



raising the bar

New cocktail cabinets mixing one part funky, one part fabulous and one part function are causing a stir, says **Nicole Swengley**

A cocktail will always evoke a sense of glamour and occasion. Yet the cabinets in which ingredients, glassware and accessories are stored often favour functionality over aesthetics. But now, in the hands of contemporary designer-makers, they are becoming as imaginative as the drinks themselves.

The latest designs are characterised by opulent materials, with exotic veneers, marquetry, vellum, gypsum, lacquers and luxurious leathers embellishing cabinet exteriors, while intricate interiors offer clever storage, compact preparation surfaces and secret compartments. “Cocktail cabinets are the perfect combination of form and

function – little workhorses with racehorse style,” says Susan Zelouf of Dublin-based Zelouf+Bell, which creates museum-quality work (the National Museum of Ireland has three of its pieces in its permanent collection) that is sought after worldwide. Karen Howes of award-winning London-based interior designers Taylor Howes adds that, “Many clients are art collectors and apply their collecting instincts to furniture – they’re looking for very special cabinets displaying true craftsmanship to sit next to their artworks.”

From top: Linley eucalyptus, sycamore, bronze, gold leaf, rose gold leaf and white gold leaf Tectonic Bar, £130,000. Armani Casa walnut and brass Club bar cabinet, £35,100

So exceptional is the craftsmanship displayed in cocktail cabinets now that Simon Stewart, director of interiors specialist Charles Burnand, describes them as “jewels for the home”. Take the eye-catching Ballue Bar (£60,000,





Clockwise from left:
Lukas Wegwerth glass,
willow, shellac and brass
Blankenau cabinet,
price on request. Linley
sycamore, satinwood
and white gold leaf Girih
Treasure Chest, £75,000.
Exterior of Linley's
Tectonic Bar, £130,000



“Clients want a cocktail cabinet to be fun, they want to create a sense of theatricality and occasion”

pictured overleaf), created by French specialists Jallu Ebénistes for Charles Burnand. Its tactile exterior resembling a modernist collage made it a showstopper at this September’s Decorex International interiors fair. The vellum-covered sycamore cabinet was handcrafted using dovetailed joints, bespoke hinges and hand-hammered brass details. It features a pull-out drinks preparation surface, mirror-backed shelving for glasses and bottles and, hidden deep within the cabinetry, three secret compartments. “People want that element of surprise and wit,” says Stewart.

Intriguing hidden elements, coupled with exquisite craftsmanship, are David Linley’s calling card. Take his Tectonic Bar (£130,000, pictured right and on previous page). The gleaming exterior is handcrafted in mulberry eucalyptus with rose gold leaf “cracks” that form an abstract world map as though tectonic plates have somehow shifted to reveal a metallic core. A secret button unlocks the cabinet’s doors and, as they open, tiny LED lights illuminate the gold-leaf-lined interior. Fitted with cupboards, glass shelving and a bespoke fridge, it also features bar columns that rotate to reveal specialist accessories, such as cocktail stirrers and olive sticks, all designed by Linley. A cigar humidor rises from a drawer within the cabinet. “There’s genuine interest in commissioning a really beautiful piece, but clients also want it to be fun,” says Linley. “They want us to create a sense of theatricality and occasion.”

Theatre was definitely on display in Linley’s jewel-like Girih Treasure Chest (£75,000, pictured above far right) shown at Masterpiece London this summer. “Girih is an



Islamic decorative art form that uses geometric lines to create an interlaced framework,” he explains. “When I spotted a mosaic tile with an eight-pointed star in a Doha museum, I was struck by its brilliance and geometry and was inspired to reinterpret the design in marquetry.” The pattern, which covers each of the cabinet’s façades, is created from specially dyed, deep-blue ripple sycamore, natural sycamore and satinwood, and gradually modulates from gold through grey to blue. The gold- and white gold-leaf interior replicates the exterior geometric pattern, and custom-fitted compartments and shelves feature dovetail joints and bronze handles inlaid with precious stones. The interior can be custom-fitted with a client’s choice of shelving, drawers, cupboards and compartments. In a typical Linley flourish, the key for the locked central chamber is in a hidden compartment. When the central cabinet is opened, mirrored glass surfaces slide apart to reveal a second secret compartment.

Pattern is also central to the work of Zelouf+Bell. The company recently redesigned Dublin’s Michelin two-star Restaurant Patrick Guilbaud, and its new Spyglass bar employs wooden marquetry in a graphic, art deco-inspired pattern of citrine tay veneer inlaid in black bolivar that points to a centre of acid-yellow bands, enlarged as if seen through a spyglass. “We love the possibilities of using



Clockwise from left: Jallu Ebénistes sycamore, vellum, mirror, brass and bronze Ballue Bar, €60,000. The exterior and interior of Zelouf+Bell's bolivar, brass, anigre, shagreen and leather Stones in a Pond cabinet, €28,275

drawer fronts are inlaid with a graphic pattern of marquetry hen-pheasant feathers, and a central drawer in the blond, ripple-sycamore interior holds a ripple-sycamore tray with marquetry feathers laid out in a book-matched pattern on its base.

Art is often the inspiration for Zelouf+Bell. Its Stella'd cocktail cabinet (€25,000), for example, features optical

marquetry in fumed eucalyptus inlaid with ripple sycamore that is based on the 1960 Frank Stella painting *Six Mile Bottom*. And the company is expanding its Artists' Series of compact, wall-mounted drinks cabinets. The series so far includes the Riley'd cabinet (€8,200) with optical marquetry patterns inspired by Bridget Riley's 1961 painting *Kiss*, and the Scullied drinks cabinet (€8,200), whose palette of dyed woods in varying thicknesses refers to artist Sean Scully's paint applications, as well as Ireland's patchwork landscape.

