

CHRISTINA O

325-foot Motoryacht



In the immediate post-war years, Europe was a drab place. The opulence of the Twenties and early Thirties, swept away by global conflict, was but a distant memory. Those who had the means to recreate the glamorous past, seemingly lacked the confidence to return to the conspicuously extravagant world of sumptuous yachts. But in 1954 the mold was recast, not, as one might have expected, by an American, not by old European money, nor by wartime armaments moguls. This was money from a new and different source—the world of Greek shipping tycoons.

But the creator of *Christina* had not been born into this clannish business and although Aristotle Socrates Onassis was destined to become the most outgoing of the otherwise close-knit fraternity of Greek shipowners, he entered it as a self-made man. He started business small, as a

night-shift switchboard operator before setting up a tobacco-importing business to fill his daylight hours. By the age of 25 he had amassed a sizeable fortune and in 1928 he was appointed Greek Consul General in Buenos Aires, a post which opened the door to high society. In 1932 he turned to shipping and developed a sizeable business which, with several vessels interned in neutral Sweden for the duration of the Second World War, fared better than most other shipping companies. In post-war years he turned his attentions to oil-transportation, building new tankers and increasing his fleet by the cheap purchase of redundant US-built Liberty vessels. A further leap in influence came in 1946 when he married Tina, the 17-year old daughter of Stavros Livanos, the patriarch of the Greek shipping world. But he did not come to inter-

Porthole ★ The magnificent atrium staircase with the omega insignia.

Left ★ The spa pool is on the Promenade Deck where lunch is often served.

Opp. top ★ *Christina O* back in her home waters after her rebuild at anchor near the island of Skorpios.

Opp. bottom ★ This yacht was a star in her early days and is destined to become one again.



national attention until he built the yacht *Christina*, which was named after his first born child.

Today, a yacht converted from a redundant war ship at a cost of 4 million would not be considered particularly special, but in 1954 this was an enormous sum to spend on the frivolity of a private yacht. To Onassis, who had just ordered 17 new tankers and bought some other ex-navy ships to convert to whalers, it was neither a large sum, nor was it frivolous, considering the influence that it would create and business doors that it would open. Thus, the surplus 1,724-ton Canadian anti-submarine frigate *HMCS Stormont*, built in Montreal by Canadian Vickers in 1943 as an Atlantic convoy escort, was purchased for its scrap value of \$34,000 and taken to the Howaldt Werke in Kiel, where much of his other conversion work was in progress, for her conversion into the yacht, *Christina*. Nothing was spared. A Piaggio amphibious aircraft, stored on her superstructure and lifted into the water by a crane, provided easy and quick access to and from the vessel; a Fiat 500 given to Onassis by Gianni Agnelli provided guests with their own means to explore the shore; and eight speedboats and a glass-bottomed sight-seeing boat ensured that transport on and enjoyment of the water was not lacking.

With *Christina* at his disposal, this self-made tycoon was able to invite the world's leading personalities to cruise

the Mediterranean in a glamorous style that had yet to be emulated in the post-war world. Like bees to a honey pot, the famous names arrived on cue. Sir Winston Churchill, fêted by right-wing Greeks as the savior of their country, was among the first to gratefully accept the invitation and becoming a close friend of Onassis he joined *Christina* for a total of eight cruises between the years of 1958 and 1963. Of these, the most memorable, perhaps, was his third cruise during the summer of 1959 when Onassis, still married to Tina, fell in love with one of his passengers, the acclaimed operatic diva, Maria Callas. It was a fateful voyage that would start a lifetime affair and destroy both their marriages. In later years, *Christina* was host to the world's most powerful and influential people—bankers, oil barons, shipping magnates as well as a host of royalty, presidents, prime ministers and the internationally known 'jet-set' of stage and screen personalities. The list is practically endless—the J.F. Kennedys, the Aga Khan, John Paul Getty, John D. Rockefeller, Eva Peron (who is reported to have been seduced

by Onassis while aboard), John Wayne, Greta Garbo, Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor, King Farouk of Egypt, Monroe, Sinatra, and Nureyev, to name but a few. But such guests were not just for the entertainment of Onassis, who had realized that a discreet word to the press would bring photographers and reporters running and their stories





would keep both his name and businesses in suitably high profile. In this respect, two of the world's most celebrated wedding receptions were held aboard—that of Prince Rainier of Monaco to Grace Kelly and, in 1966, Onassis' own wedding to Jackie Kennedy.

