



ESSAY

THE GREAT ESCAPE

TODAY'S SUPERYACHT OWNERS ARE INDULGING THEIR PASSIONS TO CREATE
UNIQUE INTERIORS THAT OFFER A PERSONALISED REFUGE, WHILE STILL
STRIKING A BALANCE BETWEEN ELEGANCE, FUNCTION AND FUN

by Claire Wrathall



Perhaps in response to the uncertain times and the parlous state of the world today, superyacht owners seem to be commissioning boats with ever more playful, escapist and fantastical interiors and letting their imaginations run wild.

Take *Maverick*, Cantiere delle Marche's 45-metre Flexplorer 146, which Francesco Paszkowski designed in collaboration with Margherita Casprini. Delivered in April 2024, it turned heads at the Monaco Yacht Show – and it's no wonder, as there isn't another boat like it. From the outside, it appears, as CdM's spokesperson Maria Roberta Morso describes, "very serious and imposing", an expedition vessel with a range of more than 5,000 nautical miles, sober livery and an almost industrial A-frame crane for ease of launching its 9.5-metre Rivellini tender and the A27 sailing boat that lives in its toy cupboard.

Once aboard, however, the mood is altogether more playful. Stepping onto the 135-square-metre stern terrace, there's a sense you've alighted on a nautical iteration of Barbie's dream house with pastel pink and mint green upholstery, cocoon chairs and umbrellas.

The owner and his wife commissioned her for a two-year circumnavigation of the world, which they embarked on in December 2024, along with their four sons (plus the older two's girlfriends), a grandmother, their nanny and her partner. He wanted a yacht that would take them "to the highest latitudes of the northern hemisphere", through the Northwest Passage, then down to South America and eventually to New Zealand and Australia. But they also needed a vessel suited to year-round family life. Hence, for example, the large state-of-the-art kitchen (emphatically a kitchen, not a galley) that opens both into the main saloon and onto the main deck, where they can cook for themselves.

On the owner's deck, there's a master bedroom where you might expect the wheelhouse to be, and a bedroom-turned-playroom for their 10-year-old. The dressing room features a glazed "accessory counter", so the owners' collection of sunglasses is displayed almost as an artwork might be. From the bathroom and sauna, a wall of floor-to-ceiling windows opens onto an aft deck furnished with – another fun touch – a swing sofa. More prosaically, there's also a kitchenette with a washing machine and drier up here. Despite the high-spec laundry facilities below decks, the owners prefer not to trouble the crew with their underwear.

That the boat has been designed to enable (comparatively) conventional family life is partly because the owner's youngest child has Down's syndrome. This aspect has partly informed the colourful palette and curvaceous forms of the furniture and lighting. "The entire boat is meant to be a place where the family can be at ease and live without formality," Morso says. Even the art – much of it created by the German sci-fi expressionist André Butzer – has a child-friendly aesthetic.

If *Maverick* is named after Tom Cruise's character in *Top Gun* (you'll find a framed poster on the owner's deck), then the Damen Yachting-built SeaXPlorer *Pink Shadow*, immediately recognisable from its unusual green exterior, was inspired by Werner Herzog's 1982 art film *Fitzcarraldo*. The film tells the story of an Irishman determined to build an opera house in the depths of the Peruvian jungle in the 1890s. It's given rise to an interior that reflects a journey through the Amazon as you move through the boat.

"You start at the beach," says designer Mark Tucker, founder of Design Unlimited. "And then, as you go up the main staircase, you work your way into the forest and along the river, with the crocodiles and the alligators, up through the decks to the tree canopy with the monkeys and birds." Even the wheelhouse ceiling is lined with bespoke silk-embroidered wallpaper from de Gournay, depicting birds in flight as seen from below, as if one were looking up at them.

"We first used them in the dayhead on *Pink Gin VI*, [the owner's] sailing boat, because we wanted to have fish swimming all around, so it was like sitting in a fish tank," Tucker says. Look up, and you see "the bellies of the fish as though they're swimming around on the ceiling. The owner loved that, so we took it a stage further here," he says.

