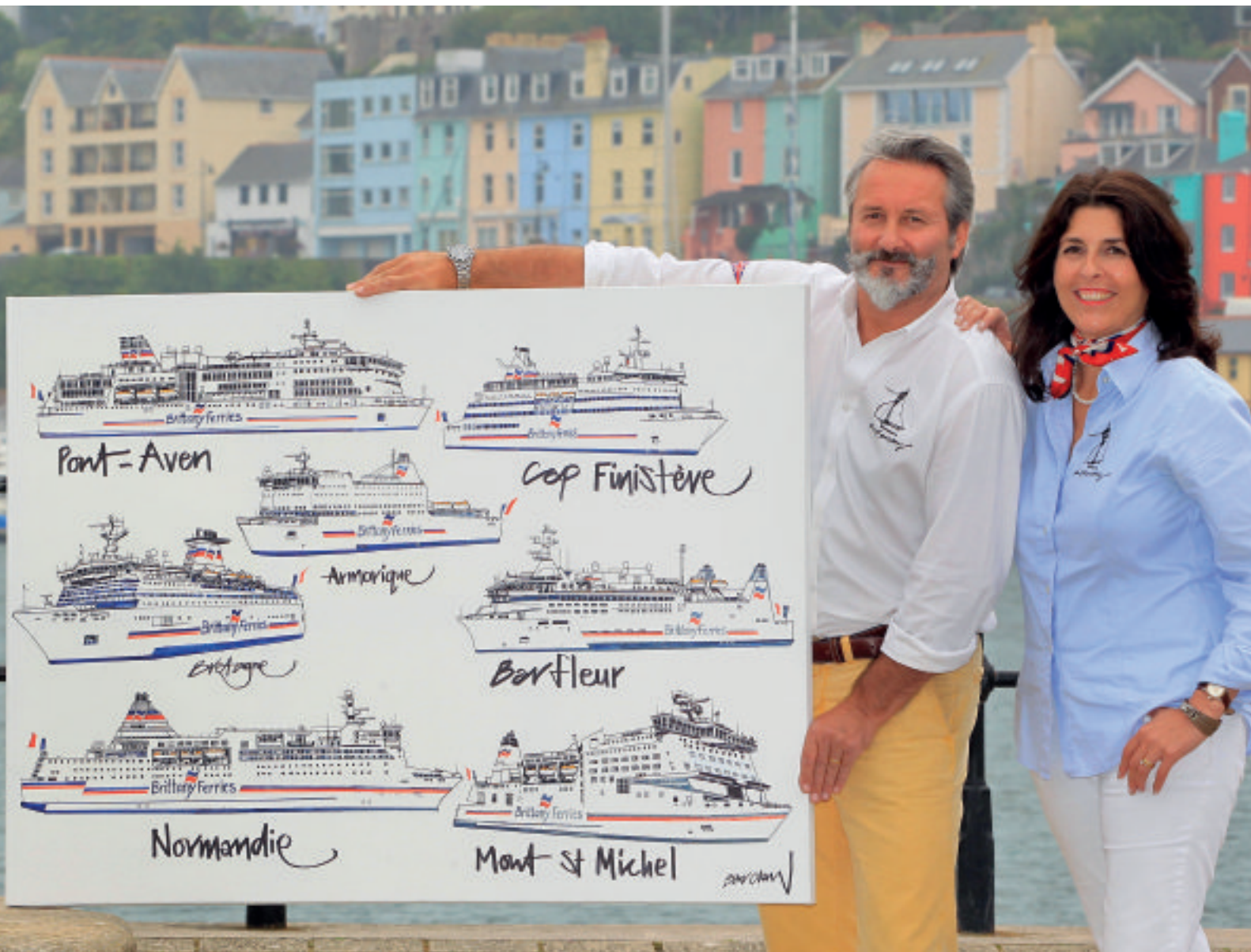


Putting it all in perspective *Paul Barclay*

Artist **Paul Barclay** has gone from dock master to illustrator, but the one thing that has remained constant is his love of boats. **Chris Rundle** caught up with him



From the hotel terrace Paul Barclay waved to the skipper of a yacht arriving to check his boat, moored in the very marina where Paul himself used to work.

"I've always loved the water. If I'm not close to the sea it mucks me up," he said thoughtfully.

"I suppose I'm on a bit of a voyage myself, really."

If he is, it is an extraordinary voyage. One which has taken him from a world where 'painting a boat' implies applying a new coat to the superstructure, to another where owners of some of the classiest yachts afloat will happily part with several thousand pounds to have him reproduce an image of their craft on canvas.

