

# Finot's finesse: pure, sleek and très chic



Jean-Marie Finot's career spans almost five decades, but this titan of yacht design remains resolutely cutting edge. Peter Poland talks to the classic-creating legend

**D**esign has always fascinated me. At its most fundamental level, it encapsulates two basic and sometimes conflicting constituents. In the words of Le Corbusier, good design is a successful marriage of form and function. It must look good and work well. Things that look nasty and perform poorly rarely sell. That's obvious, you might say, and you'd be right. But combining form and function in something as complex as a sailing boat, that has to do its job in a wide variety of weather and sea conditions while accommodating its crew comfortably, yet

still looking attractive, is bordering on a black art.

Few designers have come up with a string of winning and commercially successful yachts – without pausing for breath – from the 1960s right up to today. Even fewer have remained at the forefront of technological skills and headed the pack as each major new development hit the sailing scene, both in the cruising sector and in full-on, flat-out racing circles.

## Master of design

But one who did is Jean-Marie Finot. Even if you've never heard of him, I guarantee you will have seen hundreds of his designs sailing in UK waters. It's estimated that, since Finot took up his pencil in 1967, over 35,000 yachts to his firm's designs – from small planing keelboats to family cruisers to massive globe-girdling racers – have hit the water.

Finot was born in 1942 and decided at an early age that yacht design was his passion. Having studied the theory, he put this into practice by joining Philippe Harlé's successful design office (see PBO October 2009). He could not have enjoyed a better

grounding. Harlé's lateral (and typically Gallic) approach was already producing a steady stream of winners in the mid 1960s. Finot helped design yachts such as the *Rebelle* and *Gina*. But it wasn't long before the ambitious young designer decided he was ready to go it alone. And his very first solo design flew unerringly to the bulls-eye, resulting in one of the most successful production yachts of all time.

## Écume de Mer

Finot said, 'I decided to design an ideal coastal cruiser and fixed on the name Écume (meaning 'spray') de Mer. I gave it a wide and light hull, a comfortable cockpit with angled backrests, and a deck layout that brought all the controls back to the cockpit.' He then touted the design around various French builders, but got no takers. However, the Dutch yard Walter Huisman got wind of Finot's new baby and, showing great faith in an unknown young designer, offered to build it in aluminium at a competitive price, provided it fitted into the Quarter Ton category and took part in this event. So the design had to grow slightly in size. Thanks to its simple chine

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

■ Peter Poland crossed the Atlantic in a 25ft (7.6m) yacht in 1968 and later went on to spend 30 years as co-owner of Hunter Boats. He is now a freelance journalist





**Écume de Mer**  
from £6,000 second-hand

Finot

An early production Écume de Mer



Finot/Lanoué-Bateaux

The Écume de Mer won France's Boat of the Year award in 1976, but still remains crisp, modern and an ideal coastal cruiser today

The Pogo 10.50 is one of Finot's more recent designs

**Pogo 10.50**  
new from £132,635

Finot



Finot/Erwan Quenere

**Rêve de Mer**  
from £5,255 second-hand

Rêve de Mer was the Écume's race-winning baby sister

construction and flush deck, it was built quickly and launched in July 1968, just in time to enter the Quarter Ton Cup. It wasn't tuned up so didn't win that time, but subsequently it walked off with the prestigious Delta Race in Holland, followed by numerous GCL (the French equivalent of our JOG) races. And so a star was born.

Now the French woke up, and Chantier Mallard went into production with a GRP development. The chines disappeared, the freeboard came down, the deck sprouted a jaunty coachroof that was high enough to give headroom and the first boat off the line just made it to the Paris Boat Show in January 1970. It was an immediate sensation. Finot explains: 'In that era, sailors wanted a boat they could live and sleep in comfortably at anchor or in port. To achieve this tendency toward comfort whilst retaining the boat's seagoing qualities, we fitted in a dinette, standing headroom and a forecabin. But the hull structure, rig quality and deck layout had to be capable of taking on the open sea. It also had to be stable and fast.'

