

PHOTOS BY BILL MUNCKE



Skat's large wheelhouse provides superb visibility and a premier suite of electronics.

# GEOMETRIC VISION

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FROM  
COVER  
FOLDOUT



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**W**HAT A FIRST-TIME VISITOR gets at the International Yacht Club at Port Vauban, Antibes, is a massive geometric form that astonishes in an arena where astonishment is common currency. One's first reaction to *Skat*, in short, is to be thunderstruck. Her sloping, well-flared bow towers above, culminating at the water with a vertical knife-edge, below which hangs a significant bulbous bow. Her exuberant midships section – slab-sided and vertically windowed forward – gleams with perfection. Her transom imposes. Her passerelle amazes. Her military-style number “9906” intrigues. Her anti-romantic navy-gray paint invites wonder and doubt, even as it magically changes color with the fading autumn sun.

Though intensely original, *Skat's* form is slightly reminiscent of the voluminous bold-



ness and glassy candor of Martin Francis's 235-foot *Eco*, and Sir Norman Foster's 192-foot *Izanami*, whose military exterior and Pacific interior were a contradiction that worked.

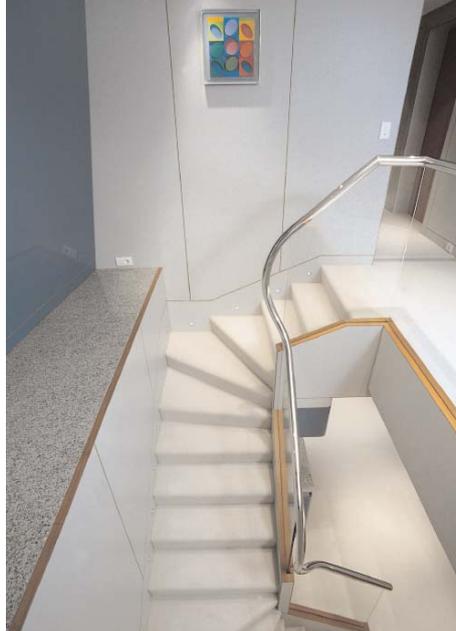
But *Skat* is no echo of *Eco*, no imitation *Izanami*. She is the expression of a highly

engaged owner who has not compromised her for anything: not the charter trade, not resale, especially not potential critics. After working 15 years to perfect his Pacific Northwest residence, the owner, Charles Simonyi, Microsoft's founding programmer, contemplated building a second, more remote, home. But the attraction of the movable feast that a large motor yacht provides took command of his imagination. After chartering several yachts, he was convinced of what he wanted in this, his first new build. Or, rather – as his design team asserts in retrospect – he learned what he did not want: arbitrariness, fussiness and dishonesty.

He appointed Antibes-based naval architect Espen Oeino (design project manager on *Eco*) to draw the hull and general arrangement, expressing no compulsion to go fast – he gets



Bright Arne Jacobsen egg chairs are the only splash of color in the uncluttered skylounge.



The interior features geometric forms throughout that complement the angular exterior hull design.



demanded, “businesslike, not fluffy;” a masculine place, rather than another lounge, perfectly sensible for navigation with surrounding glass glued without mullions to give visual continuity. Aft of the wheelhouse are the radio room, captain’s office and quarters, a pilot’s cabin and the main pantry. Further aft, enclosed in the long glass rhomboid nacelles that dominate *Skat* inside and out, are a crisply styled guest office to starboard, a cool, cozy library to port, and an informal salon sunlight-warmed by one of *Skat*’s four strategically placed skylights. The salon opens to an alfresco dining area with sliding glass walls and tempered by radiant heating or mist cooling.

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This area – the library, informal salon, guest office, and dining deck – apparently is *Skat*’s most “lived-in” space. And no wonder: Company colleagues are often aboard to brainstorm and focus on work, all the while enjoying the sea and the world’s watering holes. Computers are in evidence, but other essential office gear is tucked away in cabinets, leaving the agreeably uncluttered ambiance conducive to non-distracted thinking and unfettered discourse.

On the main deck, with a crew tender garage and crane forward, lies the modest but full-width owner’s suite with intimate study and large bath.

his speed fix from a helicopter, a Sonic 42 powerboat and a Falcon 50 jet, and he has flown a fighter plane beyond Mach one. *Skat*, instead, was to be designed for comfort, work, and efficiency (performance tests run at Hamburg’s HSVA towing tank optimized appendages and shaped the bow bulb to reduce resistance by as much as 18 percent).

