



UK-based design house Redman Whiteley Dixon has created the interiors for some of the world's largest, and most stylish, superyachts. For multi-millionaire owners, only the best will do – and that includes a liberal swathing of the finest-quality leather.

## Life on the ocean wave

*S*n the elite echelons of the super-rich, the global economic crisis didn't feel like a crisis for too long. Sales of megayachts (15 metres to 24 metres) stalled as the economic crash took hold, but orders for the largest class of private yacht – those 50 metres and upwards – were decidedly healthy. Royal

families from the Middle East, Russian oligarchs, the Silicon valley millionaires – the biggest launches from the world's richest tend to be shrouded in secrecy; partly for security and privacy reasons, and partly so as not to look too ostentatious when much of the world is reeling from one economic doldrum to another. When these

yachts can have tenders that can cost more than \$1 million it is obvious fluctuations of the seven figure kind don't worry this set of owners too much.

While there are 9,000 or so “floating palaces” out there, according to recent estimates, the world of superyacht design is surprisingly small. The top naval



(Top, main) Commanding motor yacht Lady Britt features leather headboards, chairs and accents in the master suite.

(Bottom) A leather chair in Baton Rouge's office – dyed in the owners' favourite colour.  
CREDIT: EDMINSTON/RWD

## BEAST to Beauty

architects, exterior and interior designers and yards are in strong demand, with recommendations keeping yards' order books full and designers' diaries booked up years in advance.

UK-based Redman Whiteley Dixon (RWD) is one such design house. It was launched in 1993 and is run by partners Justin Redman, Tony Dixon and Toby Ecuyer. It looks after exterior and interior design for some of the world's largest and most stylish vessels. "Yachts are the pinnacle of luxury hand-crafted interiors, and leather is one of the essential ingredients," says Mr Ecuyer, RWD's creative director.

Superyacht owners expect the best of the best. The design, construction,

materials and craftsmanship that go into every element – from the generators and air-conditioning to the cushions and cutlery – have to be the best available. On board most, leather is ubiquitous. "There are a number of reasons that we like working with leather," explains Mr Ecuyer, "and its durability and adaptability are high up on the list. It's a material in a class of its own, it benefits greatly from being a natural material with strong character."

One of RWD's recent projects is the 63 metre motor yacht *Lady Britt*, built at Feadship's yard in the Netherlands. The Scandinavian owner had no previous experience of owning a superyacht (unusual in this size category) but had admired the 55.5 metre Feadship *Twizzle*,

also designed by RWD, and used this as a template. He explains, "It is very difficult for someone who has never built a yacht to know how to proceed, but RWD, together with valuable input from my partner, did a wonderful job in creating a personal and homely environment within the template of quality."

As the owner spends a lot of time at work, he wanted it to be appealing to charter guests, and creating a welcoming yet universally pleasing interior is a large part of that. RWD designed each space to make the most of the 11 metre beam and added guest-friendly amenities such as a sauna, "beach club" [sea level terrace], spa pool, enormous on-deck cinema, and a spa and wellness centre. "The tactility



and smell make leather a wonderful component in creating an environment that nurtures all the senses," says Mr Ecuyer.

## A multitude of uses

Interiors are often a mixture of the owner's ideas and preferences and those suggested by the designers. "Owners have different experiences of the use of leather in their homes, cars and aircraft but it's always fascinating to learn from them and to suggest new applications," says Mr Ecuyer.

A creative mind can often find more uses for leather on a yacht than on land. "Leather floors are a charming solution for yacht interiors where shoes are never worn – the rich colours and aroma ooze quality and sophistication," suggests Mr Ecuyer. "Woven leather is very tactile and visually intriguing, it's a good choice for handrails although looks equally good on wall panels and furniture.