### Leader of the pack

There is no doubt that Finot succeeded in these aims. Not only did the Écume sell in huge numbers to cruising folk, it won (in standard form) the 1970 Quarter Ton Cup, not to mention countless other trophies on

either side of the Channel. So, at his first attempt, the young Finot led the way in the field of cruiser-racers.

With a beam of 2.65m (8ft 9in) on a hull of 7.90m (25ft 11in), the Écume offers a substantial amount of internal volume for a boat of its era. What's more, its ballast of 720kg (1,587lb) out of an all-up weight of 1,800kg (3,968lb) provides plenty of power and stability. In the interests of coastal pottering, Finot did not give it an excessive amount of draught, at just 1.25m (4ft 1in), but the bulb on the base of the keel makes sure that the CG is as low as feasible.

### Practical passage maker

In keeping with Finot's desire to produce a 'proper boat', the Écume's internal layout is well suited to passage making. Two long quarter berths make sleeping comfortable for off-watch crew. One extends into a settee (to starboard) with a dinette style table and a simple but effective galley lives to port. Forward of an amidships heads compartment and hanging locker, there's a double berth forecabin and extra stowage areas. Of course the fairly clinical internal mouldings are typical of the era, so not particularly welcoming. But everything is simple and eminently practical.

Then an upgraded version (in 1975/76) saw an enlarged and lengthened coachroof (to give more headroom in the heads) and

other minor changes. It won the 1976 Boat of the Year Award in France. Between 1970 and 1980 a total of 1,385 were built in various countries. The clever styling means that, even today, the Écume looks as crisp and modern as it did when it was first launched, 40 years ago.

### Rêve de Mer

Flushed with this success, Finot and Mallard quickly followed on with a baby sister; the Rêve de Mer. Launched in the early 1970's, the Rêve – at 7.15m (23ft 5in) overall, with a waterline length of 5.30m (17ft 5in) – is considerably smaller than her sister. As a result, the interior layout is open plan, with a double berth forward (with WC hidden beneath), amidships galley and work area and two long settee berths that extend into quarter berths beneath the cockpit. But she's a tough little performer in all weathers and excelled in GCL and JOG cross channel races. She was offered with two different keels, a long fin drawing 1.1m (3ft 7in) and a deeper scimitar-shaped fin at 1.7m (5ft 7in).

I recall competing in Cowes Week against one of the first Rêves to be imported into the UK. Driven by the great Jack Knights (revered journalist and top sailor), the wretched little red boat won virtually every race. The rest of us never got a look in. Sales took off, with the importer leading a





**Fleur de Mer**  
from £19,267 second-hand

Finot

**Fleur de Mer is a sharp, spacious budget cruiser**



**Revolution**  
one-off racing yacht

**Top-flight racer that lived up to her name**



**Grand Soleil 34**  
from £14,012 second-hand

**Grand Soleil built 290 of its Finot-designed 34**



**Brin de Folie**  
from £13,137 second-hand

Finot

**The Brin de Folie was a 1970s collaboration between Finot and Philippe Harlé**

convoy of Rêves that sailed over from France the following spring in order to get into the UK before VAT hit the scene. Even though the Rêve did not sell as fast as her bigger sister, a respectable 351 hit the water. And she not only makes a great coastal cruiser to this day; her Finot styling still looks bang up to date.

**Fleur de Mer**

The third Finot design built by Mallard was the larger Fleur de Mer. While retaining the same sharp styling and performance, the 9.6m (31ft 6in) Fleur offered a lot more space than her smaller sisters. Very few of the 100+ built made it over to the UK, but this model is still worth seeking out on overseas brokers' sites if you are searching for a budget cruiser that sails well and looks good.

