



ART MARINE MARINAS

# ANCHORS AWAY

ART Marine Marinas is a division of ART Marine that has become an industry benchmark and leading it is Bruno Meier, the Group's Chief Operating Officer. What Yachts wanted to know was how the re-branding of ART Marine would affect this hugely successful division of the group. What we found out was surprising indeed..

By **Shaun Ebelthite**

**A**RT Marine Marinas is one of the largest leisure marine groups in the UAE and wider Middle East. Yachts magazine met with Bruno Meier on the day his appointment as Chief Operating Officer of the group was confirmed, an acknowledgement of the many years he has spent heading up ART Marine Marinas, easily the largest marina management company in the Middle East. Bruno was ART Marine's Business Development Director back in 2007 when the decision was made to expand the group's activities into marina management. According to him, it was a natural progression for the company. "Our aim has always been to be a full 360-degree leisure marine service provider," Bruno told us, "and if you compare the amount of time a yacht spends out at sea compared to the time it spends in the marina, there is a vast difference."

In fact, Bruno estimates that more than 90 per cent of a yacht's life in the Gulf region will be spent tied up in a marina. "So the importance of the marina experience for the owner really can't be overstated. They're an extremely important part of the whole yacht owning experience." As ART Marine moved into marina management, however, Bruno discovered that it gave the group an unintended advantage in their yacht dealership activities. "It allowed us to be closer to our clients, to offer them better and more personalised services."

The expansion into marina management was a natural progression for ART Marine then, but Bruno freely admits that it was not an easy one. "It's always difficult to establish your credentials in a new area such as this, which is why I became so involved in the new division as I was able to use my own experience and expertise to give credibility to the newly-formed ART Marine Marinas." Bruno, before he joined ART Marine, had more than twenty years experience in the leisure marine industry and particularly in marina management. In fact, he was one of the first people in the industry in Turkey to bring foreign flagged charter yachts to the country. Bruno therefore, in his own words, "jumped at the chance" to head up the new marinas division of ART

**Al Bandar in Abu Dhabi is a more relaxed family-oriented marina**



Marine and was Marina Director for seven years until his new appointment was confirmed the day of our interview. Having started out with Ghantoot Marina almost mid-way between Dubai and Abu Dhabi, and having managed it for many years before replacing it with other world-class marinas in their portfolio, ART Marine now operates four marinas in the Middle East and Turkey, with Emirates Palace in Abu Dhabi as their flagship destination. What we really wanted to find out though, was how the re-branding of ART Marine would affect the hugely successful marinas division, and whether Bruno Meir would divulge any concrete plans for the future of ART Marine Marinas. What he told us was surprising indeed.

**Looking ahead**

ART Marine recently acquired the dealership rights for the Ferretti Group's Itama and Riva brands in the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman, with a long-term plan of representing all eight of the group's yacht lines in these markets. Having established the most exclusive five-star marina management operation in the region, ART Marine can only benefit from the Ferretti Group's owning company's desire to build a chain of marinas in



**Emirates Palace Marina is ART Marine's flagship destination**

China. The Italian yacht-building group was purchased in 2012 by the Chinese manufacturing consortium SHIG-Weichai Group, which, according to Bruno, has exciting plans for the leisure marine industry in China. "They want to build marinas, and we manage them, so the synergies within the family are obvious," he told us. The re-branding of ART Marine, and its partnership with the Ferretti Group, may therefore have an immense impact on the expansion of the ART Marine Marinas division. Similarly, ART Marine recently announced the signing of a deal with New Design Associates (NDA), a Shanghai-based design group with an interest in developing marina projects. "They only develop marinas, and we only manage them," says Bruno. "So again the marriage was obvious."

These two hugely significant potential windfalls for ART Marine Marinas have not encouraged Bruno to slow down, though. He rattles off a number of developments taking place as Yachts is due to go to print, including a marina deal being finalised in Egypt in the Red Sea, ongoing talks with marinas in the Maldives and Seychelles as well as Cyprus and closer to home, they're in discussions with the owners of a large marina in Qatar, as well as in Oman and Bahrain. Asked whether he can expand on any of the above developments, Bruno laughs and says, "I can only tell you we have many irons in the fire!"

