THE MONACO ISSUE

October 2023 boatinternational.com

BOAT International

WHEN BILLIONAIRES CRUISED WITH KINGS

The 1980s heyday of The Highlander – *the ultimate party boat*

"THE GOOD LIFE IS SOMETHING EVERYONE WANTS"

Tommy Hilfiger on fashion, fame and his Feadship

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GOLD STAR

ROSSINAVI CASTS A SPELL WITH 66-METRE *ALCHEMY*

"ADOPT OR DIE": WHAT AI MEANS FOR SUPERYACHT DESIGN

Use it or lose it

As *BOAT* announces its Artistry and Craft Awards, *Helen Chislett* meets the designers reviving ancient techniques to create one-of-a-kind spaces

Top: blending ancient crafts with modern materials creates an exotic look to yacht interiors (left)

From one-of-a-kind wall panels to 600-hour cabinets, superb crafts and artisanship are a crucial piece of the contemporary designer palette when creating rarefied interiors. They offer an opportunity not only to create something unique, personal and inimitable, but to bring the skill of the maker – often acquired over decades – into the creative mix. It is also worth noting that without patronage, crafts will simply die out.

In the UK, Heritage Crafts publishes the *Red List of Endangered Crafts* every two years. The 2023 list included skills such as encaustic tile making, coppersmithing and passementerie (decorative trims such as tassels and braids). If we are to keep these crafts alive and, importantly, attract new generations to train in the skills required, it is a question of finding them a role in contemporary design projects.

Fortunately, there are many leading designers in the superyacht industry who are doing just that. To this end, *BOAT International* has announced the first BOAT Artistry and Craft Awards – BACA – launching in 2024 (*for more information, see page 96*).

One designer who is passionate about craft is architect Achille Salvagni, who lives in London but operates his studio from Rome. He personally seeks out rare examples that may be in danger of being lost forever.

"It is important to keep the past as part of our existence or we lose our compass," he believes. "The message of craftsmanship reflects not only where we have been, but embodies where we are going next."

Achille Salvagni uses Japanese tatami and shoji with lacquer to create layered luxury on Endeavour *(right) and* Club M *(below)*

Japanese panels

Red lacquer

Above: the red lacquer adds a pop of rich colour to the neutral palette

Over the years, he has built up a huge network of Italian artisans to bring his projects to fruition. On Baglietto's 40-metre motor yacht *Club M*, for example, he specified cast bronze handles made by the same bronze workers who also undertake restoration at The Vatican. "I start with the craft then invent the piece around the capability of the maker – in that way, they can give advice and be part of the creativity process," he says. "I want to secure people a living not only in restoring the past, but in creating the future."

"I BELIEVE IT IS IMPORTANT TO KEEP THE PAST AS PART OF OUR EXISTENCE OR WE LOSE OUR COMPASS"

He also commissioned parchment walls and cabinets, tables and shelves with parchment tops. This was inspired by a Gio Ponti bar cabinet he had bought at auction for his own collection. "In the 1920s and 1930s, parchment was very fashionable and exotic. I wanted to restore the cabinet and was eventually directed to the same atelier that had made it originally. The son of the man who made my cabinet was still there, continuing his father's work. It was exciting to reintroduce the skill of parchment when it had been largely lost."

On the 50-metre motor yacht *Endeavour 2* – built by Rossinavi – he commissioned lacquer surfaces using the traditional urushi technique from artisans based in Osaka, Japan. "The clients are European with a passion for Japanese culture and are collectors of contemporary art, so we wanted to create a neutral palette on which they could display their ever-changing collection," he says. "Red lacquer is one of the few touches of colour we included in the project."

On the same yacht, Salvagni also commissioned traditional Japanese tatami woven straw mats, shoji-style partitions and walls made from koto wood. "The lacquer and the tatami were the first elements we commissioned, because we knew we would have to wait a long time for them – around eight months in a total deadline of nine months. It was scary in a way, because we would not have been able to make any changes had they not been perfect on arrival," Salvagni continues. "When you order something that is handmade and bespoke, you have to fully trust the people involved."

