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Giovanna Vitelli to SUPER YACHT 24: “In Avigliana we will create the Cupertino of the boating industry”

Nicola Capuzzo · Thursday, October 3rd, 2024

Cannes (France) – Giovanna Vitelli, President of the Azimut Benetti Group, shared with SUPER YACHT 24, on the sidelines of the press conference during the Cannes Yachting Festival, where part of the investments from the newly announced €160 million three-year plan is headed.

Beyond product development, where are you focusing your investments the most?

“Our investments cover various areas of our company, but in a measured way to be prepared for any future scenario. We are investing in facilities to increase production capacity and in technology aimed at automation, such as 3D printers we use to create molds for very complex, one-off, and custom parts. We have just installed a new five-axis milling machine that performs more tasks than the previous one, we’ve moved to automated warehouses, and we are exploring the field of bodywork. Automating means quality because it ensures repeatability”.

Will you also be working on the headquarters?

“We have purchased a 100,000 sqm facility in Avigliana, right in front of us, which we will use as a ‘reflection’ space, allowing us to experiment with materials and some machines to recycle and shred all the fiberglass production waste and convert it into a material suitable for construction. Additionally, together with Amdl Circle and architect Michele De Lucchi, who already works with us on interiors, we will renovate all the offices, starting with Avigliana, to give the company a more fitting image for 2024. The entire group will be involved in the project: after Avigliana, it will be Viareggio’s turn, followed by Benetti”.

How are you addressing human resources?

“Revenue has doubled in five years, and we now have 2,500 employees, so the management perspective is changing as well. We have launched an internal Academy to pass on the company’s knowledge and values from long-serving employees to the younger ones. It’s difficult to find well-trained personnel, so we train them ourselves. We’ve also developed the Marinità project to take our staff— from technical offices to production and administration—on our prototype boats. Additionally, we provide coaching for area managers: we are adopting the mindset of a large company that must constantly renew itself. It’s not easy to reach all employees, but I want

everyone to feel part of the same project; we are not a sterile multinational, nor do we want to become one”.

Will you also be changing the office layouts?

“Yes, the renovations will also serve to embrace a new way of working, with fewer individual offices and more common work areas. Starting with me, we’ve halved the number of offices in favor of shared meeting rooms, making heavy use of glass. I envision it as a Cupertino of the nautical industry, with virtual rooms to create a bit of a show and give our clients a ‘behind-the-scenes’ look”.

What’s your best strength?

“In this current period of uncertainty, one of our strengths is stability. Federico Lantero (Head of Product Design) has been with us since 2003, Marco Valle (CEO of the Azimut Benetti Group) has been with the company for 28 years. We have a solid team, with stable shareholders and management, which allows us to think about how to nurture this world for the next generation. Additionally, we have the immense luxury of not being tied to the stock market and having to deliver results every day, making promises. Who, other than a family-owned business, could decide to take a Seadeck 7 off the market for a year, immobilizing such a valuable asset, and sacrifice annual margins with no certainty of when they would be regained, just for the luxury of doing research?”

What’s your next goal?

“I would love to achieve the top spot in the order book for the 25th consecutive year”.

Are you satisfied with the partnership with D-Marine regarding marinas?

“Yes, my father sailed a lot this summer between Greece and Turkey and found a great organization. I think D-Marine is a good partner to enter this business with a hospitality-like approach. I continue to believe in marinas because they are a synergistic sector for providing services to yacht owners”.

Does it also help sell more boats?

“Not entirely. The marinas we manage have shown us that this aspect is relative. We understand the needs of yacht owners very well, and when it comes to providing services, we are better than those outside the industry. We can make a difference, and this Italian, professional management brings interesting results”.

In the refit sector, do you want and can you do more?

“We have made significant investments in the Lusben division. One of our top figures, who heads Benetti’s technical office, will now be in charge. We’ve invested €12 million in Livorno to attract yachts in the 100-meter range. I believe in refit, but we can do more”.

One last question on the current hot topic: crew training?

“As an industry, we should collectively reflect on the issue of crew training, because we risk losing some appeal with the end customer. There isn’t enough training being provided”.

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Giovanna Vitelli

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