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# Friday



What a dish!

Tantalising tagines 56



# Smooth sailing

**J**YKRI JAMAA KNOWS EVERYTHING there is to know about yachts and boats and the industry. He talks to [Veathika Jain](#) about sailing, the business and where the industry is headed in the region. Photos by [Grace Paras](#)

As the general manager of Western Marine Dubai, Jykri Jamaa introduces new boat brands to the region and provides a lifestyle that is growing increasingly popular among people of all ages. "I started sailing when I was four years old. My father made me a dinghy called Optimist dinghy – a wooden boat. This dinghy guided my nautical life. I started to race with other kids. There are various classes of dinghy boats. From Optimist I moved on to Leisure and did lots of competitions in this division. From a very young age I had decided to make yachting and sailing my career," he says.

"My parents were very competitive sailors in Finland and they participated in national competitions. I was encouraged and guided by them to race and participate in various competitions. My younger brother and I often followed them in competitions. When my parents went on sailing tours to new countries, we went with them. We did race individually but when the family got bigger, we bought a big sailing boat so that we could all race together as a family."

**I have taken sailing tactics and applied them to my professional life.**

Racing or sailing has an assortment of elements which are useful in business. In sailing, the wind is changing all the time. You often have to take risks like going left

when everyone's going right and hope for the wind to shift your way to gain the lead. Doing business is just like that: I sniff the air and take risks. I believe if you want to find your leverage and achieve something big then you need to take risks and have conviction in what you are doing.

**I am a typical Finn.** Finnish people have a very strict upbringing. The community, the parents and the heritage put pressure on you to work hard. I am not a workaholic but I do work hard. I always have a guilty feeling if I haven't worked the way I know I should on a certain day. Another Finnish characteristic that I possess is having a nagging conscience. If I don't give my all to the day's work, I don't feel very relaxed. I am hard on myself to the point that I create stress for myself. Finnish people are driven to achieve and we set our goals high, I think.

**I did a lot of summer jobs.** I joined a boat company for a summer job at the age of 15. I started as a washing boy and while washing the boats I ended up reading boats. I did summer jobs every year until my last year of college. This meant that I got a lot of exposure to the various types of boats and learnt how they are manufactured and the technical aspects involved. I wanted to gain experience through these summer jobs.

**I moved to Florida for the summer in my last year of college where I was getting a degree in mechanical engineering. In my**

third year, the company that I did my summer job with started representing an American brand – it was the biggest boat company in the world. I saw the opportunity coming and I asked them if I could work for the summer in their company to learn about the product, the way it was built and study the manufacturing process and the design aspects. I returned to university to finish my studies and got my degree.

**I had been in the boat retail industry for over a decade when I decided to do something else.** In 1995 I went to the Helsinki Business School to pursue an MBA. I wanted to expand my horizons and the acclaimed Helsinki Business School was an ideal choice. As an engineer I felt I also needed a business degree to understand the industry better. I went on an exchange to Seattle, which is a popular boat haven. I completed my MBA in marketing and finished my studies in Washington University in 1996. Washington has an even bigger boating community than Seattle so it was ideal.

**I believe in education.** I think everyone should get a good education and go to a good university. Education broadens your thinking capacity and arms you with knowledge. When you have a degree, your perspective is broader than the other guy who hasn't studied. There's an edge of knowledge that you have when you have been given an education. I also think it's a great accomplishment as you have finished something that you

**Boats and yachts are**  
Jykri Jamaa's business as well as his passion. Having worked all over the world, he has come to explore the industry in Dubai.





started. It's a platform for success. Maybe 15 years from now I will go back to university and do my PhD in business administration. It's something I'd like to do.

**I was bitten by the IT bug while** I was in Seattle. It was during the time when the IT boom had just begun. I had been in the boat business for almost 25 years and wanted to venture into something different. But before I could change my line of work, the same company with which I started my retail career, wanted me to set up their commercial office in Cannes in the south of France. I had to take the opportunity as it was at the **pinnacle of the boating business. It was a bigger culture shock for me when compared to moving from Finland to America as there was a language barrier.**

**I am a hardcore engineer because** I analyse everything. I like to know how things work. I have a pragmatic approach to almost everything in life. I take a practical approach to tackling problems and I like to study all aspects of the situation before making a decision. If I hadn't gone into the boat industry, aviation would have been my next choice of career. I am very interested in the 'how and why' of things and designing and

manufacturing airplanes would have certainly appealed to my engineering mind.

**ME**

**Me and my family**

The boat business is very hectic and time restrictions are tight. I got married at 44 and had a son when I was 46. I appreciate my family a lot as they came to me at a later stage in my life. I try to do as much as I can with my family - exercising, shopping - we all do it together. I want my family to be healthy as without it there's no life.

I spend all my spare time with my four-year-old son. Becoming a father changed **my life completely.** We do practically everything together. Now that I am in the retail business I do not have to travel much and it is good for family life. I want to be involved as much as I can in my son's life and I consider every new day to be a blessing.