When it comes to the survival of craft skills, he believes the client is key. "It is our responsibility

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Clockwise from top: the hand-painted headboard by Tobias Tovera on Come Together*, whose ceiling lights are wrapped in hand-tinted vellum (right). Below right: Luca Dini Design & Architecture uses different types of onyx in the bathrooms on* LEL

Leather and lighting

to transmit the level of complexity and detailing involved to the owner, so they in turn become the ambassador for the craftsperson. When they buy into the story and the process, it gives a different sort of pleasure when they look at their yacht and understand how much skill was needed to create certain details."

Winch Design is also highly supportive of craftspeople. As a response to the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, it established Under Winch's Wing – artisans selected by Andrew Winch and his team – with the aim not only to secure their survival but ensure their future success. These makers are promoted through the company's website and offered practical support, including business development and networking opportunities. As associate Melanie Coleman explains, the scale of Winch projects offers opportunities to be inventive and "keep skills and disciplines alive".

One example she cites is Amels' 60-metre motor yacht *Come Together* for which Winch commissioned leather specialist Rooks Books to wrap four of its own custom-designed ceiling lights in hand-tinted vellum paper. "We chose vellum for its natural patina and the depth of colour. It adds another layer of interest to the interior concept," says Coleman. On the same project, Winch commissioned US artist Tobias Tovera to create an exquisite, hand-painted headboard. "We were looking for something soft and organic, evoking femininity and serenity," explains Coleman.

While the march of technology can often be blamed for killing arts and crafts, Luca Dini Design & Architecture is embracing cutting-edge technology alongside heritage crafts. "We do not mass-produce vessels," Dini emphasises. "Each one is a unique endeavour, designed to generate wonder. Our mission is to astound those who are used to being amazed."

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The 50-metre motor yacht *LEL* is the first collaboration between Rossinavi and the studio. *LEL* has many beautiful and intriguing touches, including the carbon-fibre bar custom-made by Rossinavi's team of master craftspeople. Bedlinen is bespoke to the yacht, made by Tuscany-based Oliveri Home, while the bathrooms are clad in various types of onyx by marble specialist Nuova Lim. As these names suggest, Dini is passionate about showcasing Italian craftsmanship wherever possible. "As Italians, we tend to take the culture and beauty of our land for granted, because we are lucky enough to see and experience it every day."

Onyx and marble

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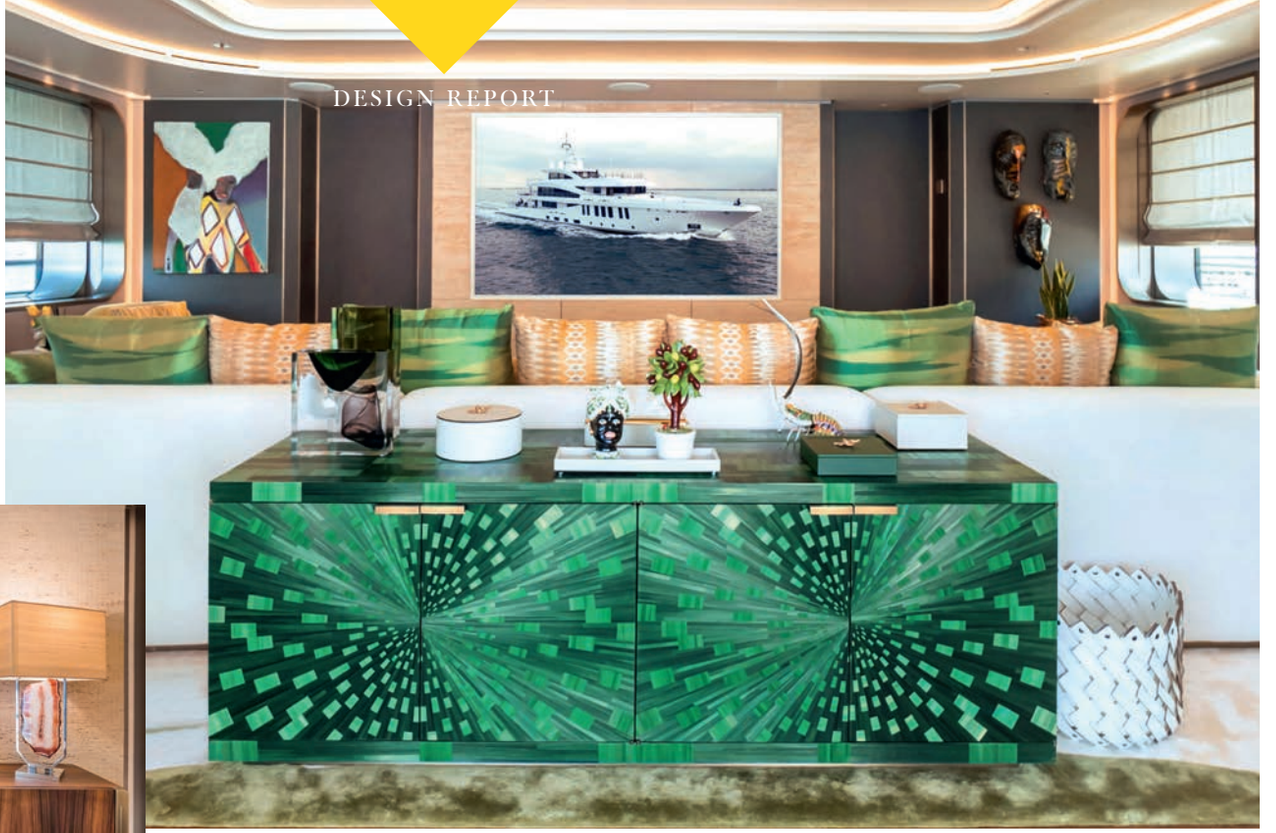
PHOTOGRAPHY: WINCH DESIGN; MICHELE CHIROLI



