



VIKING CHARACTER

A conversation with **Radenko Milakovic**, the entrepreneur who breathed new life into J Craft by combining craftsmanship, heritage, and glamour

A past in finance, a present in yachting. His name is Radenko Milakovic and he is the owner of J Craft, the man behind this exclusive Swedish-made brand's new horizons. A former hedge fund manager and equity investor, in 2008 he became the owner of the shipyard that had been founded in 1999 in Visby, a UNESCO World Heritage city on the island of Gotland in the Baltic Sea. His entrepreneurial vision is open and innovative and has made the brand grow and expand to new markets (the U.S., first and foremost) while staying meticulously true to its native heritage: craftsmanship anchored in the age-old tradition of Swedish boating. Every J Craft model is a unique piece, like a collectible: there are currently 20 of them in the world, each made by hand on the island of Gotland by master artisans drawing on the knowledge of the Vikings' seafaring art (who settled there around the 7th century). They take almost a year to complete. The hull is fiberglass, the veneers are hand-finished mahogany, the details are leather. The result is sublime, a vessel that perfectly embodies the spirit of the place it was made while suggesting the *Dolce Vita* ambiance of the Mediterranean. Radenko Milakovic has rendered this retro-style day cruiser a jewel of the sea, ready to sail into a sustainable future, ever more glamorous.

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photo: *Gossuin Brothers Production, Lucio Gelsi, Sven Germann*

How did you approach the world of yachting? Have you always been an enthusiast?

Coming from fairly humble beginnings, I couldn't really enter this beautiful world of yachting much before my mid-30s. Being able to be so close to the sea on a boat is an absolute privilege and indeed my place of peace. I cannot imagine being without it and am truly grateful for every day that I am lucky enough to experience it.

How did you come to acquire J Craft?

I first saw a J Craft in 2007 in Monaco. It was love at first sight and both my wife and I were absolutely enthralled by it. Knowing very little about boats at the time, we initially decided to rent the J Craft for the summer. We had such a wonderful time that, after the summer ended, we decided to buy one. After a little while, the opportunity arose to not only buy a J Craft but the shipyard which is what my wife and I chose to do as this allowed us to really get involved.

What impressed you most about this brand, and what in your view makes the difference on the market?

What impressed me most (and continues to do so today) is this unique blend of southern dolce vita with Nordic practicality and capability. This combination of breathtaking style and beauty with effortless power and relentlessness. A steel hand in a velvet glove which is not surprising considering that virtually every one of our employees is formerly of the Swedish Navy whose credo is performance above all. This is not a luxury but an absolute prerequisite.

J Craft is rooted in a tradition that we could call age-old, connected to the place. All this was then boosted by a healthy dose of glamour and innovation. Is this the recipe for success?

We believe that people appreciate the rare as opposed to the mass-produced. They appreciate skill and craftsmanship as well as the artistry and intense work that is involved in creating a Torpedo. Our clients appreciate the uncompromising quality of our builds and the one-of-a-kind, bespoke nature of each vessel, built only for them. They appreciate the authenticity of our heritage, the daring nature of what we are trying to achieve which is to build a technologically advanced, super-capable vessel using age-old, wonderfully time-intensive skills and techniques, and all of this in a



The 42-foot Torpedo is an ode to the “Dolce Vita”. Each model is a unique, handcrafted piece, featuring modern power and performance

first-world country. And, of course, cutting-edge technology is a must. The sea is a demanding environment and as such we believe in the technology that helps us navigate it safely.

J Craft seems to represent a particular lifestyle. Who is the typical client for this type of boat?

Our clients are very appreciative of the work we do. They are aware and have done hard work and know how much effort it takes to build something special. They are usually self-made, hard workers, and quite confident in their choices. However, it is also true to say that our Torpedos mean different things to different clients. Some see them as a work of art, some see them as a tool, facilitating their lifestyle, some see them as their place of peace, and some see them as representations of themselves. It is really unique to each client and as such we do not really have a typical client.

From Polaris (38-foot Cabrio Cruiser) to Torpedo 42 — how has the series evolved?

Polaris is J Craft’s first yacht which J Craft delivered for His Majesty Carl XVI Gustav in 2000 and remains the King of Sweden’s boat of choice some 23 years later, a fact that we are enormously proud of and a fact which shows the longevity and the timeless nature of what we create. Polaris was the first of the inaugural series of Cabrio Cruisers which were built between 1999 and 2009. After having the privilege of acquiring J Craft in 2008, we introduced the Torpedo in 2009 which in spirit and appearance is very similar to the original Cabrio Cruiser as conceived by the visionary creator and founder of J Craft, Bjoern Janson. The Torpedo is the evolution of the Cabrio Cruiser, whether from a technological, capability, or everyday usability perspective, but, crucially, it builds on and retains Janson’s spirit!