Christina, in reality the home of Onassis, could be seen gracing the quay at Monaco or anchored off Skorpis, his private Ionian Sea island. But it all came to an end in 1975 when Onassis died. At his funeral, *Christina* lay off the island of Skorpis with her ensign at half-mast—she now belonged to her namesake who found that she had so many happy memories of her father onboard, that it was too painful to keep her, and she was eventually donated to the Greek government in 1978 as a base on which to entertain visiting dignitaries. But this was a left-wing regime and, perhaps embarrassed by their custody of this symbol of capitalist

opulence, she was used less and less. Eventually, abandoned for more than a quarter of a century on a mooring at a Greek naval base, she fell into a sad state of disrepair.

A less famous yacht would certainly have succumbed, but not *Christina*. She was finally purchased by John Paul Papanicolaou, a Greek shipowner and Onassis family friend who remembered the yacht from his childhood days. Together with a small group of fellow investors, Papanicolaou in person set about arranging *Christina's* restoration to the grandeur

of her former days, employing the Piraeus-based naval architect Costas Carabelas for the task. Work started in January 1999 in Salamis, Greece when her interior was gutted, her important artifacts being salvaged, preserved and stored. Following the removal of her steam engines, and now renamed as *Christina O*, her original name having been lost to another vessel, she was made seaworthy for her onward travel through the Corinth Canal to the Victor Lenec yard in Rijeka in northern Croatia where the main rebuilding took place with a team of international subcontractors.

Papanicolaou's aim was to restore the yacht to her original state, incorporating modern amenities of a standard that Onassis, a very particular owner, would have approved. This has taken longer and cost more than was originally foreseen, as the removal of her interior, inevitably, uncovered hidden problems. For instance, after her initial survey it was thought necessary to replace just under 20-percent of her hull plating, but after ultrasonic testing in Croatia the figure quickly moved above 50-percent. All of the hull's steelwork including the keel and double bottom tank tops had to be totally renewed, and this meant 345 expensive days in a floating dry dock rather than the original estimate of 60. Happily, Papanicolaou, who personally kept a tight grip on the work, persevered with his original objective and today, after the introduction of over 560 tons of new steel—65-percent of the entire hull weight—she has a much stronger hull than ever as 12mm plate was used to replace the original 10mm plate. During the rebuild, some 56 miles of new wiring was introduced, 140 tons of pipework installed and a total of 1.2 million man hours invested in the project during the 16 months at the Victor Lenec yard.

Opposite ★ The Show Lounge is a huge saloon with oak-paneled walls and three seating areas. At the far end is a raised dais bounded by a rail supported by lapis lazuli balusters.

Below ★ The concierge desk, for planning events and booking massages, manicures or whatever.

Bottom ★ This sumptuous library located off the atrium used to be the former dining room in Onassis's day.



The secondary aim of the rebuild was to create a yacht that is able to support itself by offering elite cruises to the world's most discerning clientele. To achieve this with a yacht of *Christina's* size, Papanicolaou decided on an unusual regime in which the vessel could, in conventional superyacht manner, be taken as an entirety during the peak charter months, while at other times cruises would be sold by the cabin through the upscale and renowned US travel agents, Tauck World Discovery. To achieve the critical mass for this style of cruising, it was essential that *Christina O* could carry up to 36 passengers, and this meant that she had to comply with stringent passenger vessel safety requirements—an enormously complicated process and a very difficult task. It was worth the effort in that the economics work well. With a maximum of 19 staterooms including the master suite, guests will pay a

slightly higher fee than might be expected at the top end of the cruise liner market—but with a one to one ratio of crew to guests, with decks and saloons offering twice the total area of her cabin spaces, sumptuous accommodation with top quality facilities, service and food to match, not to speak of the authentic historical experience, the charm of *Christina O* will surely outshine that of a cruise ship.

