

# Asian marine

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## yacht security

world's best disclose safety secrets

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# yacht security

In crowded harbors and marinas there is safety in numbers as well as night watchmen. The major risk for crewless yachts under 65 feet is burglary, so most owners of these yachts take the same common-sense precautions they would at home — locking the door, perhaps setting the infrared burglar alarm, taking the valuable stuff off the boat at the end of the cruise.

If the owner possesses a crewed vessel, especially a mega-yacht with a global cruising range, the story is somewhat different. In the first place the owner may be wealthy enough to be attractive to kidnappers, terrorists or pirates. Furthermore, he may want to cruise beyond the safe havens of mainstream Caribbean or Mediterranean haunts, voyaging to exotic destinations in South America, Africa or the Far East. And if he's chartering his vessel he needs to reassure his charter clients that the yacht is as safe and secure as one's own home.

Recently two large Feadships cruised up the Amazon River to the Peruvian border. Attacks on commercial ships on the river had been reported and the town of Tabatinga on the border between Brazil, Peru and Colombia, where the

# Protecting a yacht from criminal such as thieves, hijackers, kidna and related bad guys been somewhat of thought in yachting

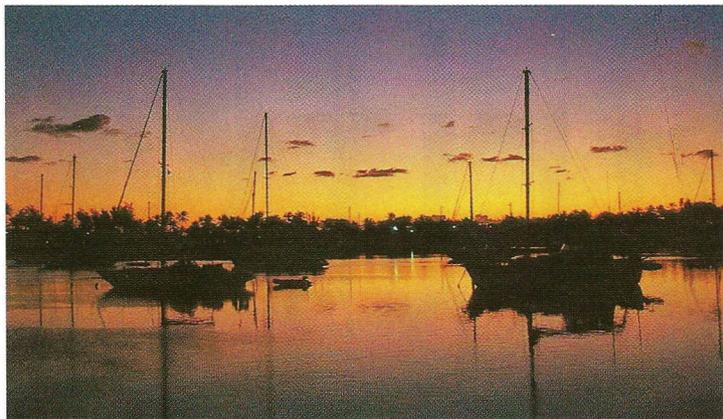


Photo Dag Pike

**Above** The hours between sun down and sun up are the most likely times for petty thefts and unwelcome boardings in popular moorings and anchorages just about everywhere in the world.

## Cruising aboard one's yacht still carries an aura of splendid isolation in wh

yachts were scheduled to pick up some high-profile guests for a cruise down the river, was a hotbed of drug activity.

Long before the cruise AffAirAction, a Miami-based security firm specializing in yacht protection headed by former French Special Forces Officer Patrick Estebe, was hired to guard the vessels during the cruise. Estebe's first task was to conduct a security survey of the vessels, including procedures for handling visitors and packages, bomb threat responses, shipyard

security, locks and keys, firearm inspection, and vulnerable parts of the yacht. Among his recommendations was to make sure the yachts had high-intensity lights that could project a ring of light around the anchored yachts. This wall of light is barely noticed by onboard

guests but makes any intruders feel very conspicuous as they approach the yacht.

The crew, including the women, also took a police weapons and tactics training course and became familiar

with the subtleties of body language in handling potentially threatening situations. "If the crew is confident and alert, a silent signal is sent to outsiders who are on board," he explained. "You can put the crew on strategic spots on the yacht where they can see in several directions, and when a visitor comes aboard they can be watched from these vantage points.

Estebe also devised procedures for the crew to follow in various situations. For example, if pirates were approaching the yacht he would divide them into three groups: one to protect the guests, another to protect the pilothouse and engine room, and a third group to confront the threat.

As the cruise date approached Estebe collected intelligence reports on the region, hired three more agents and chartered a Brazilian yacht to house his team during the cruise. The team also flew to Brazil and scouted the river all the way up to Tabatinga. In Tabatinga Estebe spent several days convincing the local drug lords that it wasn't worth the effort to attack the yachts.

