

Home / SuperMegayachts / New Builds / #TankoaTakeover: my visit to Italy's most ambitious Superyacht builder

#TankoaTakeover: my visit to Italy's most ambitious Superyacht builder



Edoardo Ratto, the General Manager of Tankoa Yachts, has been building superyachts for the rich and famous since before I was born.

His career began in 1990 as an 18-year-old at the Cantieri di Baglietto in Varazze; a heritage Italian yard which itself has been in operation for over a century. Over the years Ratto moved up through the ranks to become a hugely respected and experienced team member at Baglietto, but in 2007 it was time for a change. And so, this became the year that Tankoa was founded.



Spending the best part of 3 hours in the Tankoa shipyard in Genova, you get the feeling that the soul of the workforce permeates even the walls and scaffolding that enshrouds their latest project- kept under wraps in either of the two gom build sheds. When I asked him what the one thing is that makes Tankoa special, Ratto replied to me simply in Italian:

“Passione. È come.. quando lo yacht ha lasciato il cantiere, è stato proprio un giorno speciale. A volte qualcuno dei nostri piange dalla gioia!

Passion. It's like..when the yacht leaves the yard, it's truly a special day. Sometimes the workers are even crying!

And you can picture that sun-kissed launch day; the yacht sliding gracefully into the water adorned with signal flags, the mixed crowd coming together cheering and some shedding a stifled tear after perhaps five years of hard work. You get that feeling sometimes when something monumental you were part of comes to an abrupt end; it's the sudden loss of what's familiar, and a subtle leap into the uncharted territory of whatever comes next.



New beginnings are at the heart of the Tankoa Yachts story, yet these fresh starts are scientifically planned and underpinned with decades of experience. In one of the slick and well-furnished meeting rooms, a potential superyacht owner (or overheating press executive for that matter) is usually greeted with a stack of printed brochures that show off Tankoa's latest concepts; as one would be in any superyacht builder's office worldwide. But what is different here is the General Arrangement drawings adorning the pages, which are left blank- to be filled in over a long afternoon of ideas and dreams, with separate sections for notes and comments. Tankoa are adamant that anything is possible, and this blank canvas approach is an opportunity that many competing yards in Europe cannot offer their clients.