A voyage which has seen him change course abruptly from dock master to artist, and not just any artist, but one whose output makes him one of the most recognisable in the international yachting world.

But then, Paul Barclay is pretty unconventional. For one thing he's entirely content to give his work away.

Every day customers walk out of his Dartmouth studio clutching originals that he has been more than happy to let them have for nothing, for each sheet of wrapping paper used to parcel up their purchases has been individually decorated with an image of the racing yacht which has become Paul's own trademark.

It's an unusual selling technique, but one, which Paul points out, is also a valuable marketing tool.

"All the high street stores go to the same suppliers for their bags and wrappers, so people pick up exactly the same stuff whichever place they shop at. But I'm here first thing in the morning working on the sheets of wrapping paper so that when they come in they see something very special. It cannot be bought anywhere else. It creates something people don't see every day – and that's what keeps the brand going," he says.

In fact an unorthodox approach is what hallmarks everything about Paul Barclay. Until 2000, and after working on yachts both in the UK and abroad, he was senior dock master at the Dart Marina in Dartmouth in south Devon. But then came an abrupt change of career as he set up as an illustrator – a term he prefers to 'artist' – and began turning



out black and white pieces as distinctive as they are dynamic.

He's had no formal training, but clearly possesses a huge amount of talent, combining the skills of a draughtsman with a terrific eye for perspective. He also has the rare ability to create images by drawing freehand straight onto the canvas – and to make them appear to stand proud of it once they are there.

"[Paul] has the rare ability to create images by drawing freehand straight on to the canvas"

Paul's output runs from wine labels to warships, cityscapes to super-yachts, but it's the strong nautical theme running through the majority of his work which has brought him to the attention of the boating world.

He has worked for both Sunseeker and Crew Clothing, the one turning out some of the most luxurious yachts in the world, the other providing suitable gear for the crews who man them – as well as edging into the mainstream fashion market for the benefit of

Opposite: Captured! Paul and his wife with Paul's line-up of the Brittany Ferries fleet

Above: Treasure trove: Paul Barclay's Dartmouth shop

those who may not be able to afford a luxury yacht, but can at least afford to dress as though they do.

"What it means to the owner is that I can do an illustration of his yacht and he can buy the original, then the same design can be used to personalise the clothing of the crew," he says.

In fact the Paul Barclay organisation is very much an Anglo-French one. His partner in the business is his wife, Marianne, ensuring there's always a bilingual welcome awaiting customers arriving in the studio and shop in Dartmouth's historic heart. She's joined him after spending 27 years teaching French to English schoolchildren.

Toulouse-born Marianne moved with her family to Brest when she was just three months old: a complete change in scenery and lifestyle for the family, but one which she says impressed them so much that even after they had moved back south some seven years later, they always returned to Brittany for a month's holiday every August.

"She has," says Paul, "a terrific gift for dealing with people as well as being a real →



“The Paul Barclay brand is now almost synonymous with Dartmouth – that iconic yacht is starting to appear everywhere”

anywhere in the world sells the town as well.

“In my old studio if people walked past and they didn’t want a painting then that was it,” he said.

“But then one or two started asking me to draw yachts on to their jackets and before I knew it the yacht started to appear all over the place. That’s when I realised that putting a distinctive brand, a piece of strong imagery, on anything – clothing, bags or soft furniture – gave it a bit of provenance and made it far more attractive.

“If it rains I even sell umbrellas with the yacht on. I’ve got everything covered!”

Paul believes he has his father’s genes to thank for his prodigious talent for illustrating.

“I could draw like him when I was 14 or 15. He used to illustrate for Rolls-Royce – he would do all those exploded pictures showing the inside of engines for their manuals.

“I grew up in Lymington, near Exeter. We had a little sailing club and I was in the sea scouts. We all had rowing boats in the village, and my first job when I left school was working for a sail maker.

“When I left the marina 14 years ago I wondered what I was going to do, because around here unless you are in tourism and

Paul’s commissions come from far and wide, and subjects range from warships to department stores!

work in a bar or restaurant you are a bit stuck.

“But luckily I had inherited this ability from my father, so I started to draw people’s boats or their properties and it just went from there, although it’s taken 14 years for my style to really mature.”

He is, he says, particularly proud of his depiction of the Brittany Ferries fleet.

“With Marianne being French I’m keen to develop the French side of the business and I felt this would be one way of starting,” he said.

“We’ve had a lot of French visitors over here this summer and there was a huge amount of interest in it. In fact I could have sold it four or five times over. But this, I hope, is going to be just the start of the next part of my journey, my voyage.”

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