



10 QUESTIONS WITH...

STUART
LARSEN

By Gemma Fottles

New Zealand native and long-time Florida resident Stuart Larsen is one of the yachting world's most trusted brokers - and that's not an easy reputation to create. Even more difficult than establishing a name synonymous with integrity, efficiency and the ability to make the deal, is keeping that reputation polished, week after week, year after year. Having worked with internationally renowned brokerage firm Fraser since the early 80s, and managing to maintain and refine a sparkling reputation over the years, we caught up with Stuart recently to hear the secrets to his brokerage success.

You've been in the industry for 38 years and have sold over 300 yachts - 20 of which were in the past two years. Tell us: what's the secret to your success?

My primary focus is on the structure and process of the transaction, rather than on simply making the sale. Like in any business venture, in order to achieve the desired outcome - the sale or the purchase of a yacht - there are a number of issues and roadblocks that have to be considered and resolved. My task is to manage the issues by finding a solution which all parties - the buyer and the seller, professional advisers and interested parties - find both fair and satisfactory.

Secondly, managing the flow of information between parties is key. I ensure all information is factually correct and transparent and as such provides firm footing on which to develop a framework for the successful completion of the transaction. A global network of knowledgeable and experienced professionals is essential to obtain specialised input as and when necessary. In short: I do my homework. I need to know the yacht in question inside out, so its ownership history, refits, technical data, and so on. Only then am I able to present and discuss various information in a clear and organised manner.

To sum up, I ensure I have the tools and strategy in place which enable me to manage the transaction and orchestrate all its moving parts, including the different stakeholders, to a successful completion.

You're originally from New Zealand but have been based in Florida for your entire yachting career, helping to grow Fraser Yachts as a company since joining in its very early years. What brought you to the States and, with a background in law, what took you into superyacht brokerage?

Both happened completely by chance! After I graduated with an LLB (Hons) from the University of Auckland Law School, I took

season so I got lucky and found work as a deckhand/caretaker on a 45' boat. The owner ran a chandlery so I helped out there too. One day a client walked in and handed me a large cheque - a huge amount by poor Kiwi student standards! "Thanks to the info you gave me kid, I sold my boat," he said. "Here, buy yourself a drink. And in the meantime, come and see if you would like to work as a yacht broker for me." I never looked back. I never did go to Harvard in the end - but I have never regretted it!

As one of the most experienced yacht brokers in the world and an expert on the American market, tell us your thoughts on how the

Time on your yacht could be extended from a vacation into a lifestyle. Also, barring space travel, building a yacht is one of the most complex and captivating projects a tech-minded person can undertake. It was a catching idea. The trend spread like wildfire and I was, as they say, in the right place at the right time.

Years later the GFC crashed the industry; clients vanished and a number of shipyards went under. The recovery has been slow, inching rather than steaming forward. Until 2017, that is. Deregulation and fiscal reform in the US coupled with an upbeat trend in the global economy have moved the market beyond my expectations. The mood is bullish, albeit wary, given current political challenges, but buyers are certainly back.

Are the majority of your clients US based? If so, what are some of the key differences in selling boats to American versus European clients?

Yes, although the yachting market, given the mobility of the assets, is global. Ownership varies across the geographical spectrum so international travel is very much a part of my everyday life. In my experience, the decision-making process with Americans, especially American business people, tends to be more linear, faster and more forward looking compared to some other markets. America's new industries are tech-based and this is somewhat reflected in buyers' approach. However, there are always exceptions to any generalisation.

In mention of you and your work, one word in particular seems to constantly crop up: integrity. When it comes to the wider brokerage community, integrity is not often a word that immediately springs to mind... do you think the brokerage community are unfortunately tarred with the reputation of the few dishonest brokers, or do you think a lack of integrity amongst brokers is a real issue that needs to be addressed?

I have a lot of repeat business, and every deal still takes up a huge amount of my time, thought and energy. My legal training has

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some time-off to travel. I was due to start a JD degree at Harvard, and I found myself in New York between Christmas and the New Year. My traveling buddy had gone home, it was snowing and brutally cold and I was not prepared for the rigors of an East Coast winter... I mean, Christmas falls in summertime in New Zealand! I decided to go south and hitchhiked to Fort Lauderdale. Money was short and I had done a lot of competitive sailing in New Zealand so I decided to look for a job on a boat. It was high

market has changed over the years, and your insight into the state of the American market right now.

The reawakening of yachting in the US was driven by the first generation IT guys in the 90s. The combination of innovative hardware, software and the internet ushered in a new era. That being said, we really didn't know it was happening back then!

Company owners could still be in touch and productive without being in the office.

been invaluable to my career as a broker and contributed to the connection of my name with that word. I think lack of preparation, lack of knowledge of the market forces and regulations and lack of business experience is much more of an issue among brokers. I see a greater number of mistakes being made through lack of preparation, lack of attention to detail and a general inexperience rather than basic lack of integrity. Of course, there are some dishonest brokers, but there are dishonest doctors and lawyers out there, too. The fact that the market is small and the business intensely competitive can lead to cutting corners; a dangerous pathway when coupled with inexperience.

