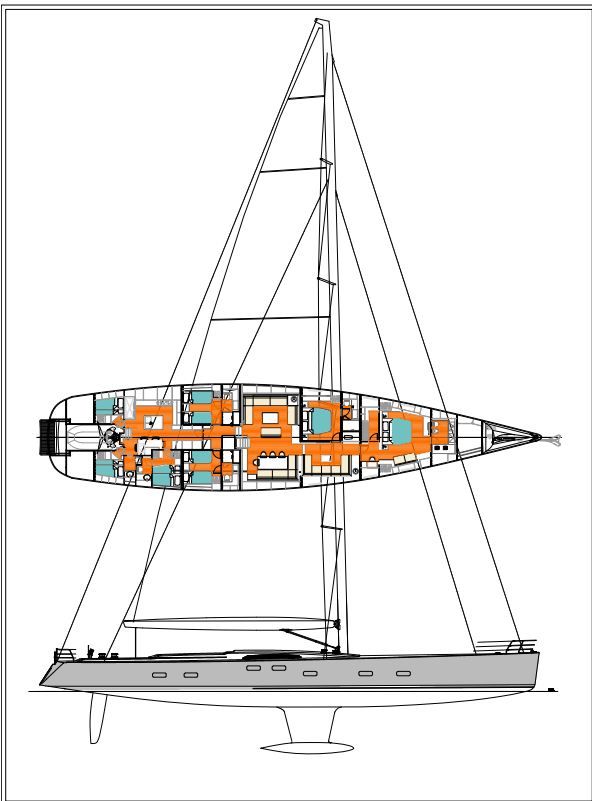


OUT OF Africa

Southern Wind's new flagship *Thalima* is a powerful sailing yacht and a study in contemporary design. Could this yacht from the flourishing South African builders be regarded as the definitive 110ft/33m cruiser-racer? asks David Glenn



D GLENN/YWPIX



Italian Willy Persico, managing director and CEO of Cape Town-based builders Southern Wind, says one of the secrets of his success is keeping a low profile, but even he must be finding it hard to resist blowing his own trumpet about the performance of the company he founded just 19 years ago.

Southern Wind's carefully planned growth, their tenacious adherence to seamanlike design and the ability to make use of new technology, particularly resin infusion and the use of split moulds, remain impressive. Moreover, the company's Italian management team has succeeded in motivating the local workforce in a society still navigating its way through the tricky waters of post-apartheid South Africa.

Thalima in context

On a recent visit to Cape Town, *Supersail World* was invited to sail the company's new flagship, the SW110RS *Thalima*, built for a three-times repeat customer, designed by Bruce Farr and Associates and styled and conceptualised by the increasingly impressive Nauta Yachts, based in Milan. She is a good-looking, go-anywhere yacht with regatta potential, which will undoubtedly attract existing SW100 customers considering their next move.

Our trial in flat water and winds varying from ten to 25 knots proved that the SW110RS is a fast and beautifully balanced yacht and painstaking planning and research into precisely what the owner wanted has resulted in some intricate and impressive detail below.

Above: sailing in Table Bay in ideal conditions. The jury mainsheet system worked until we lost control of it during a gybe. Opposite: a fine-looking set of North 3DL



FRANCESCA VAN ROOYEN



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Nauta Yachts, in conjunction with SW and *Thalima's* owner, have produced a superb below decks layout with exceptional detailing. Above: mauve-tinted shower and carbon surfaces in the bathroom. Right: four of the 44 drawers in the owner's suite



Inside SW's newly expanded, purpose-built premises, the build process is impressive, in both the mould shop and fit-out department. Southern Wind now build all their yachts using resin infusion and they mould their 110 hulls in three parts. SW's technicians say that keeping each part of the mould more or less horizontal means the infusion process doesn't have to fight gravity and operators can get to the mould more easily for setting up the vacuum and checking for integrity (see page 38).

The advantages of infusion over traditional wet lay-up are a much more accurate control and distribution of resin and a far cleaner operation, which does not expose workers to the effects of chemical reactions.

Thalima was launched in the wake of the successful SW100

GUIDO GRUGNOLA



mini-series, of which 12 have been built in just four years, the company's best-selling product by far. By the end of this year Southern Wind will have launched 38 yachts ranging from 72ft/22m to 110ft/33m and future plans include a 120ft/37m and a 140ft/43m model.

Southern Wind decided to expand their premises, situated not far from Cape Town airport and surrounded by the townships crowding the city's outskirts, just before the world economy went into a tailspin. With an additional 3,000m² of factory space – the total covered space now stands at 14,500m² – and a workforce of some 330, mainly local, they are going to have work hard in the current economic climate to keep the shipyard filled.