Right: the vivid green straw marquetry finish to a cabinet on board the Amels Moonstone *and another in rosewood for one in the dining room (below)*

Rosewood

THE DYNAMIC SUNBURST PATTERN OF THE VIVID GREEN STRAW MARQUETRY CABINET TOOK ABOUT 600 HOURS TO MAKE

FM Architettura has also commissioned Italian artisans over the past decade to create and execute their designs in yachts, private residences and luxury hotels. Founder Francesca Muzio cites 55-metre Feadship *Somnium* as an example. "We took our storytelling from the islands of the Galápagos, which in turn inspired the accents of blue and orange."

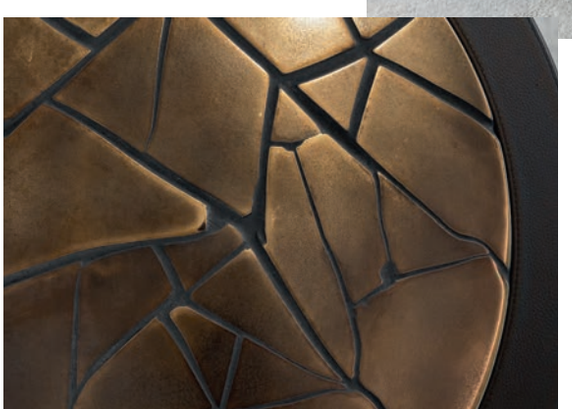
The cracked pattern of the table in the lounge was inspired by the soil of Galápagos carved by wind, sea and weather. The process used to create it – called reverse fusion – is a patented and highly skilled metalworking process developed by Paolini, one of the most renowned joinery specialists in Italy. "We commissioned them to use the same technique not only on tables, but also in several decorative panels and handrails. The results are true sculptural pieces," says Muzio.

Laura Pomponi, founder and CEO of Luxury Projects, is also popularising the past. For the 60-metre Amels *Moonstone*, she commissioned three spectacular cabinets: a rosewood veneer one in the dining room complete with a green suede interior and bespoke compartments for each piece of cutlery; one clad in expertly stitched leather in the main salon and a cabinet with a straw marquetry finish in vivid green, made to the studio's own design. The dynamic sunburst pattern took about 600 hours to create, not surprising given the complexity of the work. Straw marquetry is thought to have originated in the Far East, arriving in Europe in the 17th century. It reached its creative peak during the art deco period, but is now enjoying a revival thanks to designers such as Pomponi.