Within her 325ft 3in LOA and 36ft 6in of beam, *Christina O* offers a huge volume. In all there are five enclosed decks, all but one of which—the hold deck—are wholly or partly available to her guests. In addition, guests also have vast open air deck spaces on the Compass Deck—the highest of all, just forward of the funnel—where there is a ring of steamer-style teak sun loungers and a bar. Just below, the bridge deck has a spacious teaked area abaft the funnel, but this is reserved



Opp. top ★ The children's playroom with murals reminiscent in spirit of the ones that Onassis had.

Opp. bottom ★ One of the luxurious guest staterooms.

Left ★ The mirrored gym which is adjacent to the beauty salon, sports lounge and children's room.

Bottom ★ The Sports Lounge with its many backgammon tables.



as the guest muster station in case of emergency, while the yacht's lifeboats and a pair of splendid Hacker tenders, that glisten with wood and varnish, are housed abeam of the mast. Two more tenders, innovative RIB's with landing craft-style bows to make for easy beach landings, are stored on the foredeck. One deck below, the Promenade Deck, luxuriously paved with teak, offers a complete circuit of the yacht and includes the superb Jacuzzi Deck at its aft end, where guests are offered al fresco dining, a substantial bar and, of course, a dip in the raised spa pool.

The famous Onassis swimming pool with a faithful copy of the famous mosaic Minoan bull and vaulter from the Palace at Knossos, perfectly recreated by the pupils of the original craftsmen, still remains, and its bottom can still be raised flush to the deck by a series of cables and motors, to serve its second purpose as a dance floor. The aft mast, however, around the base of which is yet another bar, has now been enlarged to serve as the yacht's main funnel. All the engine room services are now routed through it rather than through the yacht's main stack which, painted in exactly the shade of yellow as in Onassis' days, now houses the emergency generator and battery rooms in compliance with SOLAS rules. Further aft on the main deck, the same bollards and windlasses that appear in many a photograph as posing stools for the owner's



famous guests still remain intact.

Christina's old engine room with its vast steam engines formerly extended upwards through three decks, occupying a huge volume in the center of the yacht. Her modern diesels occupy a much smaller space, and this has made it possible to convert one of these deck areas into a dining saloon and another into a gym and sports lounge. She now has four guest saloons, two on the Main Deck and two on the Promenade Deck as well as separate sports and music lounges—outstanding facilities, even for a yacht of this size. It is the aftermost Main Deck saloon, the Lapis Lounge, together with its adjoining bar that are, perhaps, best known from a historical perspective. Lined in oak and iroko paneling beneath a white beamed deckhead, this



this is still a delightful room with its walls hung with art by Renoir, Le Corbusier and de Chirico. Three separate conversation areas are formed from pale settees and chaises lounges. Just forward of the saloon on the starboard side is Ari's Bar—perhaps the most renowned

splendid saloon could have been transplanted from an English country house, but the pale carpeted floor, slowly rising with the yacht's sheerline restores the authentic atmosphere of a boat. Onassis's celebrated lapis lazuli-trimmed fireplace, after which the saloon is named, still remains, however modern safety regulations have today, sadly, extinguished its flames forever. But, fire or no fire,

spot aboard. Named after Aristotle himself, this cozy small teak floored room with its oak planked walls is focussed on its original half circular rope-covered bar, reputedly made from the timbers of a Spanish galleon. The bar top is glass, while its edge is fitted with handles like tiny bull's horns, each made from two outward pointed whale's teeth. The bar stools too, again originals, are historically



Opp. top ★ The extraordinary dining room with a single table that seats 24 as well as 4 additional tables in the gallery.

Opp. middle ★ The mezzanine opposite the dining room is the piano lounge and on the walls are the original crystal wall lamps.

Above and right ★ The Lapis Lounge with the original lapis fireplace surround.

Below ★ Ari's Bar with its infamous sperm whale-skin bar stools (now topped with white coverings for protection).



famous—or perhaps one should say infamous. 'Do you know what you are sitting on?' Ari used to ask of his female guests—'Well, it's the biggest penis in the world'. Today modestly capped in white, the stools retain their aging leather from a whale's foreskin! Onassis' sense of humor was famously coarse.

