom yachts from its Viareggio yard, many of which are now regarded as iconic designs. Names such as *Pistrice*, *Alligator* and *Kiribilli* resonate because of the way they combine style and function, able to win on the racecourse despite carrying a cruising interior.

News that Vismara is expanding with the launch of its first series-produced model, the V50 prêt-à-porter (see an explanation of the concept on page 52), encouraged us to travel to Italy for a test sail.

Viareggio is the nucleus of Italian boatbuilding. A visit to this Tuscan town near Pisa guarantees a moment of disbelief when first you see the tops of flybridges and multi-spreader rigs towering above the skyline of the town centre buildings. Some of the powerhouses of superyachting reside in disproportionate scale within

Viareggio's modest centre, including Benetti, Perini Navi and Azimut. And nestled into its bustling waterfront lies this rather special yard, Vismara Marine.

## The man behind the brand

Vismara's visionary is the name behind the brand, designer and founder Alessandro Vismara. Vismara studied naval architecture in Southampton and worked at Perini Navi as chief of naval construction before opening his own design studio. He helmed his first three-quarter ton design, *Lace Wing*, to victory at Cowes Week and the Italian Championships.

While Vismara dedicated the 1980s to designing IOR racers, for him the 1990s were all about 'beautiful boats'.

"We decided we could make a company dedicated to giving to cruising people the right to sail properly like the racing guys," he says. The Nineties saw a surge in clients who wanted minimalist interiors: no teak; and white painted throughout. These were state of the art boats built in light composite construction, some with radical features such as canting keels and wingmasts. ➤

**Main picture:** founder of the yard Alessandro Vismara stands beside a wall of photos of his one-off design successes

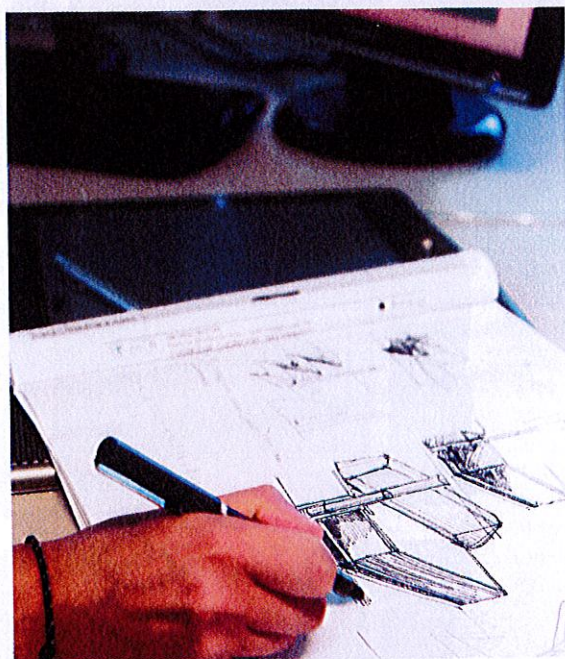






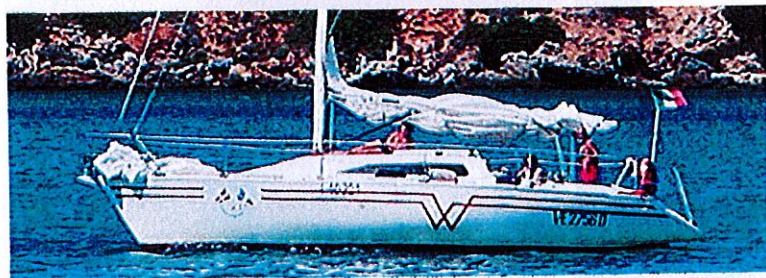


**Above:** the radical, modern interior of the V80 *Luce Guida*.  
**Right:** design in action



Giuliano Sargentini

**Below:** Vismara's first design, the three-quarter tonner *Lace Wing*



Up until 2003 Vismara designed for other builders and built for other designers at the Marine Services yard. But then he decided "to create a brand and be responsible for the cycle of design, production and resale". Vismara Marine was born.

