

This themed aquarium built for Shipwreck Tavern, a restaurant in Long Island, USA, was created by the same restaurateur who designed the Jekyll & Hyde Club in Manhattan.



If you ain't got a tank...

In the same mould as the private jet, Bentley or villa, the aquarium is the new status symbol. **Nicolette Craig** tries to discover why the A-listers now covet fish and water.

Keeping an aquarium wasn't always the coolest of hobbies — but in the last ten years or so a showpiece fish tank has become one extravagant way of illustrating your wealth.

Search on the Internet for celebrity fish tank owners and a huge list includes Madonna, Mariah Carey, Sandra Bullock, Jim Carrey and Ivana Trump. PFK's own website recently featured the AquaVista Dinosaur gold edition aquarium retailing at £3 million.

Justin Muir owns and runs City Aquarium in New York, creating

high quality aquariums for clients around the US. When I contacted him he had just designed for Ben Affleck and Jennifer Garner and was busy filming for TV shows.

He told me: "Last year we had a bunch of baseball clients and I've also worked and designed for the Saudi royal family and the Sultan of Oman, installing regularly in the \$25,000-100,000 (£15,700-62,400) cost range."

Such tanks may seem a waste of money, but have become the ultimate status symbol for the few. The media has criticised celebrities who spend their

money on fish tanks, but many are genuine enthusiasts. There are those with a lot of money to devote to their tanks, but whether they choose to do so on the basis of whether it matches their latest outfit or not is another matter...

Businessman David Saxby has what many consider to be the ultimate reef tank, having had more than 640,000 viewings on YouTube. His system holds around 13,640 l/3,000 gallons and more than 400 fish.

He said: "Hobbyists tend to fall into four categories; those who want fish for their children; people

who like fish and want tropical tanks for their natural beauty; extreme hobbyists, such as myself, keen to take a certain aspect of the hobby further — and people who choose tanks purely as decoration with little or no care for the fish."

David became an enthusiast at 31 after reading a book by Dr Elizabeth Woods claiming that SPS coral couldn't be kept in captivity. He has since developed a huge range of products, through his company D-D the Aquarium Solution, which have enabled him and many others to do just that.



ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

Justin Muir created this for US baseball star C C Sabathia.

He says he will shortly launch a product which he believes will revolutionise the world of reefkeeping, emphasising that it is his tank that has allowed him to progress that far.

"I've a large garden flat and am lucky enough to have a large tank. I use it to develop new products and think that hobbyists often lead the way in developing new ways to keep a coral garden.

"Celebrities who rely on maintenance for their tanks may have beautiful ones but are never at the forefront of reefkeeping. This does not mean that celebrities cannot be genuine enthusiasts, for these are the way forward — celebrity or otherwise."

This point is reiterated by Roland Horne, of Aquarium Architecture, who was responsible for the design of a tank for footballer Stephen Ireland, then of Manchester City now Newcastle United. That

"Owning one is like a mini marriage, paying not only for initial investment but also for ongoing maintenance."

6,000 l/1,320 gal, 13' Fijian coral aquarium tank generated great publicity in 2010.

He feels that aquarium design has really taken off in the last five to ten years and Aquarium Architecture's business has grown 120% in the last 12-18 months.

"Everyone wants a fish tank nowadays. They are the new 'must have' item that ties in fashion, trends, culture and custom electronics, while also being a sound investment.

"They can be inspired by such as foreign travel to modern art and

have the allure of something quite rare," he said.

"Most people want a natural aquarium. David Saxby's tank, for example, is like the Holy Grail! An average installation costs £50,000-150,000 and clients have to understand that owning one is like a mini marriage. They will have to pay not only for initial investment, but also for ongoing maintenance. A high-end aquarium can cost £3-5,000 a month!

"However this is not always the case. For example, we are currently working on a £650,000 installation on the Caribbean island of Granada for a retired Wall Street banker who intends to maintain the system himself."

Roland's company is currently working on aquariums for a couple of Premier League footballers, a Russian oligarch living in London and an US Internet billionaire based in California.

His staff aim to integrate aquariums into each environment so that the aesthetics, colours and sounds of a room match to fit. Employees must own their own tank so they know exactly what they are dealing with — and there's a global network of consultants to deal with problems.

Aquarium Architecture tanks even have remote controlled pumps and filters controlled via an Internet connection — especially useful for increasingly popular jellyfish tanks.

Roland added: "By and large most of our clients have a real passion for fish and are not just looking for an object of design. I recently visited a footballer and we discussed for hours the ins and outs of certain corals and how they work. That was before we even started talking fish."



Stephen Ireland's tank is the brainchild of Roland Horne.

Who are the celebs getting a kick out of fishkeeping?

