# Bezos’s yacht Koru blocks Dutch bridge in stark symbol of rising billionaire privilege



In Evan Osnos's exploration of the ultra-rich through his book "The Haves and Have-Yachts," the complexities of extreme wealth come into sharp focus, illustrated famously by Jeff Bezos's colossal superyacht, Koru. At 127 metres long, the yacht's dimensions not only symbolise affluence but also highlight a peculiar saga—Koru was deemed too tall to pass beneath Rotterdam’s Koningshaven Bridge. In a striking display of priorities, while manufacturers suggested modifying the iconic bridge, Dutch authorities categorically refused, underscoring a growing notion of entitlement among the ultra-wealthy. This narrative serves as a microcosm of modern inequality, where the powerful often operate under a different set of rules.

The financial landscape of the United States tells a remarkable story of wealth accumulation. The number of billionaires in the U.S. has skyrocketed from just 66 in 1990 to over 700 by 2023, reflecting a staggering increase of more than 1,000%. Alongside this, the count of yachts exceeding 76 metres has surged from fewer than ten to over 170, all while median hourly wages have only seen a modest 20% rise. Such a disparity suggests that the disparities are not merely economic but also seep into societal and political realms. As Osnos notes, “the world watched America embrace plutocracy without shame or pretence,” with figures like Elon Musk and Mark Zuckerberg standing as testimonials to this burgeoning influence, reshaping political dynamics.

Osnos’s analysis opens a window to the lifestyle choices of the very wealthy, revealing a world where the extravagance of superyachts has become almost normative. One yacht owner encapsulated this sentiment by declaring that living on land in luxury has become passé; on yachts, the ratio of staff to guests offers a new level of opulence. The superyacht experience is now akin to the palatial estates of yore, yet they are mobile, echoing a desire for both privacy and a detachment from broader societal issues. This fluidity also resonates with the sentiments of venture capitalist Peter Thiel, who has backed initiatives like the Seasteading Institute, aimed at creating floating micro-nations as a means of escaping political structures entirely.

Today’s superyachts are not merely vessels; they are floating fortresses equipped with luxurious amenities unimaginable mere decades ago. Furthermore, features such as IMAX theatres, ski rooms for alpine escapes, and sophisticated medical facilities exemplify the lengths to which the wealthy will go to maintain their privileged lifestyle even amidst a global pandemic. This preference for isolation hints at a historical parallel with Thorstein Veblen’s theory of “conspicuous consumption,” where ostentatious displays of wealth become a point of status rather than practicality. The modern yacht, with its capacity for deliveries of gourmet foodto luxuries like private submarines, reflects this logic.

However, while the allure of superyachts persists, owning one comes with its challenges. Financial commentators liken yacht ownership to holding on to multiple Van Gogh paintings while treading water, implying a severe devaluation of these assets over time. Yet, as Veblen recognised, this depreciation might paradoxically serve the purpose of signalling wealth. For many, the act of owning such extravagant vessels is less about investment and more about a narrative of dominance and desensitised luxury amid a world grappling with stark inequalities.

In summary, Osnos’s examination thrusts the reader into a world where the ultra-rich navigate their privileges amongst growing societal inequalities— a reflective lens on modernity’s evolving expressions of wealth. The staggering contrasts in income distribution and the extraordinary lifestyles of the super-wealthy pose significant questions about the future of society and the persistent allure of conspicuous wealth.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2025/may/26/the-haves-and-have-yachts-by-evan-osnos-review-inside-the-world-of-the-ultrarich), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2025/may/26/the-haves-and-have-yachts-by-evan-osnos-review-inside-the-world-of-the-ultrarich)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2025/may/26/the-haves-and-have-yachts-by-evan-osnos-review-inside-the-world-of-the-ultrarich), [[4]](https://www.statista.com/statistics/220093/number-of-billionaires-in-the-united-states/), [[5]](https://ips-dc.org/a-third-of-u-s-billionaire-wealth-gains-since-1990-have-come-during-pandemic/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2025/may/26/the-haves-and-have-yachts-by-evan-osnos-review-inside-the-world-of-the-ultrarich), [[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Koru_(yacht))
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2025/may/26/the-haves-and-have-yachts-by-evan-osnos-review-inside-the-world-of-the-ultrarich), [[3]](https://www.huffingtonpost.es/sociedad/el-barco-jeff-bezos-pide-ayuda-puerto-espanol.html)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2025/may/26/the-haves-and-have-yachts-by-evan-osnos-review-inside-the-world-of-the-ultrarich), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2025/may/26/the-haves-and-have-yachts-by-evan-osnos-review-inside-the-world-of-the-ultrarich)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2025/may/26/the-haves-and-have-yachts-by-evan-osnos-review-inside-the-world-of-the-ultrarich> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2025/may/26/the-haves-and-have-yachts-by-evan-osnos-review-inside-the-world-of-the-ultrarich> - This article reviews Evan Osnos's book, 'The Haves and Have-Yachts,' exploring the world of the ultrarich and their superyachts. It discusses Jeff Bezos's $485 million yacht, Koru, which is 127 meters long and too tall to pass under Rotterdam's Koningshaven Bridge. The piece also highlights the environmental impact of such yachts, noting that a well-stocked diesel yacht can produce as much greenhouse gas as 1,500 passenger cars. Additionally, it mentions the significant increase in the number of US billionaires from 66 in 1990 to over 700 by 2023, and the rise in the number of US yachts over 76 meters from less than 10 to more than 170 in the same period.
3. <https://www.huffingtonpost.es/sociedad/el-barco-jeff-bezos-pide-ayuda-puerto-espanol.html> - This article reports on Jeff Bezos's superyacht, Koru, docking in Cartagena, Spain, for maintenance after encountering severe weather in the Balearic Islands. The 127-meter yacht, valued at €500 million, is the second-largest sailing yacht globally. It features three large masts, two decks, a large swimming pool, and accommodates 18 guests with a crew of 40. The yacht is powered by kinetic energy generated by its sails, reducing fuel consumption, and also has a motor. Due to intense rains and winds in Menorca, Bezos decided to anchor the yacht to protect it and now seeks to ensure its good condition for future voyages.
4. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/220093/number-of-billionaires-in-the-united-states/> - This Statista page provides statistics on the number of billionaires in the United States from 1990 to 2023. It shows a significant increase from 66 billionaires in 1990 to around 748 in 2023, highlighting a substantial rise in wealth concentration among the ultra-wealthy in the U.S. over this period.
5. <https://ips-dc.org/a-third-of-u-s-billionaire-wealth-gains-since-1990-have-come-during-pandemic/> - This article from the Institute for Policy Studies discusses the growth of U.S. billionaire wealth since 1990, noting that a third of the $4.3 trillion in gains occurred during the 13 months of the pandemic. It highlights the stark contrast between the wealth of billionaires and the bottom 50% of Americans, emphasizing the increasing wealth inequality in the country.
6. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Koru_(yacht)> - This Wikipedia page provides detailed information about Koru, the luxury superyacht owned by Jeff Bezos. Built in the Netherlands by Oceanco, the yacht is 127 meters long with a navy blue hull and was delivered in April 2023. It is reported to have cost at least $500 million and requires annual maintenance costs of at least $30 million. When commissioned, it was the second-largest sailing yacht in the world, after Andrey Melnichenko's Sailing Yacht A.
7. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_World%27s_Billionaires> - This Wikipedia page offers statistics on the number and combined net worth of billionaires worldwide from 1996 to 2025. It shows a significant increase in the number of billionaires and their combined wealth over the years, reflecting the growing concentration of wealth among the ultra-wealthy globally.