Alessandro Vismara trained up Polish workers in Viareggio before helping to establish Rega Yachts in Poland. Since 2002, all Vismara hulls have been built at Rega, and today the Polish yard laminates hulls for a variety of brands including Mylius, Comar and, most recently, Michael Schmidt Yachtbau.

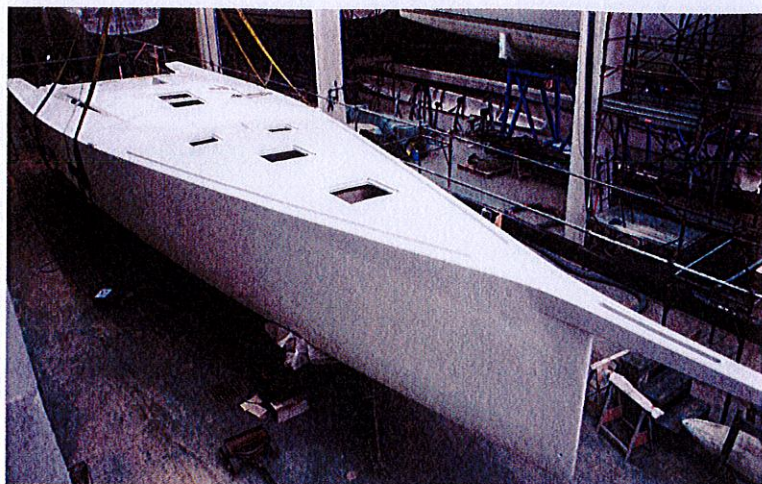
This shared construction relationship helps explain why Vismara was so busy during our visit. Hulls arrive at Viareggio either bare, or fitted with furniture, and to a very impressive level of finish. "Until now we averaged two to four boats a year, 100 per cent tailor-made," says Vismara. "The new business plan is to keep that range of custom boats and to grow the prêt-à-porter side. We think in two years' time we can be up to ten boats a year."

New builds and refits spilt out of the yard's lofty sliding doors. Indeed, a powerful-looking new Vismara Mills 56 cruiser was due to be christened the day after our visit. There were also two new V62s, a 50ft custom Vismara and the second V50 in the shed, plus five Baltic Yachts refits from 50-80ft.

As well as working closely with Baltic Yachts for nearly three decades, Vismara has worked with some of the industry's leading design firms, including Farr, Judel-Vrolijk and Bill Tripp. Its latest collaborations are with Mark Mills, who Vismara rates highly for his vision, dedication and enthusiasm.

When listing the designs his yard has produced over the years (see right), Vismara described the Mills-designed V62 *SuperNikka* as his 'perfect boat'. A Vismara, he says, is





all about CFD-analysed design, pre-preg hulls and composite interiors that form part of the boat. He believes in keeping interiors light and avoiding heavy, complicated systems.

Vismara produced a fully hybrid 50-footer six years ago, radical still today. "We have always tried to push clients to a more modern, current approach – while creating the commercial value by trying to avoid fancy requests," declares Vismara. "Why are we good at custom? We are good at listening and understanding."

### A custom approach

"I love the preliminary stages – to learn about the client, to create a relationship," Vismara explains. "But now owners don't like so many meetings – everyone is time poor. Plus they are scared to make an error."

Vismara is still very much a yard focused on custom builds, but the decision was recently made to invest in creating a 'prêt-à-porter' line of female-moulded yachts. "Many clients don't have the experience to buy a custom boat now," Vismara maintains, adding that the new line of boats "use the same high technology, but are built in a standardised design and promoted through a network of dealers".

As well as the V50 we tested (see page 52), the yard is creating more prêt-à-porter production models off the back of custom projects. The radical V62 *SuperNikka*, is a very current example. She launched last year and won the Mini Maxi worlds. A mould has since been taken with the chine smoothed out, and two more V62s were in the yard at fit-out stage.