Forward of Ari's Bar, a starboard side passageway formerly lead past the engine space to the yacht's main staircase, but this is now reclaimed land which has been transformed into an impressive dining saloon. Open across the whole 36ft 6in beam of the vessel the saloon is dominated by its huge 24-





Opp. top ★ The king-size bed is draped in fine Venetian linens.

Opp. middle ★ The study area of the suite.

Opp. bottom ★ The master bathroom is clad in white marble.

This page ★ The stunning Onassis suite comprises three large rooms and includes the original onyx fireplace.

seater table whose shape is mirrored above in a backlit glass panel which (was designed with the omega insignia). Four smaller and more intimate four-seater tables line a raised floor level on the port side gallery. To starboard, again slightly raised, the former passageway is now partially divided from the dining saloon by glazed paneling to create a music lounge, yet another delightful guest area that is furnished with a grand piano, a pair of settee groupings and a collection of Maria Callas memorabilia, including the only Gold Disc ever awarded to her (which was given to her posthumously.)

Moving forward from the music lounge past the elevator that links all four decks, one must be prepared to lose one's breath at the sight of the atrium. Circular in shape it is

ringed by a majestic staircase with an onyx and silver handrail that spirals upwards around its circumference to unite the Main Deck with the Promenade Deck and the Bridge Deck above. As one ascends its easy slope, one is rewarded by the view of the superb circular mosaic on the atrium floor depicting the Onassis omega logo entwined with a garland of laurel. Forward of atrium on the Promenade Deck is the library, *Christina's* former dining saloon, which is now oak paneled, its green upholstered chairs and settees ringed by shelves that carry a splendidly international collection of books. From here, doors open forward to the Show Lounge, a huge saloon that totally fills the forward element of the superstructure, offering within



its oak paneled walls three large seating areas furnished with Giorgetti settees and occasional tables. At the far end of the saloon, a raised dais bounded by a rail supported by lapis lazuli balusters is surely the ideal position for an orchestra, and should a cinema be required, a projection television and screen drops from the deckhead, and a state-of-the-art surround-sound system bursts into action.

On this same Promenade Deck level, aft of the atrium, (which is, incidentally, the location of a concierge desk where help is at hand for guests to plan their activities) is the Sports Lounge. In this area the original sextant wall lamps are displayed. This combines effort and relaxation with pampering and care, the latter being reserved for the children in a brightly decorated children's playroom, whose murals reflect the spirit of the Onassis children's former room. Effort may be expended beyond a curving glass wall where the gymnasium's various infernal machines will set the heart racing, while pampering takes place in an adjoining massage room and beauty salon. Thankfully, groups of comfortable chairs dedicated to relaxation fill the remainder of the space, spilling out into the open air of the Jacuzzi Deck beyond.

The Onassis Suite, the yacht's master stateroom, opens off the uppermost level of the atrium's spiral staircase where it occupies the balance of the Bridge Deck abaft the captain's quarters and the bridge itself. Comprising three rooms, a large bedroom, bathroom and study this area totals a massive 678sqft. It is entered through an impressive oak paneled, bookcase-lined study—a sumptuously furnished private lounge whose centerpiece is undoubtedly its original onyx fireplace. Beyond is the bedroom, where the king-size bed draped in fine Venetian linens is illuminated by the original Baccarat crystal wall lights while three brass-framed windows pour daylight from port and starboard. The adjacent bathroom is completely lined with white Penteli marble from the same ancient





quarry that supplied the builders of the Parthenon.

The initial plan was to create 18 guest staterooms of approximately equal size but, almost inevitably, due to the constraints caused by the yacht's hull shape, this was not possible. As a result, the larger staterooms have more spacious seating areas, together with writing desks and larger walk-in wardrobes, rather than plain wardrobes, and are positioned towards the center of the yacht, with the smaller cabins located at its ends. Ten staterooms are located on the main deck forward of the atrium, where

they open on either side of a long passageway, while the remaining eight staterooms are one deck down towards the aft end of the Cabin Deck. All rooms can be reconfigured at will to provide either double or two twin beds, all have attractively paneled walls pierced by portholes and hung with prints of the Greek Islands. All staterooms have a luxurious marble-lined shower room, choice fabrics by J.R. Scott (US), Mulberry (UK), and Jesurum (Venice), and are provided with television, surround sound, DVDs and CD players. In terms of her command and control structure,