**Me and my passions**

I am passionate about biking and Formula One racing. Speed is something I crave and racing is part of my DNA. I used to participate in motor cross races. I have had a lot of injuries. Now I only

watch motorbike racing. I could never have become a Formula One racer as you have to be well-built and compact but I love the sport and I watch every race I can.

I have friends in Formula One. They are J.J. Lehto and Mika Salo and they drove for years for Formula One. When Mika was with Arrows and Sauber, I went to the tests often to talk to the engineers and designers. As an engineer myself, I feel that Formula One is the pinnacle of the areas in engineering. It is fascinating to see the guys working with the cars. During the test sessions there is usually a bit of time in between so I was able to chat with living legends such as John Barnard about car design and dynamics and Brian Hart about engine development.

**Me and my motto**

When I was in the US in the 1980s, I became familiar with the saying: 'Be the best you can be.' I think there is good wisdom behind this saying: don't compare yourself with others. Just try to be the best you can possibly be within your limits. Try to stay physically fit but do not compare yourself with others. Positive thinking helps me find the right balance in life amidst this competitive world. I try to exercise a little bit every day - it is very important when you get older. Most of the cardio exercise I do is with my son. He sits at the back of my bicycle. **We go from our house in Jumeirah Islands all the way to Atlantis on Palm Jumeirah. Coming from Finland, I love the fact that we can do outdoor sports almost every day throughout the year.**

**Me and global exposure**

My global exposure started with America when I went to do a summer job. My second stint was in Seattle where I learnt a lot about the boat business. From there I moved on to Cannes. I stayed there for six years where I showcased products and learnt about distribution. I rubbed shoulders with the top brass of various industries from industrialists to film stars and CEOs of various firms.

From Scandinavia to America and Europe, I nurtured a desire to learn how business is done in Asia. I got an opportunity in Singapore, where I was to run a yacht company for four years. I gained exposure in South East Asia and Australia and established relationships with good brands. I had not been to the Middle East

up until now, so when the opportunity came, I grabbed it. My current employer decided to move into the yachting sector and needed someone to establish the company and to give it credibility. I feel very fortunate that I have had the opportunity to work in almost all the boating regions in the world. I am very happy with the professional and cultural exposure that I have got. I have learnt about strengths and weaknesses of various regions and I have also had my share of fun in almost all the boating hubs of the world.

**Me and my management style**

I have seen many management styles in my "nautical" life. I do not believe in "baseball bat" management style. I think that motivation rather than fear is the best driver of success. My years with the biggest boat building company in the world were good teachers. I do take advice from key people but I also feel that I should be a bit more tolerant towards my staff. I am quite a disciplinarian and it can get tough to ensure that everyone stays on track. Here in Dubai, we have people with great talent and experience in various fields. My job is to make the team resonate with our customers in the best possible way.

**Me and my contribution**

I would like to contribute to the business industry by writing a book detailing my experiences in the boat business. I have read almost all books available on the subject and I find that there are not many books that tackle this industry sufficiently. It's always helpful to read a book on the business you are interested in. I will do my best to make the book very exciting - there will be glory, mishaps, ups and downs about boats, manufacturing, distribution and maintenance packed into the pages. I would like to give my book to the next generation.

**MYSELF**

*Do you influence others or do others influence you?*

At this stage of my life, I think I am quite knowledgeable. I am almost 50 and I have been there and done that. I have seen recessions, the IT bubble, financial crises and more. I think I can influence others and contribute to other people's lives and be a positive influence. Life is a learning experience. In my job I have had the opportunity

to meet different people from various walks of life and learnt from them. I also believe that learning never stops but as far as influencing goes, I have been influenced in the past by others and it's my turn now to influence others.

*What drives you - the past, the present or the future?*

I am driven by all three. There are experiences from the past that drive you in a certain way and guide your path. The present is a blessing and you have to take advantage of what's available today, while tomorrow is fascinating. I recently went back to Cannes. It's probably the most beautiful place to be in, but it's so well developed that there's no room for a new project. I saw the same guy I saw 10 years ago sitting in the same boat at the same marina. Time has changed things but there's no progress in developed economies. I am driven by progress and in Dubai you can do something new, the pace of progress is unbelievable and opportunities are well beyond anywhere else in the world.

*How technologically savvy are you?*

I am a gadget guy. I had a VIC 20 home computer when it was introduced in 1981 followed by the Commodore 64. I was part of the first boat company in Finland to have a hugely expensive fax machine. That was in 1982. When the internet started to surface in the early 1990s we had already been using the internet for years to communicate with our dealer in Russia. Those were mystical times.

I am not into social networking through the net that much. I don't write a blog because it would not serve any purpose for me in my current job or personal life.

*Have you ever thought of opening your own boat company?*

I actually opened my own boat company in 1991 after Finland fell into a deep recession due to the previous financial crises. The purpose of this company was to liquidate the bankruptcy boats, which were the result of the collapse of the entire industry. The company was doing very well and we ended up selling around 300

boats to other European countries such as Germany.