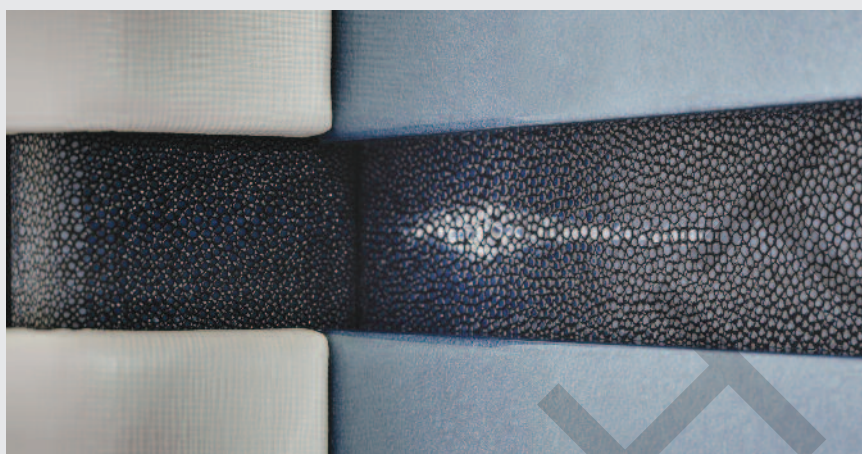
"It is also a wonderful complementary partner to fine cabinet work – suede-lined drawers in a jewellery chest, leather writing surfaces or contrasting buckled leather straps on an immaculately upholstered chaise lounge, a relationship which always appeals."

For the 65 metre Seanna, built in Italy at the Benetti yard, RWD's imaginative use of leather is clearly demonstrated. The fairly traditional interior uses walnut and marble extensively, but this is broken up by vertical leather panelling, supplied by Edelman, around the stairwell and cladding many of the walls. The windowsills are covered in deep brown, pearlised leather, which creates a softening effect.

## Supply chain

Edelman is one of three of RWD's main leather suppliers. It is based in Connecticut, US, and specialises in "luxury leather finishes" – buffalo, calf, crocodile, snake, calf, shagreen, stingray, alligator, and ostrich – offering 75 types in 750 colours. All its skins are full grain, and from Europe.

Upholstery leather specialist Moore & Giles, also based in the US, focuses on more natural tannages and finishes. Over the past 15 years, the company has formed partnerships with tanneries in Spain, Italy,



*Stingray spine detail is used as a recurring feature in Bliss.*

CREDIT: DENTROHOME

## A taste for the exotic

While superyachts have long been clad in the most decadent materials, the advent of sustainable farming means exotic skins are increasingly being requested and used to add texture. "There certainly seems to be a wonderful variety of faux skins and exotic hides currently, and it's liberating as a designer to be able to include and have these beautiful textures and colours available," says RWD's Mr Ecuyer.

Suppliers such as Simpsons Mirrors & Furniture and Dentrehome are taking advantage of the rise in sustainable farming of species such as crocodile, snake and ostrich to bring these skins into the mainstream.

The 54 metre Talisman 2, built in Turkey with interiors by H2 Yacht Design, has walls covered in shagreen. Crocodile, ostrich, snake and eel skin are also widely used. The design house juxtaposed suede and pony skin with marble and chrome in the 74 metre Talisman C, again surfacing the walls with shagreen.

The 40 metre Snowbird, designed by Illuminus Yacht Design, has headboards of embossed crocodile skin and a bar of shagreen. Hemisphere, the world's largest luxury catamaran, features 18 different kinds of leather, including crocodile and stingray. Both yachts won their categories at the Show Boats Design Awards in 2012.

Fish skins such as salmon and cod are gaining popularity as decoration for furniture. UK-based Rook's Books has expanded from bookbinding into applying natural skins to furniture and its work features on the 45 metre Karia. The design company responsible, Design Unlimited, also used parchment to great effect in the interior of the 46 metre Pink Gin.

"The usual species, all ethically-sourced, remain popular, but the choice has been expanding with coarser-haired animals such as horse and pony being valued for their hard-wearing qualities. Effective fire-proofing is of course a given in order to meet regulatory requirements," says Mark Tucker, CEO of Design Unlimited. "The whole area of using natural skins in luxury yacht interiors will continue to be an exciting one as manufacturers experiment with previously unfamiliar species and the development of new processes to render them suitable for interiors opens up further possibilities." 🌐

New Zealand, South America and the Far East, which have supplied it with an extensive and innovative product portfolio.

