

**H**eadboards have become the modern equivalent of the four-poster bed," says Martin Kemp, founder of Martin Kemp Design, whose specialisms include interiors of super-prime properties. "As well as being the focal point in the bedroom, they reflect a level of status."

When it comes to specific styles for these statement-making pieces, however, Kemp will not be drawn.

"Our clients always want something that is unique," he says. To achieve this, the studio works with material specialists such as Fumood Khableqa and Aileen Daly. It commissioned Daly's innovative upholstery studio to create a headboard (from £15,000, pictured on final page) of interwoven silk sashes, each interlocking with the next to create a pattern that is both simple and intricate. It will decorate the back of the master bed at British Land's new development Claspin Mayfair.

Alby Beinton, head of design at the architectural interior design and development practice Oliver Burns, agrees that "bespoke" and "original" are the key words in any brief. "Clients who buy super-prime properties are very well travelled and are so well educated in design terms that every element in the room must be finished with an extraordinarily high level of original detail and tailormade craftsmanship," she explains.

Oliver Burns' transformation of the Walpole Mayfair is a fine example of this principle in practice. The master bedroom of one of the development's five apartments features a floor-to-ceiling paneled headboard (pictured on final page, similar commissions from £10,000) decorated with three-dimensional leaves, each one hand-sculpted from a luxurious faux leather called Majite by



From far left: Design House Liberty's silk, brass and oak headboard, from £17,000. Frontal silk knots headboard, £650 per sq m. Majite leaf details from the headboard in Kernal and Cyber

London-based textile artist Helen Amy Murray. The technique she uses is a closely guarded secret, but the descending branches of this design took her highly skilled craftsmen several months to complete.

Murray's creation is a thing of exquisite beauty, but with "only" 296 petals it is actually at the simpler end of the master headboard spectrum. Daly, for example, has made a 7m-long headboard (pictured overleaf, similar commissions from £10,000)

composed of 10,000 hand-cut leather petals across thousands more tiny beads that drip like dewdrops across the design. Another of her clients commissioned a piece adorned with an arching criss-cross pattern made from over a mile of 4mm-thick chain, each of which was sewn in place by hand with engineer-like precision, while a residential project in New York called for a bias-cut, pleated silk headboard (pictured overleaf) adorned with birds of paradise made from hand-stitched silk thread and jewels. "This level of complexity is new," Daly says. "Headboards used to be buttoned, embroidered or pleated; now clients are asking for layer upon layer of different techniques in a single piece."

With so much going on, it is hardly surprising that headboards have increased in scale. Where once they framed the bed, now they can embrace the entire wall, incorporating side tables, bedside shelving and sometimes even a bathroom door. (Kemp has also been asked to conceal the door to a master bathroom within a headboard, artfully hiding the opening in the design on the upholstery.) "At the moment there seems to be a trend for panelling the wall behind the bed," says Liane Deshayes, design director at handmade wallpaper house Fromental. "Wrapping wallpaper around an MDF board creates the impression that the headboard occupies the entire wall. It's a new take on the feature wall."

Fromental has recently worked on two such projects; one for the design house Morphous London, for which a series of brushed, metallic silk panels was created, featuring the swooping lines of a hand-embroidered and hand-painted foliage design called Koats (£600 per sq m, pictured centre), and another, the Nimbus (£850 per sq m), for Shangri-La at The Shard. From a technical perspective, wrapping panels in wallpaper is extremely challenging because, in order to make sure that the pattern joins seamlessly across the entire width,



# keeping a cool headboard

Headboards are fast becoming fabulous focal points and even entire feature walls. **Charlotte Abrahams** talks to the designers adding new wow factor



Clockwise from top: Oliver Burns oak headboard, similar commissions from £9,750. Keir Townsend leather, wood and chrome headboard, similar commissions from £4,500. Detail of Aiveen Daly leather and beading headboard, and silk and gold bead headboard, similar commissions from £10,000

*Rachel Winham set mirrored glass into a headboard to reflect iconic London views from the apartment window*

Fromental's team has to design in a 5cm tolerance around every panel. Aesthetically, the effort speaks for itself: these are bedheads elevated to works of art.

Large-scale headboards are not the sole preserve of large-scale bedrooms; they can be used to create the illusion of space in more diminutive ones too. Alastair Keir and Keira Townsend of interior-design practice Keir Townsend are past masters at these visual tricks. One of the company's latest projects cleverly combines a wood-framed silk headboard with silver-leaf-backed glass panels that create space-enhancing reflections in a beautifully subtle way, while in another small room, it has teamed full-height strips of green velvet with light-reflecting, back-painted glass and suspended pendant lights.

"The long pieces of velvet visually elevate the ceiling," Townsend explains, "while the glass reflects the light cast by the pendants, making the room appear bigger."

