

Robb Report

PORT OF DREAMS

The Legend Begins



In Partnership With **Sindalah** – An Island of Exquisite Abundance

The Answers with... Luca Dini

Luca Dini's life could have taken a very different turn. As a young man in Florence, he dabbled with the idea of becoming a lawyer, spending two years studying and attending lots of parties—as he'll playfully admit—before a chance meeting led him to join the office of Pierluigi Spadolini, dubbed the Jon Bannenberg of Italian yacht design. Years later, the acclaimed yacht designer-turned-architect has brought to life some of the world's most spectacular luxury vessels. Now, Dini is at the helm of, arguably, the biggest project of his career: the luxury Red Sea island of Sindalah in Saudi Arabia's visionary NEOM development. Despite the project's demands, Dini's life is certainly not all work and no play. In his free time, he sails around Italian islands and rides motorbikes through the Florentine hills. "I like to feel the fresh air on my face; it makes me feel free, like a kid again," he says of outings on his beloved Harley-Davidson. "I force myself to enjoy life and not to live just to work." *ISABELLA SULLIVAN*

What's the first thing you do in the morning?

The first thing I do is have a nice hot shower followed by authentic Italian coffee. I can't start my day without it.

Talk us through your dream travel itinerary.

I leave my heart in Saudi Arabia every time I go there. It is impossible not to be fascinated by the incredible landscapes it offers, from the sparkling sea to majestic mountains. I don't have a destination in mind for the future, but I would certainly like to carve out some time for a long trip with my family.

Are you wearing a watch?

I own several watches, which are all connected to very personal memories. The most precious to me is a Rolex GMT¹, the first watch given to me by an employer when I designed my first vessel, at the age of 25. I remember doing everything by myself, which was one of my most significant opportunities and satisfactions.

¹ Introduced in 1954, the Rolex GMT Master was designed at the behest of Pan American Airways, whose pilots needed to keep track of multiple time zones.





LUCA: GIOVANNI MARGARINI; AEOLIAN ISLANDS: GIUSEPPE GALLO/UNSPLOASH; COFFEE: FREDERIC DUPONT/UNSPLOASH

FROM TOP: Houses cling to the hillside in Alicudi, the westernmost island of Italy's Aeolian archipelago; Dini begins his mornings with an authentic Italian coffee; the Rolex GMT-Master II.



The last time you completely unplugged?

My work is fast-paced, but I always find a way to disconnect. I like spending time with friends, on vacation, at the stadium, and weekends at the beach. I care about quality of life, and every moment must be lived to the fullest.

What's your favorite hotel in the world?

I don't have a favorite hotel, as I like to change where I go. I'm curious. I do lots of research and don't like to do the same things in the same places. The hotels I stay in must be unique and have a strong identity.

You've designed dozens of yachts, but do you sail yourself?

Absolutely. One of the most beautiful ways to spend a holiday is on the water: It's the ultimate way to disconnect. One of my favorite places is Sardinia, a constellation of beautiful locations, both for the type of nature they offer and for all the leisure opportunities on land. The Italian Aeolian Islands² are a recent and delightful discovery. These seven islands are entirely different from one another, all with breathtaking landscapes.

² Scattered off the coast of Sicily, these islands have long been a favored escape of the glamorous set: Ingrid Bergman and Roberto Rossellini fell in love on Stromboli, while Giorgio Armani had a villa on Panarea.

What is worth spending money on?

The pandemic certainly overturned my way of seeing things and, most of all, how I live. Only some have the opportunities our clients have. However, there is one thing that is precious to all and does not discriminate: time. True luxury is the quality of how we spend our time, which can mean different things based on one's way of life.

THE FUTURE AWAITS

With innovation at the fore, Saudi Arabia's cutting-edge NEOM
giga-project is building a new model for urban living amid
breathtaking natural environs.



The landscapes surrounding NEOM have remained relatively unknown and unfrequented despite their majestic natural splendor and temperate year-round climate.

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WHAT IS NEOM? This is the question on everyone's lips, as the world takes notice of a forward-thinking destination coming to life in a little-known corner of Saudi Arabia. It's here, amid a seemingly endless expanse of desert and along a shimmering Red Sea coastline, that a region the size of Belgium has become a blank canvas where the most cutting-edge innovations in architecture, urban planning, and sustainable living are taking shape.

