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# Vision Quest

No one has more fun building yachts than Dennis Washington, owner of 226-foot *Attesa*, perhaps because he gets so involved in the process.

**LEADSHIP 226** On a recent late summer day in Vancouver, B.C., Dennis Washington was polishing his latest project, 226-foot *Attesa*. To other eyes the yacht was finished; she had even been photographed. Yet, carpenters scurried to follow his *ad hoc* directions for better cabinet storage partitions and to reposition screens containing precious Lalique panels. There is an elevator aboard the yacht but he didn't use it, bounding up and down staircases with the energy and lankiness of a teenager, although he's 50-something years the wiser. Washington's enthusiasm for his latest *Attesa* overflows. But mixed with a gentle air of pride in doing things with his own hands is the same steely determination that took him from hard times to the *Forbes* 400 list. »



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## It is safe to say that ever since Washington knew what a Feadship was, he wanted one. With *Atessa*, he has a platform big enough to hold all his ideas.

Washington leads a Montana-based empire of mostly privately held companies, mainly in heavy industry or transportation, and is chairman of the Washington Group International, a global engineering and construction company employing some 38,000 people in the United States, western Canada and 35 other countries. It all started with a \$30,000 loan from Caterpillar to buy a single bulldozer in 1964.

"Hey, I don't want this story to be about me," barked Washington. "I want it to be about *Atessa*." However, understanding Washington is the answer to the "why" question that haunts a discussion of any of his three yacht reconstruction projects, all named *Atessa*. He is more likely to deliver his short answer, "I like projects."

In 1991, he turned a sturdy 130-foot Kong and Halvorsen trawler named *YeCats* into a sleek 143-foot yacht pretty enough to land a supporting role to Robert Redford and Demi Moore in the movie *Indecent Proposal*. He modeled the refinements on a Feadship parked nearby in San Diego—Joan Kroc's *Impromptu*. Then, in 1995, he got the chance to buy *Impromptu* and set about revamping her for a multiseason lifestyle, adding a longer stern and a helicopter pad.

Washington doesn't refit boats, he guts them, keeping spaces that fit his needs and completely reinventing those that don't. All three *Atessas*, his float plane, jet and helicopter have benefited

from the extraordinary skills of Seattle-based stylist and designer Glade Johnson, but Washington's uncanny ability to imagine in three dimensions are at their very core.

In 2002 he bought, *Aviva*, a 204-foot Feadship built in 1998, which suffered a bizarre fire in 2001 that affected just the engine room and the upper deck but filled the interior with smoke. After a protracted insurance battle, the owner put *Aviva* up for sale and Washington grabbed it. At last he had a platform big enough to hold all his ideas.

"Dennis has a way of looking at things other people think are dead and seeing viability," said one of Washington's team members. "He was that way in the beginning with dump trucks and scrapers and later with the Butte mine he bought from ARCO. He just sees how to make things work, often in new and different ways."

Washington's vision for the newest *Atessa* gelled during a short cruise on the boat not long after purchase. "Dennis wanted to improve the boat's water access in a big way, he didn't like the placement of the gym, and he thought the main staircase should be grand," said Johnson. His answer to the fire damage on the upper deck was to cut the deck off entirely and start over.

It's safe to say that ever since Washington knew what a Feadship was, he wanted one. With *Impromptu*, he had the chance to take one apart and put it back together, hiring De Voogt to engineer the stern extension and the helideck. Yet that boat was not built to Lloyd's class and predated MCA.

With his next Feadship, he was going for top marks. Not only did he contract the De Voogt office again for engineering assistance on the 24-foot stern extension and the upper deck—which had now morphed

into two decks—but after deciding that everything in the engine room was suspect except the main engines, he replaced it all with the systems Feadship is currently specifying for new builds. All together, *Atessa* is an up-to-date Feadship, just one not completed in Holland.

So why didn't he just order a new Feadship? "The process would kill him," Johnson said without a second's hesitation. "He has to be involved every day, sometimes all day. He makes running changes. No yard could handle that, and he couldn't handle not being able to get from his desk to his project in just a couple of hours."

*Atessa's* rebirth came at Vancouver Shipyards, which is part of the Washington Marine Group of companies, broadly involved in ocean transportation, ship repair and shipbuilding. Washington chides himself a bit for the fact that he spent three times as much on rebuilding the boat as he did on purchasing it, and that's bare costs, working in his own yard. "I wouldn't have taken this on if I didn't have these facilities," he said. "Sometimes we'd build something, and I'd look at it and say, 'That's not right,' and start over." But Washington's savvy track record of success is safe with *Atessa*; with the dollar's weakness against the Euro, he's got a 226-foot 2005 Feadship at a steep discount.