Shortly thereafter the convoy appeared, the guests arrived in their



**Above** The aft deck doors of St. Jill, the new 124 foot Delta megayacht, when properly locked, should work as a serious deterrent for even the most ambitious petty thieves.



**Above** The helm station is like the vault in a bank. Once a thief or pirate has control of this element, the ship is theirs.

elements  
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jets and for the next several weeks a wonderful time was had by everyone as they cruised leisurely down one of the world's largest, most spectacular rivers. Estebe's team seamlessly blended in with the crew, wearing tropical crew uniforms, helping pleasantly with some duties and staying mostly in the crew areas. At least one security agent was on board each Feadship at all times. No one knew that the smiling, congenial Frenchman constantly kept a loaded gun in the pocket of his dress white shorts. And there was not one single incident the entire trip.

As yachts get larger, their range and capabilities increase and owners and charter clients want to expand into remote areas security concerns are likely to grow. Risky areas included portions of South America and the Far East, especially around Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines, where piracy is still very active. Even the well-traveled Mediterranean has had some incidents reported. No longer is it enough just to keep yacht ownership secret like an unpublished telephone number.

Mike Reardon, a broker with Ft. Lauderdale-based Fraser Yachts, says the issue of yacht security comes up "all the time" with his clients. Yacht builders are also increasingly incorporating security features such as safe rooms, hidden escape routes, on-board sensors, etc. into yachts still under construction. Ironically, brokers say Americans are much more concerned with security than Europeans, even though Europe has a longer history of kidnapping prominent people.

"It's a problem that exists but is often covered up where yachts are concerned," says Martin Redmayne, editor of The Wood Report. "In the Med, for example, there are the "pedalo pirates" who sneak up on yachts in silent pedalos and board the aft swim platform during lunch or supper and may enter the lazarette, stealing anything portable." Such incidents are rarely reported.

Mike Reardon recalled one incident several years ago in which a 160-foot motoryacht was boarded by some machete-wielding natives in

