

A UNIQUE ROLLER

Rolls-Royce collaborates with furniture maker Boucher & Co to create a Ghost with a unique shagreen inlaid interior

by SHAWN CHUNG

Rolls-Royce Motor Cars never ceases to amaze us with the opulence and grandeur of their vehicles, and it is a great testament to the stewardship of the BMW Group that the iconic R-R logo and Spirit of Ecstasy has flourished in the decade since the British brand was acquired by the German auto-conglomerate.

The modern Rolls-Royce car is a technical marvel of sleek metal and engineering, with a luxuriously upholstered interior exquisitely crafted by the artisans on the company's Goodwood premises. But such has been the carmaker's absolute adherence to the highest standards of safety, refinement and durability that every component, fabric and material, from wooden door panels to leather or cloth upholstery, has to pass. A stringent battery of tests await each vehicle before they can be applied to any Rolls-Royce car.

This in turn has made it exceedingly rare for Rolls-Royce to advocate an external party for coachwork, but there are always exceptional exceptions, such as Australian furniture maker Boucher & Co.

Boucher & Co. is a world leader in the field of high-end Art Deco and contemporary furniture, and the company's recent collaboration with Rolls-Royce was for a specially commissioned interior of a Rolls-Royce Ghost, featuring crafted wooden panels across the dashboard, central console and doors with inlays of shagreen, created from sustainably sourced stingray hide.

Shagreen has been much admired throughout history for its unique patterns and texture, and was a much sought after material during the Art Deco era of the early 20th century. According to David Boucher, Creative

Director for Boucher & Co., “Over the last four decades, the renewed interest in Shagreen from collectors of new modern ultra-luxury, has come from their fresh appreciation of the clean sharp lines, amazing materials, highly skilled craftsmanship and simple timeless beauty involved in perfectly executed Art Deco inspired pieces. My clients love the amazing craftsmanship, unique materials, beautiful design and the ability to have a one-off piece designed in collaboration with their own thoughts and our expertise that creates a very individual and world-class look for their luxury homes, cars and yachts.”

It is also an exceedingly difficult material to work with, with only 10% of available stingray leather compatible with the high standards of Boucher & Co. At the furniture maker’s Toowoomba-based workroom, master craftsmen with over 20 years of expertise had to create new methods and techniques to apply shagreen to the company’s works, an often arduous task, but with premium results.

“To give you an idea of the difference between using a fine leather for a desk inlay or using Shagreen for the same purpose,” says Boucher, “the leather inlay would take about 10 to 20 hours to make, including a skilled gilded hand-tooled design in silver or gold and inlaying this into the desk. To do a Shagreen inlay with solid black ebony inlays, and to then apply a hand cut and buffed lacquer finish of up to 30 coats of lacquer could take up to three months.”

This collaboration between Boucher & Co. and Rolls-Royce Motor Cars will initially be available on the Ghost, but the carmaker is willing to explore any customer requests within their stringent standards. As Boucher states, “to meet Rolls-Royce’s exacting standards we had to ensure the material remained durable over thousands of cycles of temperature changes, from -30 to +90 degrees Celsius, and yet produce that level of fit and finish expected by a Rolls-Royce customer. This was a very challenging process to get through, involving developing new glue techniques, very evolved and meticulous hand sanding techniques, and amazing lacquers. It is expected that a Rolls-Royce will look and function perfectly in the most extreme climates on Earth, from the hottest to the coldest.”

Boucher also revealed that he has already received inquiries from clients in the USA, Middle East and Asia regarding his shagreen interior services, and is able to offer a number of options including secret compartments, fitted cases for various spaces within the car, customised picnic sets, and Shagreen and timber car key cases. What they can do is only limited by the imagination. ☺



Boucher Inspired Rolls-Royce Key Box



Boucher Inspired Rolls-Royce Ghost Treadplate



David Boucher inspecting the finer details