

**DESIGNER'S COMMENTS ON 112' ketch, *SIGNE***  
**By Joseph Artese, Interior Architect**

***Signe's Interior***

Extensive use of skylighting as an artform is probably the most unique feature of this yacht.

The Wellman's charge was that a unique artistic expression be given to the living spaces on *Signe*, the most important of which was to be the maximum use of natural light.

My first rendition was a traditional design similar to the 90' sloop, *Whitefin* which Bruce King and I had developed for Phil Long. The Wellmans loved *Whitefin*, which they had chartered and which was, presumably, why they had chosen me to do the interior of their first custom yacht. However, Mrs. Wellman rejected this first attempt as being *too* traditional. Their more specific brief called for an "eclectic" expression "ranging from traditional to contemporary with stops in between and 'surprises' in every room". The yacht was also to be a "celebration of woods".

The point of departure was an unprecedented and daring use of skylighting. There are over 60 skylights, hatches, opening cabin ports, deadlights and prisms to illuminate a unique combination of sculptural shapes, rare Hawaiian Koa wood, bird's eye maple and bleached olive ash burl to define the stated desires of the owners.

As one descends the curved, bronze inlaid koa wood stairway into the huge salon (almost 30 feet diagonally), it's hard to believe that this is actually "below decks". Although filtered for U.V. and excessive heat gain, the fall of light and shadow is all about. Looking aloft, the majestic rig is still visible from almost every vantage point. A jewel-like, five-foot dectagonal skylight of koa and beveled glass crowns the salon and washes light over the library and custom bronze and nickel fireplace.

The aft end of the passageway opens up dramatically under a large skylight at the entry to the starboard and owner's staterooms. We enter the owner's stateroom through an 18" deep, arched portal and come out under overhanging plants and the third major skylight, the most unique of all. Here is a multi-faceted, structural skylight, through which the mighty mizzenmast rises like a tree through a forest's canopy. The branch-like radial struts of the skylight cast a fall of light and shadow down the 18" diameter elliptical spar and throughout the spaces below. To my knowledge, stepping a mast through a skylight has never been done before, let alone, an 80' spar. But then, on *Signe*, skylighting is used as an art form and our client specifically requested "surprises".

To further the infusion of natural light, 6" dioptic deadlights and prisms are strategically located to allow sunlight into the darker areas under the decks and to highlight special features, exotic cabinetry and objects d' art. Also, by filling in the dark spots they balance the light and decrease the apparent "burnout" from the cabin ports. Further, they can be used to accentuate the widest parts of the yacht and allow the designer to artfully play patterns of light through the interior.

To play off the dramatic use of natural lighting, strong sculptural forms and exotic hardwoods became the balancing dominant feature. Koa, a wood found only in Hawaii, was chosen for its wild grain pattern and unique chatoyance. To my knowledge, this was the first time koa has been used to dress out a yacht interior although koa has, for generations, been the tree from which the Hawaiians have traditionally hewn their dug out canoes.

Sculpted into sensuously curving louvers and crisply faceted sea rails, inlaid with fine bands of polished bronze, used as massive corner posts or a deep archway, the warm glow of koa wood is used throughout the interior, along with bird's eye maple and olive ash burl. The architectural sculpting of these woods is the underlying theme of unity. Moving from one area to the next, the interior is of a piece: functional, an artistic expression, yet completely comfortable.

For example, aft of the pennant locker and 3' x 5' electrical panel opposite, is an 18' long and narrow passageway that connects the salon to the three staterooms aft. In order to minimize the claustrophobic nature of this restrictive passageway, a unique device was used to "visually" expand the space and multiply the interest. The bulkheads in the passageway are raised panel painted pale ivory up to the koa hand rails. From the hand rails up to the overhead are a series of louvered panels of koa with the louvers fixed open to reveal mirrors affixed to the bulkheads behind. The louvered panels are hinged to open for easy cleaning of the mirror. The reflected imagery, although an illusion, seems to expand the narrow 24" space, making it less confining and more interesting. Punctuating this space with a 5' long art gallery created further interest.

The galley is a pure expression of purposeful function. Designed to handle thirteen gourmet meals three times a day, it is finished in rock maple and ivory satin l.p. paint, has 3-4 primary work stations, 44 square feet of work surface, and over 60 cubic feet of freezer and refrigeration. To support the chef, there is an electric four-burner gimballed stove, a Dacor "convection plus" self-cleaning oven, Sanyo microwave, convection broiler oven and two Mouli food warmers. Behind tambour doors, when not in use, is a host of countertop appliances.

The styling, although comfortably anchored in tradition, is allowed to range a bit, but always balanced as an integrated aesthetic sculpture. The raised panel work is limited to the solid koa doors and some wall panels. The arched doorways, extensive use of louvers, and polished bronze are traditional in feeling. The faceted searail and flush European style casework are crisply contemporary and balance the bold use of curved louvers and natural koa. Through the yacht, the massive cabin facia and other principal koa pieces have a flush inlay of polished bronze.

In summary, *Signe's* interior is a bold but balanced departure from the traditional expression. With her many varied skylights, variety of woods, innovative use of mirrors, and extensive mood lighting, this is a yacht which utilizes the finest craftsmanship still available to produce an environment that is warm, light and elegant in the oldest tradition of fine boat building.

As I look back, I must say that working with Bruce King on our various collaborations, were the most exhilarating and rewarding moments of my career. Bruce is an absolute master of his art and in my opinion, the most gifted NA to ever draw a line.