**Brin de Folie**

As the French market's appetite for performance cruisers ballooned in the 1970s, Finot drew another top-seller in collaboration with his old mentor, Philippe Harlé. Jeanneau had previously (and perhaps foolishly) turned down Finot's Écume in favour of Harlé's similarly sized Sangria. So, in order to cover all the options, Jeanneau now asked the two designers to join forces to draw its new 8.7m (28ft 7in) Brin de Folie.

This 3.1m (10ft 2in) beam fast cruiser was in many ways the French equivalent of our



**Bénéteau First 22**  
from £7,664 second-hand

Bénéteau

**First 22 is a 'big sister' of the Bénéteau First 18**

Centaur and its rivals. While UK cruisers of that era tended towards chunky construction, smallish rigs and bilge keel performance, our French friends went for sleeker looking craft with fin keels – 1.65m (5ft 5in) in the Folie's case – and a sporty turn of speed. The accommodation, however, was similar to the UK norm; offering a twin berth forecabin, amidships heads, dinette saloon, aft galley, aft fixed chart table and a quarter berth. Well over 800 Folies were built over a 10-year period, and this model is still sought after as a modestly priced starter boat. When, or if, the Pound to Euro rate of exchange gets back to sanity, these French cruisers of the 1970s to 1980s are well worth a look.

**Revolution**

At around the same time, Finot competed with the top names in international yacht design and created a top-flight offshore racer that took the world by storm. Predictably, perhaps, this Admiral's Cupper astonished the establishment and won trophies galore. *Revolution* lived up to her name.

Built by Huisman in aluminium, *Revolution* was unlike anything else on the ocean-racing scene. Her high freeboard hull, painted in an eye-catching red, was totally flush decked. Her interior was minimalist bordering on stripped. She didn't even bother with an engine, and onlookers gawped in disbelief as this large

yacht was sculled – yes, sculled – with a massive sweep into and out of harbour. This was purist French sailing at its purest. What's more, *Revolution* went on to be RORC champion for an unprecedented four successive years, from 1976 to 1979, as well as competing successfully in successive Admiral's Cups. One could argue that she was one of the most successful and fashion-busting yachts of all time and the first of many Finot race designs to dominate their fields. More on these later.

Comar was another major European company to prosper by signing up Finot to design its Italian-built Comet cruisers from the early 1970s to the late 1990s. Few made it to the UK, due primarily to the disproportionate cost of shipping. But 26 different Finot-designed models appeared, with a grand total of over 3,000 boats being built and distributed throughout mainland Europe. I must confess to spending many hours poring over a Comet 701 at the Dusseldorf Boat Show in the mid-1970s, borrowing ideas for the similar size Hunter Sonata that we were developing at the time. I learnt to understand that nicking one detail is plagiarism; while nicking several is research. And Finot had many details and ideas worth 'researching.'

**Grand Soleil**

The up-market Grand Soleil brand also hung its hopes on Finot in its early days,



**Bénéteau First 18**  
from £4,500 second-hand

The Bénéteau First 18 is a lively performer



**Bénéteau First 28**  
from £16,500 second-hand

First 28 of the early 1980s had conventional accommodation layout with amidships heads



**Fastnet 34**  
from £18,995 second-hand

Fastnet 34 makes a great budget cruiser



**Bénéteau First 29**  
from £19,950 second-hand

First 29 built from the mid- to late-1980s featured modernised interior layout

and 290 of its Grand Soleil 34 models were launched between 1972 and 1983, while the bigger Finot designed Grand Soleil 38 and 41 models also sold well.

### Fastnet 34

Another Finot design of the mid-1970s that occasionally crops up on the UK market is the Fastnet 34. Around 40 of these handsome 10.2m (33ft 6in) cruiser-racers were built. It looks very much like an overgrown Écume. With its conventional accommodation layout with amidships heads, and generous beam of 3.4m (11ft 2in), owners speak glowingly about the Fastnet's comfort down below and eminent suitability for extended 'live-aboard' cruising.