"We used a lot of wallpaper on *King Benji* as well," Tucker continues, alluding to the 47-metre Dunya Yachts-built explorer yacht, complete with kaleidoscopic crow's nest, that he designed "almost in parallel but on a different tack". Its owner, he continues, "had come to us because he liked *Pink Gin VI*, and he loved that eclectic look". As the owner put it, he wanted an interior in which "every wall had to be so crazy that [guests] would want to take a photo in every room".

They settled on an undersea theme, which they conjured in the lower-deck cabins with wallpaper from Pierre Frey, Osborne & Little, Tecnografica and Adam Ellis Studio. "You can create really beautiful effects with things you can find," Tucker says. Witness, too, the bamboo ceilings and bamboo-clad, marble-topped six-seat outdoor teppanyaki bar, which incorporates a TV screen concealed by a panel of gnarled wood on top.

PHOTOGRAPHY: PREVIOUS PAGES: BLUEPROD; THESE PAGES: MAURIZIO PARADISI; TOBI HOLZWELLER



Cantiere delle Marche's 45m Flexplorer *Maverick* belies her serious exterior with an exuberant interior design that balances colour and comfort for the owner's family during their two-year circumnavigation



Top: *Maverick*'s asymmetrical saloon design gives the illusion of a full-beam layout while still leaving room for a passageway on the port side. Top right: the transom infinity pool can be covered and the deck bulwarks dropped to expand deck space to create a large lounge at anchor. Above: the owner's youngest son's cabin. Right: a lower-deck cabin displays a photo from the movie *Top Gun*, which inspired the vessel's name. Elements from the movie can be found throughout the boat





Above: hand-painted de Gournay leopard wallpaper, accented with gold leaf, adds a luxurious touch to Pink Shadow; a life-size stainless-steel crocodile sculpture by Michael Turner makes a statement in the boat's Amazonas bar (right); the dining room on board (below)



PHOTOGRAPHY: BLUEPROD; MARCO WOOG



Above: the Tahiti Plage beach club on Pink Shadow's main deck. Left: de Gournay wallpaper features in the dayhead aboard 53m Pink Gin IV. Below: designer Mark Tucker incorporated vibrant wallpaper on 47m King Benji, drawing inspiration from his design on Pink Gin IV. Top right: Yasemen Hussein's concrete table on Pink Shadow is framed with wood and decorated with vintage botanical illustrations



Back on *Pink Shadow*, the most literal homage to the movie is the Fitzcarraldo Lounge on the upper deck. The floor features a woven-to-order carpet depicting the once-seen, never-forgotten scene in which a steamship is physically hauled over a hill. But visual references to the film's jungle setting can be found throughout: for example, there's the disconcertingly life-like, lifesize crocodile made of stainless steel by Lymington-based sculptor Michael Turner, which presides over the Amazonas bar. There's a tiger sitting in the trees, another specially commissioned de Gournay wallpaper, this time hand-painted and embellished with gold leaf, which you see when the lift doors part. "It's full of surprises!" Tucker says.

The main entrance to the boat is through the beach club, named Tahiti Plage after the Saint-Tropez nightclub that inspired it and a favourite of the owner. "It was very important to him because we've partied a lot with him and been to a lot of beach clubs when developing boats for him," Tucker says. "So we know him really well. He likes a bit of fun, a bit of out there, and as we've done more boats with him" - this is their fifth project together - "we've pushed the boundaries each time." Hence the circular Minotti sofas that hang from a crane over the water. "You can lower them down to the water and just relax there," Tucker says, adding that ultimately his aim here was to "create an atmosphere of total relaxation, rosé lunches, parties and a really chilled vibe."

At night, however, it morphs into a nightclub, "with a glitter ball, smoke machine and big disco speakers. That's what the boat's about: having a great time." Hence the retro foosball table, purchased on the spur of the moment from the owner of a bar, again in Saint-Tropez.