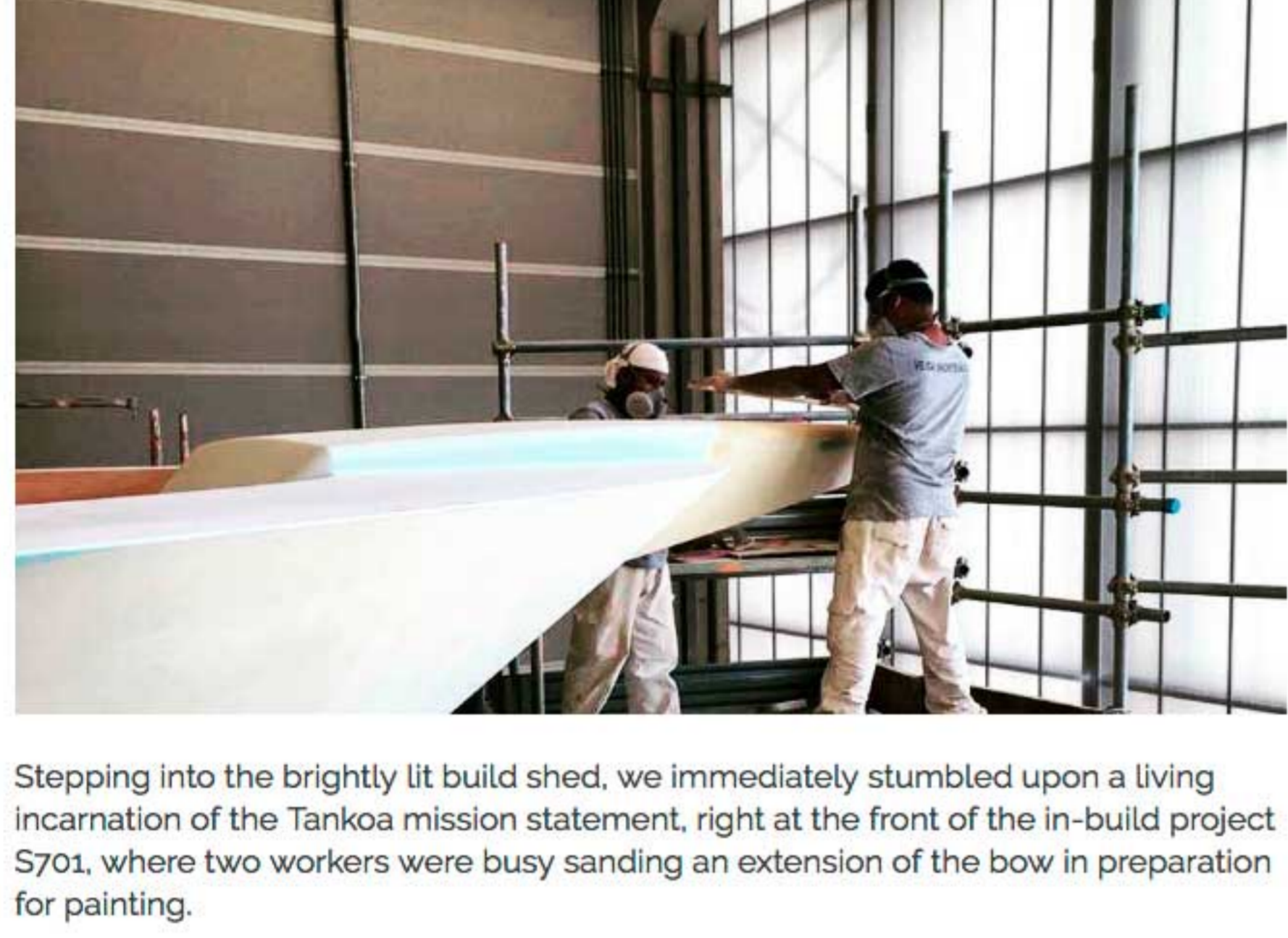


"We have to find a way to show buyers the huge benefits of working with a smaller yard," Ratto explains to me, "our prices are comparable to the Dutch yards, for example, but everyone expects us to be cheaper because we are Italian. This idea has been created by the Italian yacht market cutting its prices by sacrificing on quality. The reality is that we can deliver the same work product as the Dutch or the Germans, and we have the experience to do so."

The point is a good one, and the idea that a client can achieve a more personalised finish for their yacht by opting for a boutique-style builder is one that, to me, seems clearly attractive- especially when you're considering a well-funded and financially stable business like Tankoa.

The thing is, purchasing a semi-custom yacht from a busy yard in Northern Europe seems like a fairly risk-free proposition on paper, and it is. But the semi-custom offering comes with certain limitations on personalisation that some ambitious owners may find frustrating. A boutique yard, with only one or two yachts in build at any one time, will certainly be more receptive to last minute changes and new ideas.

"I remember in the 90's at Baglietto, there were so many celebrity clients arriving at the yard, all wanting their yachts engineered specifically to them," muses Ratto, "we would always say yes, and that's why we were so popular in those days. It's the same ethos here in Tankoa, and our company mission is to be the partner of the yacht's owner in the realization of their dream."