### Bénéteau First

But Finot really hit the big time when Bénéteau came banging on his door. First up were the First 18 and 22 models. In those days, even the biggest builders liked to have 'starter boats' in their ranges to attract new owners to their brand. Indeed, Bénéteau does so to this day with its hugely popular Finot-designed First 217. Back then, the First 18 (1,065 built) and First 22 (763 built) did the job. Indeed, they still do, as newcomers to sailing continue to buy them as budget mini-cruisers.

The First 18 fits loosely into the Micro Tonner format at 5.90m (19ft 4in) overall.

Its fractional rig gives it a lively performance and a pivoting keel puts it firmly into the trailer-sailer market. An open plan 3-4 berth accommodation plan is simple and basic, but it provides scope for coastal pottering. What's more it enjoys typical Finot good looks. To this day, it's a great buy.

The 6.95m (22ft 10in) First 22 is a 'bigger sister'; with similar fractional rig, pivoting keel, sparkling performance and attractive looks. The interior is of course bigger than the 18's, boasting a forepeak divided off from the rest of the boat by a bulkhead. But the minimalist galley is really only fit for a brew up and all-purpose casserole cooking – not for complicated cuisine.

Another top-selling Finot design from this era was the First 25. Between 1979 and 1984, a phenomenal 1,115 were built. This was the heyday of small family cruiser production, and Finot had an uncanny knack of knowing what the market wanted. He explains this success by saying, 'While the 6.5 to 7m (21ft 4in to 23ft) yacht is for us the most "alive", it is limited as a seagoing cruiser. For family cruising you need two cabins, a separate toilet compartment and headroom. These can be incorporated into a 7.5m (24ft 7in) boat, which still remains easy to handle and maintain.'

Meanwhile the insatiable Bénéteau machine continued to demand more and bigger. Finot and his colleagues must have

burnt a lot of midnight oil. Next up came the First 28 (1980 to 1982 – with a conventional layout and amidships heads), and First 29 (1983 to 1989 – with modern aft heads layout). Between them, they notched up sales of 1,120. As attractive, middle of the road cruisers that 'go a bit' and offer a variety of keel choices, these two models are well worth a second glance if this is the size and character of yacht you're looking for.

### Perfect partnership

But by the mid 80s, Finot was getting too busy. So he teamed up with the young Pascal Conq to form the enlarged Finot/Conq group, which continues to work flat out to this day. And the workload grew exponentially as Bénéteau passed ever more commissions in Finot's direction. There are too many models to list the lot. Indeed, the total number of Bénéteaus (First and Océanis) to have been built to Finot then Finot/Conq designs has already reached 16,000, and is still rising. And that's a lot of boats in anyone's book.

### Bénéteau Océanis

Whilst Finot and Finot/Conq's many First designs top out at around 32ft (9.75m), they have scaled far greater heights in the Océanis range. Starting back in 1995, the 281 was one of the smallest of the Océanis marque to be built. Following Bénéteau policy, its hull lines



**Bénéteau Océanis 31**

from £65,685 second-hand

Finot/Gilles Marini-Raget



Océanis 31 was 2009 European Yacht of the Year

**Bénéteau Océanis 281**

from £24,522 second-hand

David Harding



Océanis 281 makes a great fast cruiser

**First Class 8**

from £8,600 second-hand

David Harding



First Class 8, a top-selling One Design

**Bénéteau Océanis 323**

from £52,110 second-hand

David Harding



Océanis 323 is impressive in comfort and performance

**Clipper 400**

from £83,200 second-hand

Bénéteau



Océanis Clipper 400 proved a popular charter choice

evolved closely from an earlier First – in this case the Finot-designed First 265. So there's no shortage of performance there. Layout is 'typical modern' and the 281 (of which 331 were built) offers a lot of comfort in a relatively small package. I suspect that the reason why Bénéteau stopped building Océanis cruisers of this size is simply that they are too small to satisfy the voracious (and very valuable) charter boat market. But a 281 makes a great fast cruiser if you can find one.