Along with the models, the brand itself is going through an expansion under your leadership.

What are the biggest challenges?

From a commercial perspective, the challenge is that we are a small-scale manufacturer who is producing a very labor intense product in a very high-cost country. We produce in Sweden and we only use the highest quality of materials and skills in our production as we are very concerned with quality as well as sustainability. The challenge we have is to find the right balance between scale and commercial viability. We believe that with our targeted production rate of between 3-4 boats a year, we can achieve our goals. Beyond this and purely from a product perspective, we have to remain the single best product in our segment which means staying at the cutting edge technologically without compromising on our soul and our vision.

Besides Europe, America is your target market.

Does that market have a counterpart that appreciates the qualities of J Craft?

It has taken us a fair bit of time to come to the USA. It is a big market that is rightfully very demanding and we needed to be ready for this. Finding the right people in the USA, people who understand and respect our values, and having the right organizational structure and resources in place before going to the USA was an absolute prerequisite for us. We needed to achieve this and be comfortable with it before making this decision. We have now done so and have therefore officially entered the US market. We believe that our Torpedo is the right product for this market and just like in Europe, the USA has a good number of people that appreciate what we are trying to achieve. As such, we are plenty excited to be here and look forward to the delivery of our first US-bound Torpedo in Q4 of this year. This summer we will have an extensive set of activities, which means that we and our Torpedo Natalia will spend the whole summer and autumn, starting in New England and going down to Florida. An exciting period is ahead.

One theme of discussion in the yachting sector today is sustainability. What impact does this have on your company?

Sustainability is at the heart of everything we do, whether regarding our Torpedo itself or our people and, indeed, our organization. Starting with the Torpedo, it is important to note that we build our



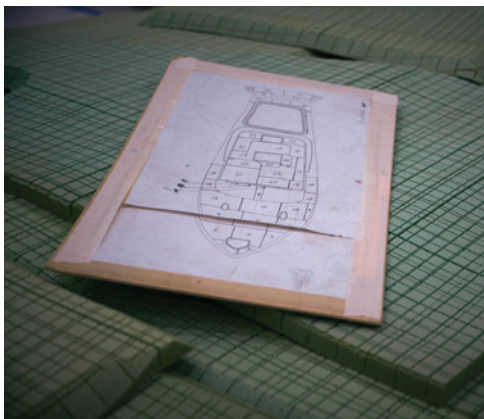
Torpedos for the “few” and not the “many.” We are an artisanal manufacturer that focuses on building truly artistic, but immensely capable seafaring vessels, entirely by hand in over 8,000 (wo)man hours in one place, from the keel up, on our Swedish home island of Gotland in the Baltic Sea.

How is this translated into production?

We deliberately avoid (going to an extreme degree) the outsourcing of parts and labor, so common in most mass-produced products these days, where parts are made in disparate – cheaper – parts of the world, only to be shipped to one assembly point at an immense cost to the environment. We consciously chose to not do that, choosing instead to ensure that well over 95% of the Torpedo is Swedish-made and sourced. For our choice of materials, we use the very latest in technology, putting a deliberate and heavy emphasis on the environmental impact these materials have, not only during their creation but through their lifecycle including their eventual disposal where we put a very strong emphasis on biodegradability. When we produce, we use green energy to a maximum extent, and we are proud to say that J Craft will soon cover 100% of its entire energy needs from fully renewable sources in both building our Torpedos and running our organization. We are also immensely aware and deliberately choose our partners and suppliers with whom we work based on their environmental credentials and their green energy usage. When it comes to our organization, we are proud to have entered into various apprenticeship programs on our home island of Gotland to preserve and develop the age-old knowledge and traditions of Swedish and Scandinavian ship-building by teaching the next generation of Gotland-based master builders to carry forward Gotland’s proud and storied shipbuilding history, originating from the Vikings who started building ships in Gotland well over 1,000 years ago!

Projects for the future?

Evolution rather than revolution is our credo. We will be building on what we have and looking to improve on what is already widely acknowledged to be an outstanding product. We will look to add further elements which will again further improve the usability and practical nature of our Torpedo without compromising any of her beauty.



Since the launch of its first, luxurious model in 1999, J Craft has continued to build boats on the Swedish island of Gotland, following an age-old nautical culture

