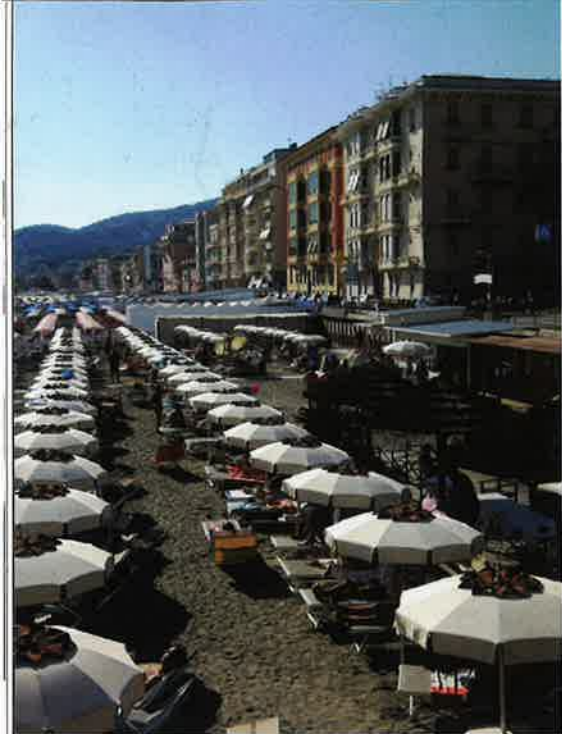


A man and a woman are standing on the deck of a yacht, looking at each other and holding drinks. The sun is setting behind them, creating a warm, golden glow. The yacht's interior is visible in the foreground, with a grey cushioned seat and a magazine. The background shows a calm body of water and distant hills under a clear sky.

THINKING INSIDE THE BOX

AN ECONOMICAL AND VOLUMINOUS TRAWLER-STYLE YACHT FROM ITALY,
TESTED IN ITS HOME WATERS. BY ALAN HARPER



Varazze is an unassuming little town on Italy's Ligurian coast, about 20 miles west of Genoa. Seen from the sea during the summer, its waterfront cafés and elegant buildings are arranged in an orderly row behind ranks of beach umbrellas.

Glancing up at the shore from the helm of the Absolute 64 Navetta, Varazze could have been any one of the numerous resorts along this stretch of coast that was built up in the 19th century along the line of the coastal railway.

But this is Italy, where things are often not quite what they seem. You can peel back the layers of history like an onion. I let my eye wander along the waterfront and got the sense that there was more to this place than gelato and sunbeds. A crenellated tower stood, incongruous, among the domestic facades—a remnant, perhaps, of an old city wall. And there, off to the right, a square campanile, or bell tower, emerged above the rooflines, its red bricks and narrow, arch-topped openings unmistakably Romanesque. If I were to go looking for the hidden heart of the town, that might be the place to start.

It took a bit of finding. Varazze's old town is set back from the beach, and once across the straight coastal road, the medieval streets were narrow and haphazardly placed. Some seemed like little more than steep alleyways; others opened out at random into polygonal piazzas, while the low, late-season sunlight warmed the old cobblestones and gave a glow to the stucco and stonework. With its intricate patterned stone paving, the Piazza Sant'Ambrogio was clearly a focal point of the old town, one side almost entirely taken up by the imposing Baroque façade of its church. Inside, few traces of the original fabric remained beneath the exuberant decorative embellishments applied over the last five centuries, but there alongside, almost hidden by that outside façade, was my Romanesque red-brick campanile, defiantly unadorned and dating back 900 years.

The Absolute Navetta 64 had taken a bit of finding too. If the name of Varazze is known at all to the wider boating community, it's as the historic site of the old Baglietto shipyard, and also as a luxury yacht harbor, the brainchild of Azimut-Benetti boss Paolo Vitelli, who

LOA: 64'5"
 Beam: 18'1"
 Draft: 5'10"
 Displ. (full load): 108,973 lbs.
 Fuel: 951 gal.
 Water: 267 gal.
 Power: 2/1,000-hp Volvo IPS 1350
 Price: \$2.3 million

| RPM | KNOTS | GPH | RANGE | dB(A) |
|------|-------|------|-------|-------|
| 1000 | 8.4 | 9.8 | 735 | 55 |
| 1250 | 10.0 | 16.9 | 506 | 57 |
| 1500 | 12.0 | 29.3 | 351 | 60 |
| 1750 | 14.1 | 43.9 | 278 | 62 |
| 2000 | 18.9 | 61.6 | 263 | 62 |
| 2250 | 23.1 | 78.2 | 252 | 67 |
| 2450 | 27.2 | 97.2 | 240 | 71 |

Seas: 1-2 ft. | Fuel: 4/5 | Water: full



You can't study the 64's profile and not stare at the massive expanse of glass in and above the hull. Whether you're inside or out, you'll never forget you're on the water.