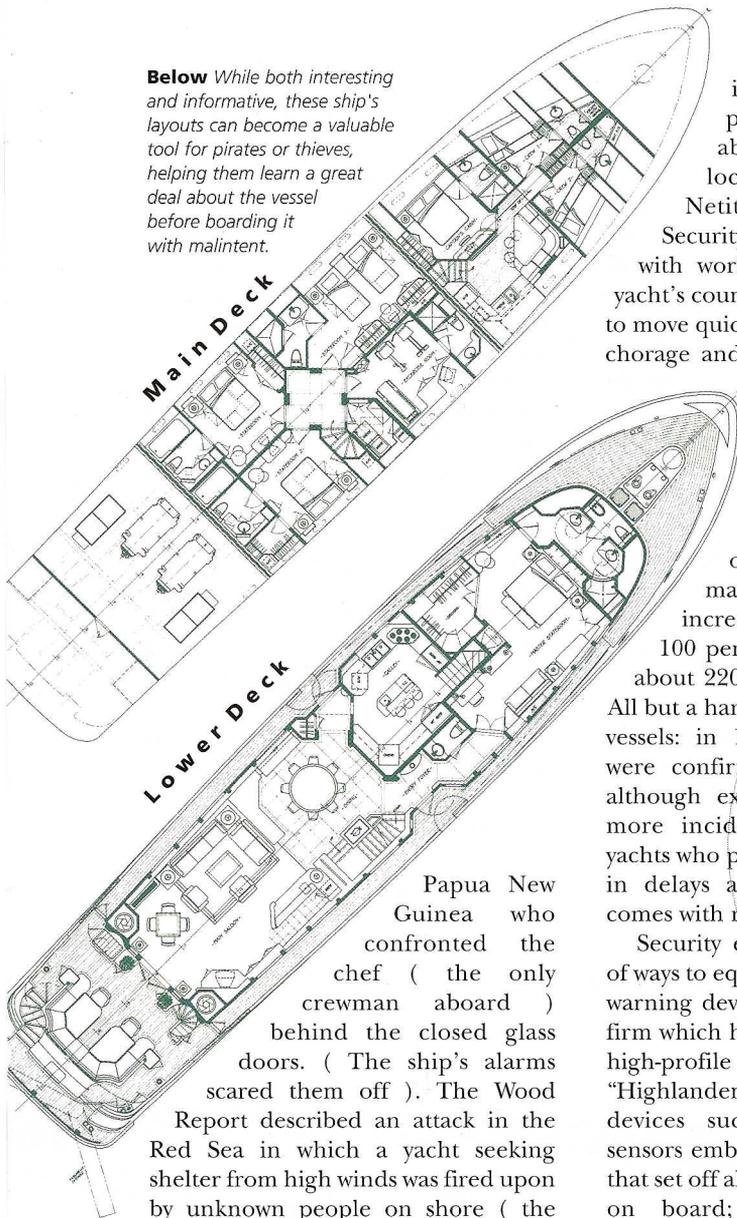
Photo Shaw McCutcheon

ich the rest of the world is held at a distance by moats of protective water.



*Meduse and Charade, two beautiful Feadships with seriously important cargo, up river on the Amazon. Obviously isolated from the modern world, these ships depended solely upon their own security forces – both in advance of, and during the trip – to keep the company out of harm's way.*

**Below** While both interesting and informative, these ship's layouts can become a valuable tool for pirates or thieves, helping them learn a great deal about the vessel before boarding it with malintent.



Papua New Guinea who confronted the chef ( the only crewman aboard ) behind the closed glass doors. ( The ship's alarms scared them off ). The Wood Report described an attack in the Red Sea in which a yacht seeking shelter from high winds was fired upon by unknown people on shore ( the bullet-pocked yacht weighed anchor without any casualties ). In the Mediterranean there are infrequent stories of yachts being hit. In one instance a 48-meter Codecasa yacht was held up by armed robbers off the coast of Italy. Off Corfu a band of Albanian pirates boarded the yacht Carenia, killed the captain and made off with the tender.

Up to now yachts have led a relatively charmed life free from piracy. One reason may be that, compared to a freighter, a yacht is still mysterious to the bad guys. "The average criminal looks at one of these things and they don't know what to make of them," says Capt. Pat Trainor, who has taken the 160-foot Feadship "Dream Seeker" around the world. "They don't know what to encounter on one of these boats. They've never been on them."

"An important advantage that the yacht has over a commercial vessel lies

in the flexibility in plotting a course and the ability to avoid high-risk locations," says Omer Netanyahu of ICTS Global Security, an Israeli security firm with worldwide contracts. "If the yacht's course is flexible it will be able to move quickly from anchorage to anchorage and build up relatively high speed."

The London-based International Maritime Bureau, which keeps statistics on shipping attacks, says the incidents of reported attacks on marine vessels worldwide has increased sharply from around 100 per year between 1991-95 to about 220 or so in 1996 and 1997.

All but a handful involved commercial vessels: in 1996 eight yacht attacks were confirmed, only two in 1997, although experts believe that many more incidents go unreported by yachts who prefer not to get entangled in delays and legal problems that comes with reporting an attack.

Security experts describe a variety of ways to equip a yacht with protective warning devices. Mari-Tron, a Florida firm which has supplied equipment to high-profile yachts such as "Azurra", "Highlander" and "Limitless" offers devices such as pressure-sensitive sensors embedded in the yacht's deck that set off alarms when someone steps on board; television monitoring equipment; public address systems that announce an intruder is aboard; infrared motion-detectors in the

interior; and sensors to detect the theft of a tethered tender.