The prime challenge to Oeino was to take the owner’s lead and create a suitably functional, handsome shell to envelop an interior ultimately styled by Milan designer Marco Zanini (with Flávia Alves De Souza) who had styled the client’s home. Oeino and Zanini are long-time friends and collaborators. This produced a solid common vision, and the designers agreed to a single-theme philosophy based on bold geometric forms and near-uniform gray coloration. But it isn’t just gray geometry that unites *Skat*’s many parts; it is an ingenious, controlled group formulation. As Pierre Perben of Oeino’s office says, “The owner was approachable, available

and quick to make decisions. He was always keen to discuss the design and realization, and visited the yard often.”

For the exterior, other than a stunningly long, compound-curve bow sheer, Oeino’s team sculpted *Skat*’s steel hull and aluminum superstructure in broad flat surfaces that intersect in crisp straight lines – a severe test for any shipyard. Even the designers’ presentation model required much more time than usual to build.

*Skat*’s general arrangement is no less successful. Below the mast – with dual observation platforms and conning station – the top deck includes a Jacuzzi with bar, video and champagne cooler forward; an outdoor dining table, barbecue and helipad doubling as a sun worshipper’s deck aft. Amidships is a glass-enclosed gym with sauna, featuring laptop plug-ins for guests who take their aerobic sweat with a grain of digital salt. The wheelhouse, on the bridge deck below, was designed by Zanini and Mike Craig, *Skat*’s American captain. It is, as the owner

Three double guest suites and a guest lounge center on a lobby. Each enjoys the luminosity of three large windows plus two in each bath, with no side decks outside to deface the view or diminish the privacy. Each cabin has a discreet “Do Not Disturb” light outside the door.

The crew entrance adjoins the main dining room through a pantry. There is little formal dining aboard *Skat*, however, so the pantry – closed when the 12-seat table is used for conferences – doubles as a bar. The unassuming main salon features a large, flat video screen hidden in the overhead, and opens to another alfresco lounge. On the deck below, *Skat*’s affable multinational crew of 16 has enviable accommodations in eight cabins and an inviting mess and lounge. The electric control room and workshop, a superb garage for two large tenders and personal watercraft, multi-fueling stations and a beach club off the stern platform fill out the deck. To allow the crew to move efficiently without intruding on guest spaces,



the crew has ship-length passageways on the two lower decks, a spiral staircase serving all decks and even separate entries to the elevator.

The lower deck contains the audio/video control room; cool, cold and deep-freeze walk-in stowage; laundry, technical and bonded-stores rooms; the all-important wine cellar; and the engine room, wherein Lürssen's installations are magnificent. Engines, gensets, compressors and watermakers are double-resilient mounted on a massive steel "raft" that floats on some 60 flexible mounts to cut off vibration and noise. (Owing to her MCA certification, *Skat* is divided into seven watertight compartments with 14 watertight doors.) Lürssen also made good use of off-the-shelf Mil Spec components, a well-earned benefit of its building many other "gray boats" for the world's navies.

*Skat's* own minimalist décor was prescribed, says Zanini, by a client with "a clarity of vision, a precise aesthetic, logical mind



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and a contemporary way of life," who wants *Skat* to have a "seamless continuity with his home and executive jet." Thus Zanini employed a single visual language in crew, service and guest areas. Like *Izanami*, *Skat's* interior style is chaste and functional (the owner liked *Izanami's* content but not her speed-driven concept). Zanini's minimally embellished interior – patterned by extensive use of CAD – relates clearly to Oeino's authoritative geometric exterior. A backdrop

is formed by gray Formica panels edged in thin teak strips, with no *cache-misère* cornices to disguise overhead joints. Simple materials and a few primary colors are variously combined to distinguish each space. Cabinet doors are blue-lacquered wood (but fire-engine red when associated with safety). Gray Brazilian guanabara granite counters, different tones of gray carpeting for crew and guests, gray Pisan marble bathroom tiles, industrial gray rubber flooring in technical spaces and teak decking beneath tables and chairs all extend the backdrop, against which the many brilliantly colored, pre-fractal Vasarely works confirm the owner's early commitment to the information age.

Freestanding furniture offers other welcome color accents and provides repose that ranges from the hedonism of rectangular white settees that convert to "beds" for sun worship, to black leather couches for relaxation, to bright-red Arne Jacobsen egg chairs for reading or socializing, and finally to spindly pastel Italian folding chairs. This pervasive minimalism allows any space to be quickly transformed by a changed wall hanging or throw pillow, and its openness enhances *Skat's* remarkable longitudinal and athwartship interior sight lines. Artificial lighting and variable window screens can be used to effect mood variations.

"*Skat*" is Danish for "My Darling," but is also a traditional Nordic tax. With that name and her startling looks she caught many an eye during her summer 2002 shakedown to Norway, Sweden and Denmark. Wherever she sails, be assured that *Skat* will continue to startle for a long time to come.



The chaste and functional design theme continues through to the crew areas.

BILL MUNCKE, TOP PHOTO BY KLAUS JORDAN

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