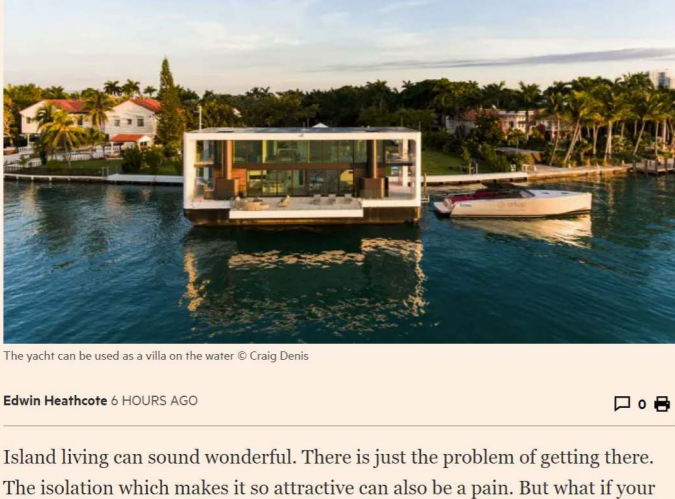


Welcome to the first truly seaborne house

Arkup's Livable Yacht is a remarkable hybrid of nautical and land architecture



The yacht can be used as a villa on the water © Craig Denis

Edwin Heathcote 6 HOURS AGO

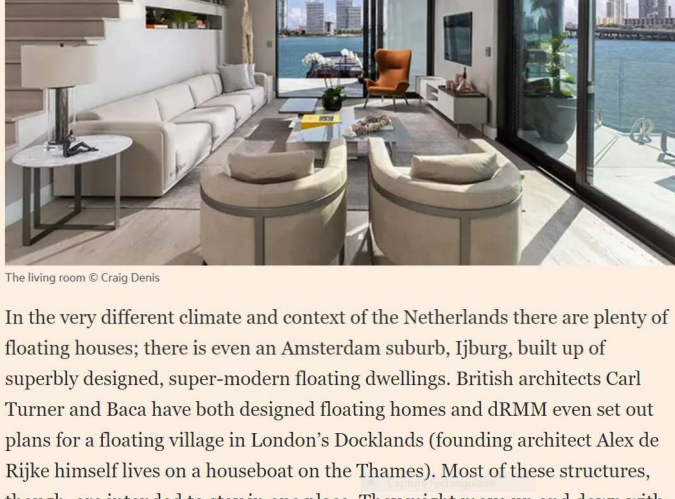


Island living can sound wonderful. There is just the problem of getting there. The isolation which makes it so attractive can also be a pain. But what if your house *was* an island? Is there a state between the seclusion of living on an island and the luxury mobility of a yacht?

There is now. Arkup's Livable Yacht is a hybrid of nautical and land architecture, a slightly strange mash-up of technologies from marine construction, oil-rigs, Dutch houses and super-yachts to create a new typology.

Clambering around in the noise and dust of the prototype, still under construction in a Miami boat yard when I visited, was an odd experience. The heavy engineering was all in place, along with the incredible technical complexity of the machinery and controls, all visible through hatches in the floor. Yet it did not feel like a boat. It was a building being built inside another building, sheltered by the huge roof of the boat-shed and surrounded by luxurious-looking, sleek boats of the type you see around South Florida's many marinas.

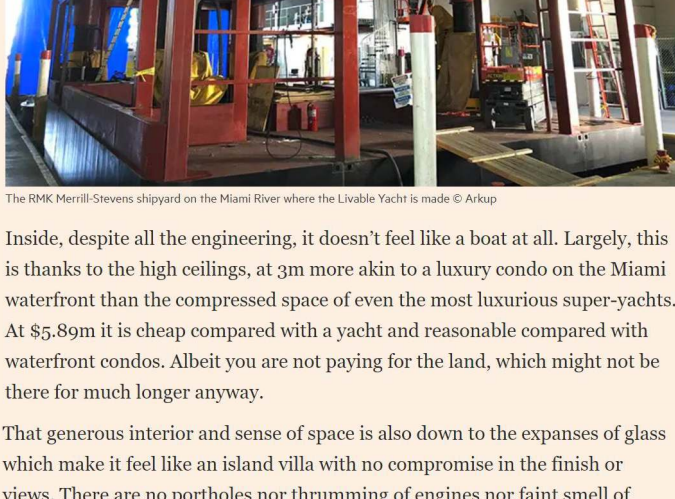
In a way, the Livable Yacht is only a collection of existing ideas and off-the-shelf technologies, yet they have been combined in a manner that makes this the first truly and completely self-sufficient seaborne house. And it is a remarkable thing.