I was then asked to establish and run a new yacht company as part of the big Finnish industrial conglomerate - the same sort of setup we are undergoing in Dubai. I could not refuse the stability, perks and resources to develop something big and started as a managing partner of the new company. Now that company is by far the biggest yacht company in

Finland and one of the biggest in Europe. My own company might grow active again in the distant future.

*Where do you see the boat industry in the future and how important is it to participate in boat shows?*

The boat industry is volatile. The demand follows economic cycles. It seems that the Middle

East will cope with the current challenging times with less pain than the rest of the world. The long-term demand for boats will remain strong globally. In the Middle East, I think we will see exponential growth for the next 30 years. It is clear to me that the focus will remain here.

Boat shows are where you meet your clients and showcase your products. It is important to participate in these worldwide to mark a footprint of the company. The Dubai show is one of the fastest-growing shows in the world and the others coming up in the area are continuously popping up, which is great for the industry.

*Have you ever been emotionally attached to any of your boats or yachts?*

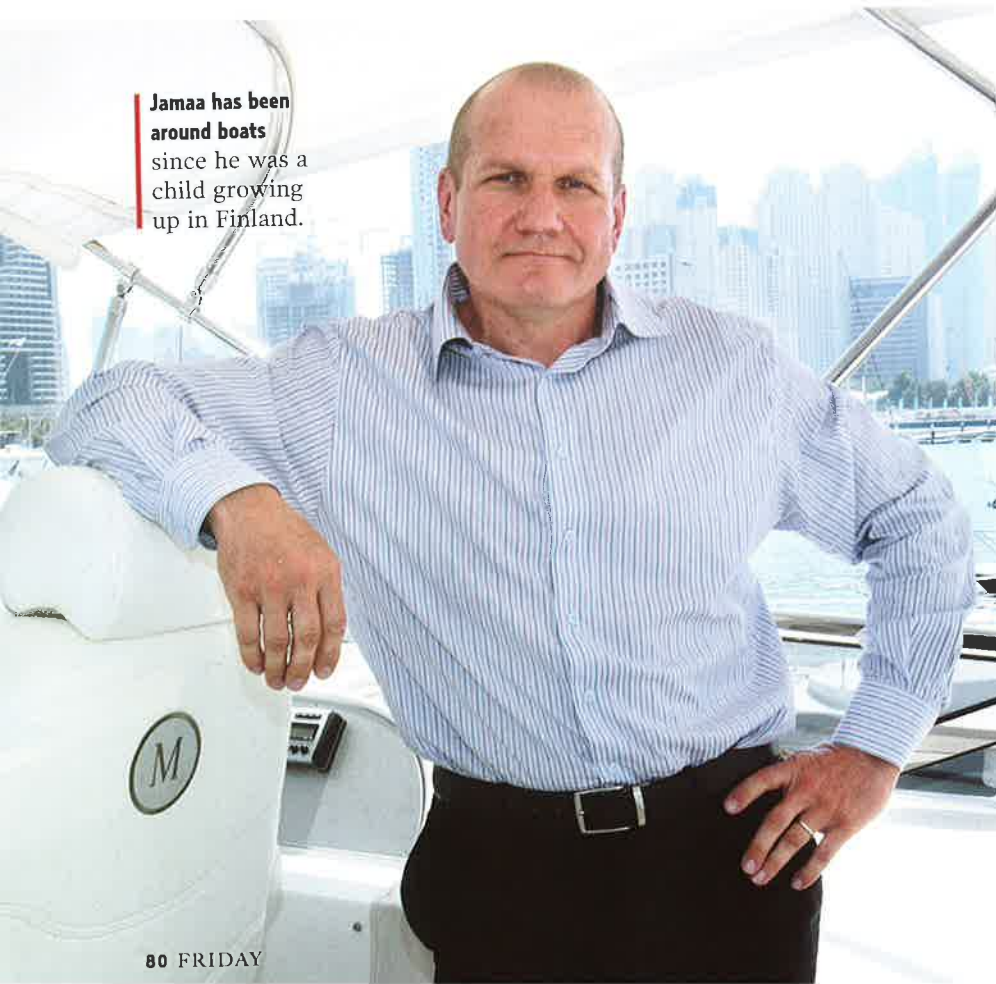
I still have an attachment to the Optimist dinghy that my father built for me from plywood when I was four years old. I think we gave it to a friend's son to learn how to sail and we never got it back. I would certainly like to find it and refit it for my son to have the same experience I had on that dinghy.

Many other boats have touched my heart - the late Sea Rays in the '80s were stunning. We built a 10-metre Sundancer for American football star Walter Payton in 1985 in Merritt Island Florida and that involved special care.

Maybe some day I'll own a huge 25-metre sailing boat for my family and me to sail in. **E**

- Veethika Jain is a Dubai-based freelancer

**"I would like to contribute to the business industry by writing a book detailing my experiences..."**



Jamaa has been around boats since he was a child growing up in Finland.