Now that dressing rooms are ubiquitous in master suites, the only major piece of furniture in the bedroom is the bed itself and, at the top end of the market, headboards have usurped elaborately dressed beds as the room's focal point. The primary function of a statement headboard is, of course, wow factor – which explains why more and more headboards are appearing in materials other than fabric. "As an alternative to traditional upholstered headboards, we have noticed the emergence of more contemporary materials such as glass, metals and wood," says Joe Burns, managing director at Oliver Burns.

The company's latest project, at Beau House on London's Jermyn Street, boasts one such example (pictured top, similar commissions from £9,750). Inspired by the tailoring traditions of the local area, it is a wall-



sized, layered fretwork design of extraordinary intricacy, every piece of which was carved by hand from dark-stained oak. This headboard also incorporates a discreet upholstered section directly behind the bed – a device used by several designers working with hard materials.

Rachel Winham, for example, managing and design director of the eponymous London-based interior-design practice, set fragments of mirrored glass into the headboard (similar commissions from £12,000) she designed for the show apartment at the capital's South Bank Tower. "The apartments look out over some of London's most iconic buildings, including The Shard," she explains, "and we wanted to incorporate the view into the interior scheme itself." The headboard features smaller pieces of mirror falling away from a larger shard – or at least appearing to. The fragments are, in fact, set securely into several layers of silk-upholstered MDF.

Townsend also favours combining soft materials with hard. Asked recently to create a headboard for a young girl with tomboyish tastes but whose mother wanted a softness mixed with the strong geometric shapes that her daughter likes, Townsend decided to frame sumptuous, padded leather panels with bands of gleaming chrome.



*Upholstery can conceal features like speakers and wireless charging stations*



From top: Helen Amy Murray Majille headboard for Oliver Burns, similar commissions from £10,800. Christopher Guy wood La Flamme headboard, from £9,257. Aileen Daly silk headboard for Martin Kemp Design, from £15,000



The result (pictured on previous page, similar commissions from £4,500) is appropriately gender-neutral, the soft leather offset by the bold metal strips. International furniture brand Christopher Guy has dispensed with upholstery altogether. Guy himself regards headboards as akin to show-stopping mirror frames or fire surrounds, and so his unashamedly extravagant design La Flamme (from £9,257, pictured centre left) is made entirely from hand-carved wood painted in a range of metallic finishes. Is it comfortable to sit against? Not very, but he doesn't believe that it matters – and the strong sales of La Flamme certainly seem to back up his claim – eight were sold in 2015. “No one wants to sit bolt upright in bed,” he says, “so they always use pillows even if the headboard is upholstered.”

Functionality, however, does have a role to play in the world of headboard design when it comes to technology, with makers increasingly being asked to incorporate audio-visual units, lighting and blind controls, sockets and even panic buttons.

Dara Huang, founder of London-based Design Haus Liberty, has just completed a satin, brass and oak headboard (from £17,040 with bed frame, pictured on opening page) for Amazon Property's ultra-prime development Park Crescent London, which conceals an array of technological

features within its stretch-satin upholstery – including embedded lights, speakers and wireless charging stations. “I travel a lot,” Huang says, “and I am inspired by the kind of ease and efficiency I experience in hotels around the world.” The headboard can also be programmed so that the embedded LEDs replicate the rising dawn, which allows for a more natural awakening. And should you choose to be coaxed awake by the gently increasing strains of your favourite tunes, then it can do that too. ✦

**BEDHEADS ABOVE THE REST**  
**Aileen Daly**, 2 Letchford Gdns, London NW10 (020-8962 0044; [www.aileendaly.com](http://www.aileendaly.com)). **Christopher Guy**, 020-3397 2410; [www.christopherguy.com](http://www.christopherguy.com) and see Design Centre. **Design Centre**, Chelsea Harbour, Lots Rd, London SW10 ([www.dtcch.co.uk](http://www.dtcch.co.uk)). **Design Haus Liberty**, 82 Clerkenwell Rd, London EC1 (020-3696 6860; [www.dhliberty.com](http://www.dhliberty.com)). **Fromental**, 020-3410 2030; [www.fromental.co.uk](http://www.fromental.co.uk) and see Design Centre. **Helen Amy Murray**, 5 Swanfield St, London E2 (020-7613 1511; [www.helenamymurray.com](http://www.helenamymurray.com)). **Keir Townsend**, 142 Old Brompton Rd, London SW7 (020-7746 2442; [www.keirtownsend.com](http://www.keirtownsend.com)). **Martin Kemp Design**, Greencoat House, Francis St, London SW1 (020-7183 3885; [www.martinkempdesign.com](http://www.martinkempdesign.com)). **Oliver Burns**, 9 Stratford Pl, London W1 (020-3036 0485; [www.oliverburns.com](http://www.oliverburns.com)). **Rachel Winham**, 5 Pond St, London NW3 (020-7443 5511; [www.rachelwinham.com](http://www.rachelwinham.com)).

CHRISTOPHER GUY: DANIEL LASE/OLIVER BURNS; DAVID ARAMIAN; KEIR TOWNSEND; MARTIN KEMP DESIGN; AILEENDALY; OLIVER BURNS; HELEN AMY MURRAY