When we visited in March, however, there appeared to be no shortage of activity, with SW100 no 11 and 12 in build, two Reichel Pugh 94s under construction and an interesting smaller custom project underway, the details of which were under wraps.

The 94ft/29m is an all-carbon yacht which is clearly going to have a more performance-orientated slant and which Willy Persico explains is a reaction to satisfied owners of SW72s and 78s, both designed by Reichel Pugh. The second 94 is being built speculatively.

Southern Wind emphasise that the 94, like all their yachts, despite its all-carbon construction and the sound insulation issues that brings, is first and foremost a capable offshore fast cruiser with racing potential as an added bonus. The trend

towards competitive sailing is, however, clear, with regattas on both sides of the Atlantic bursting at the seams. This year the company have hosted their tenth Southern Wind Trophy, this time in Porto Cervo where up to ten yachts were due to take part, including the new *Thalima*.

While SW yachts have excelled as long-range cruisers, they have also figured on the race course. Names like the SW72 *Starr Trail*, the Reichel Pugh/Nauta SW72 *All Smoke* and more recently Michael Cotter's SW79 *Whisper*, which did very well in the Rolex Fastnet and Maxi Rolex Cup in Sardinia last year, are all top performers. Racing in comfort is what it is all about.

Concerns that Southern Wind might be loaded with part-exchange yachts, a policy they encourage, at a time when

Full-beam saloon with a sightline through the lower saloon and forward to the owner's suite



Thalima SW110RS

PHOTOS: GUIDO GRUGNOLA



Above: the owner's suite comprises a dressing room and walk-in wardrobe (left), the sleeping cabin and a large bathroom with a full-length bath forward

Willy Persico (right) with Stefan Falcon and a model of the three-part mould used for the SW110RS



D GLENN/YWPIX

second-hand prices are being forced down, were allayed by Willy Persico. He told us that there were currently two unsold yachts in this programme and another would arrive this summer. Persico himself owns one of them, although it is, of course, for sale. "I will never be without a yacht myself," he says. However, all three yachts remain on the books of the Genoa-based Pegaso, which is the European marketing arm of Southern Wind. "The shipyard will never have to carry the burden of having to sell traded-in yachts," says Persico.

On board

Sitting in Cape Town's impressive Waterfront dock complex, *Thalima's* dark hull looked enormous from pontoon level – menacing even, with her blunt, plumb stem. As you step aboard, the vast tracts of teak-laid deck, flush hatches, relatively shallow cockpits and only half a dozen drum winches present a streamlined, clean finish. The RS suffix stands for Raised Saloon, but in profile it is barely noticeable that there is a superstructure.

The key features on deck are the high-modulus carbon fibre mast by Nordic, V-section Park Avenue-style boom, also by Nordic, and PBO standing rigging by Future Fibres. Now that Southern Spars have set up a superyacht mast-making facility in Cape Town, Marco Alberti, SW's general manager, admitted that they will probably consider Southern in future, but that Nordic's excellent after-sales service and attention to detail had provided them with a high-quality product to date. With news that Future Fibres are also entering the mast building arena, Alberti's choice may soon be wider still.

A superb, hydraulically opening transom door leads into a lazarette capable of stowing a RIB on the centreline. Because SW cleverly mount the space-hungry steering quadrant off the sole of the lazarette, there's much more room for stowage. This area is expertly designed and laid out for dedicated equipment and spares stowage, and has evolved through many yachts being thoroughly tried and tested offshore. The fact that yachts are normally delivered on their own bottoms from Cape Town, entailing passages of several thousand miles, has created a natural research and development process.

The same goes for the other end of the yacht where a big sail and bosunry locker, just abaft the anchor arm mechanism, is well designed with properly configured space for cordage, spares, kedge anchor, sails and the removable PBO staysail



stay which can be coiled. Again, offshore passagemaking experience seemed much in evidence here.

We took some time to inspect the fold-over deployment arm for the CQR main anchor. Southern Wind were concerned that the previous design involving a heavy hydraulic motor, which was difficult to maintain, tended to be jerky in operation as the anchor was moved into its operating position. Together with the torque loads, this made engineering the system difficult.

SW have solved this by using a much lighter hydraulic ram, which lies beneath the deck to starboard and operates a 10-tonne Spectra tackle which moves the arm around its pivot. The operation is fast, smooth, silent and impressive (see video at www.yachtingworld.com). If the system fails for any reason, the arm and the anchor can be lifted on a halyard.

Sailing *Thalima*

There couldn't be a better place to put a sailing yacht through her paces than Table Bay, lying beneath the shadow of Table Mountain and offering a variety of wind and sea conditions.

