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# Mark Tucker of Design Unlimited

Francesca Webster joins Mark Tucker aboard *King Benji* in November 2024 to hear about how the studio has evolved following a busy season of launches.



Over the past year, Design Unlimited has made waves in the superyacht design world, with the studio's most ambitious project to date, the 58-metre Damen Yachting superyacht *Pink Shadow*, making her debut at the 2024 Monaco Yacht Show. Sharing the stage was another of their recent creations, the 46.7-metre Dunya explorer *King Benji*, first showcased at MYBA in the spring. These distinctive yachts — with their respective dark green and bright blue hulls and vibrant interiors — have drawn significant attention, illustrating the breadth of Design Unlimited's capabilities.

At the Fort Lauderdale International Boat Show, we sat down with studio founder Mark Tucker to discuss the studio's evolution over the past five years and to gain insight into future projects.

**We last sat down with you in 2019; can you give us a bit of an insight into how the studio has evolved over the past five years?**

Well, the team has grown significantly and we now have 16 designers in the studio, doubling our pre-Covid size. That growth has really been a reaction to the work we are doing, not only the custom projects, but also the production work for companies like Sunseeker, with whom we collaborate for the interior design of all new products in their range. A production design role like that demanded an expansion of our FF&E capabilities to handle the increased demand on our interior decoration, furnishings, and materials department and therefore our Furniture, Fixtures, and Equipment (FF&E) team has doubled in size.

As a result, we have also developed our studio facilities to accommodate our expansive international samples, fabrics

and material library. We have also created more inviting spaces for our clients to meet and collaborate with us, while bringing all our research materials into one space, which is a significant improvement. Since 2019 we have also gained three other new team members who focus particularly on CAD and computer visualisations. This has been partly driven by our customers' needs, especially in production, to show prospective clients exactly what the end result will look like.

**The work you do for Sunseeker is extensive. How much time of the studio's time is devoted to custom projects?**

We have about a 60/40 split, with 60 percent of our activities dedicated to production yachts, though of course it varies because custom yachts come in waves; you do a lot of work over a period, then there is a quiet phase while it's being built, and then supervision at the end. The production work helps smooth that curve and keeps the team engaged. With production, you also get to see your designs realised faster — very often only a year and a half from design to seeing it in the water, which I think is great for the team.

We have also now moved into the residential sector for the first time, having recently completed a house on Venetian Islands in Miami and another down in the Florida Keys. Both of those projects came to us through existing yacht clients, so it has been a natural evolution, but we are now receiving an increasing number of requests for residential work which is an exciting development.

**This year was obviously huge for the studio, with *Pink Shadow* and *King Benji* exhibited at Monaco. Has there been a shift in studio perception?**



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Yes, it was fantastic. Our yachts photograph beautifully, but they need to be experienced in person – to touch, feel, and see how the colours work. That's something you only really get by walking through the space yourself. *King Benji* has also been an open boat at Fort Lauderdale this year, so anyone could take a tour onboard with the crew, which is a very unusual but exciting situation. *Pink Shadow* was heavily in demand at Monaco Yacht Show and she has been extensively published, which is fantastic for visibility.

Regarding the perception of the studio, we've had strong inquiries since, but as you know these are both unique interior design projects. We don't stereotype ourselves by saying, "This is all we can do." We work on a wide range of projects for a wide range of clients and this is reflected in our portfolio. More recently we are getting requests from clients who want something more relaxed and cosier, with little areas where they can sit and unwind, instead of large vast spaces. It's great for the team as well, as it keeps the work challenging and interesting.

**With a team of sixteen, how do you balance such different identities across projects, from explorers to sailing yachts?**

We have a structured approach that really helps, starting each new project by working closely with the owner to define the direction through mood boards and material samples. Once we're aligned, the project tends to fall into place. We check back at each stage to make sure we're on track with the initial concept. This process keeps everything clear and prevents us from veering off course.

People remember certain statement projects, but not every client wants the same thing. Some like to look at bold designs but wouldn't necessarily want to own one. We can also cater to those who prefer a more general or timeless style, often considering resale value. If you look at our portfolio, there is a huge range, with the more sedate interiors like that of the 53-metre Feadship *Mirage*, or the 54-metre *Baltic Ravenger*, which differ greatly from projects like *King Benji*.

**Can you share a bit more about your relationship with Sunseeker?**

Our work with Sunseeker is highly collaborative, and we oversee the entire interior design process. We've worked with them for specific projects for over twenty years, but two years ago, we were asked to take on the interior work for the brand and help them develop a new look. We're responsible for the overall material selection, and we recently launched a new collection with all new timbers, flooring, lacquers, stones and 250 fabrics, all of which are sourced globally.

We manage the costs, ensuring that we meet budget targets because there is a difference between the cost price and sale price, which has to align. It's quite challenging but rewarding, and it ensures the interiors resonate with buyers worldwide – from the UK to Asia to America.

When we began working with them, they wanted to redefine the ranges – the Predator, Manhattan, Yacht, and Ocean lines. We started from scratch, looking at the DNA of each line and the clients buying them. It was fascinating to see how each model serves different client needs. We helped them redefine each range with a clear identity, and that became the basis

for each new design going forward.

We recently launched the all-new Ocean 156 at the Southampton Boat Show, which has been extremely popular. It's a single-deck design with a flow-through main deck, creating a sense of openness. You can forget you're on an 80-foot (about 24-metre) yacht; she feels much larger, with three decks, generous cabins, and flexible living areas. Working with a brand like Sunseeker, that pushes boundaries, really makes design exciting.

**You've got some significant yachts in-build, including the 61.61-metre Ares Yachts ketch *Simena*. Are there any projects you're especially looking forward to?**

*Simena* is particularly exciting, our first project with Ares and their first superyacht. She is progressing well and with her launch next year, she'll become the studio's largest yacht to date. We've also signed the third hull of CDM's 49.9-metre Flexplorer series to owners who saw *King Benji* and *Pink Shadow* and loved what we'd done, which is always exciting to see. Then we have *Magic* in-build with Vitters with Reichel / Pugh exteriors and a completely different project from the big explorers we've been working on lately.

**Finally given your studio's varied portfolio, is there a particular ethos you would say defines Design Unlimited?**

I'd avoid saying we're known for a single style. Every client is unique, so we sit down, listen, and work out exactly what they want. It doesn't matter if it's a fifty-foot production sailboat or a custom fifty-metre motor yacht – each project is treated with the same level of dedication.

Every project comes with the same challenges - such as sourcing the right materials, and understanding how those materials interact with each other. Yes, we've got a fantastic team with a broad range of ages and skills, and we handle everything in-house. We've invested heavily in the latest software and hardware, even standardising monitors so that colour consistency is precise across all our visuals. We're also integrating AI into our research, which is a fascinating new area. All of this allows us to keep our work personal yet professional.

Honestly, I think our portfolio is beautifully varied. We approach each project – on land or sea, no matter the size – with the same enthusiasm and dedication. ●



JEFF BROWN