

DARING DIVERSITY STORY JERRY STANSFIELD PHOTO NEIL RABINOWITZ SYLVIA BOLTON DESIGN

DIVERSITY OF GOEGRAPHY, CULTURE, EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE HAVE SHAPED A PACIFIC NORTH-WEST FIRM WHOSE APPROACH TO INTERIOR DESIGN BALANCES OLD AND NEW, EAST AND WEST.

Early in her fine arts education, Sylvia Bolton sat, as perplexed as her classmates, while an instructor launched a new term by directing his students to write a 200-word essay describing a coffee mug, but without using the word 'mug.' "I immediately thought I was in the wrong classroom," Bolton recalls. "Who ever heard of a writing assignment in an art class?"

As it turns out, the assignment was genuine, part of a deliberate method to the instructor's madness. "The exercise forced us to think about the object in terms of its essence—its form and function—and not in terms of what we call it," Bolton adds.

The lesson appears to have stuck, for her creations uniformly impart a sense of interrelated spaces, using substance, surface, light, scale and volume to establish mood and ambience while supporting the underlying function. "My approach to yacht interior design is to sculpt spaces," she says, "not just arrange elements. Before we begin actual concept work, we answer the fundamental questions: What's the purpose of each space? How will people move within, around and through the space? How does light behave in it? As we develop each concept, we collaborate closely with the owners to make sure the work corresponds to their lifestyles."

Sylvia Bolton's more conventional art studies have been equally formative. Born and schooled in Bulgaria—the crossroads of Europe and Asia—and fueled by a passion for art that emerged in early childhood, she claims an unusual mix of influences, from Western and Eastern traditions to the simple elegance of those contemporary styles favored by many European designers.

Further studies in Rome, New York and Seattle, augmented by architectural restoration work in Italy, have helped to further refine her skills, spatial awareness and sense of function. Her tenure at the Pacific Northwest design firm of Glade Johnson, himself an accomplished artist and illustrator, provided additional practical experience while confirming Bolton's resolve to specialize in the interior design of yachts.

A weighty resume, hers, but not without a subtle measure of comic relief. Witness the 94' classic pilothouse yacht Alexis, a refit project characterized by masculine tones and textures softened by what Bolton refers to as pranks, details that playfully break the visual ground rules established by the underlying themes. In the master stateroom, for example, neutral hues and a headboard bulkhead grid of matte gold squares convey a disciplined geometry into which she throws a spirited, organic carpet border of clearly Oriental origin. Bolton also favors contrasting light and dark values, balancing warm and cool hues, light and shadow, strong and textured surfaces. With a nod to the contemporary European design influence, she tends to favor simple compositions over complex. "The most perfect things are the simplest," she says.

In her custom projects, Sylvia Bolton strives to create, in each interior, an extension of the owner's personality. "I try very early in a project to identify the client's preferences and taste," she says. "Whenever possible, I visit clients in their homes, both to listen and to get a sense of the way they live. Often I will ask them to select photographs of favorite interiors in architectural or boating magazines. What they tell me and show me, I believe, is fundamental to creating a compatible environment aboard their yachts."

Like any designer of growing stature, Bolton has amassed a portfolio of successful projects and a commensurate roster of happy clients, both individual owners and yacht builders. These, of course, have led to an enviable list of current and pending projects, including two Horizon 82s, an 80' North Star sport fisherman, an Ocean Alexander 78' and a pair of steel expedition yachts, at 92' and 102, at the new Aleutian Yachts yard.

A work load like that requires the occasional diversion, and for Bolton that means cruising the open road on her 2000 Harley-Davidson Custom "Fatboy" motorcycle. It's her second bike, and like the first boasts a lively graphic theme that's—you guessed it—custom designed by Sylvia Bolton. Her



enthusiasm for the sport and the distinctive look of the machine have earned her a spot in this year's Professional Women Who Ride calendar.

Back at work, while she also manages to squeeze in an occasional home design project—in each case for a satisfied yacht owner-client—interior design for yachts continues to offer the greatest professional rewards.

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