

# Boat Life

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Mark Boddington still heads the studio he opened more than 35 years ago



## A polished performer

Furniture maker to the stars, Mark Boddington tells Lucia Ferigutti that superyachts are leading the way

From a young age, beautiful furniture was catching designer Mark Boddington's eye: "Once a year, we were allowed to go and have lunch with my father at the family brewery. I was always fascinated by the joinery shop where they used to make all the bar tops and cabinets by hand. They were French polished and beautiful," he says. His entrepreneurial spirit stems from his grandfathers, who were also patrons of the arts – one owned one of the largest collections of works by Pre-Raphaelite Dante Gabriel Rossetti, now exhibited in museums around the world, including Tate Britain.

After school, Boddington enrolled at John Makepeace's prestigious furniture-making college – where David Linley had graduated just a couple of years earlier. "It was almost like being a monk, [working in] an Elizabethan house in the Dorset countryside," he says. "There were only 20 students; we had organic food for lunch. It was a real privilege." For his graduate show, Boddington made a

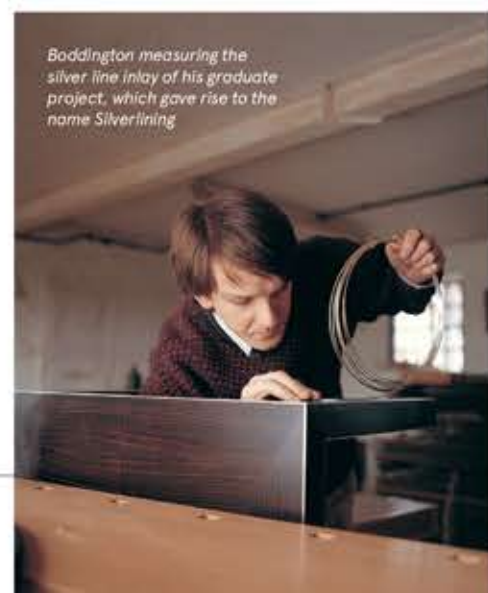
Macassar ebony table with silver-line inlays – he sold seven for a total of £39,000 and had the equivalent of 13 months' worth of orders in the book. It was the catalyst he needed to begin his own business, which he named Silverlining. To produce the tables, he set up a workshop on the Duke and Duchess of Westminster's estate in Cheshire just as they were about to start the refurbishment and extension of their residence, Eaton Hall, designed by star architect to the super-rich John Stefanidis. This fortuitously guaranteed him a steady line of commissions: for Eaton Hall, Silverlining produced 30 pieces, from dining chairs to garden furniture – including three- to four-metre-high rose arbours that are still standing three decades on.

**"Ultimately, our clients are pioneers and want to push boundaries. They want to be part of exciting projects"**

Through word of mouth and the Duchess's introduction to Stefanidis, a string of high-profile international clients followed, including the Gettys and the Rothschilds. Still only in his mid-twenties, Boddington had broken into the American market, and through a chance meeting with Kevin Costner's architect on a plane from Miami to Los Angeles, he landed his first project in Hollywood. Soon Tom Ford, David Bowie and Madonna all wanted a piece of Silverlining. "I guess [it was] great for the ego. You know, in those early days, working for people that are well known." He still loves working in the US. "America is very inspirational; there's such a positive attitude to doing new, innovative things and to being successful," he says.

Predictably, his Hollywood clients' requests were very different from those of British royalty.

Boddington measuring the silver line inlay of his graduate project, which gave rise to the name Silverlining



Left: hammering and folding layers of Damascus steel



A desk covered in reindeer hide salvaged from a 1786 shipwreck. Top right: the desk's handle detail



Hinge showing the wood-like grain of Damascus steel. Above: a lazy Susan table with drinks cabinet made of 3,000-year-old bog oak (above left)

"I would say they reflected Hollywood glamour," he concedes. "Yeah, we did some really, really crazy things." Recently, briefs have included a table sturdy enough to support after-dinner belly dancers for a Lebanese client, and a banquet table concealing a rotating wine cabinet – activated through a motion sensor – for a Hong Kong-based Maotai [a distilled Chinese spirit] collector. For a surrealist-inspired interior in London he is creating "melting" furniture, reminiscent of the misshapen clocks in Salvador Dali's famous painting *The Persistence of Memory*. An art nouveau replica desk for Abeking & Rasmussen's 78-metre *Amaryllis* took 4,440 hours to complete. "We didn't charge enough for it," he laughs.