the crewing of the vessel, her galleys service areas and machinery spaces, *Christina O* has more affinity with a state-of-the-art cruise liner than a yacht. The bridge is awesome in its equipment and communications systems, which were installed without regard for expense. The 35-strong crew is managed by the captain and ten officers. Fulfilling all the passenger ship requirements for SOLAS, US Health Authority and US Coastguard approval was not easy but, as a result, *Christina O* now boasts service areas, such as an incinerator room, a heavy duty waste shredder, a

huge commercially equipped galley in full compliance with strict USPH, three fully-equipped pantries and a sizeable laundry/linen room which contains an ironing machine so massive that it can deal with unfolded bed sheets.

The engine room, too, is an impressive commercially-equipped compartment, dominated by two of the newly developed MAN straight-six diesels, while a generator room, located beneath the floor of the spacious control room, has three generators of 470 KW each. The MAN diesels, each of 2,775hp, provide slightly more power than that of her former steam units in their prime, allowing the *Christina O* to be driven at a formidable 19 knot cruising speed while stability is assured by her two pairs of Vosper stabilizers—original machinery, but re-motored during the refit.

The rebuilt *Christina O* will certainly delight her passengers with a heady mixture of luxurious living, gourmet cuisine, and adventure both ashore and in the water, all interwoven with the spirit of her legendary former owner. He would certainly have been proud of his new yacht.

It is difficult to overstate the significance of the re-emergence after so long of what is arguably the most famous yacht in the world, a star in her own right, and the star quality has been confirmed by the huge media interest in her since her re-launch. She has appeared in newspaper and magazine articles throughout Europe and the United States and on numerous television shows including a significant segment on the NBC Today Show. What other yacht could attract this much attention?!

Opp. top ★ The famous Minoan bull mosaic swimming pool that converts to a dance floor.

Opp. middle ★ The curved bar where guests are often served lunch is forward of the spa pool.

Right ★ The impressive bridge with its ship-like array of electronics.

Below ★ The starboard aft view shows the massiveness of this impressive yacht.





SPECIFICATIONS

LOA: 325ft 3in (99.13m)
Beam (max): 11.12m (36ft 6in)
Draft: 4.26m (14ft 0in)
Displacement (to DWL): 2,250 tons
Propulsion: 2 x 2,775hp MAN diesels
Gearbox: 2x Reinges
Propellers: Adrio S.L., Spain
Shafts: Vickers, Canada
Speed (max/cruise): 19.5 knots/19 knots
Fuel capacity: 275 tons
Range: 12,000+ nm
Electricity generation: x 470 Kw MAN
Power converter: 6 Heavy Duty Systems
Stabilizers: 4x Vosper
Windlass: original rebuilt Rexroth, Scottish
Water tight doors: Schuenrock
Bow thruster: Brunvoll
Stern thruster: Brunvoll
Watermakers: Sea recovery
Life boats: Watercraft
Davits/cranes: Chat Harding Acza

Tender: Hacker Craft Yamaha Prestige
Fire control system: Siemens/Danforth
Automation: Dan Foss
Exterior paint: Hempel
Insulation: Thermax & Rockwool
Air conditioning: Carrier Laval
Navigation equipment: Raytheon
Autopilot & Gyrocompass: Raytheon/Anshutz
Entertainment systems: Senso Systems
 (1500 watt RMS x4 systems)
Owner and guests: Double master suite
 and 18 guest staterooms,
Crew: 36
Construction: Steel hull and part aluminum
 superstructure
Classification: A1 Passenger vessel AMS
Interior construction: Decon, Greece
Rebuild Naval architect: Costas Carabelas, CCTO, Greece
Rebuild Interior Architect: Apostolos Molindris
Builder/Year: Canadian Vickers/1943
Rebuild/Year: Victor Lenec Shipyard/2001
Refit manager: Titan Brokerage Corporation
Charter brokers: Titan, Hyde, & Torrance

