

CECIL WRIGHT

FANATICAL ABOUT YACHTS

THE SUPERYACHT EXPERIENCE: FEBRUARY 2014

Chris Cecil-Wright

By Maarten Janssen



In the times when a big boat was 45 metres and a massive boat, 60, a broken back saw a former army man segue his focus into brokerage with Camper & Nicholson. Twenty years on and now his own boss, Chris Cecil-Wright talks to us about his new venture, client relationships and how Roman helped.

Chris Cecil-Wright has those most-precious of commodities among new business owners; the trust of his clients, an in-depth knowledge of his craft, and the ability to find humour in any situation.

The year was 1993 and Cecil-Wright had a broken back. It was obvious that the army man was going to need a

new direction, and he knew just where he wanted to go.

Having spent a year in hospital, once back on his feet he wasted no time getting to where he wanted to be. Letters to Camper & Nicholson hadn't garnered him a response but, fortuitously, knowing the right people did, and his opening to the industry was delivered in the form of a friend's uncle.

That uncle was a Managing Director of Camper & Nicholson and Cecil-Wright was on his way.

In those days, there were two or three brokerage companies doing big boats and I had no idea what a big boat was. We used to think a big boat was 60-feet, a really big boat was 45-metres, and a massive boat was 60-metres."

He still remembers selling his first yacht; not least because it taught him the lesson on client relationships which would help him reach the position, in twenty years' time, to successfully start his own enterprise.

The first superyacht I sold was a 105 foot yacht, to a Spanish client. I put every single boat I had ever heard of, on the desk in front of his wife and him."

The client asked Cecil-Wright which he preferred. Boldero, was the swift reply. "Great, I was looking at that!" Came the client response.

The clients left the office happy, unwittingly leaving behind a gold pen under a pile of brochures in their excitement. Cecil-Wright wrapped it up, and immediately took it to DHL to be sent to Spain.

40 minutes later the client's wife ran back into the office, asking if they'd found the pen.

Yes," Cecil-Wright replied. "I've already sent it with

"The first yacht I sold was a 105 foot yacht"

DHL to Spain."

The clients never forgot that. They still recall it today. It was a strong start to the relationship, and through it I've been introduced to all sorts of good people in Spain."

It was relationships like that, which led this industry stalwart to branch out on his own.

Over a number of years, many of my clients asked me why I didn't start my own business. My answer was always that I was perfectly happy doing what I was doing. When that answer began to move towards 'yes, I've been thinking that too,' I knew the seed had been

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sown. And timing is everything. It was the right time. Edmiston was fine, I am fine, we're all friends. I left on good terms." And as for the name? Again, it came down to those relationships.

They all said, use your name, the name your clients trust. Besides, if you put your name on the door, chances are you're going to behave properly."

It's not just existing relationships of course, Cecil-Wright knows the knack of building new relationships. It's in getting started. *I read the Sunday Times, or the Financial Times. If I read about someone who's just sold their stake in a hamburger restaurant, and he made 350million overnight, I'll send him a note. 'Dear Joe, congratulations on the sale of your burger chain. Surely now you deserve a bit of a rest. How about yachting?'"*

"If you dealt with Roman, you dealt with all the Russians"

Heading a team of five based in Monaco, that quiet sense of humour and practical approach to getting things done, stands Cecil-Wright in good stead with those new to the industry.

"People ask me about the yachting game and that's when I begin to build my credibility. If someone says they want a 25 metre boat to go from Monaco to Saint Tropez really fast, I say get a helicopter. You'll enjoy it more and it's much quicker."

"Yes, but in Saint Tropez, I want to be anchored', they say. In that case I tell them to get a yacht and keep it down there."

"And if they want to get onboard their yacht in Monaco, and then down to Saint Tropez for breakfast. I tell them you can't do breakfast at 40 knots. Why not have breakfast at 12 knots, enjoy your paper, and get in to Saint Tropez on time for lunch. By the end of the conversation you've completely changed someone's expectations of what yachting is all about."

Of those clients, both new and existing, word of mouth has been paramount to the success of the new venture. When Nick Edmiston left Campers to start his own com

pany, he called Cecil-Wright on a Friday lunchtime to ask him if he'd join him. By Monday night, he was back in Monaco ready to join forces with Edmiston.

As the company grew, they developed a solid working relationship with the captain of 27-metre Leopard, owned jointly by Boris Berezovsky and Roman Abramovich. From there, the working relationship with Abramovich took off; bouncing from Sussurro, to Le Grand Bleu and then, of course, the Pelorus project. At the same time Edmiston were overseeing the build of Abramovich's 86-metre Ecstasea.

The great thing in those days was, if you dealt with Roman, you dealt with all of the Russians. He passed on a lot of people to us and it was fantastic; a great relationship."

The obvious enjoyment Cecil-Wright gets from working with his Russian clients hasn't changed. *They say it how it is, and they don't mess around. These days Russian clients are more aware of the market and products and they have the attitude of not sitting on the bench too long. They look, they decide what they want, and then they go for it."*

The idea of just going for it, is one Cecil-Wright holds himself to, also. The focus of his new company, Cecil Wright, is on new builds, with charter the bread and butter, and of course, second hand sales. Offering the best available in the market today, he's confident in creating a niche of looking after only the highest quality.

"The pinnacle of building yachts, is building at Feadship. My first build there was a 39-metre, the second, a 77-metre, the third, a 78-metre and the fourth was a 99-metre."



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The 115 metre superyacht Pelorus



The 99-metre yacht, Madame Gu's colours come from the Russian flag. It's a very cool boat and the disco on top makes the Ministry of Sound sound average."

However, Cecil-Wright doesn't call himself a broker, though he gives it a nod, saying technically it's what they do as a company.

The last word though, is that all-important one again.

We sell relationships.

It's a lot more than a matching service. At the end of the day, I invariably put my hand on my heart and say I have delivered value.

The way we work, instead of just selling the product, we're selling ourselves. We've got a nice team of people.'

