Heesen’s Galactica Star is proving to be a leading lady in the superyacht hall of fame.

Considering Heesen’s 65-meter Galactica Star was only delivered to her Owner this time last year, she’s had an unprecedented 12-months on the water. She’s already been stalked by the paparazzi, appearing on celebrity websites and in the pages of glossy magazines, mainly thanks to her involvement with arguably, the biggest couple in pop music today - Jay Z and Beyoncé were photographed on board Galactica Star last summer, holidaying with daughter Blue Ivy.

The ‘Zees’ invited friends and family to join them for a cruise taking them from Formentera in Spain to the Isle of Capri in Italy, with Beyoncé’s 32nd birthday celebrations happening on board. As far as publicity goes, you simply cannot beat having music’s most powerful couple dancing on your sundeck, but Galactica Star’s popularity doesn’t stop with pop legends, as last month, she was awarded ‘Best Luxury Yacht’ at the prestigious Arabian Business Lifestyle Awards.

The event attended by over 600 of Dubai’s VIPs at the Montgomery Golf Club was dedicated to distinguishing up-to-date trends and styles, from lavish cars to superyachts, arts, fashion, fine dining, sports and travel. The judging panel of Lifestyle Editors shortlisted dozens of nominations for each category down to just four. They evaluated each of the nominated yachts on overall luxury, size, speed for size, interior design and exterior yacht design. Galactic Star was a clear winner over Benetti’s Aurora, Gulf Craft’s Majesty 135 and Sanlorenzo Yacht’s 40 Alloy. Quite an achievement, to say the least.

But, what makes Galactica Star such a hit with awards panels and pop stars alike? Well, firstly, it just so happens that she’s absolutely gorgeous. Frank Laupman spent five years as an in-house designer with Heesen before setting up Omega Architects in 1995 and he has been intimately involved in creating most of the yachts delivered by the shipyard since then. As a result, when it came to designing the exterior of Galactica Star, in Frank’s own words: “The biggest design challenge was to move away from the recognised platforms, because you have to deny what has almost become a part of yourself.” In fact, the project developed from a concept he was already working on at a time when Heesen was considering the acquisition of a facility in Rotterdam to build and launch vessels over 65 metres. Laupman had toyed with the exterior lines of an 80-metre yacht with an axe bow that would
Galactica Star

The beach club is one of the focal points of Galactica Star.

eventually provide the basic design ingredients for Galactica Star. “The problem with such a big boat is how to make it conform with the sporty look that Heesen clients expect,” explains the designer. “The solution in my initial concept was to have a very compact superstructure, while the dramatic arches in the stern connecting the hull and superstructure were a way of balancing the shape of the bow.”

The reverse bow was later replaced with Heesen’s iconic pelican bow, so called because it resembles a pelican’s beak and throat pouch in profile, and the superstructure grew to include more in the way of open sundecks. The fashion plates (the lateral superstructure supports for the upper decks) are also recognisably Heesen. But the final design could easily have turned out looking very different as another leading European designer was also asked to submit an exterior proposal for the project, now fixed at 65 metres. Ironically, this spurred Laupman on to follow a more daring path, whereas his competitor was probably more conditioned by the styling of previous yachts in the Heesen range. In the event, the owner opted for the design from Omega Architects that combines clean and contemporary lines with just a hint of historic Heesen.

Hull wise, Galactica Star features a Fast Displacement Hull Form from Van Oossanen Naval Architects, a revolutionary design that combines the efficiency of a full-displacement hull at low speed with the top-speed performance of a semi-displacement yacht.

The attempts to contain the size of the superstructure, along with the slender fore body associated with the FDHF, means that Galactica Star is not as spacious inside as some wide-body yachts of similar length, but this was
anticipated from the start and what she lacks in interior volume she more than makes up for in exterior space and sheer good looks on the water. Indeed, the relatively small footprint of the superstructure in relation to the length of the hull means there is correspondingly more space available for outdoor living areas. Perhaps the most impressive of these is the main aft deck with its rigid awning of tinted glass providing welcome shade for the seating area next to the pool. Galactic Star’s interior was developed by Bannenberg & Rowell and followed on from their distinctive interior designs for Elandess II, Aurelia and Lady Petra from Heesen Yachts. They created a similarly striking form-language aboard Galactica Star based on a select palette of materials and textures that have been brought together in bold and sometimes surprising combinations. “What really drove the interior design was the yacht’s beautiful exterior and the new direction it represents for the shipyard,” explains studio principal Dickie Bannenberg. “We wanted to come up with a fresh, graceful and exciting style that complemented Frank’s contemporary exterior lines.” Dickie’s father, the late Jon Bannenberg, is widely attributed with being the first modern superyacht designer after he wrested aesthetic control out of the hands of the naval architects. Many of his creations are still considered radical today and Dickie has inherited his father’s non-conformist – some would say iconoclastic – approach to yacht design. “There is no formal theme as in our previous projects for Heesen,” continues business partner and Creative Director Simon Rowell. “Instead, we were given a free rein to develop a new design language that is taut and disciplined, yet also flows throughout the interior from one space to another.” There is no shortage of signature B&R motifs, such as their penchant for symmetry and geometric shapes, but aboard Galactica Star these elements have taken on a three-dimensional identity by being absorbed into the fitted furniture. Despite being complex in concept, the end result appears surprisingly simple, which is arguably the secret behind all good design. The main salon is the focal point on any superyacht. It is the first room that guests see when they board a yacht moored aft to, providing designers with the opportunity to make a powerful statement. Galactica Star’s bar is designed to be a place to stop and chat rather than just walk through on their way somewhere else – and this attention to detail can be seen throughout the yacht. The most complex interior feature to design and build was the central staircase that extends from the lower deck to the sun deck. Like the main salon, the lobby is a centrepiece to impress guests boarding from the starboard entrance and sets the mood for the rest of the yacht. Another prime space aboard Galactica Star is the beach club. By moving the tender garage forward into the bow, nearly 80 square metres were freed up on the lower aft deck, which gave B&R the extra room to work some magic. Because these spaces are at water level and necessarily contained within the hull structure, providing the kind of natural light and easy access worthy of the ‘beach club’ appellation can be a challenge. So in addition to the transom door that folds down to create a swim platform, there is another hatch that does the same on the port side of the hull to maximise the floor plan. Moreover, the large pool on the main deck immediately above has a glass bottom, creating another source of natural light that is tinted a delicate blue by the water. B&R added their own inimitable style to the space by incorporating ribbon lighting into the ceiling around the pool window in a geometric pattern that is repeated in the teak decking. With its comfy loose furniture, bar and a sauna hidden behind back-lit Lamellux with woven wood sandwiched between the acrylic panels, all that’s missing in this beach club is the sand. The studio had over 20 meetings with the Owner’s representative to fine-tune the interior design. But the moment of truth came when the Owner viewed the results for the first time during the launch – always an anxious experience for any designer. “I remember my dad didn’t have a single meeting with Paul Getty when he redesigned the interior of 80m Talitha,” recalls Dickie. “He enjoyed the theatre of taking an Owner around the finished yacht for the first time, but it’s not something for the faint hearted.” By all accounts Getty came away completely satisfied. Some 20 years later, the Owner of Galactica Star followed suit.