

# Perfection Would Be the End

OVER THE *LAST 40 YEARS*, FRANCO PACE HAS PLAYED A MAJOR ROLE IN SHAPING OUR IMAGE OF SAILING. HIS PICTURES ARE ICONS OF *MARITIME PHOTOGRAPHY*



Just like city of Trieste, Franco Pace gazes down on the gentle blue of the Adriatic, with the sun behind, hanging above the green peaks of the karst hills, and the Mediterranean before him. Trieste is at the farthest edge of Italy, shaped by wind and sea – just like the people who live here. There is the Mistral, which comes from the sea in the summer as a cool breeze, the warm Scirocco from the east, which brings the rain, and, of course, the Bora, which whistles cold and dry through the alleyways and across the piazza at up to 100 kilometres per hour. This mix of water, light and wind is also what made Franco Pace one of the world's best known sailing photographers.

It is a mild spring morning in March when we meet at the canal on Via Gioacchino Rossini for coffee. Franco arrives on his bicycle; it would have taken too long on foot. He says he's like a turtle, "I'm slow on land, but everything's fine in the water." He lifts his hand to greet passers-by, delivery people and café customers. Pace has been well known in Trieste since the early

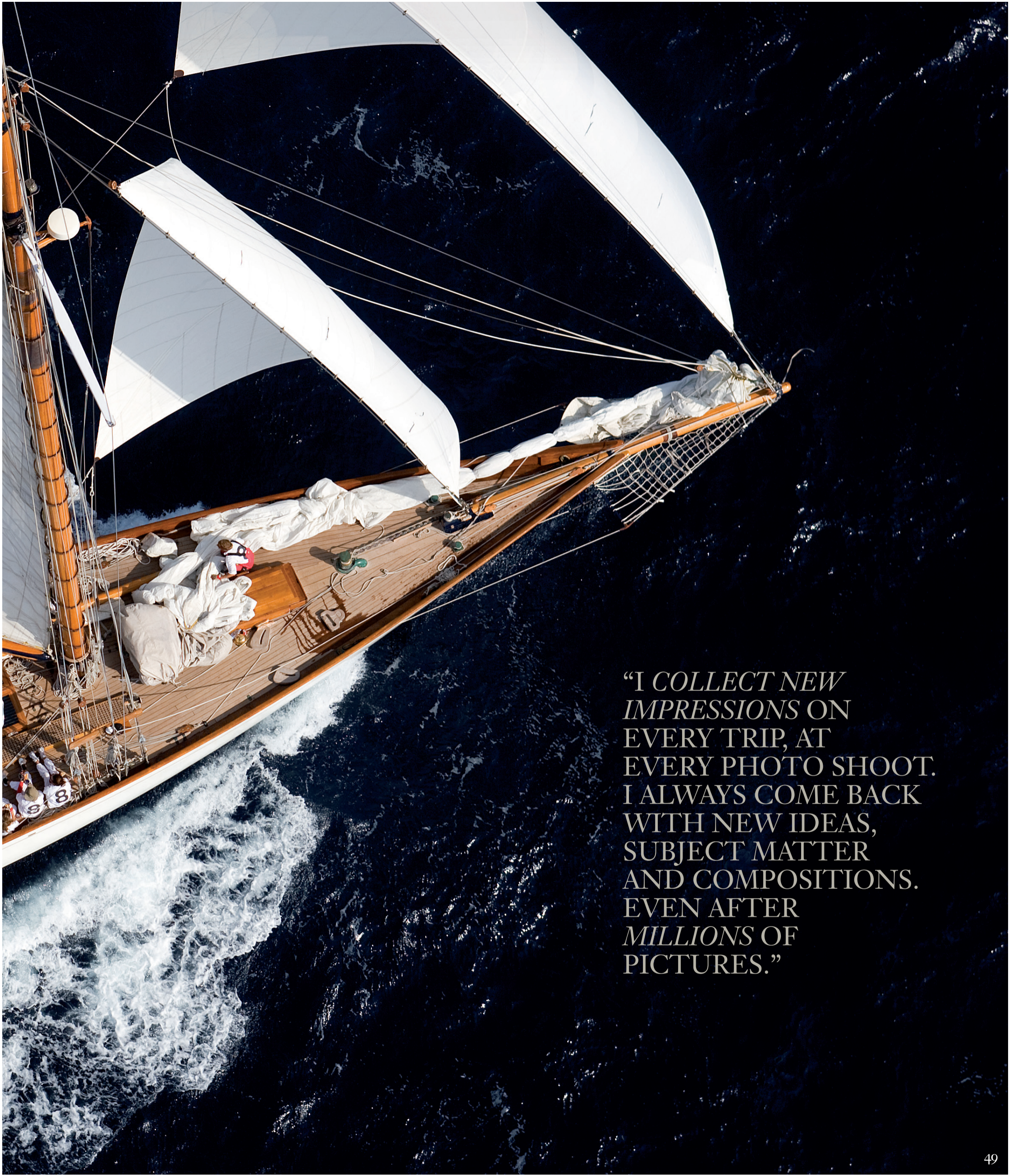
80s. Back then he spent eight, sometimes nine months of the year on sailing trips and at regattas, exhibitions and productions all over the world. He takes things a little easier now with only five or six major races.