In reconfiguring the yacht's aft end, Washington knew he wanted to hide the toys not stowed in bays forward on the main deck, so there needed to be a garage as well as several places for people to enjoy sun



Shirred silk surrounds a spectacular Beaux Arts chandelier by Sabino, top, creating a dramatic rotunda entrance to the main deck. An 1810 Russian mahogany desk and a grand piano are the gatekeepers to the salon proper. The theater features electronics by Lino. The master suite, opposite, takes its pale color cue from honey onyx and antique gold-veined white marble.



The bridge-deck salon, above, offers a cozy space for informal dining or relaxing. European sconces from the 1920s and an antique Belgian black marble fireplace mix easily with contemporary furnishing. The complex parquetry of the floor is delicately reprised in the dining table. The morning room, below, is brightened by anigre joinery and Ralph Lauren chairs. Ebony and stainless stools front a glass breakfast bar by Marki Olyeyk. Washington's office, far right, is a Deco departure. A glass door opens on to a spectacular atrium.



or shade out of the way of people boarding tenders. For Johnson, split levels translated to split levels, and the beach deck was born. A half-level below the covered, formal outdoor living room on the main deck is a curved expanse of teak with deck chairs and a hot tub. A hatch leads below to a day head and steam room cleverly sandwiched between the engineer's control room and lazarette. Wide steps sweep down from either side of the midlevel deck to the arrival deck beyond.

"One of our concerns was that in following the original hull lines aft, the longer the boat grew, the narrower the stern would become," said Johnson. "We achieved balance by beginning to widen the boat at the lower rub rail gently at first and then pushing it out boldly at the back." Johnson's office used a 3-D modeling program to create the design for this area, as well as the new fashion plates, exterior stairs and the shape of the superstructure, and sent electronic files to Diederik van der Hoek and Ronno Schouten in the De Voogt office for weight calculations and structural detailing.

The new superstructure above the bridge deck is composite, its mold made by Janicki Marine. It was constructed in a single piece more than 60 feet long at Northern Marine and barged up from Seattle. The club deck begins with an outdoor lounge area and Jacuzzi and then transits to a five-station gymnasium, which is followed by "a morning room," an informal place for breakfast equipped with a small galley where guests can order up eggs any style at a glass-topped breakfast bar or relax with coffee in a suede Ralph Lauren chair. Tucked behind the elevator shaft is a small beauty salon that converts to a massage room. Aft, beyond a curved glass wall that frames a unique spiral staircase, an EC-130 helicopter has pride of place.



## When it comes to decorating, the houses are hers but the boat is mine.

Above the club deck is an imaginative sky deck with forward observation seating. A covered center service area is underneath the array of domes, while weatherproof fabric drapes aft-facing lounges like a Bedouin tent. Although one deck was replaced with two, the actual maximum height of the domes and antennae is lower than on *Avista*, and the entire structure—painted Harley-Davidson Silver—seems to disappear against the sky. The new midnight blue hull also visually lowers the profile and has the added benefit of making the huge square portlights in the guest cabins disappear.

In addition to Johnson, Washington's project team included his two captains, Ted McCumber and Fred Larsson, who have been with him since the first *Atessa*. And not to be overlooked is Phyllis Washington—a design force in her own right. If anyone knows how to interpret Dennis Washington's ideas, it's his wife of 41 years. After Washington's early business ventures gained success, Phyllis quit her teaching job and began studying design and antiques. Her first venture was PJ's Interiors, and several years ago she opened Maison Felice, a large antiques store in Palm Desert, California. Although Washington appreciates his wife's taste, there is a line of demarcation. "I told Phyllis that when it comes to who has final say on decorating, the houses are hers but the boat is mine."

