

Superyacht

INTERIOR DESIGN

EXTERIOR SPACE

CREATIVITY AND ARCHITECTURE



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IN THE WORLD OF LUXURY INTERIOR DESIGN THERE ARE A NUMBER OF STUDIOS THAT WORK AWAY IN THE BACKGROUND, ATTRACTING LITTLE MEDIA ATTENTION BUT QUIETLY BUILDING UP A REPUTATION FOR THEMSELVES. LONDON-BASED **DKT ARTWORKS** IS ONE SUCH COMPANY.



Founded by art graduates Niki Davies, Steve Keeling and Sean Trowbridge in 1979, DKT has evolved from designing kitchens to creating some of the most involved, intricate and varied artworks for superyacht and residential interiors. *SuperyachtDesign* went along to its London studio to talk to Keeling and meet his team of artists.

"It is still a bit of a work in progress," says Keeling apologetically, as we navigate our way around ladders and piles of insulation on the way to his office. Earlier this year, DKT relocated to a much larger studio and showroom in South West London to be able to accommodate its growing team and a large number of ongoing, sometimes expansive, projects. Looking around at the various completed artworks and pieces in progress, it is hard to believe that the company has its roots in kitchen design.



STEVE KEELING

"Niki, Sean and I had just finished art college," explains Keeling. "I had been working in theatre and TV, Sean had been an AV technician and Niki was a painter, but she was starting to design kitchens, so we banded together and started working together. It grew really quickly and somehow we went from kitchens to paint finishes, and then into gilding, mosaics and murals. We never looked back."

Now their portfolio includes everything from contemporary and classical murals to surface finishes, acrylic pieces, sculptures and mosaics for some of the biggest superyachts on the water. Along the way, the team has built up strong links with some top yacht designers, including Terence Disdale, Andrew Winch, Raymond Langton and Evan K Marshall.

"DKT artworks can be found on all of our yachts," Emily Naumann, a designer at Raymond Langton, tells us. "They put the finishing touches on our designs and the result never fails to be both beautiful and unique." Naumann describes a feature wall panel that DKT did for them on the staircase of *Excellence V*. "It tells a story about transportation by air, sea and land finished in a bronze relief," she says. "It was very personal for the owner. It is always exciting to work with DKT, creating such wonderful pieces and seeing them come to life."

"What the interior designer wants from one project to the next can be wildly different and because we offer so much, they can come to us for variety rather



than a specific style," Keeling explains. "We are flexible and the designer can guide us with their vision. We never just look at one job, but at the whole relationship. So we're willing to put that little bit extra into a project and if we say something can't be done, they believe us."

It is extremely rare, however, that DKT is asked to do something it cannot do. On 134m *M/Y Serene* built by Fincantieri, for example, the firm completed more than 20 individual artworks on top of the other projects it was working on in London. Many of the pieces featured materials or finishes that the company had never worked with before and, on top of it all, everything had to meet the stringent SOLAS regulations, representing another learning curve for DKT.

"*Serene* was probably our most challenging project to date," says Keeling. "One feature in particular gave us a problem and that was the lift. It was around 4.5m high, curved and it required high levels of accuracy, had to comply with SOLAS regulations and had several special metallic finishes. It was a nightmare, actually, and a real learning curve, but we did it in the end and it looked great."

There are about 30 people who make up the DKT team from more than a dozen nationalities (Keeling



SHOLEH TAVAKOLI

describes the studio as "a bit like the United Nations") and while most of them are able to turn their hand to more than one art form, projects are assigned to focus specifically on their individual strengths. During our visit, for example, Sholeh Tavakoli was applying wafer-thin wisps of gold leaf to a frame for a Terence Disdale project—a job that was likely to take her three days. Originally from Iran, Tavakoli has no artistic training at all, but her gilding work was flawless.

The sheer variety of projects scattered about the studio is astonishing. From completed pieces waiting to be installed to works in progress or samples from previous jobs, everywhere you turn there is something eye-catching and beautiful. Many of the pieces are destined for highly secretive superyacht projects, or prototypes for the owner's eyes only. One such piece was a stunning marble wall panel depicting pelicans. The original is now aboard *Serene* behind a water feature, but the studio made a cast mould of the delicately carved piece in case it was damaged en route, which now hangs on the workshop wall. Another piece is a screen that it did for a Candy & Candy residential interior last summer; one side is quite contemporary, with an abstract cityscape design, and one is more classic oriental.

"The finished effect looks like some kind of synthetic composite, but it's actually created with layers of torn paper, followed by metal leaf and then a chemical finish," explains Keeling. "You always want something that looks like a really special material, but one that you aren't quite sure what the material is exactly."

DKT has undeniably mastered a variety of special materials over the years and it often draws on the expertise of acrylic fabrication experts K2, based in Hertfordshire.

"The first project we did in acrylics was for Björn Johansson on *M/Y Marlina*," says Keeling, pointing to a couple of hand-sculpted, ceiling light panels. A more unusual acrylic piece was made for an Italian record producer who loved the Marvel series of comics. "He wanted us to invent a superhero for him, so we invented a whole story line depicted in several materials, the culmination of which was an acrylic artwork with integral illumination," recalls Keeling. "We could let our imagination go wild on that one, but we didn't make a penny. Logistically it was a nightmare—it weighed half a ton and we had to lower it into the space in a small, external courtyard between the client's subterranean recording studio and swimming pool."

With so many projects on the go at once, the challenge is to not let anything fall through the net and ensure that systems are in place to keep everything running smoothly. The rapid growth of the company has meant that Keeling has had to move away from the purely creative side into more of a management role, something that he admits can be frustrating as he finds he has to put in a 40 or 50-hour week before he can pick up a pencil and start designing.

But he still uses any downtime to research new ideas and has racks of books and magazines behind his desk acting as visual references.

"We have lots of ideas bubbling away in the background," he concludes. "In fact, we were just talking today about bringing in more contemporary elements into some of the inlay work we do, such as holograms. That could be exciting." ■

