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LUXE LIFE

The New Breed
of Yacht Clubs



LUXURY COLLECTIONSM

REIMAGINING THE YACHT CLUB

By Roger Grody

Few leisure activities represent exclusivity like sailing, but yacht clubs catering to elite hobbyists are morphing from stately bastions of privilege to flashy waterfront retreats.

Left photo courtesy of Mohamed Masaau;
Below photo courtesy of Binyan Studios

Left:
Yachting in crystal blue waters.

Below:
South Florida's Olara, for the
yachting life.

Like polo or collecting vintage sports cars, sailing conveys a sense of affluence. And like exclusive golf clubs, elite yacht clubs exude a luxurious, Gatsbyesque lifestyle that extends well beyond a polished teak deck. From Nantucket to Santa Barbara, yacht clubs envelop a passion for sailing with opulent décor, fine cuisine, and a robust social scene. However, the traditional yacht club is evolving, and here we explore exciting new opportunities for sailors.

While some are more egalitarian, many prestigious yacht clubs have aristocratic pedigrees and typically shun publicity. The New York Yacht Club—its members have included Vanderbilts, Rockefellers, and Kennedys—was founded in 1844 and its Beaux-Arts Manhattan headquarters features a spectacular museum-worthy salon filled with ship models.

Serving the Los Angeles sailing community for a century but offering a more contemporary approach is the California Yacht Club, providing 230 slips for members at Marina del Rey, the nation's largest marina. General manager Cory Hathaway suggests, "We're not quite as buttoned-up as some East Coast clubs, but more formal than most." He explains, "We don't have a super-strict dress code—it reflects Los Angeles' laid-back attitude—but the dining room is on par with a four-star, high-end hotel."

Hathaway reports that in addition to an older, lifelong sailing demographic, California Yacht Club draws younger members from nearby technology, entertainment, or aerospace firms, as well as affluent families who appreciate onsite swimming, pickleball, and youth activities. "Yacht clubs today play the same role as country clubs," says Hathaway, but adds that sailors develop an incredible bond not always established among golfers.

The traditional yacht club experience is now being integrated into sexy coastal developments that make the old school yacht club, with its 19th century roots, feel dated. Olara, a prestigious new address in West Palm Beach, Florida—condominium prices begin at \$2 million—was designed by the trendsetting firm Arquitectonica. When the project debuts in 2026, Olara's 80,000-square-foot amenity suite will reimagine the traditional

yacht club with a waterfront restaurant, state-of-the-art fitness center and spa, swimming pools, co-working space, and private dock accommodating residents' yachts.

"With yachting culture so popular, we decided to enrich Olara's stretch of the Intracoastal Waterway with a private dock and elevate the overall waterfront experience," reports Peter Rosenthal, chief development officer at New York-based Savanna. "Having a private dock is an experience that fosters a sense of community among condominium residents who enjoy boating," he adds, noting that a concierge will heighten the level of service and hospitality. "The seafaring experiences at Olara, much like the traditional yacht or country club, will be exclusive and perfectly seamless for residents and their guests," states Rosenthal.

The first exclusively residential development by the Four Seasons hospitality brand is not in the Caribbean but on Lake Austin in the Texas capital (debuting 2026), with a contemporary design befitting the burgeoning technology hub. The project, encompassing 179 condominium-style residences and nine stand-alone villas, features 3,000-plus feet of private waterfront. Penthouses are equipped with 40-foot pools while a 300-foot infinity-edge indulgence with private cabanas is part of the amenity package at the private Lake Clubhouse, reached via a \$29 million glass funicular-style elevator.

"Residences with boat slips are highly sought-after on Lake Austin, and we offer the only private marina with a clubhouse serviced by Four Seasons," says Jonathan Coon of Four Seasons Lake Austin. He notes the 576-foot-long marina will attract buyers with their own vessels, in addition to accommodating a fleet maintained by Four Seasons. "Residents and their guests will have exclusive access to the Lake Clubhouse and over 100,000 square feet of premier amenity space," says Coon, citing a spa, indoor sports club, restaurant, theater, and orangerie with indoor pool as additional attractions. "Residents and their guests will be afforded privacy and a level of amenities and services beyond what is typically offered at a yacht club," he adds.

America's traditional yacht clubs have enduring appeal. But for elite sailing enthusiasts preferring to reside a short elevator ride from their superyachts, real estate developers will continue to redefine the institution.