Such devices merely warn of an intruder; what to do at that point carries an escalating level of risk. Security experts differ on whether a yacht should carry weapons. "From the moment you choose to carry a gun and use it, you must be ready to bear the consequences," advises ICTS's Netanyahu. Different countries have different laws regarding weapons, and even in the U.S. what is legal in one state may not be legal in another. In one incident a yacht was impounded in Honduras for several days when the captain declared he had a gun aboard; eventually it was freed after paying a "fine" to the port captain. For many captains, the legal risks aren't worth the trouble.

If one does plan to carry weapons, advance planning becomes very important. "I wouldn't go anywhere without being armed," says security expert Gayle Hawkes Martin & Assoc., who has written the only comprehensive text on yacht security. "But you just don't go out and buy a bunch of guns and stick them aboard your boat. You have to do some very serious planning. First, what countries do you want to go to? What are the laws in those countries?"

Hawkes suggests a large yacht might take two sets of weapons aboard; one for customs declarations, the other

**Below** This scene at Man of War Key in the Bahamas is a typical example of "security in numbers." When cruising off the beaten path, the company of another vessel is wise to seek.

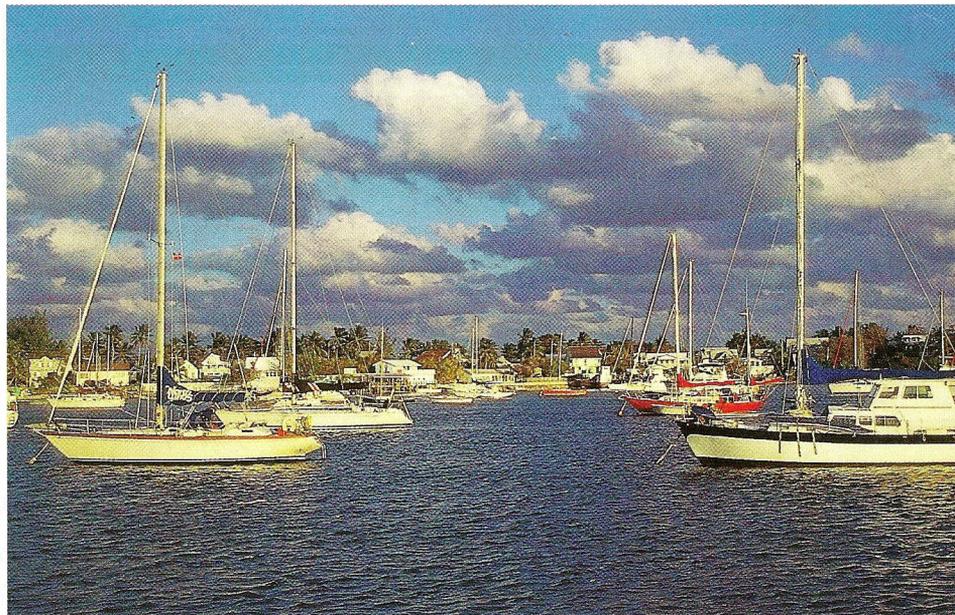


Photo: Dag Pike

hidden in the bowels of the boat. The risk, of course, is the hassle that would follow if the hidden guns were discovered. "We advise a client of his options, and this is one of them. They have certain consequences, and now that client must make his decision."

Increasingly, crews are being trained to handle a variety of threats, and a well-trained crew can leap to pre-assigned tasks when a security alert is sounded, much like a fire drill. Hawkes described a scenario in which a passing yacht is flagged down by a vessel in "distress" on the high seas.

International law requires the yacht to provide assistance. While two armed crewmen watch from a distance and a third watching the opposite side in case of a ruse, the "survivors" would be helped aboard by two unarmed crewmen who might inspect them for weapons. They would be watched at all times as long as they were aboard.

"Security is about anticipation," Estebe explained. "It's not about outgunning people, outmuscling or outnumbering them. It's about anticipating what they will do. And if you can do that, you're still in charge."