But it feels like the home of a collector too. Wherever you look, every surface has been decorated to suggest something evocative of nature and intrepid travel, right down to the fact that the inside of each wardrobe in the six cabins has a different interior. Even the 3.6-metre-long dining table, designed and crafted by Yasemen Hussein, a runner up in the 2024 BOAT International Emerging Artisan of the Year award, is rich in symbolism. Its top was cast in lightweight concrete from a mould lined with different types of heavily embossed Anaglypta wallpaper to create a texture that suggests it's been engraved with botanical motifs. Then it was shipped to Baltic Yachts in Finland, where it was mounted in a carbon fibre frame. "The amount of time and effort that went into it was amazing."



The dining table on *Kasper 7*, a 67-metre Benetti superyacht launched in 2023, is another showstopper: an immense oval of roseate resin, on which sits an arrangement of golden starfish and other aquatic creatures. Designed by the owner and his family, with practical support from the Beirut practice Askdeco, the yacht's interiors have an air of softness and ethereality, augmented by diffused lighting, squashy seating and strange, amorphous cactus-like forms that decorate the walls or support shelves and other built-in furnishings. But then, as the boat's name suggests, it's all been conceived, at least in part, as a homage to the owner's love of *Casper*, the supernatural comedy about a friendly ghost.

It's not uncommon for owners to cite the name of a favourite movie when commissioning a yacht interior, says British designer Tim Gosling, particularly regarding marine-grade carbon-fibre deck furniture. "If you think about all the Jules Verne books, of Captain Nemo and 20,000 *Leagues Under the Sea*. So many of the ideas in them have filtered through into the design of things we've created, especially as the materials have become available."

He cites the Nemo Lounge on *Kismet*, a 122-metre Lürssen launched in 2024. Venture down to the cinema where the three-square-metre screen retracts to reveal three big windows, each pane 15 centimetres thick, set below the waterline to observe underwater marine life. "There simply wasn't strong-enough glass for something like that 15 years ago," he says.

Its owner has clearly had terrific fun channelling his love not only of Louis Quatorze splendour, but sci-fi. The brief, says its designer Pascale Reymond of Reymond Langton Design, was to create an "exceptional" interior "that makes you travel through time and space". And the result is a conceit that seems to combine the opulent splendour of Versailles – what with the "hall of mirrors", the hand-painted de Gournay saloon ceiling and the elaborately carved

limestone fireplaces at the entrance to the dining space – with the futuristic aesthetics of *Interstellar*.

Check out the Gergely Bogányi-designed "Batpiano" in the private entertainment space on the owner's deck – "an art deco sculpture crossed with something out of *Star Trek*," as one musician put it – in a space designed to conjure the sense that you're underwater. Or venture down to the glass-walled corridor that transects the engine room – "The Tron" as it's become known – and you find yourself in a dazzle of neon lines, "like taking a wormhole to another dimension", as *BOAT International's* US editor Cecile Gauert put it when she went aboard. Or maybe you're straying into a video game. It's like augmented reality, but for real. Wild, wonderful and the epitome of the truism in yacht interior design that if you can imagine something, someone can almost certainly realise it for you.

Among the "non-negotiables" specified by the owner of the 112-metre Freire superyacht *Renaissance* were locks on the cabin doors that open by means of waterproof wristbands and an outdoor commercial pizza oven, one of five al fresco dining options, of which one is a sushi bar.

The oven, a Rinaldi Superforni, "was very prominent on the owner's wish list", recalls Dickie Bannenberg, co-founder of Bannenberg & Rowell, which designed the yacht. "He wanted to be able to offer a huge variety of amenities to potential charterers. And it's great to see it in action, with one of the yacht's two chefs making pizza to order. You can sit at the counter and watch him in action. When you don't want yacht-level eating twice a day, it hits the spot perfectly." (And lest you give in too much to temptation, the immense gym contains not just multiple bikes, treadmills and cross trainers but a Kinesis machine, TRX Suspension Training and a ballet barre.)