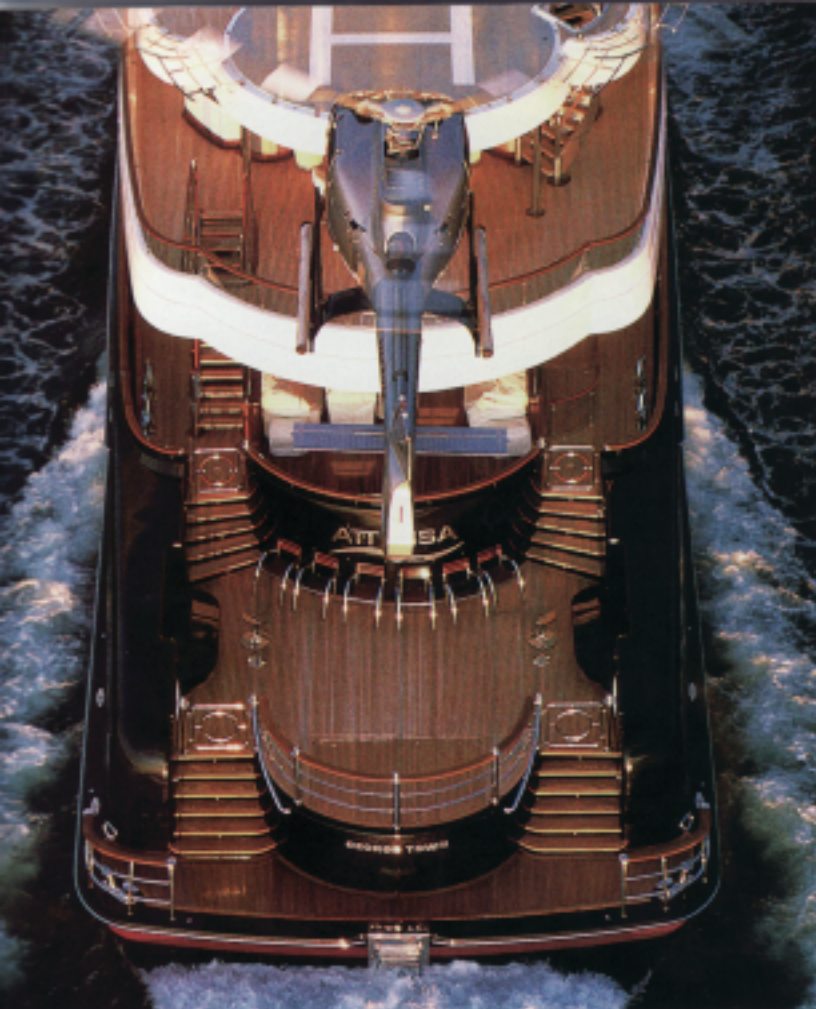
While Johnson did the space planning and architectural details, Phyllis Washington sourced all loose furniture, fabrics, window treatments and carpets. The elegant color scheme blossomed from one

shimmering, coppery, silk organza, which appears as floor-to-ceiling drapes in the main salon and stairway. Variations on copper—sunrise to sunset colors—appear throughout the yacht, contrasting with the grayness of the Pacific Northwest and the blue-greens of tropical seas.

One of the striking features of the new arrangement is the intimate scale of the spaces. "I'm on my boat a lot by myself or maybe with one or two other people. I don't want to feel out of place in rooms designed for a crowd," said Washington. In his previous boat, his desk was in a corner of the skylounge. Now, he has a dedicated office behind the bridge in a space that was once a gym. It's a powerful space with a black-lacquered French Deco desk, ebony floor, glass doors facing the atrium staircase and wall-size Coromandel screen.

"Their goal was to keep the boat homey," Johnson said. "They are not ostentatious people and some rooms by size alone seem ostentatious. There is no grand dining salon; his style is to eat outdoors."

Another element of their style is an eclectic mix of comfortable new furniture mixed with functional antiques. A nod to Biedermeier is the thread that unites furniture and accessories crafted over several centuries. *Atessa* looks like a beloved home full of collected things rather than an homage to shopping in the nearest design district. While he is particular about artwork, the exact provenance of many of the antiques is somewhat lost on Washington. "I didn't buy antiques for investment. I bought them because I liked them and because they bring something to the room," he said, shrugging. One such »



"something" is an etched glass Beaux-Arts chandelier by Marius Ernest Sabino, which lights the rotunda in the main salon.

There are, of course, details he does delight in pointing out: holographic fireplaces in the bridge-deck salon and master stateroom so real you have to touch them; a six-layer glass skylight by Markian Olynyk at the top of the central staircase; and a state-of-the-art generator installation featuring three of the latest cleaner-burning Cat gensets in a soundproof room. A separate control room for entertainment and communications equipment—called Houston Control—is forward between the crew mess and a staff cabin. *Attessa* is also the first yacht in the world with an eight-hour UPS battery backup instead of an emergency genset sanctioned by MCA.

Between the main foyer and the master stateroom is a dedicated theater that seats at least 12 people on two levels of curved sofas facing a wall-size projection screen designed by Linn Audio. It's not as funky as the outdoor theater setup on the second *Attessa's* sun deck, but it's far more functional.

