



The DDA bespoke division
can make vision reality

Dahlgren Duck & Associates

Top of the Table

Supplying bespoke design integrated dinner services and linens for yachting, private jet aviation, palaces and private residences, DDA's Custom Luxury Division is highly regarded for their unique capabilities in the design coordination and fabrication of exclusive, one-of-a-kind design integrated china, crystal, flatware and linen. We discovered how they make every meal memorable and every supper a special occasion...

By: Iris Savage



DDA provides bespoke china for elite aircraft.

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Thirty years ago Jim Dahlgren and Allan Duck recognized that the enjoyment of food extended far beyond the menu itself. They understood that the way food is presented, the color of the plate, the weight of the cutlery, the table setting, are all visual cues affecting the overall experience. They began to provide china, crystal and flatware, as well as fine linens to jets belonging to the world's elite. The service rapidly extended to enriching the interiors of superyachts, palaces, private residences and even boardrooms. These were the foundations on which the truly inimitable offering provided by Dahlgren Duck & Associates was built. Today DDA, as it is also known, positions itself as a strategic luxury lifestyle partner for its clients as it provides an unmatched collection of luxury items that embellish personal interiors. The business supplies the world's finest crystal, china, flatware, linens and amenities; as well as customized and bespoke services for the international jet set. The offering can be broken down into three distinctive divisions.

Thanks to long-established relationships with a range of leading international design houses it can provide high-quality items that complement interiors. This pret-a-porter service requires an initial discussion about the desired look and feel. After which careful selection of the right stemware, china and soft furnishings is then made.

The fantastic relationship with the brands also enables DDA to offer a customized service where clients can request existing styles, designs and patterns, but have them tailored for their own specific style. This may involve the addition of an owner's crest, a company brand, or perhaps a family's heritage symbol, which is added to the familiar luxury house design.

The jewel in the sparkling crown of offerings however is the Bespoke Design Division, which makes DDA a genuinely unique business. It provides prestigious clients with the opportunity to have their china, crystal, flatware, or objet d'art conceived, designed and produced to their exact requirements, resulting in genuinely unique items available only to that specific customer.

Working with royalty, heads of state, governments, celebrities, and high net worth individuals requires a certain confidence, comprehension and collaboration to make visions a reality. It also requires a large black book of contacts that can fulfill the exceptional demands. It is this one-of-a-kind network of project consultants, artisans, boutique craftsman, and a dedicated team, with years of experience that can bring the idea to reality.

"We are fortunate that our heritage has availed us of the finest international artisans to craft these unique, bespoke products. Understanding the materials we work with, and the environments they will be in, is crucial to our customers and to our business," says DDA CEO Scott Ritter about the Bespoke Design concept. "Sometimes a customer will come to us with very broad specifications which require us to research, design and reiterate; or they'll have seen a pattern in nature they want replicated in their china or flatware. Others will come with very specific ideas we have to then realize for them," Ritter explains. The process can be lengthy however DDA manage

the increasingly prevalent need for instant gratification by engaging clients throughout the entire process. "Encouraging client involvement helps them understand what is necessary to make the dream come true. We try to educate them on what is involved and our team regularly connects to provide progress updates. We are also using smart technology to encourage their involvement. The pieces created are incredibly personal, used and touched on a daily basis, and will in some cases one day become museum pieces. For this reason alone we invite our clients to take the journey of production with us," states Ritter.

DDA is investing heavily in digital platforms that allow customers to view product progress from where ever they are in the world. "The combination of the improved communication streams, and the progressive production techniques, has resulted in reduced waiting times." Although Ritter is keen to point out that works of art don't happen over night. The process is also complex. "We initially meet with either the client directly, or perhaps the project manager, architect, or interior designer. A discovery meeting helps us interpret the design requirements, budget specifications, and the subsequent elements that we must consider. This is where our expansive network comes into play, on occasion there has been only one person who could possibly fulfill the requirements, and invariably we know who that is," adds Ritter.

Following the discovery session DDA will engage artisans and designers to create initial detailed sketches that aim to interpret the clients' specification. 2D examples are created to reflect the final item. DDA is also embracing 3D printing technology



Scott Ritter the CEO of DDA.

Unique by Design

Ritter's favorite dining set was created around the precious stone of lapis lazuli. One of our designers had visited a mosque in Casablanca and the patterns, colors and style became the inspiration for this set. The initial sketches took about six weeks to create. During the discovery meetings DDA learned that the client loved horses, and the colors of lapis. This was taken into account so during the design process the artist created a look that fused lapis in the china and silverware. However DDA took it one step further and created a stirrup strap along the length of the cutlery with the base of each flatware handle emulating the metal part of the stirrup where the foot is placed.

"When we showed the designs to the client it became immediately apparent this completely went beyond his expectations. The challenge for us was that at this time sourcing the lapis lazuli was quite difficult so it took some time to find the right stones," adds Ritter. "In addition there was only one silversmith in the world that we trusted to complete the task, so we

had to be confident he had the time required to commit to this project."

