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## Form, Function and Fashion



Above: a Patrick Knowles rich interior (left) versus a Christian Grande minimalist bath (right).

Below: Bling, Andrew Winch-style, is faux-crocodile door handles.

## BLING AT SEA

Yacht jewelry makes interiors come alive **STORY BY LOUIS POSTEL**

**WHAT IS TRULY MEMORABLE** about a master bath, or—for that matter—an entire stateroom?

Often it's that finely detailed gold faucet in the form of a swan or dolphin set between crystal knobs, is it not? A perfunctory though exquisite fixture such as this creates a special aura that focuses one's attention, delighting the heart as well as the hands that cup the water flowing out of it.

The challenge facing designers when it comes to installing this kind of "yacht jewelry" is not affording the gold—their clients have the means. The challenge is to do the gold without the gaudy. Designers are our editors when it comes to yacht interiors, helping us decide what to leave in and what to leave out. They're the ones who try to make sense of the daunting vocabulary of faucets, levers, escutcheons, drawer pulls, hinges, keyhole covers, robe hooks, soap grabs, towel bars and myriad architectural details. It's these details that can mean the difference between memorable and just OK.

And in the course of this process, no designer worth his or her platinum-plated sconces would encourage a client to plate everything in gold, just certain strategic items and conceivably nothing at all. This exercise of »



editorial restraint especially holds true in our twenty-first century modern moment. Ornamental doodads devoid of function are enemy No. 1.

How, then, to add visual interest—"bling"—while at the same time remaining as simple and elegant as the sweeping lines of the hull itself? How, in epic terms, are our most able designers managing to navigate between the twin sea monsters of style: the Scylla of Super-Minimal Starkness and the Charybdis of so much Pretentious Clutter? We checked out various design projects in progress to find out and came across three basic approaches to evading these beasts when it comes to

using yacht jewelry: Baroque, minimalist and transitional.

Let's start with Baroque. Baroque? Isn't Baroque synonymous with too much stuff? Talk about clutter, talk about gold-plating everything in sight. Actually, upon closer examination, Baroque is compellingly logical when done well. Consider Rubens, and all those fat babies massing around the Virgin Mary, surrounding her with magnificent, focused energy. Granted there's a lot going on, but it is hardly random or chaotic.

Katalin Bard, a Hungarian-born yacht designer based in Hollywood, Florida, refitted the 116-foot *Quivira*, a tri-deck built by Benetti, in a fine, contemporary mode. Bard is now involved in a project in its preliminary stages; something quite different from *Quivira*. Her new project is an unabashedly Baroque, gold-leaf yacht interior filled with jewel-encrusted hardware that

Bard has dubbed the "Shimmering Splendor." The reason its over-the-topness works is the sense of order and restraint Bard brings to the scheme. There's a general paring down of the color palette to just beige and silver with a few purple accents here and there in honor of the amethyst slabs in the head.

"You need a common denominator," says Bard about the beige and gold. This requirement for a common denominator holds especially true in the two-story master stateroom that will feature—if it's built—princely onyx columns with carved gold-leaf capitals flanking a bed whose headboard is resplendent with glass beads. Lie down and you look up at a dome inlaid with iridescent glass mosaics in gold, pink and platinum

gray. In the same vein, Bard named and themed the VIP staterooms after semi-precious stones: Brown Tiger Eye; Red Jasper; Malachite; and Pink, White and Green Onyx, with color schemes to match. "Marble and granite alone don't cut it anymore," quips Bard.

For Christian Grande, gold faucets don't cut it either.

"It's not our style, though we have nothing against the material itself," says the yacht, auto and product designer based in Parma, Italy. "We are looking for flexibility: clean shapes and surfaces that allow for a lot of freedom to change the yacht's design and let it evolve."

And forget those high, arced faucets, adds Grande: "They are so un-ergonomic. You are always knocking your face against them!"

An avowed minimalist, Grande's faucets and other hardware practically disappear from view, thanks to high technology that's now possible with the miniaturization of valves. All that shows is a metal plate or cover. And with the aid of a special backlit film from 3M, the plate can be glamorized with all sorts of special effects. Faucet users can find the faucet plate in one color, and when they pull it out for use it lights up in another color altogether, or with an image.

That's what Grande thinks of as a jewel for the head (no pun intended): "a fulcrum of the entire design because it is the center, or aligned with the center." Not just a shiny bauble, the faucet plate now has an architectural *raison d'être*. Once he's determined the shape of the cover plate, Grande carefully calibrates the shape of the flow itself.

"The water's dynamics and dimensions—those are very important aspects of the design, and [they] have to be integrated into the initial plan," he says.