Just a few short years ago, Saudi Arabia's natural beauty and rich history remained unexplored by international travelers—until 2019, when the Kingdom began to open its doors to tourism. And now, the nation's 1,000 miles of pristine Red Sea coastline, vast deserts, mountain ranges, ancient UNESCO World Heritage Sites, and lush wadis strewn with palm trees are beckoning travelers eager to explore tourism's final frontier. As the Kingdom began opening up as never before, Vision 2030 was born: an ambitious road map charting a decade of innovative growth across all sectors. Vision 2030 aims to help Saudi Arabia achieve what no country has done in such a short space of time.

Tourism is perhaps the most ambitious of Vision 2030's pillars. Previously untouched coastlines are transforming into glamorous seaside attractions, and ancient desert settlements will play host to futuristic cities and cultural and entertainment hubs. While developments across the Kingdom, from the Royal Commission for AlUla and Diriyah Gate to the Red Sea Project and Qiddiya, are gearing up to welcome a projected 100 million annual visitors by 2030, one endeavor in particular has stood out for its scale and ambition: NEOM.



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PETER FITZHARDINGE

Located on the northwestern coast of Saudi Arabia near the city of Tabuk, the landscapes surrounding NEOM have remained relatively unknown and unfrequented despite their majestic natural splendor and temperate year-round climate. The area stretches from the Red Sea coast out onto ancient deserts home to towering rock formations. While the region will change the paradigm of urban living, it also will be an oasis for nature and wildlife: 95 percent of NEOM’s territory will be protected, with rewilding projects currently underway.

Encompassing many projects and destinations, NEOM is arguably the world’s most exciting venture—transforming this storied land into pockets of thriving

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: The waters around NEOM are renowned for diving; Trojena, in the mountains of NEOM; the cutting-edge mirrored smart city THE LINE.

PREVIOUS PAGE: The Great Arch in NEOM’s Hisma Desert.

residential communities, tourism retreats, and beautiful island destinations. The range of planned projects is dizzying: There's Trojena, a year-round adventure destination built high above the deserts, complete with skiing on snow during the winter months, which will play host to the Asian Winter Games in 2029; global hospitality heavyweight Ennismore is Trojena's hotel partner, with outposts of its 25hours and Morgans Originals to be the destination's first two brands. Elsewhere, the industrial Oxagon, a next-generation port, will be a hub for innovation and logistics—and will boast the world's largest green hydrogen production plant. Perhaps the most daring project of all will be THE LINE: a 106-mile-long (170 km) mirrored linear cognitive city rising above the desert like a mirage and designed to be free of cars and emissions.

But the first to launch, in early 2024, will be Sindalah: a Red Sea island and yachting paradise poised to be a dazzling playground for luxury travelers. "Sindalah will be the first opening of 'NEOM as NEOM'—a taste of what is to come in the future," explains Peter Fitzhardinge, Director of Marketing for NEOM Tourism. "It will be the perfect place to step into NEOM, to explore the seas, natural beauty, and rich cultural heritage of this land and witness the ambitious and grand vision of NEOM as it takes shape—including the extraordinary, reimagined city of THE LINE."

Visitors to Sindalah will check in to sumptuous resorts from Marriott's Luxury Collection and Autograph Collection, among others, and will explore a thriving waterfront district with restaurants, nightlife, shopping, and a glamorous 86-berth marina. "Sindalah is an island that few have seen and even fewer have set foot on, in waters that are unsailed, in a part of the world that is yet to be explored," says Fitzhardinge.

While seemingly years away, thanks to the drive behind Vision 2030, these projects are crystallizing into thrilling new showpieces every day. Forty percent of the world's population lives within a six-hour flight of NEOM, and the region is already connected by air to global hubs with direct flights from London and Dubai to the NEOM Bay airport. A gateway to the Red Sea and to NEOM itself, Sindalah will be a glittering addition to the world's yachting circuit, thanks to its year-round climate and dazzling events calendar. Under the watchful eye of Luca Dini, who helms an



acclaimed Italian yachting and design firm, Sindalah was landscaped and designed to serve as a natural extension to days spent aboard a stylish superyacht. "His vision, designs, and tone for Sindalah are truly extraordinary," says Fitzhardinge. "With every conversation and design, he takes it to a higher level."

When Sindalah welcomes its first yachts next year, the Red Sea island will serve as the inaugural showcase for global travelers of the innovation that spans the reaches of NEOM. Sindalah promises to grant the world its first true taste of NEOM's possibilities, setting the tone for a decade of head-spinning projects and marking a new era of tourism in the country. "Sindalah embodies all the principles of NEOM: beauty in a raw and ancient landscape, iconic architecture, and a reimagined sense of adventure and travel," says Fitzhardinge. "Sindalah offers the world's travelers the opportunity to be the first, not just to Sindalah, but also to NEOM."

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