Many of the companies Pomponi works with are exclusive to Luxury Projects because she has also chosen to invest in them financially. "To avoid losing the expertise and knowledge deeply rooted in these historical crafts, we are also employing young, talented people willing to learn all these techniques – it is important not to see those skills disappear forever, so we must pass them on to new generations."

Traditional art and crafts are being revived across Europe. In the UK, many designers beat a

Reverse fusion



Above and left: the cracked pattern on the table in the lounge of Somnium *was inspired by the soil of the Galápagos carved by the sea and the climate*

PHOTOGRAPHY: MARIACHIARA CASALE; LAURA POMPONI/LUXURY PROJECTS

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Carved fresco

path to the South London door of DKT Artworks when in search of bespoke craftsmanship. Established in 1979, the studio comprises around 40 skilled artists and craftspeople who specialise in high-end bespoke decorative finishes and site-specific artworks such as bas-relief, sculptures, murals, trompe l'oeil, specialist paint finishes, gilding, verre églomisé (the technique of reverse-painting glass), mosaics, polished plaster and illuminated artworks. It is also responsible for more than 90 prestigious yacht projects, many of them award-winning.

Creating fantastical staircases on superyachts is something of a studio speciality. On Oceanco's 90-metre *DAR*, for example, they were commissioned by the Italian design house of Nuvolari Lenard to create an ocean scene of fish on the staircase's curved panels. "The inspiration of the design brief was to bring sea life and nature on board," says Guglielmo Carrozzo, DKT's head of marketing. "The fish were hand-carved and then hand-decorated with a fresco effect. There was a lot of detail involved to achieve such a seamless and elegant effect."

For the 50-metre Heesen *Arkadia*, Bannenberg & Rowell commissioned DKT Artworks to create a bas-relief artwork nearly two metres high as the central feature of the stairwell when the yacht was refitted. Taking inspiration from volcanic lava once it has cooled, the design was first moulded by hand in clay then cast in a type of bronze, which was gilded with leaves made from precious metals.

"The request from the client was for an artwork with an unusual and textured organic feel that had wow factor – it is mission accomplished when the owner and their guests stop in front of it to admire it," says Carrozzo.

DKT was also commissioned by Studio Indigo to create verre églomisé panels on Feadship's 70-metre *Joy*, which won a World Superyacht Award in 2017 (exterior by Bannenberg & Rowell). The 18th-century technique involves panels created from silver metal mesh sandwiched between antiqued, mirrored glass and hand-painted, silver gilt glass. For the project Mike Fisher, founder of Studio Indigo, was determined to work with the best artisans and the highest-quality materials possible. "We used more than 250 unique and bespoke materials to give the yacht a real sense of identity and luxury. Our first challenge was to make the corridor spaces feel larger than they were – églomisé is not only decorative, but also gives a sense of depth to these narrow spaces."

In addition, DKT Artworks created the

"ÉGLOMISÉ IS NOT ONLY DECORATIVE, BUT IT ALSO GIVES A SENSE OF DEPTH TO NARROW SPACES"

PHOTOGRAPHY: ANDREAS VON EINSIEDEL; DAVID CHURCHILL/HEESEN YACHTS; GEORGES AJOURI/THE WORLD OF YACHTS

Clockwise from top: DKT Artworks' stunning curved panels of fish; Studio Indigo aims to make corridor spaces feel larger; a two-metre high artwork created for Arkadia, *taking inspiration from cooled volcanic lava*

Gilded leaves

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Left and below left: the tree trunks and branches created by DKT Artworks on Joy.Right: gloriously textured stair covering by Studio Indigo

bas-relief artwork with a metallic finish on the stairs depicting trees, echoing the effect of the églomisé, but more practical given the curve of the stairs. Other special touches included the handwoven rug commissioned by Front for the corridors and salon. "Texture and comfort are very important as more often than not, you're walking barefoot on a yacht," says Fisher. "We wanted to play with that tactility through the use of contrasting textures – nettle and silk – resulting in a rug that was unusually soft. The pattern was designed to echo that of the stairs and the corridor panels."