**ART Marine Marinas' 'Destinations'**

The marina management side of ART Marine's activities is growing as rapidly and developing in nature as fast as the ART Marine group on a whole then, but what really sets ART Marine Marinas aside as a marina operator is their portfolio of ART Marine 'Destinations' - a program

that is unique in the global industry in terms of its scope. The program started out as a privilege cardholder scheme for berth holders within ART Marine's network of marinas. "We wanted to offer to our berth holders more facilities, privileges and advantages to having a berth in our marinas rather than another," says Bruno. "Also, we didn't understand why so few people were using their yachts and taking advantage of the close proximity of marinas within the region and the near-year round good weather." Out of that grew a network that has now expanded into Asia, with select marinas in the Eastern Mediterranean under consideration as well. "We started the program within our marina portfolio, but then other marinas that we didn't manage started getting in touch and we realised that there was a wider application for this scheme," Bruno explains. "We re-named it 'Destinations' and opened it up to any marina that meets the requirements and standards that we deem necessary to be classed as a 'five star' marina."

There was an unintended kickback from this move, however, in that now, according to Bruno, the 'Destinations' brand has become a de facto industry benchmark of quality. "We have a lot of interest from marinas that are not yet a part of the Destinations network because

**Reef Island may soon be joined by another marina in ART Marine's Bahrain portfolio**





of the reputation that it has." The Destinations network is a boon for yacht owners because it eliminates so many of the restrictions that often come with boating. Through the destinations network, berth holders can cruise the coast of Dubai from their home marina, stopping in Jebel Ali Marina on their way to Abu Dhabi or Al Hamra on their way to Musandam and not have to pay for overnight berthing. The addition of marinas in Thailand, Singapore and China, as well as the Maldives, will open up new cruising grounds for berth holders in the new marinas coming under ART Marine's management, but will also perhaps encourage Dubai-based yacht owners to cruise further afield.

"I'd always like to see yacht owners making better use of programs such as this," says Bruno. "I caught the yachting virus as a child on Lake Geneva in my home country, but in the Gulf there is a need to promote the yachting lifestyle more." Asked why he thinks there is still such under-utilisation of yachts in the region, Bruno suggests it's a question of family history. "For many yacht owners, there is a lack of deep boating or yachting culture in either them or their families, so they

**ART Marine Marinas**

**EMIRATES PALACE MARINA, ABU DHABI**

**Number of berths:** 168  
**Yachts up to:** 80m  
**Services:** on-yacht dining, health club, laundry, fuel station, wireless Internet

**AL BANDAR MARINA, ABU DHABI**

**Number of berths:** 177  
**Yachts up to:** 24m  
**Facilities:** laundry, crane, bars and restaurants, waste collection

**MARTI MARINA, TURKEY**

**Number of berths:** 430  
**Yachts up to:** 100m  
**Facilities:** yacht repair and maintenance yard (with a 60 ton travel lift), sailing school, F&B and retail facilities

**REEF ISLAND, BAHRAIN**

**Number of berths:** 80 (when completed)  
**Yachts up to:** 60m



Dubai Creek Marina, UAE

use their boat conservatively, they'll go out for a few hours a few miles off the coast, but they won't go far, they won't go stay overnight in another marina." This is what Bruno is always hoping to change, to encourage yacht owners to explore, to find out what's around the next headland, to discover their region from the sea. "What we need to do is infect more people here with the virus and a starting point is providing them with the best marinas in the region." ■



Jebel Ali Golf Resort & Spa, UAE

Nansha Marina, China

Zighy Marina, Oman

Island Hideaway Marina, Maldives

Royal Phuket Marina, Thailand

Marina at Keppel Bay, Singapore

Royal Langkawi Yacht Club, Malaysia