The living room © Craig Denis

In the very different climate and context of the Netherlands there are plenty of floating houses; there is even an Amsterdam suburb, Ijburg, built up of superbly designed, super-modern floating dwellings. British architects Carl Turner and Baca have both designed floating homes and dRMM even set out plans for a floating village in London's Docklands (founding architect Alex de Rijke himself lives on a houseboat on the Thames). Most of these structures, though, are intended to stay in one place. They might move up and down with the tide but they are broadly fixed and plug in to existing infrastructure.

What makes Arkup's Livable Yacht so unusual is that it has everything it needs on board: solar panels on the roof provide electric power, water filtration systems collect rainwater and four huge hydraulic legs can anchor it to the sea floor (like the legs of an oil rig) or retract when it needs to float away. There is a bridge and an electrically-powered motor with twin propellers, a boat lift for a tender and a hydraulic retractable terrace.



The RMK Merrill-Stevens shipyard on the Miami River where the Livable Yacht is made © Arkup

Inside, despite all the engineering, it doesn't feel like a boat at all. Largely, this is thanks to the high ceilings, at 3m more akin to a luxury condo on the Miami waterfront than the compressed space of even the most luxurious super-yachts. At \$5.89m it is cheap compared with a yacht and reasonable compared with waterfront condos. Albeit you are not paying for the land, which might not be there for much longer anyway.

That generous interior and sense of space is also down to the expanses of glass which make it feel like an island villa with no compromise in the finish or views. There are no portholes nor thrumming of engines nor faint smell of gasoline and no awkward bulkheads. The interiors have been designed by Brazilian fit-out and furniture company Artefacto with a characteristic flourish of Latin American chic — lots of white, super-modern furniture, organic forms, indoor/outdoor living and, perhaps, a touch of Asian boutique hotel. It has a hint of cocaine and suitcases of money but otherwise it is tasteful enough.



Bird's eye view of the rooftop showing the solar cells © Craig Denis/Artefacto

In fixing it to the sea floor the hydraulic legs ("spuds" to use the technical terminology) the dwelling is made stable and avoids the slightly queasy sensation of instability. Spread over two floors with kitchen and living below and bedrooms above, it is extremely open to the views which are, in a way, its *raison d'être*. It is possible, here, truly to be at one with the sea which surrounds you, while sitting just comfortably enough above it.

It has also been conceived as a kind of urban island. Although we might think of island living as reclusive, visualising the archetypal desert island (and the company does provide some renderings of this mythical lifestyle), even the design here suggests a kind of slick, upscale real estate. Could it be possible to set up in a prime waterside neighbourhood — not needing to hook up to any infrastructure — and then just float a little along the shore to get a different view? It's a seductive idea.



The yacht docked on an island near Miami Beach © Craig Denis/Artefacto

There is also something curious about this new hybrid, an intimation of a different — but very possible — future. Being constructed in Miami places it at the nexus of the issues around rising sea levels and a planet being transformed by climate change. Miami has been caught up in a roaring property boom yet it is also frequently cited as the US city with the most to lose from rises in the sea level, with real estate of more value at threat from being underwater within a generation than any other in the US. The Livable Yacht's particular combination of responses to a demand for luxury, space and mobility and a reaction to environmental apocalypse seems to situate it somewhere between off shore wealth and off-world living. It is a place of escape in every sense.

Its self-sufficiency has also led to a suggestion that this new hybrid typology might be part of the solution to crises. Able to be deployed at short notice to disaster areas where, quite possibly, the infrastructure has failed and the land is unsafe (in the aftermath of floods, earthquakes, volcanoes etc), the Livable Yacht might find another alternative future in the very opposite of the luxury living scenario from whence it emerged. NGOs have been looking carefully at the opportunities it offers, from floating hospital to emergency response shelter.



Floating homes in Amsterdam's Ijburg suburb © Architect Koen Olthuis—Waterstudio.NL

That the amphibious house's architect is Dutch should give some substance to this notion of another type of living. Koen Olthuis and his practice Waterstudio are specialists in floating structures. They designed many of the houses in Ijburg and have more experience in this hybrid architecture than any other practice. The collaboration with naval engineers Donald L Blount & Associates and the Arkup team, green-tech entrepreneur Arnaud Luguët and co-founder Nicolas Derouin should give confidence that this is not a bauble but a dwelling which might change the way we look at the water.

Traditionally, water has been a kind of enemy to architecture. Even in those cities that derive their beauty from their relationship to the sea — Venice, for instance — floods, maintenance and the perils of sinking or storms create a situation in which the city is constantly under threat. Even New York was forced into a moment of clarity after Hurricane Sandy. This house-cum-vessel intimates a future in which architecture might not fight against the watery future but embrace it.

Edwin Heathcote is the FT's architecture critic

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