The boat has seven decks and an internal volume of 7,200GT (it's also built to PYC and Ice Class 1D standard) and can accommodate 36 passengers in 19 cabins. To prevent it from seeming even faintly like a cruise ship, the challenge "was to lay it out so that there were intimate and cosy and welcoming spaces as well as a double-height main saloon and formal dining room", Bannenberg says.

One such space, just forward of the main saloon, is its Jazz Club, "an intimate, slightly moody space with a speakeasy vibe," Bannenberg says. At one end, there's a spectacular backlit onyx bar. And along the top of the shelves that run along the adjacent wall is a collection of seven trumpets, pre-played so each has a provenance and patina. There's also a gallery of black-and-white photographs of jazz legends and a library of rare cognacs. Capable of accommodating 24 people – enough to conjure a crowd – "It would feel like a decent-sized saloon on any normal yacht," says Bannenberg, "but on *Renaissance*, it feels really snug."

The starting point for its design is a 1950s painting, *Jazz Café* by François Chabrier, that spells out the word "Jazz". "That set the tone," he says. But if on land the owners are revered for having put together one of the finest collections



Above: the dining table on *Kasper 7* is a pink resin oval designed by the owner with help from interior design company Askdeco. *Kismet* features a Gergely Bogányi-designed "Batpiano" on the owner's deck (left), the "Tron", a glass-walled corridor in the engine room (below left) and a Nemo Lounge cinema (below), where the screen can be raised to showcase life underwater through windows beneath the waterline

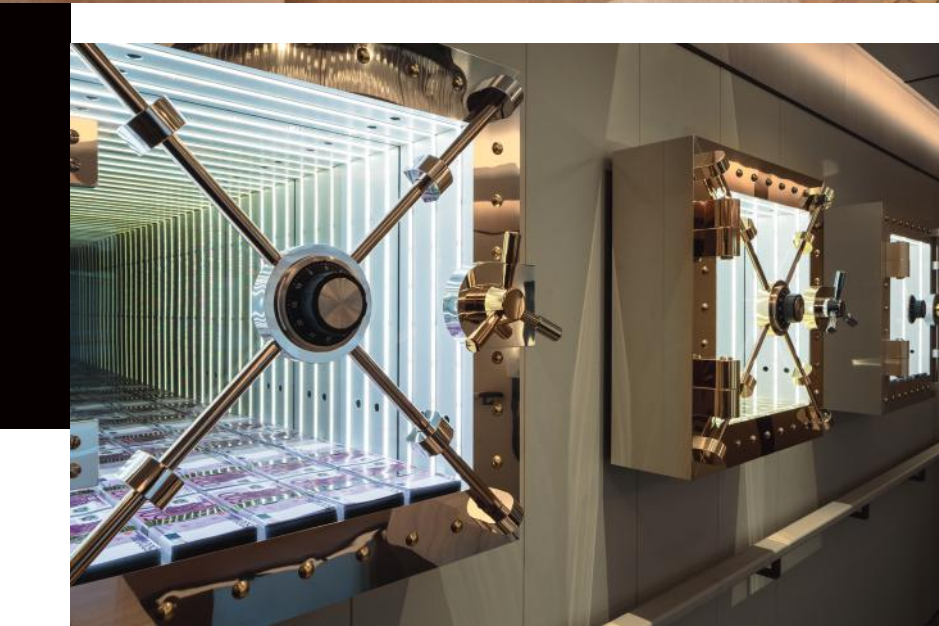


PHOTOGRAPHY: BLU/PROD; SILVER SCREEN COLLECTION/GETTY IMAGES; WORLD HISTORY ARCHIVE/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; SILVANO PUPELLA; GIULIANO SARGENTINI

Top: shelves on *Kasper 7* are designed to mimic the look of coral. Above: Ben-Hur shows how colour can evoke historical periods



The 47m explorer yacht M has ample deck space (right) for a helicopter, which also disguises storage for the owner's ICON A5 amphibious plane. The interior (below) is a contradiction to the grey exterior with its softer tones



