

# NO PLACE LIKE HOME

After a life aboard luxury superyachts around the world, this captain is glad to be home.

By Jacqueline Brinkman

As MV *Seafaris* returns to her home berth at Cairns Marlin Marina after a four week maintenance period at Cairns Slipways, Captain Duncan Smith has a smile on his face. His excitement can be largely attributed to the recent birth of his son, but also to the opportunity to be cruising the Great Barrier Reef again at the helm of Australia's pre-eminent charter superyacht.

*Seafaris* is the brainchild and labour of love of NSW property developer, Jeff McCloy. Jeff was intimately involved in every aspect of the design and construction of the 40.6m catamaran, which has recently been recognised both internationally and in Australia for its exceptional design.

Duncan first heard about the project in 2004 as Captain of MY *Perfect Persuasion* when the McCloy family chartered that yacht in the Mediterranean. When Jeff learned that Duncan had returned to Australia in

2006, he quickly recruited him for the final stages of *Seafaris*'s fit-out and launch.

Duncan is undoubtedly proud to be in command of such a unique vessel, but is equally thrilled to be designing and offering a cruising experience unlike any other. "*Seafaris* offers a whole new level of cruising, centred around reef access rather than ports. It is not unusual to drop anchor and be surrounded by a pod of minke whales," said Duncan.

According to Duncan, the special features of the vessel add another dimension to the cruising experience. "Take the teppanyaki bar - another vision of the owner. Guests can watch the chef prepare the catch of the day as the sun sets over the Tablelands, bringing out the incredible colours of the reef."

The expansive 11 metre beam and 41 metres of luxury catamaran is cleverly carved to balance privacy,

comfort and space. The master suite and four guest staterooms are sanctuaries of relaxation for up to ten guests. With a dive guide, fishing guide and renowned chefs among the crew of ten, *Seafaris* offers a level of luxury, attention and expertise on par with the world's most sought-after superyachts.

Duncan has enjoyed a dynamic and varied career on the world's oceans before returning 'home' to Australia. Duncan spurned traditional weekend and after-school jobs for driving tenders in Sydney's local marinas. On finishing high school, he deferred enrolling in university and instead travelled to Africa. There he met up with a friend in South Africa and secured a four year internship with the global company Unilever PLC, completing a Bachelor of Business.

In 1989, he and a friend from Sydney joined a three masted staysail schooner training ship and spent 12 months literally learning the ropes on the Indian Ocean, North and South Atlantic and the North Sea. The pair left the vessel in Southampton and joined a 140ft superyacht, MY *Joystar*.

After 12 months cruising the Mediterranean, Duncan headed to Florida and joined MY *Lady Valen* for a summer Caribbean itinerary, bound for Venezuela. "This vessel was so interesting as they were just completing a 3 metre extension, which in the early 1990s was quite revolutionary for a yacht of this size," remembers Duncan.

In his next posting, Duncan joined a custom-built Hatteras which operated between Fisher Island, Miami and West Palm Beach. The yacht spent six months in Florida before transiting the Panama Canal and cruising Mexico, finally basing itself in California for the next summer. Duncan recalls this period as being one of the best learning grounds with

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great opportunities, not least of which was racing motorbikes around the Florida Keys! He recalls that one of the toughest lessons was spending months planning an expedition to Alaska, with every aspect prepared, only for the plans to change at the last moment.

He warns this is one of the few downsides of the industry. "The anticipation of wonderful itineraries and the frustration of either not getting there or not getting off the boat other than to do the garbage run."

After a stint cruising Puerto Rico and chartering the next winter in the Caribbean on board the 120ft Denison, MY *Enerly*, Duncan returned to Florida to join MY *Antipodean*.

One of his first charters was in Tahiti for the acclaimed actor, Dustin Hoffman. Duncan recalls the time aboard MY *Antipodean* cruising the South Pacific with great fondness. "We had the opportunity to spend extended periods of time in French Polynesia and Fiji, to live and experience the culture and extensively explore the region. We made great friends and even lost a crew member to a Polynesian princess!"

When the vessel returned to Fremantle, Western Australia for a major refit, Duncan had the opportunity to undertake commissioning and delivery work for Warren Yachts and further his qualifications. He then returned to MY *Antipodean* in 1995 as captain.

With a new owner, the vessel was based in South East Asia. He recalls a highlight of this period being the first yacht to gain access to the remote cruising grounds of Burma and chartering around the Mergui Archipelago. "The volatile environment meant every aspect and movement of the trip had to be planned. Two government officials were required to be on board to give permission where we could anchor."

Another high point for Duncan was being in Hong Kong on charter for the official handover from British to Chinese rule in 1997.

While aboard *Antipodean*, Singapore became Duncan's second home



and the vessel chartered every season in Thailand. He recounts the intensive charter periods, but also unforgettable opportunities with the owner inviting the crew to stay where they were for three days and dive Sipadan, one of the world's most spectacular dive sites.

In 1999, MY *Antipodean* was acquired by an Australian owner and returned to Australia for refit.

Duncan describes the excitement of being in Sydney for the 2000 Olympics. "Michael Jordan boarded the vessel following his 400m track win, it also happened to be his birthday. The yacht anchored alongside the Sports Illustrated party, being held at Farm Cove and 1500 people stopped partying to spontaneously turn and sing happy birthday to him ... you couldn't have planned a more poetic moment," recalls Duncan.

Duncan remained with MY *Antipodean* until 2002. He kept busy with

deliveries before joining MY *Perfect Persuasion* with his partner Sam, who had been working aboard MY *Slipstream*. The pair discovered they were expecting a baby in March 2004 while in Barcelona and began making plans for Sam to return to Australia. Sam's farewell charter proved to be a dream one, with Brad Pitt, George Clooney and Matt Damon aboard for the Monaco Grand Prix. The first baby picture (in utero) of little Molly features some famous signatures of well wishers!

After returning to Australia in 2006, Duncan now holds the enviable position as master of the premium superyacht in Australia. The novelty of being able to go home most evenings to Sam and their two children is another attractive feature of the program.

Duncan recalls that along with the great opportunities and fun times comes a real sacrifice in a yachting career. "On-board a busy charter yacht you work when everyone else is on holiday! I've missed eight friends' weddings and at one point only made it home to family for two out of twelve consecutive Christmas seasons because of sailing schedules."

"*Seafaris* enjoyed a busy and successful maiden charter season, covering 11,000 miles: equivalent to three transatlantic crossings!" Duncan is looking forward to future seasons on board *Seafaris* with plans for cruising as far afield as PNG and the Kimberleys.

Duncan states the beauty of the cruising grounds and the competency of the local workforce as key advantages to the Tropical North Queensland region as a superyacht destination.

When asked to name the highlight of working in Australia, Duncan quickly states it is the chance to share this unique and stunning region with guests from around the world. "To pull out a chart for guests and plot a cruise to some of the most spectacular and remote sites they are ever likely to experience... this is a reminder of what blue water cruising really is... it reminds people of the romance of yachting." ○