Flip back to the previous page and note again the size of the windows. Low-height furniture only enhances that affect—and the view of the sea underway.

after decades of determined wrangling with the authorities finally got it built about 15 years ago. With that heritage, you might imagine that the marina today would be Azimut City, but it hasn't worked out like that: The local Absolute dealer has built quite an empire in his nine years of occupation, and the boats moored along the waterfront are testament to his industry. You wouldn't think it would be easy to miss something as obvious as the Navetta 64, but I walked past it a couple of times before finding it, hiding in plain sight among its many sisters.

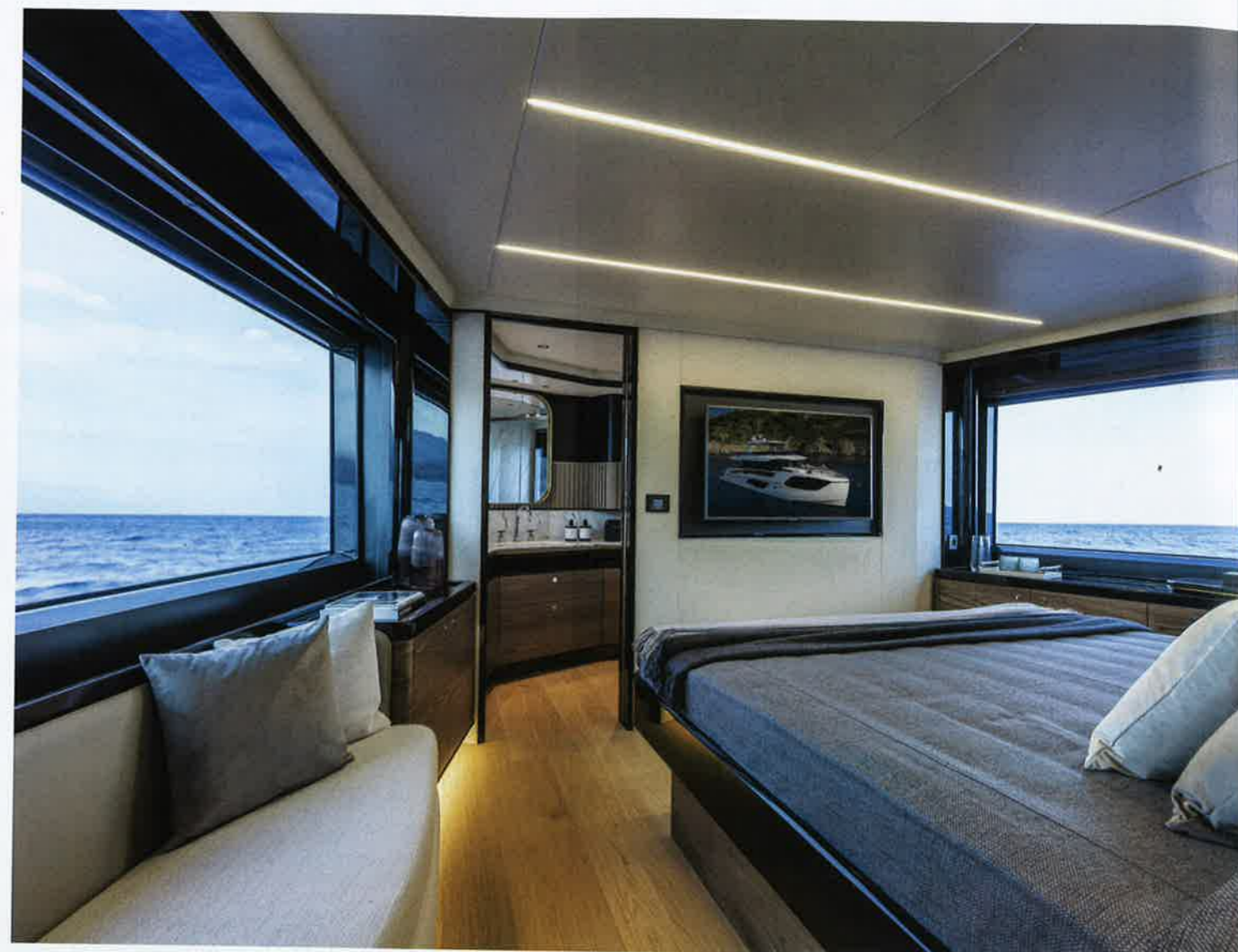
Do you remember that Dudley Moore movie, *Crazy People*? About an ad man who loses his mind and comes up with a catchphrase for Volvo: "They're boxy, but they're good." I can't imagine why looking up at the imposing form of the 64 called this to mind, but just as the ads in the film turn out to be a huge success, so do Absolute's Navettas. Boxiness is kind of the point—they're huge inside, and they look it. Most designers think outside the box. Absolute's think inside it, and they do it very well.