Fisher recognises the important part that top-level craftsmanship plays. "As designers we often have ideas about how we want a space to look and feel, but we need the skills of crafts people to visualise them. It is both a push and a pull to bring out the best of the designer and the artisan working together."

Not all yacht designers were willing to share the names of the artisans they worked with, which seems a shame given the collaborative nature of the work that Fisher describes. As Carrozzo says: "The superyacht industry plays a crucial part in helping craftsmanship survive. We create artworks and finishes for a tiny niche of individuals who appreciate uniqueness and quality. It is important to give workshops and studios like ours the visibility and credit they deserve, because we are all part of the chain in terms of creativity. Prestige and reward should never be confined to those at the top."

Helen Chislett is the author of Craft Britain: Why Making Matters, *written with David Linley (OH Editions), £40. She also runs her own online gallery, helenchislett.com, launched as a response to the need for artists and artisans to promote their work to the super-prime sector of interior design and architecture.*

Know your crafts

Bas-relief carving and sculpture Put simply, it is the art of carving in relief, so that design elements are barely more prominent than the flat background, but give a three-dimensional effect.
Gilding An age-old technique that involves the painstaking process of applying fine sheets of precious metal leaf to a surface, accentuating architectural and decorative detailing.
Lacquering East Asian lacquer is made from the resin of the *Toxicodendron verniciflua* (formerly *Rhus verniciflua*) tree, a close relative of poison ivy. Resistant to water, acid and heat, its use goes back centuries in China when it was used extensively for vessels, harnesses, musical instruments and even entire rooms. It was not until the 17th century that it was imported extensively into Europe, leading to the chinoiserie craze of the late 17th and 18th centuries.
Metalworking This craft can trace its roots to around 7000 BCE. It took on new relevance in the 17th and 18th centuries as furniture became increasingly ornate.
Mosaic This art form dates to ancient Mesopotamia 5,000 years ago, but it was the ancient Greeks who first styled small pieces of stone and pebble into precise, geometric patterns and detailed scenes of animals and people.
Parchment making Parchment is made from the untanned skins of sheep and goats, whereas vellum is made from the skins of young animals, notably calves and kids. It is said to originate from the 2nd century BCE. Parchment found new popularity with the designers of the art deco period, such as Jean-Michel Frank, who used it extensively on furniture as well as on wall panels.
Passementerie Textile trims go back to the nomadic people of the Middle East. However, the French elevated them to an art form, founding the Guild of Passementiers in the 16th century. The craft became a sign of economic status, with aristocracy covering every inch of their noble residences in heavily ornamented fabrics.
Polished plaster Also called decorative stucco, it was the perfect base for the painting of frescos. Venetian plaster became popular in the 15th century as it could be made to mimic marble, and was lightweight – the ideal material for a city built on stilts.
Shoji and tatami Shoji screens, or paper stretched into frames of wood or bamboo, rose in popularity during the 12th century in Japan. Tatami mats, originally made of rice straw, date back to the 8th century and were used by the nobility for sleeping. Later they began to be used to cover entire floors.
Specialist paint techniques Fresco grew in popularity in Italy in the 13th century, but was perfected there during the Renaissance. It underpins mural-making and is considered one of the most significant techniques in the history of art.
Straw marquetry It began as the poor relation to wood marquetry, most often used by lowly people such as sailors and clergymen. It was popular in France during the reign of Louis XV (1715 to 1784) and was revitalised during the Art Deco period by prestigious decorators who embraced its unique qualities and vibrant colours.
Trompe l'oeil While the earliest examples are said to come from ancient Greece, it was a term invented by the French in the Baroque period of the 17th century meaning "deceives the eye". It is the artistic term for a highly realistic, optical illusion.
Verre églomisé This is the term for reverse-painted glass. It owes its name to Jean-Baptiste Glomy (d 1786) who championed the technique in France. By painting on the back of glass, often using gold and silver leaf, the skilled artisan adds depth to the mirrored surface, creating spectacular effects.

PHOTOGRAPHY: ANDREAS VON EINSIEDEL; FEADSHIP