Spinneybeck, another RWD supplier, claims to have been the first company to bring full-grain, aniline dyed Italian leather

to the North American design community 40 years ago. Headquartered in Canada, skins are sourced from Germany, Switzerland and Italy, and tanned using "recipes" created in Italy by Sirio Gobbetti. He oversees the processing at Industria

Conciaria Arzignanese, a tannery in the Arzignano region.

"The leather craftsmen and women we work with are true artisans with a deep and enviable knowledge of their material and craft; they help us to find the most appropriate materials for our designs," says Mr Ecuyer. "We would never presume to be experts in leather, although experience informs us of the finishing and quality we are looking for."

## Marinised products

For every industry and craft involved in superyacht construction, the limitations of working in a marine environment have to be considered. While designed to cope with sometimes treacherous seas, these mighty vessels present unique challenges: fluctuations in temperatures, exposure to UV light, a saline and sometimes humid environment, and even insects can play havoc with material.

"We use leather extensively in the bridge for its non-reflective and robust qualities. Here it will be expected to not fade in the sunlight and cope with salty air, wet hands and heavy wear," says Mr Ecuyer.

Blinds manufacturer Oceanair's products are used in RWD projects and on some of the world's largest superyachts, with leathers sourced from Northern Italy. "The key challenges are UV and significant heat variation, as our products are often located near air-conditioning vents, which further exaggerates the heat change," says Oceanair's director of sales and marketing, Ian Howarth. "The increase in luxury boat activity in the Gulf has taken this challenge to a higher level."

The UK-based company has a UV and heat chamber where it tests the materials to between 80-90°C. "Superyacht clients often have very 'specific' desires when it comes to fabric choice: we have supplied blinds made from crocodile skin and goat skin," he adds.

Safety on board is another factor – particularly on the larger sailing yachts, which are often used for racing and are subject to a greater degree of heeling. Leather handrails used on board the 58.8 metre Kokomo, one of the largest sailing yachts in the world, provide not only a



*Tan-colour leather chairs match the woodwork around the dining area on board Lady Britt*  
CREDIT: EDMISTON

pleasing aesthetic quality but also an essential grip for those onboard. Leathers used in outdoor spaces, for the seats at the sun deck bar or surrounding sunpads, need to keep cool, like automotive leather. "Clearly, maintenance and wear are also factors, depending on the application," adds Mr Ecuyer.

RWD was involved with sister ships Baton Rouge, Icon and Maidelle, taking different roles in each of the 62.5 metre vessels. For the interiors of Baton Rouge, it chose "town-house elegance meets beach house styling". She was the second in the series, and her owners chose to extend the outdoor space, making the sun deck 80 square metres. They decided on an enlarged suite with his-and-hers offices, and there is an extensive beach club. In terms of decor, there are 29 types of wood, plenty of the owners' favourite colour, blue, interspersed with woven leathers.

Maidelle, meanwhile, uses high-gloss wood, mirrors and lighting to add drama, with ivory padded leather for contrast. Leather 'archways' separate the bed from the seating area in the owner's cabin, and in the upper saloon [living room] panels of golden goatskin parchment add warmth.

## The bigger the better

The use of leather will always have a place in this industry – where money is no object, and owners are willing to pay for high-quality materials that are made to last.

And with the increasing length of these private vessels comes an increasing amount of space to clad.

RWD designed the interiors of the fourth-largest private yacht afloat, the 155 metre Al Saïd, about which little is known. She was delivered to her owner, Sultan Qaboos bin Saïd Al Saïd of Oman, in 2008, and has a complement of 150 staff. She has six decks and features a helipad, a cinema and a concert hall that can accommodate a 50-strong orchestra.

There will always be an element of one-upmanship at this level of ownership. When Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the ruler of Dubai, launched the 162 metre Dubai in 2010 it was the largest in the world – but it didn't take Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich long to launch Eclipse – a mere 50cm longer.

However, both have been left in the shadows by the private new launch that embarked on sea trials at the beginning of April. Project Azzam, which sailed out of Dutch yard Lurssen's shed, is believed to belong to serial owners the Abu Dhabi royal family. At a whopping 180 metres, the yacht is longer than some cruise ships and is rumoured to cost more than £500 million. If the interiors of the family's previous yachts are anything to go by, it will be a refined affair, with open space, plenty of coloured marble, expanses of white – and lots of leather. ☉