Past iconic Vismara models include yachts such as *Kiribilli*, a 60ft 'maxi' developed with Renzo Piano, and the 54ft fast cruiser *Brizella*. But this V50 is the start of a fresh new era, "a type of boat that has not existed before".

**Above:** the Mills-designed V62 *SuperNikka* in build and on the water

### Alessandro Vismara's most iconic designs



**Pistrice** – a V40 launched in 1992. Designed for IMS racing – "the first real proof that you can win races like the Sardinia Cup with a cruising boat, and that you could sail like a racer," declares Vismara. She won the IMS Italian Championships and Champagne Mumm Cup in 1993.



**Kiribilli** – the green and gold flush-decked 60ft design was developed with Renzo Piano as a fast cruiser with mini-maxi characteristics. Launched in 2001.



**Dragon 2** – 'Gold Dragon' – "Totally Vismara, with a minimalistic very current design," comments Vismara. Striking features include her wraparound coachroof windows, gold and red styling and a central engine under the saloon table.



**Luce Guida** – a state-of-the-art V80 designed by Luca Dini. Built for the Princess of Kuwait, this has one of the most radically different interiors I have ever seen., as shown opposite.





## ON TEST: V50

**T**his is Vismara's 'prêt-à-porter' concept, a yacht that can be chosen off the shelf. Vismara even provides the option of doing so online by making a simple choice of colours, aesthetics, layout and specification. It uses the company's rich custom yacht building experience to offer a refined product with multiple variations. The four-step ordering process makes it as easy to pick and mix to suit style as it is to buy clothes online – and, crucially, for a guaranteed fixed sailaway price.

### “PRÊT-A-PORTER, A CUSTOM YACHT THAT CAN BE CHOSEN OFF THE SHELF”

The V50 is a clever model to kick off this production range with – a decksaloon motor sailer incorporated into a lightweight, performance hull, with two compact engines.

The first to launch, *Dragon*, is the third Vismara for Guess fashion designer Angelo Bruni. His input can be seen in the stark black and white styling throughout.

I particularly like the deep, protected cockpit, free of

sailing systems, with single-level connection to the decksaloon. The raised aft deck covers a large tender garage, neatly stows a composite gangplank and creates a large sunbathing platform and a handy seat for the helmsman.

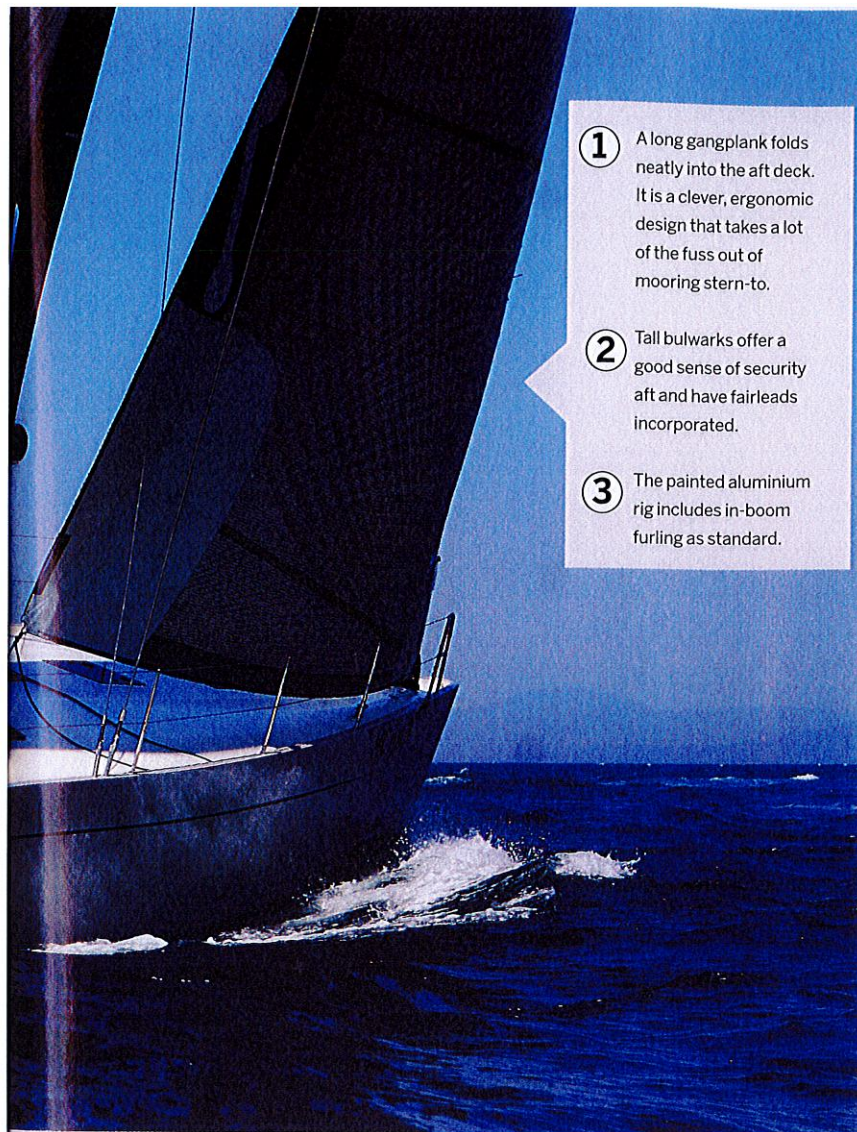
At the core of Vismara yachts is a lightweight composite hull. The V50 has a sporty hull built in E-Glass, plus a carbon rudder. So she is a medium to light displacement yacht, with 45 per cent of that weight in the keel.

