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# ART

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# DECO

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# MAESTRO

To craftsman David Boucher, the status quo must be challenged in order to achieve the exceptional

STORY: JONATHAN TAN

PHOTOS: ROLLS-ROYCE AND DAVID BOUCHER

**L**ike a magician working his craft with elaborate illusion to mesmerise and thrill audiences, Australian master craftsman David Boucher elicits the same reactions with his one-of-a-kind furniture pieces. Seamless curves, flushed joints and a flawless finish aside, Boucher's artful masterpieces also feature secret compartments and intricate details that hark back to the Art Deco movement of the 1920s.

With 37 years of experience under his belt, Boucher is very much a man of the Art Deco movement. Curious, determined and always up for a challenge as he pushes to achieve the impossible. "We are constantly attempting things that are seemingly impossible and inventing new ways to do things. I not only believe that the impossible can be done, I believe it must be done," shares the 59-year-old.



## As a self-taught craftsman, how did you learn furniture making?

Growing up on the farm was a wonderful preparation for life. If something was broken, you fixed it. If you didn't have it, you made it. I understood from a very early age that life is tough and you have to be persistent to win. I was always been a keen and fast reader, and pretty soon I was accumulating an amazing collection of books on how to make furniture. Books taught me so much, and the rest was learnt by always being prepared to have a go at something I had never done before.

## What drew you to the Art Deco movement?

About 25 years ago a gentleman heard about our creative mechanical furniture pieces and contacted me with a request to create some beautiful pieces for his amazing two story penthouse apartment. He was passionate about Art Deco and loaned me some books on the period, and after reading them I was immediately hooked. I am so in love with this style. Its strong soaring lines bring out a deep passion in people. I love observing how it affects people so deeply. I watch them as their eyes play over the pieces and then see them smile as all they can do is reach out and caress them.

## In your own words, how would you describe the Art Deco movement?

Art Deco is a very seductive design period. Its clean lines and strong colours are achieved using the most expensive and rare of materials. Macassar Ebony, Amboyna, solid black Ebony, Shagreen, Nickel. All these are difficult to obtain and are very challenging to work with to the very high level of accuracy needed for Art Deco design. Art Deco pieces utilise hand veneered flush joints and seamless curves. Creating these pieces requires craftsmanship of the highest calibre possible, and there are only a handful of master craftsmen and women in the world capable of working to this level.

## You're known for working with Shagreen rawhide. Can you tell us more about it?

Shagreen is one of our trademarks, with the others being secret compartments and mechanical furniture. I first saw photos of Shagreen in a book loaned to me by a client and was fascinated by its



appearance. When I finally discovered people in Europe who did use it, they were unwilling to share the slightest piece of information with me. It has taken me and our craftsmen a lifetime to develop our current level of expertise.

Shagreen is tanned Stingray Skin that has been inlaid into a timber veneered surface, then had the bony exterior sanded off, and has been lacquered over. In the 17th and early 18th centuries, the term 'Shagreen' began to be applied to leather made from stingray skin. This is also termed Galuchat. Stingray skins are naturally covered with round, closely set, calcified papillae called placoid scales. These scales are ground down to give a roughened surface of rounded pale protrusions, between which the colour shows when the material is stained.

## How can Shagreen be used?

The use of Shagreen in furniture was first popularised in Europe by Jean-Claude Galluchat (d. 1774), a master leather-worker in the court of Louis XV of France. It was used in furniture by the Master of Art Deco, Jacques Emile Ruhlmann, and its skilled use is now revived and used to great effect by our own master craftsmen. Recently we have developed a new way to use the leather as a semi opaque lampshade. It was this technique that paved the way for the new Shagreen interiors for Rolls-Royce motor cars.

## What's your creative process like?

My client is always my biggest inspiration. I like to spend time with them in their own environment and see what inspires them. I am the main cook in our home, and my wife, Margaret and I enjoy

having clients come over to our apartment for a home cooked dinner and a glass of wine. When you cook for someone there is a level of relationship and trust that builds quickly. Barriers are broken down. Stories are told and inspiration soon comes. I usually create a few simple sketches to catch the ideas, and then my staff and I go to work as a team to create some stunning options for them. Once we have something beginning to take shape we will usually make a 1/10 scale Marquette to see how the lines and proportions balance out. From there we hand draw 1:1 plans that see the last of the bugs sorted out and then the materials samples are produced and approved and work begins on the new masterpiece.

## Can you share some details of upcoming projects?

I am just starting design work for a red Shagreen and black Ebony interior for a Rolls-Royce Wraith. It is going to be simply stunning. I feel very excited and privileged to be asked to create these amazing interiors and beautiful mechanical furniture pieces for our clients. It's so special to know that our work will be enjoyed in the homes of collectors, art galleries and museums for centuries to come.

It has been a dream of mine to work with Rolls-Royce for over thirty years. Both our companies are fanatical about excellence, in both design and manufacture. Both also aspire to the very best possible, with a consuming passion for continuous development and improvement in every aspect of their work. If it exists, make it better. If it doesn't exist, create it. Never be satisfied with the status quo. **TG**

