Q12 2012

Superyacht

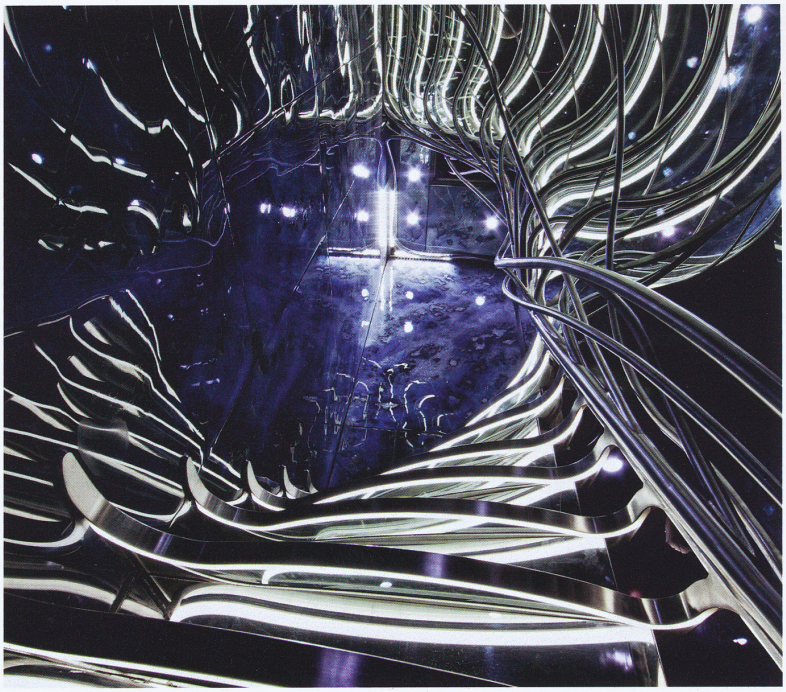
INTERIOR DESIGN EXTERIOR SPACE CREATIVITY AND ARCHITECTURE

DESIGN

FOCAL POINT 2 BASED UPON

BEYOND THE STARS

Over the past five years, Based Upon in London has worked on a number of the world's largest and most acclaimed yachts, creating monolithic furniture, free hanging artworks and handmade decorative surfaces. During the refit of a recent 50m Heesen, Timm Bergold, founder and creative director of Star Design, chose Based Upon to create a feature at the core of his yacht that would set the studio its greatest artistic and technical challenge to date. Ian Abell reveals how the studio set out to achieve the design brief.



Timm had seen the work we had created for the 50m Heesen, *Celestial Hope*: a hand-carved canopy of leaves that stretches across three decks and overflows into the corridors and hallways. His initial brief was to express, in an abstract way, a journey from the depths of the ocean up to the cosmos, with the tree of life at its centre. Our vision was to create a celestial realm, a point in space at which one experiences the ocean abyss, the sky and the cosmos from a single point. As it was a refit project, we inherited some geometry that we wouldn't have chosen, but it added to the challenge.

What followed was a dynamic creative collaboration between Star Design and Based Upon over 18 months. The teams met every month to refine the direction and to commission samples. It's one thing to create an artwork to hang on a wall or to place within a space, but considering a 3D volume on multiple planes—that must also be functional and meet all the necessary regulations—was a great test for us. We were creating intricate samples that were five-metres long and a metre wide just to understand how the colours would flow through the artwork. It was a privilege to work with someone of Timm's talent and vision. We were trying all sorts of experimental things and lay them out over the studio floor ready for his visit. He was then able to see what would work and quickly tie the whole thing together, refining and refocusing us for the next phase of development.

The walls appear to be a natural material at first, a rare stone somewhere between onyx and labradorite, but it has layers of naturally pigmented resins flowing around a contoured resin landscape of glacial mountain ranges finely clasped in white bronze. We began with lightweight aluminium honeycomb panels and applied a palette of metals. At the base of the colour work are beautifully oxidised bronzes, coppers and aluminiums, giving an intense tone of natural pigments, and then layers of resins sit on top of this, fading through a palette of subtly pigmented blues. We created these landscapes over weeks and then sanded them away to create a flat plane, cutting across the mountain range to reveal its core. It's a continuation of Based Upon's work using metals and resins to create very natural landscapes inspired by viewing the earth from the air. We were able to achieve an incredible depth in a 2D plane and you get a sense of peering into a distant space. We've been developing these techniques by carefully layering metals and resins and this may be the finest example of our craft yet.

The entire space has been designed with a sophisticated DMX-controlled lighting scheme created to mix with the natural light that flows into the space and work with the changing presence of the light at dawn, through dusk and into night. Working with London-based firm, we created eight settings to respond subtly to the changing light over a 24-hour period. On the lower deck, an elemental crack splits the installation and glows in tones of amber, reminiscent of the Earth's core. At the wheelhouse ceiling, a cast bronze moon glows among fibre optic stars that are set within resin at varying depths, creating a sophisticated sense of perspective and distance rarely seen in fibre optic installations. The rear edge of the tree at the atrium's core carries a glowing seam of light, which bifurcates to spread into the front edge of each bespoke tread.

The staircase itself presented a new challenge for us, as it was to be the largest functional object the studio has created. Facing a complex feat of engineering, we enlisted the help of London architects Atmos studio, Fluid Structures Engineers, Sinnex, and specialist steel fabricator Littlehampton Welding. All those involved in the project are in agreement that it is one of the most difficult projects they have attempted. We approached almost every steel fabricator in the UK and only three would hazard a price on seeing the first renders. The staircase is a testimony to the genius of Atmos Studio and its ability to combine artistic flair with engineering accuracy, which is phenomenal.

The staircase represents a primordial burst of energy; an explosion from a single point that immediately replicates in an evolving cellular way to fill the space. Intertwining helical arcs embrace each other to create floating steel and glass leaves that we walk up, and a dancing sinuous vine structurally supports them. Finer strands of stainless steel grow away from the main structure, seeking out the distant vortices of the resin walls.

"The long branching strands of the central structure stitch together a dazzlingly complex array of stainless steel tubes, 2D-rolled and seamlessly welded together into an intricate, carefully-controlled 3D sculptural web of stringers, guard-rails and handrail, all acting in concert, all refined to the thinnest possible structure that robust use will allow," says Alex Haw from Atoms. "The ensemble spirals upwards and sprouts into the laser cut steel plates supporting the treads—fine leaves supporting a thin layer of structural glass, delicately laced with non-slip veins. The glazing filters a rich elongation of views through the depths and heights of a boat more readily associated with luxurious horizontal length than vertical height."

This is certainly the most complex work we have created and probably the most accomplished—and Timm is very happy with it, which is the real test. However, he has informed us that he has a new project in mind, which will make this one appear quite simple.

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