

# Onboard Interiors

SM

www.onboardinteriors.com

## Yachting

### Master Plan: Tips for Surviving an Interior Refit

By  
Jay  
Coyle

don't think much of some of the "interior decorators" I've encountered in the yacht business. Whether they are incompetent or inflated by ego, their big ideas come easy when someone else must make them work. The interior designers I do respect know the difference between a boat and a beach house and don't become your wife's shopping pal. They are professionals — designers like Sam Rowell. If you haven't heard of Rowell it's because he's never wasted time banging his own drum — his focus has always been getting the job done. Though he's semiretired, I asked Rowell for a bit of advice on interior refits.

Starting from scratch on a new build is always easier than a refit, Rowell says, because there are fewer unknowns. "When you start digging into a boat there will be surprises. It usually starts out with a small idea, say a bigger TV or additional freezer space," Rowell explains. "The carpenter starts cutting and discovers wires. He calls in the electrician and the next thing you know the electrical panel must be moved. If you want to control the budget, rule number one is to work with existing bulkheads and cabinetwork." Rowell has been called in on a number of interior design projects for the postmortem cleanup. "I've seen owners so disgusted that they sell the boat with the interior unfinished — it's too bad and it's unnecessary," Rowell says.

Sensible owners set goals and a budget. If they are refreshing their existing boat it's often a short

laundry list — carpet, window treatments, etc. Even personalizing a boat that is new to its owners can often be accomplished simply by updating the soft goods and accessories. Rowell suggests this can be done on a 60-footer for as little as \$30,000. "Obviously if you spec custom stone counters, Italian leather, gold fixtures and new wood veneers, all bets are off." Rowell says that raising the bar in this fashion on a 60-footer could easily drive interior refit costs to more than \$100,000.

While a fixed price for services and materials is nice, Rowell says cost-plus is more typical. This usually covers design hours and an agreed-upon markup for designer-supplied materials and workroom time. A new build project usually begins with drawings, renderings and sample boards. Rowell takes the same approach with a large refit project, but on smaller ones, often a few hours aboard with the client and some samples are enough to get things moving. "A lot of folks have a good idea of the bits and pieces they like — it's the designer's task to help integrate these ideas and visualize the complete boat."

Rowell insists it's important to find an interior designer who has experience with boats. "You might have the best residential interior designers in the world, but if they are unfamiliar with boats there could be problems." An appreciation for the weight of materials and their behavior in a marine environment is critical. Rowell remembers "fixing" one boat that had just undergone an expensive interior refit. "One of the fabrics the designer had chosen had metal rings and grommets — it was just weeks old and the metal was corroding." Rowell also remembers a high-speed sport-fisher that churned its crystal and china to gravel.

Rowell's first project was dressing up a custom tournament boat in the 1980s. "She was typical of the day. You could pretty much clean her interior with a hose." His last custom project was a fish boat that cost well over \$10 million. The trend has been toward overcomplication; however, some things never change. "Proven yacht interior design themes still look right on yachts," Rowell says. "Darker satin-finish teak and mahogany interiors were a traditional selection since they offer relief from the sun. High-gloss interiors can be blinding and shout out imperfections and wear." It's all about the details and finding an interior designer who gets it. □

This Whitcar 56 interior by Sam Rowell blends practicality, tradition and luxury.