Some yacht owners who are building their own vessels are adding certain features to make them even more secure. One is to "harden" certain parts of the yacht such as adding a layer of bulletproof Kevlar to

**Right** Docked in isolated locations like this Bahamian backwater, super-yachts can become easy targets when unaccompanied by other vessels.

**Below** Safety in numbers is key. Neither *Meduse* nor *Charade* would likely venture into such isolated territories without the presence of a sister vessel. One such yacht may indeed be an obtainable goal for serious pirates, but the presence of the second yacht, with its likely bevy of capable weapons and high tech communications equipment, should be enough of a deterrent for just about any band of unsavory characters.

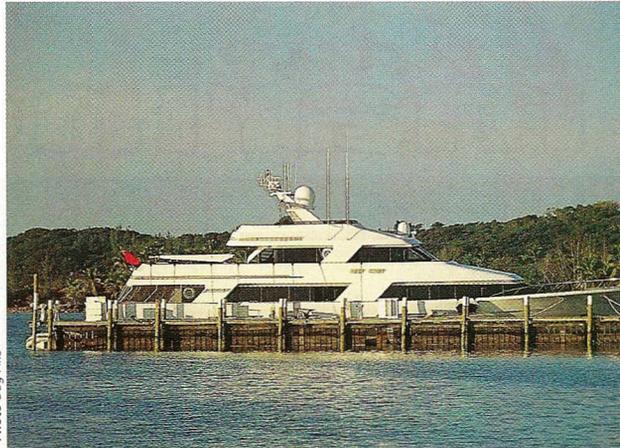


Photo: Dag Pike

Security is about anticipation. It is not about outgunning people, outmuscling or outnumbering them. It's about anticipating what they will do.

the walls and doors to the master storeroom, where the owner might find safety. Other key areas to harden would be the engine room and the pilothouse. If the engine room has steering and navigational capability the yacht can be controlled entirely from there.

Doors through-out the yacht can have special electro-magnetic locks controlled from a central point to virtually lock up the whole boat instantly. And hidden escape passages can be constructed so that guests or crew can move unseen from one part of the yacht to another (such escape

When called on to protect a yacht such as the *Feadship* going down the Amazon, *AffAirAction's* Estebe does all he can to make the guests comfortable, staying in the background and presenting an affable, friendly demeanor when around the guests.

But for the really paranoid yacht an American company offers a device called COVERT, consisting of a weatherproof housing containing an enormous searchlight, a .50-cal. autoloading rifle, a smoke generator and an automatic parachute flare and chaff dispenser to repel aerial attacks. Optical, infrared and laser target designators are linked to a special radar and telescopic cameras so the captain can watch and target any pursuing vessel from miles away. According to the manufacture (who has yet to make a prototype), the rifles can shoot special bulletted shot/shell ammunition that can "easily defeat body armor and shred a small boat at 100 meters."

There is, of course, no guarantee that the bad guys won't be better prepared than the yacht and that the villains might win. But the bottom line is that with proper preparation and planning virtually any yacht can be well-protected against most of the bad guys, and that there's really no reason owners and guests can't explore the most interesting, remote regions of the world in safety and comfort. ■

And if you can do that, you're still in charge.

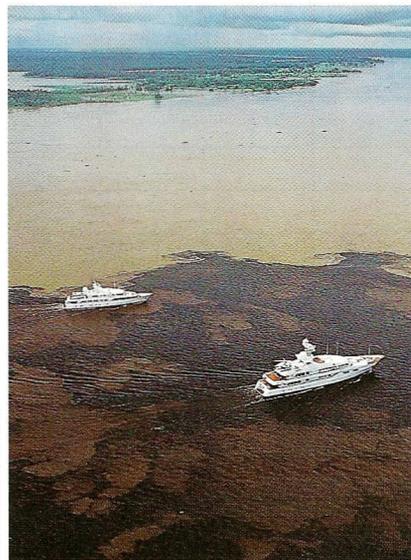


Photo: Shaw McCutcheon