



SKIP NOVAK

IT CAN MAKE SENSE TO KEEP GOING FOR LARGER AND LARGER YACHTS, BUT YOU LOSE SOMETHING IN THE PROCESS



Some years ago I piloted a 170ft superyacht down the coast of Chile. It was the owner's 12th sailing boat, each one progressively larger than his original 40-footer. I assume the size of the vessels increased as a function of the owner's business success and aspirations.

This is an understandable progression. For the marine industry these repeat clients are fundamental to the lifeblood of many of the world's premiere production and custom yacht builders. Four or five yachts, always larger and more extravagant, are not uncommon through the life of a keen yacht owner.

Why go larger?

Sometimes perplexing from the point of view of a dockside observer, the reasons for going larger are several: faster passagemaking is a given; more privacy perhaps; greater separation between the professional

crew and the owner's party; more luxury for sure; more space for conveniences and gadgets and, dare I say it, more status. Ramping up is obvious, but going back down? It takes some willpower!

This past Christmas I took a holiday on board the 54ft *Pelagic*, as mentioned in my February column where I

speculated on our chances of survival in a confined space for a month. It was, in fact, a great success, both families of four all accounted for.

We cruised northabout the Falkland Islands then on through the eastern entrance of the Straits of Magellan to Punta Arenas and then down through the channels of Tierra del Fuego to Puerto Williams near Cape Horn. It was a cool to cold voyage, which means a lot of time below living on top of each other.

I never did, but I should have kept track of the number of times you need to say 'excuse me' when navigating below or trying to extract yourself out of the

companionway hatch. This is part of the human price we pay (with the smells) for benefits that are only clear when we do scale down to smaller vessels.

Granted, on the larger *Pelagic Australis* the capabilities are obvious – mainly speed and space on board, both on deck and below. Although we are still very creative with pushing the boundaries of exploratory cruising, there is no doubt that when I fall back aboard *Pelagic*, I feel a sense of liberation.

Not only do we have fewer systems, but the systems are by nature more simple, and the cruises usually are more troublefree technically. If things do go wrong the size of the objects that fail are more manageable.

The real advantage of 'small' though is just the size of the floating object. We can do things with *Pelagic* that we wouldn't dare do with *Pelagic Australis*. *Pelagic* is 'man-handleable', while the big boat at 74ft and 55 tonnes displacement is not.

She is also about the maximum size you would want to entertain when hanging from shorelines in confined spaces where it is likely to blow. With *Pelagic* we can literally run her up on beaches for safety, with the confidence that we can refloat her. With the bigger boat, we can't play this game.

More satisfying situations

Looking back over *Pelagic's* history through my photo archives, I see that we found ourselves, by design or circumstance, in many more interesting and satisfying situations, which translate into memories. I speak here about the motives and essence of exploratory cruising.

When I see ever bigger and bigger yachts venturing into far corners of the world I do question the logic. Anchored in some cases way offshore and limited in their inshore navigation, they not only remove themselves to a great extent from the environment they chose to cruise in, but they also potentially remove themselves from some human contact.

When it is not possible to play it close and cavalier lying to a broken-down jetty in some far-flung outpost which sports no marinas, you are really missing something in the spectators that you will attract.

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