In the long term, cutting corners never pays off. There is a correlation between positive business results and professional competence. The industry has changed almost beyond recognition in the last 30 years – technology, regulations, globalisation – it's time professionals develop knowledge and skills to match what the market now requires.

As well as being listed on the Fraser website as a Fraser broker, you also have your own website, where current and potential clients can gain an easy but thorough overview of you, your career and what you can offer. We don't see this a lot in the brokerage community. With the digital domain only growing in

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significance, do you think more brokers need to embrace the powers of the internet more in order to make a mark for themselves?

Absolutely yes. Interconnectivity provides huge opportunities. Over the past two years I have started exploring new avenues and the potential is amazing. However, the internet is only a tool – it can't 'make' an experienced professional broker.

This is my take. I have been with Fraser for 38 years now. Yachting is a niche yet global market so the internet is now central to our business. In addition to information about the yachts and the company representing a yacht, clients want more 'personalisation'; they want and need to know who they are doing business with. The decision to showcase my listings, my experience and my abilities in a more direct manner at stuartlarsen.com was a natural consequence of this realisation. It complements the marketing and services provided by Fraser, the most respected name in global yachting, and is therefore a win-win for all.

Over time, I would be surprised if other brokers with a listing base (or companies, for that matter) don't see the benefit of developing their personal brand, all in the interest of the end result: selling yachts for that win-win. At the end of the day, an owner doesn't care the source of the buyer, so diverse market penetration can only help all the players involved. That being said, a client will always be interested in selecting the right person at the best company to represent his or her interests in a transaction.

The late Ed Dubois has previously stated in interviews that the big boat scene for the designer was really kicked off when you approached them in 1985 and asked him to take a look at a design for a client. The result of that meeting was that Dubois was put in the running alongside sailing design greats such as Martin Francis and Bruce Farr to build a 110' yacht in New Zealand for the American owner Bob Milhous. Can you tell us a bit more about this story and your relationship

with Mr. Dubois?

As one of your recent interviews with my fellow “Kiwi” Neville Crichton indicated, New Zealand boatbuilding, and especially at Alloy Yachts, took off as a result of Ed Dubois' designs. I knew Ed from some of his smaller racing designs and I was impressed. I knew that Bob had built one yacht in New Zealand and had liked the experience. So, I approached Ed about the New Zealand project - in my view it would be beneficial to all parties and help raise the profile of Kiwi boat building. The result was the elegant and super sporty Aquel, then the largest sloop in the world.

My collaboration with Ed continued and we worked on a number of designs for clients, including his first ever foray into motor yachts. In 1994 we embarked on a 50-metre project at what is now Turquoise Yachts in Istanbul. The project put Turquoise Yachts on the map and after the first 50-metre Turquoise, Ed Dubois went on to design many more motor yachts. Our collaboration continued over the years. He was immensely talented and creative and is sorely missed.

What are some of your most memorable sales over the years and why?

Frankly, almost all are memorable – for different reasons. They all have their 'twists

and turns', some were more difficult than others, and so were the clients - buyers and sellers alike.

I must say I have a liking for yachts that do things, and that do those things properly. Poor designs, poor execution and poor engineering do not sit well. Yachts that go places on their own bottoms and not on dock ships are what clients should generally look at first. It is a great limitation when a yacht is boxed into the 'big white boat' category. If the exterior finish befits the yacht's capabilities, who cares if it is faired or not. Who cares if it has stainless steel rails or not. It is all about capability and what the owner wants to do with the yacht. Happily, I see yachting as becoming less about the physical product and more experiential.

I think helicopters are the best tender ever invented so I tend to gravitate toward the explorer style yacht with helicopters and big tenders where the guests don't get soaking wet when they go to dinner onshore. Take the 107-metre Ulysses and the 73-metre Planet Nine for example, both yachts I have been involved with. Now, these two yachts have serious capability. On the other hand, take Cian Gianni, a 60' Frers design, made for sporty singlehanded performance sailing. These are the kind of yachts that make this business so special! I am lucky that I have clients from both ends of the spectrum and I still find each transaction, large or small, deeply compelling.

What is your advice to young brokers who wish to carve out as impressive a career as yourself in the world of superyacht brokerage?

Work hard. Travel hard. Expect long hours. Be honest. Be transparent. Learn to negotiate. Learn regulations. Learn geography. Learn shipyards. Learn inventory. Learn designers. Learn naval architects. Learn interior designers. Learn surveyors. Learn your colleagues. Learn your competition. Learn to write a proper letter. Don't expect fast results. And always remember who you work for. And guess what, it's NOT you!

LARSEN'S RECENT SUPERYACHT SALES

ULYSSES

107.4M, KLEVEN WERFT, 2016



WILDFLOUR

47.5M, DELTA MARINE, 2008



ICON

67.5M, ICON YACHTS, 2009



G2 MAZARIN

23.77M, TAMSSEN MARITIME, 2011



TALON

27.41M, CHEOY LEE, 2006