Once the renderings were completed it became apparent that some modifications would be needed to make the concept work, and bring it to life. It was a completely unique process that resulted in each piece of flatware incorporating lapis in a cabochon style, i.e. stones that have been polished and shaped rather than cut. This was necessary to make it look appealing and keep the handling balanced.

To date Ritter has not seen anything else quite like this set. "We believe this to be a completely unique set of work on so many levels, and demonstrates what makes DDA stand apart from other companies in this space. It's our ability to create the seemingly impossible." And for sure the guests will enjoy their dining experience a whole lot more when eaten with such beautiful china and flatware. It is testament to the creations provided by DDA that clients often return with further ideas and visions, that only DDA, with its experience and knowledge can fulfill.

BESPOKE AIRCRAFT ACCESSORIES

to showcase the finished design before it goes into production. This improves the process, as modifications can be made right until the last moment. "We are extremely detail-oriented and this is paramount in our bespoke design work. It has to be right and we will always evaluate it before we send to the client, if we think its' missing the point we'll review and tweak to create the perfect finish," adds Ritter.

The intricacies of creating such pieces also raise a number of challenges. However, the greatest challenge Ritter states is nothing to do with sourcing materials, finding clients, or keeping up with the latest trends. "The international community of artists with the skills and talents required to fulfill our client needs is shrinking. We are lucky that our network trusts us and will introduce us to those they believe will be able to match their expertise. That knowledge is one of our great strengths and while it takes time to form the relationships, we are working on this



Initial doodles, become sketches, that become final designs and eventually reality

every day." Trends are also changing so the type of artisans required to fulfill the projects is altering.

"Clients are increasingly leaning towards the contemporary forms, with design becoming more edgy, incorporating a variety of colors and textures. The engaging senses of touch and sight are playing relevant roles with textiles, dinnerware and more. We are seeing a different push from a boardroom feel to a more personalized state." Ritter notes that in a world where citizen's journalism is challenging the concept of privacy the wide body aircraft, super



DDA always keeps up to date with design trends to weave into designs

The Artisan

The artisans involved in creating these rare works of art are individuals with immense talent, yet they quietly create magnificent pieces in their private workshops. The DDA team liaises directly with them relaying the client's wishes and desires which will often encompass particularly specific requests. A recent challenge involved creating cutlery made from titanium, a flatware service the like of which had never been made before. Working with the strong, lustrous metal threw up certain trials and tribulations in order to create something beautiful and functional. But the final outcome delighted the client exceeding his high expectations. This is the aim for each of the artisans, to produce products that satisfy the client's needs whilst meeting their expectations within the parameters of the environment where they will be used. The design process must incorporate and consider the client's vision, the purpose of

the product, and any specific environmental aspects. For jets weight is always an issue, whilst on yachts safe stowage is also a factor. However the artisan will always work to produce the desired concept and then figure out the production after.

Designs are inspired by client's requests, brain storming, and stimulated by any number of external factors. The inside of a mosque, the patterns of nature and even a customer's love of animals have all informed designs produced by the artisans. Starting with a simple doodle that develops into a formal sketch the final design is presented to the client before renderings of the items are tweaked one last time before final production. The spark of artisanal creativity becomes the ultimate luxury item, which supports the customer's preferred lifestyle, and may one day become a museum piece.

yacht cabins, and private residences are increasingly becoming entertainment areas. "We find they invite friends and family to join them in their personal spaces, and they are looking for a more playful environment that allows them to entertain discretely. Our latest designs are reflecting this."

One such design, and challenge, was to fulfill a request for a champagne glass where the bubbles could be illuminated. DDA created a threaded sterling silver base, with a crystal glass that screwed on top. Glow sticks were created to fit into the base. When the lights went down, the champagne glasses lit up. "This was a really fun, but an incredibly complicated project as we had to extensively research options that made the concept viable. More than anything it demonstrates we can really envisage, and subsequently realize, pretty much anything for our clients," smiles Ritter.

Other pieces that have wowed clients include the creation of a sterling silver horses head that was the focal piece of a bedroom in a wide body jet; a flatware set with a pattern etched into the handles that was inspired by a nutshell the client found on a beach; and a dining set inspired by an original artwork from a hunting lodge, which was recreated on the client's presentation plates.

It is clear Dahlgren Duck & Associates understand how beautiful, luxurious styling must combine with practical functionality to create the breathtaking finishing touches expected in the interiors belonging to the world's elite. However when it comes to talking price Ritter maintains discretion. "For us what we do is priceless, we know the clients put much more value on the environment that is created than the money they spend. For them it's a lifestyle choice that extends their personality into their private spaces. If what we do can enhance their dining experience then we have achieved our goal, and our customers have made their environment their own."



A fork, the design of which was inspired by the shell of a nut found on a beach.



DDA works closely with clients to support their luxury lifestyle