Finot/Conq have also picked up awards with Océanis designs. The current Océanis 31 won the European Yacht of the Year Award in 2009 and the Océanis 37 won sailing magazine *Voiles'* 'Voilier de l'année' in 2008.

**Clipper**

One of the top-selling Finot/Conq Océanis designs is the Clipper 400 and its successor the 411. These two models notched up an extraordinary 850 boats from 1991 onwards. As usual, Finot managed to combine good performance and ample accommodation in a good-looking yacht. A large quantity of these were, of course, snapped up by charter operators, but private owners also continue to find that the model has a lot of appeal. And if 12m (40ft) is not big enough for you, the Océanis 423, 473 and 523 are all also Finot/Conq designs.

**Figaro**

But my favourite Océanis, as already featured in my recent articles on 32-footers, is the 323. This great yacht

(and the racier First 317) is developed from one of the most famous One Designs commissioned from Finot/Conq by Bénéteau: the Figaro 1. Up until 1990, Figaro events (crewed and single-handed) had been sailed in a variety of yachts around the Half Ton, or 9m (30ft) size. But the organisers finally realised that competition would be more challenging and the costs less alarming if a strict One Design was selected. Bénéteau duly put forward a new Finot/Conq design and this got the nod. Over the next nine years around 120 of these exciting 9.14m yachts were built. The First Class Challenge – a slightly tuned down version – also proved popular with round the cans and cross channel racers.

**First Class**

Talking of versatile One Designs, we should not forget the First Class range, the most famous of which is the First Class 8. Finot says: 'For some time, I represented France on the ORC (Offshore Rating Council), the international organiser of offshore racing. I felt that IOR boats were becoming increasingly complicated and expensive, yet were no longer seaworthy or efficient. I wanted to develop One Designs so, in association with Jaques Faroux and Bénéteau, I developed a new French 8m One Design. In the first year we sold more First Class 8s than all the quarter tonners ever built.'

Over the years, 969 of these speedy lifting-keelers were bought. Basic four-berth accommodation puts coastal cruising on the agenda and even relatively

inexperienced crews can enjoy competing in club or class events. The First Class 8's lifting keel also makes trailer-sailing viable and the RYA owned a fleet for many years, using it for training and match racing. Of course more modern sportsboats such as the Finot designed First Class 7.5 surpass the First Class 8's performance (especially when planing), but this doesn't diminish its ongoing appeal as a low cost/high performance fun boat for day sailing or slightly cramped coastal cruising.

**Mini Transat**

Finot and Conq have also made huge contributions to the world of high speed and semi loony trans-ocean racing in supercharged soap dishes, be these 6.50m (21ft 4in) Mini Transat yachts or monster IMOCA 60 world girdlers.

Like many great sporting events, the Mini Transat was invented by a Brit. Back in 1977, Bob Salmon somehow persuaded the Penzance SC to start a single-handed race across the Atlantic for boats of just 6.5m (21ft 3in). A fleet of 24, including such simple production boats as Anderson 22s, E Boats, Muscadets etc, duly assembled and – ignoring the many prophets of doom – set off for Antigua, via the Canaries. To cut a long story short, Minis have prospered and proliferated. Numerous events are held every year. The Transat race now finishes in Brazil.

Predictably perhaps, the French took up the gauntlet and dominate the field. And – surprise, surprise – Finot became a leading Mini designer. Over the years, Minis have been at the forefront of yacht



**Pogo 2 Mini**  
new from £33,232

**Fast, furious and fun – the Pogo 2 production Mini Transat racer**

design. Twin rudders, asymmetric spinnakers flown from pivoting retractable bowsprits, deep bulbed keels (some of which cant), broad-sterned planing hulls, huge mainsails with squared off heads; all evolved in the Mini class.