In theory, then, she's a stiff boat. While trying to put that to the test, we were dealt very fickle conditions off Punta Ala, with everything from mirror calm to 20-knot pulses of offshore breeze.

The helming experience was a little unremarkable. Yes, the V50 certainly feels light and rigid. Upwind in 10 to 15 knots of wind, she is absolutely in her element – balanced and fast – certainly more rewarding and slippery than any other motor sailer or decksaloon model I've sailed. She averaged 7 knots upwind, and up to 10 knots reaching under main and genoa.

But I was frustrated not to be able to get the best out of her. Before I list the reasons why, it is worth emphasising that *Dragon* is very much tailored to suit her owner. A combination of dirty undersides, no working instruments and an inability to trim the sails effectively – insufficient halyard tension and a problem with the vang – were





- ① A long gangplank folds neatly into the aft deck. It is a clever, ergonomic design that takes a lot of the fuss out of mooring stern-to.
- ② Tall bulwarks offer a good sense of security aft and have fairleads incorporated.
- ③ The painted aluminium rig includes in-boom furling as standard.

frustrating in terms of collating performance figures.

My main issue however is with the winch layout, which I found neither practical nor safe. The owner had requested that two winches were sited abaft the helms to keep them out of the cockpit. The mainsheet is led via a three-point coachroof bridle forward along the boom and back to winches on the aft deck, German-style. The genoa is sheeted inboard close to the mast, and goes underdeck to the aft deck where it shares the same two winches.

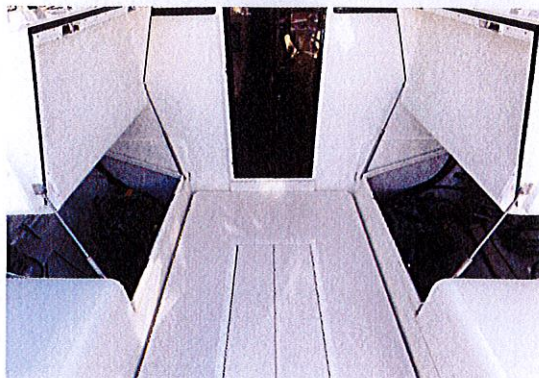
Bruni said he finds the system no problem to manage short-handed. But I couldn't understand how you can helm and trim without having eyes on the sails. Even with a dedicated crew on each winch, we still had problems swapping over main and working jib sheets during tacks. Upwind when heeled, it seemed an exposed position from which to adjust sheets, particularly with a low lifeline aft.