So to describe the Navetta 64 as a roomy three-cabin yacht with an occasional fourth hardly does it justice. With almost 7 feet of head-

room, the main deck is laid out on one level from transom to helm station, with the galley equidistant between them. A generous and well-appointed owner's cabin resides in the bow, sitting on its own raised deck level to allow for a useful storage area beneath. On the port side, the VIP suite rivals the owner's for space, and its assets are emphasized by the clever use of sliding pocket doors for the head, which simply disappear into the bulkheads. Sliding doors are also used for the twin-berth guest cabin and its head compartment, removing at a stroke the awkwardness that conventional hinged doors can bring to the lower deck of even quite substantial craft.

The 64's standard interior finishes would be easy to live with: elm and walnut veneers for the furniture, oak for the floors, with light Corian surfaces—or marble, as an option—and accents of fabric and leather.

As for that fourth cabin, it's in the stern and is technically the Navetta's "beach club." A clever articulated backrest converts the comfortable aft-facing sofa into a full-size, aft-facing double berth measuring 6 feet, 3 inches by 5 feet, 3 inches. With enviable views to wake up to, instant access to the swim platform (and the truly



On many yachts, this forward space would constitute the master. Thanks to the beach club, this will likely be the second-most coveted stateroom.

stupendous engine room), an optional sun awning, and its own small head and shower, your guests will be fighting for this one. Its curved glass doors are rendered completely watertight when underway by a high-tech pneumatic gasket.

There is an equally alluring relaxation area on that broad foredeck, linked by safe sidedeck walkways a good 18 inches wide to a spacious cockpit. The Navetta's flybridge is huge for a 64, more than 30 feet from windscreen to aft rail, and spans the full beam.

Something else the designers have thought about is how boats are actually used. So, not only does the 64 have a side door at the helm station, but there are side access doors in the gunwales on each side—because you don't moor stern-to all the time. I particularly enjoyed the boat hook stowage arrangement—a hidden tube, accessible at the cockpit docking station—while the three roller shades in the cockpit add shade, shelter and privacy.

The hull design is as clever a combination of shapes as the rest of the Navetta 64. Aficionados will be familiar with Absolute's way of thinking, and the way the form combines an incisive forefoot to smooth the ride into head seas with flat aft sections for maximum lift. It's a

simple principle, but not as easy to achieve as it looks—a too-rapid transition in the angle of deadrise can have the effect of presenting a flat face to the oncoming seas, which rather defeats the purpose.

Absolute's stated aim with this hull shape is to provide a wide range of planing speeds with as little variation in efficiency as possible. In a cruising boat, this is a priceless attribute. You select your speed according to the sea state or your mood, without being penalized by a spike in fuel consumption. A glance at the figures shows that the yard got it right: The difference in range between 15 knots and 23 is negligible. The 64 felt as relaxed and comfortable planing quietly at 15 knots as she did with the throttles pushed home, with almost no variation in trim. Such were the boat's cruising characteristics that the only way to gauge how fast it was going without relying on the instruments was to look over the side at the water: It felt and sounded pretty much the same at 15 knots as at 25. In a good way.

And then, of course, I glanced up again, saw Varazze basking sleepily in the late-season sunshine, and noticed something off to the right—a Romanesque campanile. Must remember to check that out. You never know what's hidden on the horizon. □