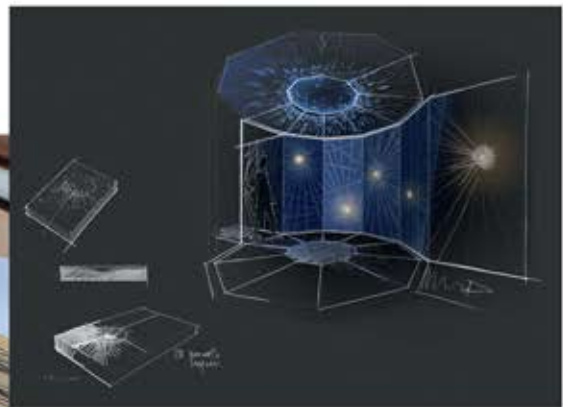
His very first yacht commission was the infamous 55-metre *Feadship Tits* (complete with tenders named *Nipple 1* and *Nipple 2*), built for Jefri Bolkihah, Prince of Brunei, and designed by Andrew Winch. He's since completed work for 82 yachts and is currently working on nine, all

due to launch by 2024. "The superyacht industry is where new things happen and the rest of the industry follows," he says.

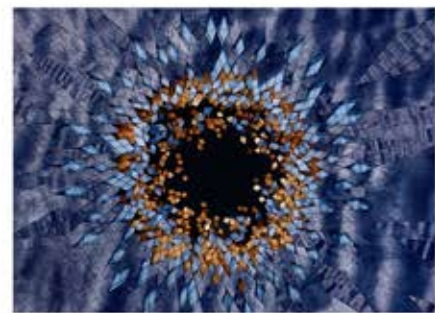
If he had to define Silverlining's trademark style, Boddington says it is: "microscopic-level craftsmanship, using materials in a different way. [Also the use of] really vivid colours – we are developing new dyeing technology, which we are going to patent." Boddington employs a research team tasked with finding the rarest materials: reindeer hide salvaged from an 18th-century shipwreck, wood buried in the ground for millennia, even wood from Churchill's war



Mark Boddington passed up a future in his family's famous brewery to pursue a passion for craftsmanship

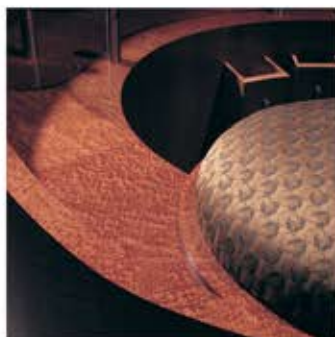


Big Bang from the Elements of Time collection is an experiment gone right, creating a new decorative finish from offcuts of wood veneer



## A research team is tasked with finding the rarest materials: reindeer hide salvaged from an 18th century shipwreck or wood buried for millennia

Right: a dressing table bound for Hollywood.  
Below: the ancient art of Urushi lacquer



rooms. "We love combining the new with the old - things like laminated Damascus steel, which was used on swords in the fourth century BC, or Urushi lacquer, a 7,000-year-old ancient technique from Korea." The latest collection combines Welsh slate with carbon fibre.

"Ultimately, our clients are pioneers and want to push boundaries. Normally they're an expert in their field and want to be part of exciting projects." Ninety-eight per cent of them are repeat customers - a Swiss client is on his 32nd project. No matter how high-profile, all pay a visit to the workshop in Wrexham, North Wales, where the magic happens. There, all prototypes are 3D printed - in fact, even some of the "final" pieces are actually 3D prints covered in wood and leather.

There is a dedicated research and innovation department and a chemistry department - and a lot of new ideas come from monthly "innovation Fridays" involving all staff. "You need a culture which allows people to make mistakes - if they live in fear, they will never try something new.

"There were lots of offcuts at the bottom of our laser machine and someone decided to throw

them into some bio resin - we achieved [a pattern] that looks like an asteroid exploding," which they are now replicating on two large-scale artworks on a superyacht.

Where does the inspiration come from? "I'm fascinated by nature." Just like Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava was inspired by leaves when designing the shape of his buildings, Boddington is studying plants' cuticular wax and how to apply it to create chemical-resistant soap finishes. With sustainability taking centre stage, "we're looking back at nature and what we can learn from it". He's also partial to the simplicity of mid-century Danish and Brazilian furniture designers, which he collects - particularly pieces by Hans Wegner.

Legacy is close to Boddington's heart: he wants Silverlining "to continue that relationship with these clients for generations to come". To this end, he's getting ready to commission a leading architect to redesign the company's HQ, including an academy, visitor centre and on-site restaurant - "if I wasn't a furniture maker I'd be a Michelin-starred chef," he says. As if you'd need another reason to visit. [silverlining.com](http://silverlining.com) □