These issues are easily addressed however; Vismara knows this and offers future production models with winches forward of the helms. A self-tacking jib might also be a wise option if the V50 becomes a popular choice for couples. "We made some changes to the second model as the first was built with the customer," says Alessandro Vismara. "These include a less deep cockpit, a slightly raised coachroof and more winches which are forward in the cockpit for easier sail handling."

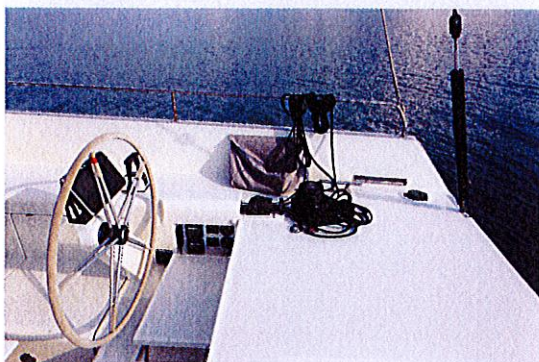
**Above:** styling is ultra-clean to the point of clinical aboard *Dragon*



**Above:** cockpit benches are well protected under the carbon canopy. High bulwarks make comfortable backrests to sit out on the side decks



**Above:** twin engines are fitted under the cockpit benches. These are good for manoeuvring and keeping noise out of the interior

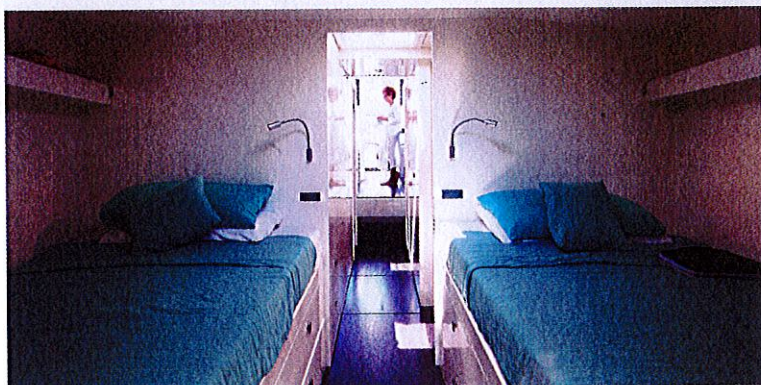


**Above:** we liked the large aft deck over the dinghy garage and the helm positions, but the siting of the winches will not suit many



**Above:** clear sightlines over the low coachroof and through the decksaloon windows. Note the simple, three-point mainsheet system





## “SHE IS FRESH AND LIGHT BELOW, THE ANTITHESIS OF CONVENTIONAL”

**Main Picture:** light, bright and very white, the interior has many clever features

**Above:** the split berth set-up in the owner's cabin.

The helming position does however benefit from good sightlines over the low coachroof looking forward from the windward helm or sitting and looking along the leeward rail. There is also reasonably clear vision through the coachroof when seated at the helm.

Twin engines provide many benefits. The extra manoeuvrability is a big confidence booster – dual engine control and torque negates the need for a bow thruster at this size and aids motor sailing. Positioning the engines in the forward cockpit lockers means their weight is central, yet keeps noise and odour out of the interior.

The twin-throttle controls are located in an exposed position however, which needs addressing.

The pros arguably compensate for the extra maintenance required, and having two exposed drives that lack protection from the keel. Vismara does offer protective skegs forward of the propellers if desired – something I would consider essential for offshore sailing.

### Enter the *Dragon*

The deep and spacious cockpit along with the dinghy garage are prime assets to have, but come at the expense of accommodation space below.