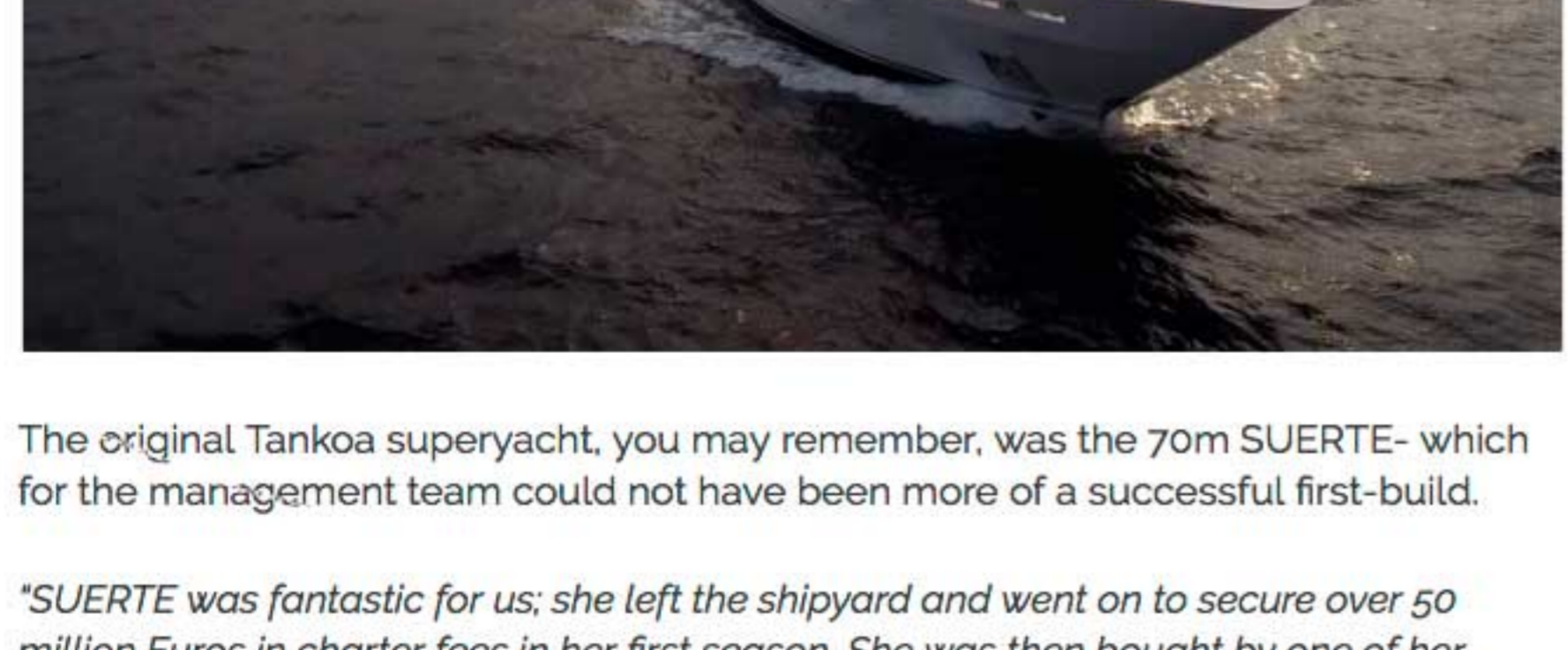


Stepping into the brightly lit build shed, we immediately stumbled upon a living incarnation of the Tankoa mission statement, right at the front of the in-build project S701, where two workers were busy sanding an extension of the bow in preparation for painting.

"What's going on here?" I asked.

"Ah, here we are looking at a special request by the owner to lengthen the bow by one meter - he wants to put a stainless-steel aeroplane on a bowsprit. (similar to the Jaguar on KISMET, or the Phoenix on PHOENIX2). The yacht has grown to 72m this week!"

An ambitious client is just what a small yard like this needs to grow and to make its name in a highly competitive market, and Tankoa have been lucky to attract someone like this for their (now) 72m project S701.