Currently, Grande is developing a new line of faucets soon to be launched by an international boat accessories company he says he can't yet name.

What happens when a client hands a motor yacht designer a relatively modern boat and tells him he needs it plusher and more decorative within a few short months from purchase to delivery? There's no time for major structural changes. The designer in question is Andrew Winch of the United Kingdom, whose many projects have been chronicled in the pages of this magazine. Ingeniously, Winch had all lever door handles, stair rails and treads wrapped in red faux crocodile leather imported from France. In an understated way, these jewel-like features greatly heightened the sumptuousness of the burgundy hues of the transitional-style refit of this Amels yacht. Even inside the steel and glass lift Winch installed red leather panels with an intriguing surface texture, a texture Winch describes as "like sand rippling." As defined by Winch, yacht jewels can be beautiful and warm to the touch as well as brilliant to the eye.

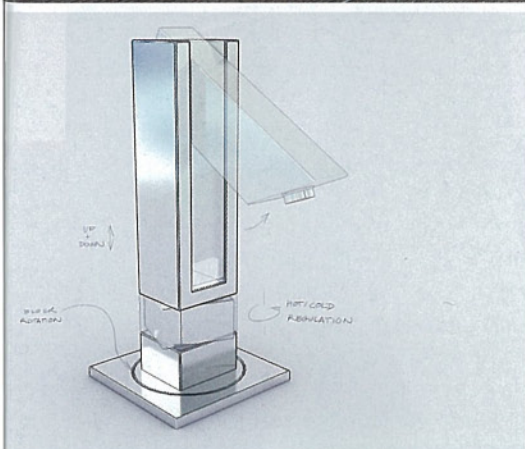
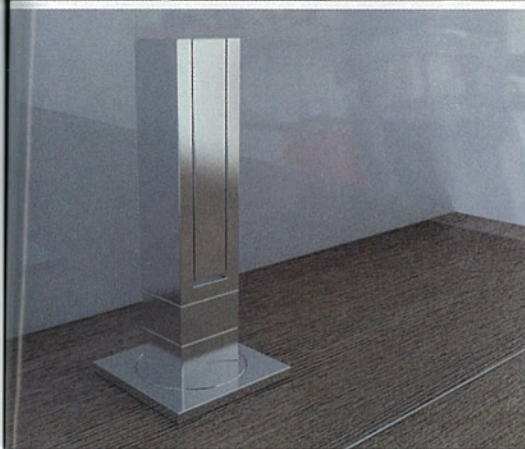
Patrick Knowles, a major designer based in the Fort Lauderdale area, has no problem with gold, but he does with gaudy. The head on *Twilight*, for example, just called out for a gold-plated sink. ➤



Katalin Bard refitted the 116-foot Benetti *Quivira* with an element of yacht jewelry by selecting several prominent fabrics woven with gold.



Above: Minimalist Grande fit this galley with clean, functional and ergonomic fixtures. Below: Grande's vertical fixture (left) and some contemporary knobs from SA Baxter (right).



"Chrome just didn't do it. Gold gave it that classic, nautical look," says Knowles, who took great pains to keep the lines clean and simple nevertheless. In gently Southern inflections, he describes this restraint as the "necessity of controlling the silhouette. When you have a swan faucet, just leave it at that."

Great control is also made possible, Knowles points out, with products from companies such as Sherle Wagner in New York because they make it so easy to coordinate their semi-precious stone inlays with the marble and other costly slabs specified for the walls and floors. This versatility and craftsmanship becomes especially critical when a scheme calls for backlighting translucent onyx vanities, for example, as on *Kiss the Sky* and *Chairman*.

For Knowles, the concepts of scale and yacht jewelry go hand in hand. He explains that to feel balanced, people need to feel there's a horizon line in any given space. Otherwise, the ceiling feels oppressive, as though it's bearing down on their heads. And especially in modern spaces with low-profile furnishings, the floor can feel as though it's rearing up.

**Above:** Knowles adds shimmer with a sea horse on *Taipan*.  
**Below:** He chose furnishings in black and white enriched with gold for *Chairman*.



That's why in one transitional-style stateroom he's working on, Knowles placed a pair of columnar lamps to adjust what he calls the "vertical balance." The light they give off is less important than the balancing function they provide between the ceiling and floor.

Let us conclude with the vision of a lone sea horse. Knowles had one recently sculpted, gold-plated and installed on top of a newel post at the bottom of a stair rail in what he felt was a "too lackluster" salon. Now, suddenly, there is with this piece of yacht jewelry a sense of "vertical balance" indeed—a kind of definition and rightness to human scale. And, in the end, what could be more memorable? □