The interior can be tailored to suit the owner's personal taste. *Dragon* is very minimalist, in accordance with her fashion designer owner's wishes. Bruni's first two Vismaras, also called *Dragon*, were built in carbon fibre – a 46 followed by a 54-footer. “The [gold] 54 (see *Iconic Designs*, page 51), all in carbon ten years ago, was fantastic to do,” says Bruni. “But I realised it was not the perfect boat for cruising.”

Now he has grandchildren, his requirements have changed – his family all like to go on sailing vacations together. “I wanted to build a special boat that you could be inside and out of the sun without being below decks,” he explains – Bruni's wife doesn't like being cold or in the sun. The cockpit is also the ideal place for children, a protected area in which they feel safe.

When we first arrived at night, the white interior seemed particularly Spartan in the unforgiving glare of downlights. But during the day the decksaloon demonstrated its merits – the all-round visibility from



## SPECIFICATIONS

<b>LOA</b>	15.50m	50ft 10in
<b>LWL</b>	14.00m	45ft 11in
<b>Beam (max)</b>	4.30m	14ft 1in
<b>Draught</b>	2.50m	8ft 2in
<b>Disp (lightship)</b>	13,300kg	29,321lb
<b>Sail area (100% foretriangle)</b>	129m <sup>2</sup>	1,390ft <sup>2</sup>
<b>Berths</b>	4-6	
<b>Engine</b>	2 x 40hp Volvo saildrives	
<b>Water</b>	800lt	176gal
<b>Fuel</b>	400lt	88gal
<b>Sail area:disp</b>	23.4	
<b>Disp:LWL</b>	135	
<b>Designed by:</b>	Alessandro Vismara	
<b>Built by:</b>	Vismara Marine	
<b>Price ex VAT:</b>	€750,000 (£596,828)	
<a href="http://www.vismaramarine.it">www.vismaramarine.it</a>		



**Above:** fashion designer Angelo Bruni is thrilled with his third *Dragon*

inside and the abundant natural light comes into its own when you're afloat.

"When it's very hot, inside is better than outside and you can still see everything," explains Bruni. With the hatches open and breeze flowing through, *Dragon* certainly feels fresh and bright below, the very antithesis of a conventional interior.

The decksaloon, linked with the cockpit, constitutes the heart of the boat. Bruni has elected not to have a separate navstation, preferring simply to use the aft part of the galley's extensive work surface or the saloon table if required. The double sink and stove have covers to help create a long single-level surface and emphasise the uncluttered styling. Water tanks are located under the saloon – another benefit of a decksaloon design – and there is plenty of additional galley stowage.

Accommodation is all forward of the saloon in 13 potential layouts of two or three cabins and two heads. *Dragon* has two cabins. A sliding door separates the large owner's cabin from the rest of the interior. Bruni chose to forego a third cabin in favour of extensive wardrobe stowage, but there is also ample stowage under the berths.

The twin-berth layout is a clever solution as the berths are each wide enough for two to share if desired, yet they

**Main picture:** the V50 has a tall rig and generous sail area for enjoying light breeze sailing



provide an option for either tack. "Two separate beds is perfect," Bruni explains. "In summer it is very hot here and you don't want two in a bed." A heads and large shower cubicle are located in the forward ends.

In my opinion style has won over practicality in places in *Dragon's* interior – future owners may appreciate more fiddles and handholds, for example. But the fittings are classy, the solid headlining panels look smart and the painted bulwarks show a quality finish to her build. Indeed the high calibre of her construction should be noted in relation to her premium price.

The V50 is offered in three packages, 'Easy Sailing', 'Altura' and 'Luxury', which cost from €750,000 to €813,500. These are, rather refreshingly, fully commissioned, sailaway prices with no hidden extras – literally off-the-shelf pricing.

The V50 is a funky, modern, deck saloon cruiser that harnesses the skills and experience of a trend-setting custom yard and combines them with a set price and delivery time. Although this is Vismara Marine's first production line, the V50 *Dragon* is still a yacht with a custom feel. So for those looking for something different, the 'prêt-à-porter' concept might just offer that ideal union of production and custom yacht worlds.