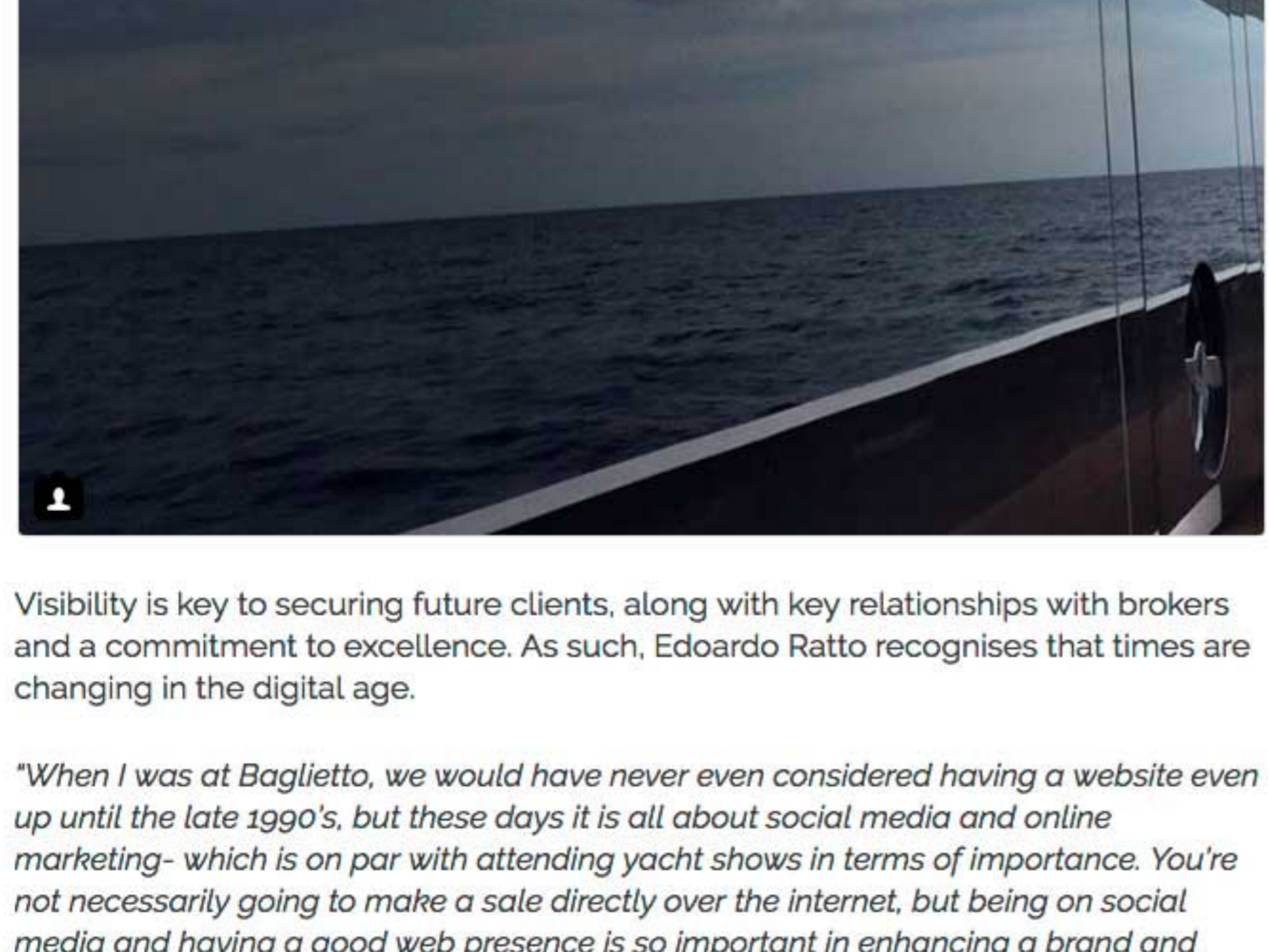


The original Tankoa superyacht, you may remember, was the 70m SUERTE- which for the management team could not have been more of a successful first-build.

"SUERTE was fantastic for us; she left the shipyard and went on to secure over 50 million Euros in charter fees in her first season. She was then bought by one of her charter clients after less than 12 months from leaving the yard."

For marketing purposes however, this was mixed news for Tankoa. With SUERTE following her new owner back to the Middle East, away from the camera lenses and yacht enthusiasts of the Med, the directors were anxious to accelerate the build of their second boat VERTIGE, built for a French client who required a boat built for chartering, but also to a specification that would match his own personal taste.

Launching in 2017, with an interior and exterior penned by another long-time Baglietto collaborator, Francesco Paszkowski, VERTIGE will make her debut at the Monaco Yacht show this year and has already been a regular on the charter scene.



Visibility is key to securing future clients, along with key relationships with brokers and a commitment to excellence. As such, Edoardo Ratto recognises that times are changing in the digital age.

"When I was at Baglietto, we would have never even considered having a website even up until the late 1990's, but these days it is all about social media and online marketing- which is on par with attending yacht shows in terms of importance. You're not necessarily going to make a sale directly over the internet, but being on social media and having a good web presence is so important in enhancing a brand and cementing your experience to a global customer base."

Never a truer word has been spoken..