The Mini Transat is now split into two divisions: prototype and series production boats. In 2009 both classes were won by Finot/Conq designs. In the production class, over half the top 10 finishers were Finot/Conq-designed Pogo 2s. If you crave thrills in a production 6.5m flyer, buy a Pogo.

**IMOCA**

Then there are the 60ft (18.3m) IMOCA monsters. Once again, Finot/Conq are at the forefront of design. *PRB*, for example, won two successive Vendée Globe races then came in third in the latest edition (renamed *Roxy*) in the hands of Sam Davies. What's more, Finot himself has always been closely involved in the rules of the IMOCA class, working for increased safety and stability. Wherever yacht design is pushing at the boundaries, you are likely to bump into Jean-Marie Finot.

**Pogo**

A logical progression from these extreme one-offs and single-handed flyers is to be found in the upwardly mobile Pogo range, built in France by Pogo Structures. This company first came to public (admittedly mainly French) attention when it introduced the all-conquering Finot/Conq designed Pogo 2 production Mini Transat yacht. To this day, this company's amazing

yachts are largely unknown to the British sailing public, more's the pity.

Flushed with the Pogo 2's success, Finot and Structures took a leap of faith in their recipe for super high-performance sailing, and launched the Pogo 40 in 2003. Aimed at the new Open 40 Class, this extraordinary boat shot to fame when it won the inaugural Open 40 division in the 2006 Route de Rhum single-handed transatlantic event. What's more, the Class 40 winner (in a 26-strong class) was an unheralded and largely unsponsored Brit, one Phil Sharp. Since then, numerous Pogo 40s have hit the water and the latest offering is a detuned cruising version featuring a hydraulic lifting keel. True, its accommodation is hardly plush. But then everything you need is there – and boy, does it shift. This amazing yacht brings a whole new dimension to fast cruising. Maybe we will see some over here in the UK one day?

**The master's own**

So what have the great man and his wife sailed down the years? Jean-Marie Finot's first self-designed yacht was the aluminium prototype for the *Écume*. Since then he has owned, amongst others, *Baleine* (a Yamaha 29), *Eglantine* (a half tonner), *Concorde* (a ¾ Tonner), *Cigale* (a Comet 13), a First 260 and a First 27.7 – all Finot designed, of course.

But what now? Finot has just bought one of the brand new, top-selling and award-winning lifting-keel Pogo 10.50 class. This dramatic yacht is the latest development in the flying Pogo range. But, being the



**Pogo 40**  
new from £136,575

**Pogo 40 has been a consistent race winner**

experimental sailor that he is, Finot has replaced its standard carbon fibre mast with a rotating carbon wing mast, and he and his wife (who are getting on a bit) control the Pogo's powerful rig with electric powered winches.

**Put them in the bin**

'I like boats that sail very well. Engines are only needed for getting in and out of harbour. I like plenty of draught under the hull (a hydraulic lifting keel is essential). I don't like shallow or twin keels; they're not efficient enough. And I don't like complex instruments. Put them in the bin,' Finot told me. He's a purist all right, which I find hugely refreshing in this modern age of compromise.

And what is your ideal boat, I asked? Finot replied: 'I think 8.5m (27ft 11in) is a good length. At this size you get headroom, enough space to live in and enough performance to go to sea.' He's also adamant that a deep draught lifting keel is a 'must'. Then – in the pursuit of peace, quiet and ecofriendliness – he wants an electric engine driving through a retractable prop. What's more, he's already working on it. If you visit Finot's website, you'll come across *La Mouette*. She's 8.2m (26ft 11in) long, 3.2m (10ft 6in) wide, displaces 1.7 tonnes, of which 0.6 tonnes lives in the 2.3m (7ft 7in) draught lifting keel, has two 300lt (66gal) water ballast tanks, a rotating wing mast, a 30.5m<sup>2</sup> mainsail and a 67m<sup>2</sup> asymmetric. Could she be the fast cruiser of the future? Knowing what Finot has already achieved, I wouldn't bet against it.