112m Renaissance features a double-height main saloon (above), artwork by French artist Noart comprising three glass front safes filled with banknotes (left), and a jazz bar (below) with a library of rare cognacs. The vessel is built to the Passenger Yacht Code



PHOTOGRAPHY: BURGESS; JULIEN HUBERT/TW YACHTS; DENNIS LO

OWNERS ARE DEMANDING INTERIORS – AND TOYS – EVERY BIT AS LUXURIOUS AND LEADING-EDGE AS YOU FIND ON BOATS TWICE THEIR SIZE

of 16th- and 17th-century European paintings by almost 40 artists, many of them women, the art they choose to commune with when afloat is mostly contemporary and altogether lighter-hearted.

Embedded in the upper-deck stair lobby bulkhead, for example, a work by the French artist Noart of three glass-fronted lit-from-within safes have been installed just above the handrail, each apparently filled with stacks of banknotes. While in one of the saloons, a couple of resin-encased handbags, one Chanel, the other Gucci, each a unique sculpture from Fred Allard's *The Bags* series, would seem to have been left casually on the side tables.

Although much of the art has been commissioned, notably a lot of glass, not all is original. In another playful touch, above the bedhead in all the cabins – guest and crew – hangs a giant blown-up postcard view of famous places where the yacht might call: Capri, Istanbul, London, Mykonos, Monaco, Rio de Janeiro, Venice, oh, and Hollywood, not in this instance a site-specific view, but a still life of a director's chair, old-school megaphone and clapperboard, the very stuff of cinematic dreams.

One can't help feeling that the owner of *M*, a sometime stunt double with blue-chip Hollywood credentials, had fun briefing Sanlorenzo when he commissioned the 47-metre explorer yacht also designed by Paszkowski (in collaboration with Studio Indigo). Not only is there a seven-metre tender and deck space sufficient to land its liveried helicopter on, but beneath it there's housing for an ICON A5 amphibious aeroplane with folding wings. "It's extraordinary how the toys are now dictating the shape of some boats," Gosling says, concurring with the view of one broker who likened its almost military dark grey exterior to a Land Rover Defender "that melts into a soft, calming" interior.

If the owners of explorer yachts used to enthuse about the marine science labs they had on board, "They're not

just about lab space and wipe-down floors anymore," Gosling says, and owners are demanding interiors – and toys – every bit as luxurious and leading-edge as you find on boats twice their size.

Expansive deck space is invariably a priority. "There is [demand for] a lot more playtime area," says interior designer Tara Bernerd, whose recent yacht projects include a 34-metre Sanlorenzo SX112 for a Hong Kong-based client with a young family. "So we have that huge deck. The whole back of the boat has really changed [thanks to] a shift in lifestyle." Life aboard is much less formal than it used to be. No surprise then that the umbrella and director's chairs on the aft deck are pale pink. "I don't mind playing with pink," she says. "I'm doing a project where the whole bedroom is pink." But this shouldn't be seen as a feminisation of interiors. "Some pinks can sit [well] with khaki," she adds. "And pastels can be pale blues, pale khakis. I think people are definitely being more adventurous with their colour choices."

That said, colour should never eclipse the overall design. "I wanted the boat to feel fresh and crisp and sporty to work with its architecture," Bernerd says. "We didn't want a mismatch, a DNA that didn't speak to the boat."

Aim for what Bernerd calls a "backdrop of clean, warm, pale woods" and an immaculate finish, and the owner can always amp up the fun quotient and the bold colours with art and more soft furnishings, both of which are comparatively easy to reinstall if you tire of them. As Gosling points out, colours "reflect the period you're living in very distinctly", and don't always age well. "Look at the way it dates film. *Ben-Hur* now is hysterical with all that 1960s purple," he says. "Sure, it's set in Imperial Rome, but if you look at *Gladiator II*, the purple they've used is totally different. In 20 years, they'll be saying: that was so 2024. Look at the purple!" If you're planning an Imperial Rome themed interior, be warned!