

Interview with a Chef

In A League of Its Own.

ANERQ



Words: Khawer Carr
Images: Burgess International



Well, where to begin, M/Y Nero? How can I describe this yacht, which is among the most elegant and sophisticated that I have ever seen, without mentioning the bonus that I was fortunate enough to experience it firsthand? There is an incredible story behind this motor yacht. You could easily spend a day or two exploring the hidden gems onboard and design signifiers that tell this yacht's design heritage. Every part and characteristic, no matter how big or small, has a narrative and a purpose, no matter where you are on board.

From the outside, Nero is a superyacht that pays homage to the early 21st-century yachts, when the finance industry and the growing manufacturing industry were at their height. Despite having the appearance of being built in the 1920s or 1930s, this yacht is distinctly of the modern era.

The custom design draws inspiration from J.P. Morgan's renowned Corsair IV yacht. The Corsair Yachts shipyard was specifically founded to build this unique commission, and 90m Nero was launched in



2008. Her design is intended to convey the same grandeur and regality as the yachts of her namesake. Nero's amazing quality is that she feels like she belongs everywhere she goes.

Nero is a true work of floating art, but rather than being appreciated from a distance, its purpose was to be experienced holistically. Nero has recently completed a rather extensive refit; the goal being to make her more liveable and functional, which will help the boat fulfil its potential as a charter yacht. This monumental task was given to Laura Pomponi, the talented designer, who went on to win first place for the Master Cabin Award at the 2017 International Yacht & Aviation Awards in appreciation of her exceptional work on the inside of the vessel, demonstrating the desire to strike a balance between aesthetics and functionality. Every aspect of Nero's decks reflects the past that inspired their creation.

There's no denying that the instant you set foot on Nero's limousine tender, it feels like a scene from a movie. You can't take your eyes off Nero once you lock eyes with her; she has you from the minute you first see her and as you approach. There will be times when all you want to do is circle the yacht until you have the guts to board. Every guest will feel an enthusiasm similar to meeting royalty—



not the kind that makes you leap about. In your head, you're on cloud nine, humming with excitement, but on the exterior, you're struggling to contain your disbelief and wondering, "Is this really happening?" This is what Nero can do to you. I would know; I have met the late Queen of England.

All of your anxiety, anticipation, and mental build-up simply disappear once you've boarded. The first people you meet are the Captain and crew, and immediately you have the feeling of déjà vu, or a familiar and comfortable environment. You forget that the outside world even exists as you're strolling to the main lounge, a feeling that I have never experienced on any yacht I have been on over the years. You have a sense that a weight has been lifted, and your day-to-day problems just disappear. And the crew contributes to that as well - they can only be described in one word: ninjas, or, to put it another way, mind readers. The crew is always there, hidden away, wherever you are on Nero. Whenever you think, "I could use a glass of water" or "I have a requirement," they are there with the very thing you were thinking about.

As you can probably tell, Nero has gotten under my skin. As someone who is frightened of the sea, primarily due to the unknown, this has got to be one of those experiences that will live with me forever. I never once felt afraid to be on the water during my time onboard;



Nero simply casts a spell on you, like a mother holding her terrified child, even in choppy waters.

Across the five decks of Nero, you'll find that each level is distinctive, each with its own ambiance. Unwind in one of her many living and entertainment areas, including the spacious sun deck. There is a sophisticated party room and lounge on the main deck. And why not treat yourself to a drink from the comprehensive selection of Nero cocktails at the private Art Deco cocktail lounge?

With enough room for twelve people across six staterooms, everyone has their own space—an escape. The wonderful part is that each cabin feels unique and special. The master suite on Nero is outfitted to make guests feel like they're in a five-star hotel, even if they're out at sea. Even in





the midst of the most exuberant celebrations onboard Nero, guests can enjoy the suite's own living, dining, and study areas, as well as unique access to the observation lounge and swimming pool.

When you really need to get the knots out of your shoulders and back, you may take advantage of the yacht's on-board professional masseuse, who is dedicated solely to your relaxation. But that's not all; guests also get access to a beauty salon onboard and onboard beautician, as well as a fully equipped gym that comes with a personal trainer and a yoga instructor.

But enough about me talking about Nero; at this rate, I might go on forever; instead, I will now present you to one of Nero's numerous talented crew members. I'd like to introduce you to Chef Chris Westrip. Chris has been in the industry for more than thirty years, and it all started with his grandmother, adding, "I used to cook and make fresh breads with my grandma on the farm, using fresh produce; that gave me the cooking bug."

And even when Nero is on charter, he continues to take the time to buy produce locally, no matter where in the world they may be. Chris added, "I try to use local produce from local markets and suppliers and adopt the cooking techniques of the area I'm in." He continued, "Most mornings I'll head



ashore and see what's locally available."

M/Y Nero gets around, whether it is along the Mediterranean or Southeast Asia, and given that Chris likes to use fresh produce, I had to ask if Chris had a signature dish. "All my dishes change according to the area and produce I can get on the yacht, so it's hard to have one signature dish. Perhaps variety is my signature!" Adding to that, one of the strangest requests he got from a guest was "Nigerian giant snails!" which, to be honest, would surprise me too. But for every chef, there was a time when Chris was not on a yacht but working in a traditional restaurant. However, every chef I have interviewed has different thoughts and feedback when comparing working in a large kitchen in a restaurant to going to a much smaller galley on a yacht. Chris shared, "On the yacht, I am cooking to the family or guests' own specific preferences; in a restaurant, I have much more freedom—as long as the dishes sell! In each instance, I relish the opportunity to impress."

With all the places Nero has been, I asked Chris if there was a location or part of the world he would recommend when guests are looking to charter Nero. "Nero is as at home on the Côte d'Azur as she is in the Caribbean or Eastern Mediterranean. I think she truly shines, however, when she's within reach of the shore—this is a yacht you want people to see and one you want to admire for yourself as you transfer from superyacht to shore in her custom tender." Chris answered. But



Chris's favourite place and yachting destination is Spain, adding, "Barcelona is my favourite place; all the food is good; it's great to pick up provisions here and discover new, inspiring flavours for myself."

Adding his final thoughts, he shared some advice to charter guests, "Fill out those preference sheets and speak to the chef directly; you may think you're being picky, but really you're making their life easier!"

Nero is a yacht that brings out the best in you. Sitting on the sundeck, you and your guests will feel as though Nero is guiding you like some sort of supernatural creature, and you will feel as though you can conquer the world no matter what you do for work or what is happening in your personal life. This is how I felt when I had to leave: not unhappy or upset, but revitalised and ready to take on the world, and most of all, secure in the knowledge that Nero will be waiting for me as and when I need her.

Whether I'm discussing the yacht's interior, design, or crew, most of the time I compare it to a five-star hotel. In this scenario, I think it devalues Nero and the crew. No matter how many stars a hotel may have, it simply can't compare to Nero.

Nero is in a league of its own, in every. Single. Way.

M/Y Nero is available to charter through Burgess International.

