

SKIP NOVAK

WHILE BUILDING A NEW EXPEDITION YACHT, SKIP'S EXTREME UTILITARIAN PHILOSOPHIES ARE BEING TESTED

Yet another consequence of the lockdown which, as I write, is very much still in force in South Africa, is that I cannot follow the construction of the new Pelagic 77 in the Netherlands in person. This vessel is for a private owner, but will eventually be chartering at times under the Pelagic brand. Launch date will be at the beginning of next year.

The Dutch builders never really stopped during their lockdown and they continue to forge ahead. The last time I saw her was in mid-March, as a bare aluminium shell and deck. Sadly, I am now missing being at the builder on a regular basis to monitor the machinery, systems and interior that are going on at pace. This is when, no matter how experienced the builder (and KM Yachts is top of the line for expedition-style vessels), it always pays to have someone with hands-on boat operation and maintenance on site to tweak this and that. We do it as efficiently as possible by email but it is not the same.

Having said that, long gone are the days at a custom builder where things are decided ad hoc as you go along, unless you go the painful artisanal route and take years. Back in 2002 on *Pelagic Australis* we were in a big shipyard environment and although we had the design finalised, much of the decision making with regard to installation was done on the job and I was at the yard four days out of a four-and-a-half day work week in Durban. They had the capacity to react to my desires and whims, often unravelling an installation and starting again with little loss of time.

Today, that approach is anathema to a builder. On the Pelagic 77, designed by Tony Castro, everything was 'drawn' in 3D down to every locker space, shelf and fiddle, likewise every bit of machinery in the engine room and throughout the bilges. Once you start the construction, making any changes implies substantial delays and substantial cost increases. You have to have your ducks in a row.

However, by being on site during the build, there is still much a sailor can

contribute. Practical matters like placing equipment in the interior can impact on how easy it is to access and also how people will move round it. In the engine room, you must ask yourself and demonstrate things such as: can you swing a normal spanner to get that bolt off to remove such and such, or was it buried with other pieces of equipment compromising the access? Shifting something a few centimetres this way or that might make all the difference and avoid having to hire a Houdini as a crewmember.

Years back, I remember having a look at a well known production build where the genset had been mounted above the main engine in an impossible space where you could not pull the injectors without removing the generator.

Bilges are also a minefield of problems. Can all hose connections be accessed? Are through-hulls easily got at without removing interior fittings? It is an endless list. It is not only about making life

easier; the implications for safety and seaworthiness, especially when it comes to plumbing, cannot be ignored.

And that brings this discussion to my *bête noire* – the plumbing in the heads compartments. In my somewhat extreme utilitarian philosophies, this ranks at the top. Firstly, you must ask the most fundamental question about what you will be doing in that compartment, and how long do you want to linger in there. For me, it is get it done and get out.

Then there is the all important question of maintenance, and especially in a charter situation. Blockages – which there will be – have to be dealt with quickly. On

Pelagic Australis we achieved a system whereby some but not all of the heads (toilet, sink and shower hoses, valves, pumps and fittings) are easily accessible. I had a dream: it was to make the Pelagic 77's head compartments an example of plumbing, if not art. Alas, various forces were brought to bear on my radical ways this time, and although we now have a properly fitted out heads module, as is the norm, we have tried to give access to all the important fixtures. I do not envy the skipper and crew, however, when those blockages occur. Oh, those bruised knuckles! ■

'Once construction starts, changes mean substantial cost increases'