Pieces designed for more lavish entertaining include the company's Othello cocktail cabinet (€40,000), which has an Islamic-inspired geometric pattern

“Sexy little cabinets become a focal point – a sculpture – even before the first tray of cocktails is served”

inlaid in a marquetry starburst that contrasts pink ripple sycamore with dramatic macassar ebony, and doors that open on a pink ripple-sycamore interior and rose quartz bar top. And for its Stones in a Pond cabinet (edition of six, €28,275, pictured below), a patinated solid-brass inlay forms an optical pattern that is reminiscent of the black-and-white jumpsuit that David Bowie wore on tour in the early 1970s.

London-based designer-artist Violeta Galan exploits the play of light on pattern for her alluring Sybarite cabinet (price on request, pictured overleaf). Straw marquetry in four bright colours creates a shimmery effect while contrasting with a black, ebonised-wood carcass and brushed-steel legs. The interior can be custom fitted, with shelving for glassware and bottles – including juices, because, says Galan, not everyone wants storage for alcohol.

Straw marquetry was also on display in Armani Casa's Club bar cabinet (£35,100, pictured on opening page), unveiled during Milan's Salone del Mobile in April. This eye-catcher, handmade in a signed and numbered edition of 50, features doors in an ocean lacquer finish evoking a dramatic, Turner-esque seascape. Even the interior, lined

cocktail cabinets as a palette for intricate patterns that interest us,” says Susan Zelouf. “We design sexy little cabinets that become a focal point – a sculpture – even before the first tray of cocktails is served.” Taking luxe materials like shagreen, semiprecious stones such as amethyst or rose quartz, and cabinets inlaid with metal or contrasting timbers, the company uses marquetry “to create wonderful optical patterns, geometric motifs or witty, colourful scenes inspired by our collection of vintage kimono fabrics,” says Zelouf.

For a client with an interest in Japanese design, Zelouf+Bell is creating the Torii bar (£45,000), made in red and black bolivar and featuring an exterior pattern of grazing cranes inspired by an antique Meiji-era tomesode kimono. The interior is constructed from ivory-figured anigre veneer with a bar top and pull-out shelf in ivory shagreen. “Our client has a pair of important celadon vases, so both the base of a removable serving tray incorporated into a drawer and the leather lined drawer bases are in celadon – a vivid shot of colour referencing the period porcelain,” says Zelouf.

For another client living in the countryside, the company commissioned Irish sculptor Cheryl Brown to create a naïve, patinated-bronze hen pheasant that perches on the asymmetrical door-front of a cocktail cabinet (€28,175) in figured mahogany. The



in pearly-gold fabric with bronze lacquer detail, is a departure from Armani Casa's usual restrained approach.

"The bar needs to be an artwork, not just a functional piece of furniture," says London- and Doha-based interior designer Katharine Pooley. "This is where a maker like Rupert Bevan is unsurpassable with his immaculate attention to detail, old-school craftsmanship and contemporary understanding of unusual finishes and interpretative design."

"Today's cocktail cabinets are design objects in their own right and increasingly multifunctional, incorporating icemakers, fridges and even sinks – almost like an à la carte kitchen for the over-18s," says Bevan. "What I like is the crossover between functionality and design. I enjoy the surprise when you open the cabinet because you can't necessarily tell from the exterior what is inside. And, with this type of piece, you don't have to follow any rules. You can go as formal, kitsch or over-the-top as you like."

Bevan's Miami Beach House cabinet with antiqued mirror (from £16,800), originally designed for Soho Beach House in Miami, updates a classic 1920s cocktail cabinet for contemporary living. Antique mirror-glass clads the exterior while the interior is fitted with glass racks and shelving and there is space for a mini fridge. Equally sparkling is his 605 cabinet (from £13,200) featuring a diamond pattern on its golden, vellum-wrapped doors. Its gilded interior contains two height-adjustable glass shelves and a central, pull-out, black glass worksurface. And his art deco-inspired Monochrome drinks cabinet (from £12,800) contrasts an ebonised and oiled oak carcass with off-white lacquered panels, giving it an eye-catching, striped effect. A mirrored back-panel, adjustable glass shelves and black glass countertop are found inside along with ample storage space. "Because everything we make is bespoke we can translate exactly what our clients want into the design," says Bevan.



Left: **Violeta Galan** walnut, steel and straw **Sybarite** cabinet, price on request

"I would like to think that my background in decorative finishes enables me to dream up almost anything."

Berlin-based Lukas Wegwerth prefers to let the contents of a cocktail cabinet speak for themselves. For the Blankenau (price on request, pictured on second page) Wegwerth perches a simple glass cuboid on an organic, willow-tree base that has a rasped, burnt and shellac finish. "It's both functional and sculptural," says Sam Pratt, co-director of Gallery Fumi, which represents Wegwerth. "Wegwerth has deliberately left each piece as a clean, empty box so clients can request bespoke shelving." Totally transparent, it's perfect for displaying shimmering crystal glassware and bottles of luxurious liqueurs, and, just like a newly invented cocktail, it typifies the one-of-a-kind pieces that make home entertaining considerably more refreshing these days. ♦

GUIDING SPIRITS

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