Franco Pace was born in 1942 in Tunis to a Tunisian father and an Italian mother, who worked as a teacher in East Africa. In 1943, in the fog of war surrounding the African campaign, the young family returned to Trieste.

Like all those from Trieste, Franco, too, spends a lot of his free time on the water – rowing in the harbour area, on the beach, in Bagno alla Lanterna or on his friends' sailboats. As a young man, he was hired during the holidays as a crew hand on big sailing yachts and was drawn by the fascination of the old sailors. It was clear early on that he had a talent for design and an eye for form and colour. Franco began to paint while he was still at school. He studied biology in Trieste, working, sailing – and taking pictures with his first camera, a Nikkormat.

NO MAST TOO  
HIGH: HIS  
EXTRAORDINARY  
PERSPECTIVES  
HAVE MADE  
FRANCO PACE  
FAMOUS





*“I COLLECT NEW  
IMPRESSIONS ON  
EVERY TRIP, AT  
EVERY PHOTO SHOOT.  
I ALWAYS COME BACK  
WITH NEW IDEAS,  
SUBJECT MATTER  
AND COMPOSITIONS.  
EVEN AFTER  
MILLIONS OF  
PICTURES.”*



*EVERYTHING IS FLUID – AND EVEN AFTER 40 YEARS, FRANCO PACE IS ALWAYS IN SEARCH OF SOMETHING NEW. HE SUMS UP WHAT CONTINUES TO DRIVE HIM IN ONE SENTENCE, “I DON’T WANT TO REPEAT MYSELF.”*



“I noticed that I could express my ideas just as well with a camera and black-and-white film as I could with a brush and canvas – just much faster,” he says. Soon he found his subject matter – the coast, the sea and sailing. It was the many facets of this sport that he found so captivating; the elegance of the ships, the colours, the water, the light and also the people who work on the ships.

When he began teaching biology at a high school in Trieste, he continued his photography on the side, perfecting his hobby. A small exhibition received a certain degree of regional attention, but no more than that. The moment that changed everything came in 1976. Trieste was the location for the Sailing World Championship in the half-tonne category. More than 50 top crews from all over the world came to the Adriatic. Franco took photographs during the day, spending the night bent over the light table in the lab.

After the awards ceremony at the Adriatico Yachting Club, he was meant to beam the most impressive images of the race onto the clubhouse wall in a multimedia show using six projectors. But the technology failed and Franco and his helpers arrived too late. The sailors had long since dispersed to the city’s bars and restaurants. Nevertheless, he went through with his show – he wanted at least to see for himself the result of all those nights of hard work. “It was a miracle,” he says today. “When we showed the pictures, all the sailors came back to the clubhouse. By the end of it, more than 400 people were

sitting on the pier in amazement.” By the next day, biology teacher Franco Pace had become a famous yacht photographer. Within the space of a week, he had given up his job at the school. Now he was invited to attend regattas and sailing events all over the world. He displayed his slide shows, produced calendars and, in 1983, successfully published the first of numerous books he has produced to-date. He created around five million images in a little under forty years, including numerous icons of yacht photography.

But Franco still hasn’t discovered the secret to the perfect picture. “Fortunately,” he says. “Perfection would be the end of my work, the end of creativity. You can only ever give your best, have patience and wait. Wait for the right light, for the boat to be in the right position, the sail to be set in a certain way; but later, you sit at the screen and think to yourself ‘I should have waited a moment longer here, or cut this image differently, or used a different angle’. There is no such thing as perfection.”

We have lunch in the time-honoured clubroom of the YC Adriatico. The food is good; he likes to eat here – but he would prefer a table outside on the pier, among the boats. Could he ever give up the photography completely? The amount of travelling will surely decrease, he says, but he will never stop taking photographs. “Perhaps I’ll turn my attention to my city. There’s so much light, so many beautiful nooks and crannies.” But until then, he still has a lot lined up.

One thing is for sure, though. He won’t have any lack of sailing boats in Trieste. And certainly not when the Barcolana starts in October – Trieste’s big regatta with more than 5,000 boats of all classes. Franco Pace will be in the thick of it once more – with the motorboat, on top of the lighthouse and on deck. And, once again, he’ll be waiting for just the right moment. **B**

THE OLD TOWN,  
THE HARBOUR,  
THE BARS AND  
CAFÉS – FOR  
FRANCO PACE,  
TRIESTE IS NOT  
ONLY HOME, BUT  
ALSO A STAGE.  
IN 2009,  
MORE THAN  
35,000 PEOPLE  
VISITED HIS  
EXHIBITION IN  
THE OLD FISH  
AUCTION HALL



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