The prevailing south-easter, known as the Cape Doctor because tradition says it blows away 'disease and pestilence', whips round the edges of Table Mountain to provide channels of fresh breeze and rough water offshore and great flat water sailing inshore off Milnerton and north towards Sunset Beach.

With a full main and effectively a blade jib we enjoyed some short tacking and a couple of runs in the flat water, where *Thalima* demonstrated few if any vices. Southern Wind have worked very hard on the Spectra-on-quadrant direct steering and with no discernible play at all (rare) she was an absolute joy to steer.

She stood up well in the gusts and hard on the breeze we topped 11 knots in 18-20 knots of true wind at a true wind angle of 24°. Speed jumped to well over 13 knots when we cracked 10° although the instruments hadn't been fully calibrated.

There's little doubt that you would have to slow her down in waves upwind. In fact, the last time we sailed here was with the SW100 and on that occasion further offshore we had to do just that. Off the wind this yacht will cover the distances with consummate ease and real pace.

Displacing about 86 tons, this is by no means an ultra-light yacht, but she isn't heavy either and with her torpedo bulb keel drawing 13ft 8in/4.2m and her relatively long-chord fin providing the lift upwind, her sailing qualities should be assured.



Thalima SW110RS

PHOTOS: FRANCESCA VAN ROOYEN



PHOTOS: D GLENN/YWPIX



Top left: the attention to detail and properly designed storage in the lazarette are impressive. There's room here for a decent-sized RIB. Top right: SW have used their considerable design and engineering expertise to redesign the anchor arm with a hydraulic ram and tackle system to operate it. Above: progression of resin infusion. The yellow plastic forms the vacuum bag, the air sucked out via a series of pipes. The resin (darker patches) is then drawn into the pre-preg matrix until the whole structure is infused. This took about 20 minutes

A fault with the Bamar mainsheet captive winch meant that a jury mainsheet system had to be devised. It worked extremely well until we went through a gybe and the smallest of flogs in the fully battened North main as we headed slightly high took the sheet straight off its temporary winch. The boom bore against the lowers and superficial damage was sustained to the portside V section of the boom. It brought our trial to a premature end.

A stunning interior

Southern Wind have stuck to their premise that it is best to contain the crew accommodation, galley, navigation and monitoring area aft, while owner and guests can enjoy the raised saloon area and extensive sleeping accommodation forward. In fact, *Thalima* has additional guest accommodation abaft the saloon, but in essence the layout is very similar to previous yachts.

Thalima's extra length works particularly well forward where Nauta have worked hard on subtle sightlines, maintaining deckhead height right outboard and working with the owner on an extraordinarily detailed stowage plan in every cabin.

For instance, the sightline from the lower saloon just forward of amidships, through the owner's suite and then on to the carbon fibre-appointed bathroom further forward (see photo on page 35) is particularly impressive.

The owner's cabin alone has 44 drawers, mainly hidden behind lightweight panels and there are some neat bedside stowages dedicated specifically to your water glass and mobile phone, for instance.

The bathroom is superbly appointed with moulded carbon fibre surrounds for two stylish china sinks, a hidden faucet for the bath and a rectangular showerhead with cleverly directed lighting that colour-tints the water.

There's a VIP cabin further aft to port opposite a very neat



You can see video footage at www.yachtingworld.com

lower saloon, which could double as a library. The deck saloon, complete with custom-built carbon dining chairs, which dismantle and fold away, is full of light, not only from the superstructure ports, but also a series of hull ports, providing a great view outboard.

Two mirror-image twin guest cabins are located either side of the centreline passageway eventually leading to the crew area. Throughout the aft accommodation there are hidden stowage areas revealed by opening bulkhead panels retained by push-activated catches. There's a coffee-maker, ice-maker, hidden ironing board, a beautifully built, temperature-controlled wine rack and a number of other mod cons. It's a classic case of a place for everything and everything in its place.

Mario Pedol of Nauta explained how they have made sure the chef will remain undisturbed in his or her work by keeping the thoroughfare between the midships and aft accommodation on the centreline and having the galley offset to port, protected by an island work surface atop a set of cupboards (see drawing on page 33).

There are three sleeping cabins for six crew and two separate head compartments as required by the MCA charter regulations. The only criticism that could be levelled at this area is that the seating and table area for crew is rather meagre.

Definitive cruiser-racer

Southern Wind, with considerable help from Nauta Yachts, have subtly blended contemporary styling with their mantra of seamanlike design. It's arguable that this is the definitive combination of cruiser and racer at this size. Now that SW have breached the 100ft/30.5m mark their yachts will be an increasing force on the Bucket and Superyacht Cup courses of the world. If, that is, owners have got time to break into their cruising schedules.

www.southernwindshipyard.com