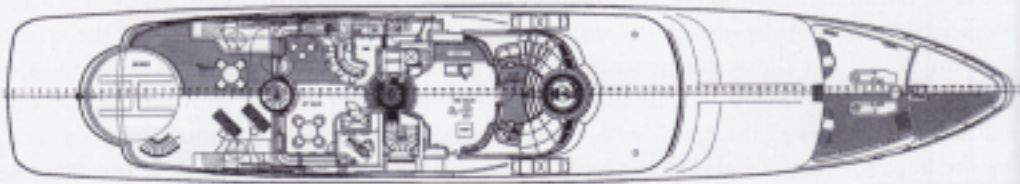
In the 14 years since Washington's first *Attessa* ran in *ShowBoats*, few things have changed. Washington, who laments he doesn't have an architect's education, still carries projects to fruition in exacting detail. Vancouver Shipyard already holds Washington's next work in progress. The former Boeing corporate yacht, *Daedalus*, a 120-footer built at Abeking & Rasmussen in 1966, is already being gutted for the Washington treatment. He liked her classic Philip Rhodes lines, and when he heard Boeing no longer wanted her, he made an immediate offer. Washington sees it as a complement to his rugged Canadian island lodge. And he's already renamed it *Impromptu*. □

**READER'S RESOURCE** Vancouver Shipyards Co., 50 Pemberton Ave., North Vancouver, BC, Canada V7P 2R2 604-988-6361. De Voigt Naval Architects, Zijlweg 148c, 2000 GE Haarlem, Holland, 31 (0)23 524 70 00

**Builder:** Royal Van Lent/Vancouver Shipyards **Year launched:** 2005 **LOA:** 226' (68.58m) **Beam:** 36'9" (11m) **Draft:** 11'4" (3.5m) **Max. speed:** 16 knots **Cruising speed:** 13 knots **Range:** 5,000 nm **Hull material:** steel **Superstructure material:** aluminum, composite **Fuel capacity:** 37,000 U.S. gal. (140,000 ltr.) **Freshwater capacity:** 11,000 U.S. gal. (41,000 ltr.) **Naval architecture:** De Voigt Naval Architects **Interior design:** Glade Johnson Design/Owner **Exterior styling:** Glade Johnson **Classification/certification:** Lloyds Maltese Cross 100 A1, SSC, Yacht P+LMC, MCA **Engines:** 2x Caterpillar 3516B DI-TA **Generators:** 3x Caterpillar C9, 215kW each **Air conditioning:** N.R. Koelling/Carrier **Watermaker:** 2x HEM 40 series; 3,000 gpd **Stabilizers:** Quantum, Zero Speed Conversion **Bow thruster:** Jastram, 150 hp **Stern thruster:** Veth retractable Azimuthing Z-drive, 150 hp **Satellite TV:** Seatel 4094 Antenna, Sony DSS receiver **Radar:** 2x Furuno 2815 x-band **Chart plotter:** Transas Navisailor 3000 ECDIS **Autopilot:** Anschutz Nautopilot 2010 **Gyrocompass:** 2x Anschutz Standard 20 **GPS:** 2x Leica MX10DGPS, 1x Leica MX420 AIS **Satcom:** NERA Inmarsat Fleet 77, NERA Standard B, 2x Sailor H2095B

**Inmarsat C, Sailor SC4000 Iridium Magnetic compass:** Anschutz TMC-20 **SSB:** Skanti TRP7203 w/DSC9000 **Depth finder:** Furuno color video sounder FCV-292,

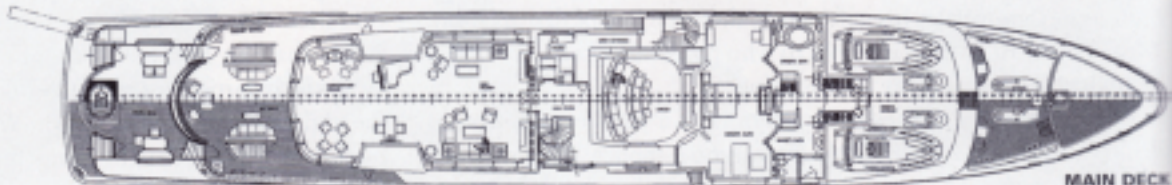
Furuno color sonar CH-36 **Wind instruments:** B&G Hydra 2 **Weatherfax:** Furuno DFAX 210 **Monitoring system:** DataStar



CLUB DECK



BRIDGE DECK



MAIN DECK





For those who like their bubbles with altitude, the club-deck Jacuzzi, below right, is four levels above one hidden under the teak expanse of the beach deck, beyond the hatch for a small crew boat. Overlooking the beach deck is an undercover outdoor living room that spills out of the main salon. Throughout the yacht, loose furniture allows spaces to be reconfigured.