Stephen Ireland, the Newcastle United footballer, hit the headlines with a tank that reportedly cost £100,000 — but in reality cost far more. Contrary to popular belief, Stephen is said to be a huge reef enthusiast

England captain John Terry has his own aquarium and is also a keen fish enthusiast, even appearing on the front page of *Angling Times* — one of PFK's sister publications.

Hip-hop star Nelly was featured on *MTV Cribs* with four aquariums, including one with

Lake Malawi cichlids, Nurse sharks and Tiger barbs — thankfully not all together.

Veteran rocker Roger Daltrey is a keen fish farmer, designing and creating Lakedown trout lake some 30 years ago.

Rapper Kanye West has a 1136 l/250 gal fish tank in his bathroom, while P Diddy spent nearly \$10 million/£6.25 million on a mansion with a 3120 l/700 gallon fish tank.

Former Tory grandee Michael Heseltine keeps both fish and pheasants.

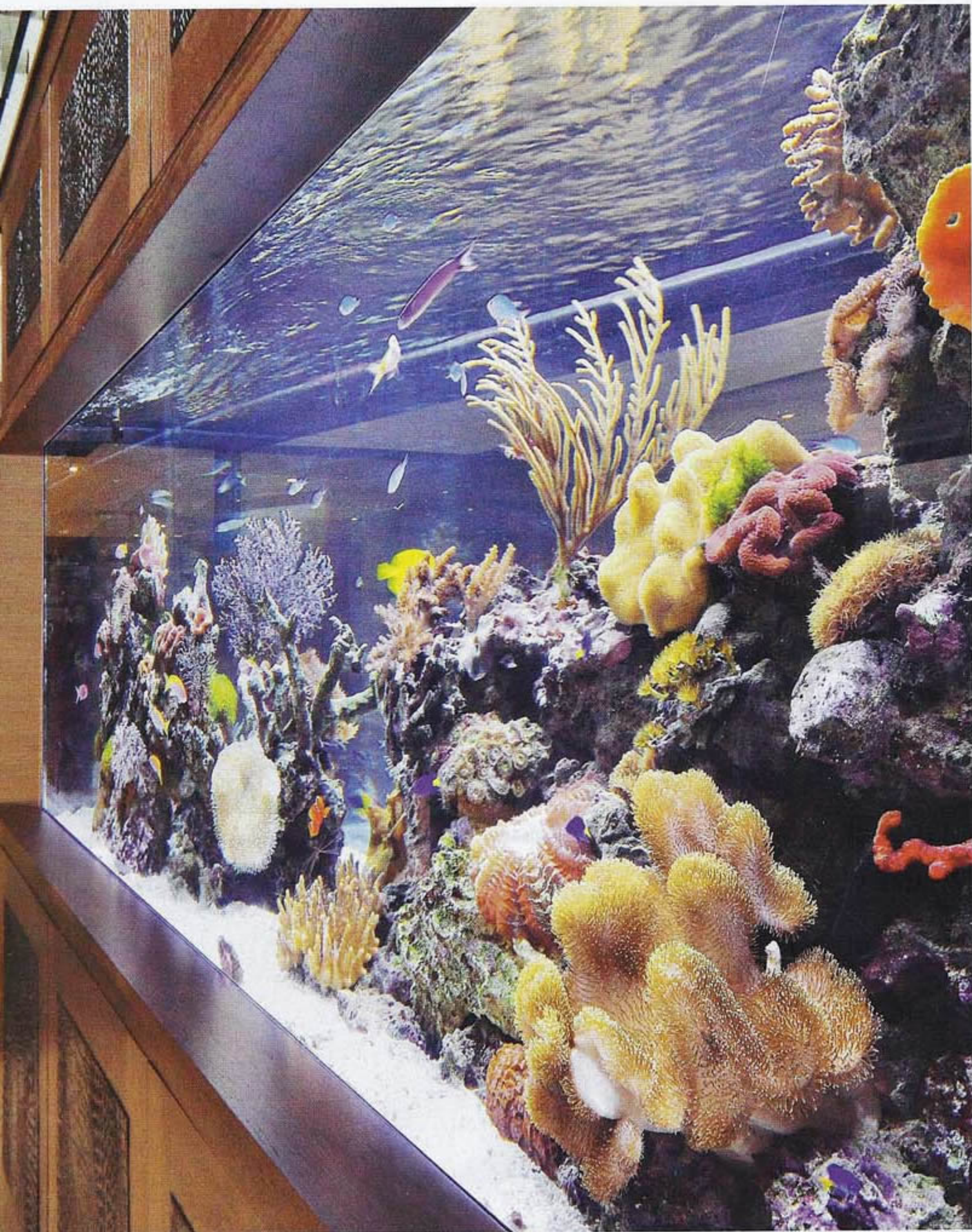
Pop singer Mariah Carey has a large marine tank.

Singers Ice-T and Wyclef Jean and motorcycle customiser Jesse James are all said to have a passion for reef tanks, in particular sharks. Wyclef is rumoured to have a shark tank in his car!

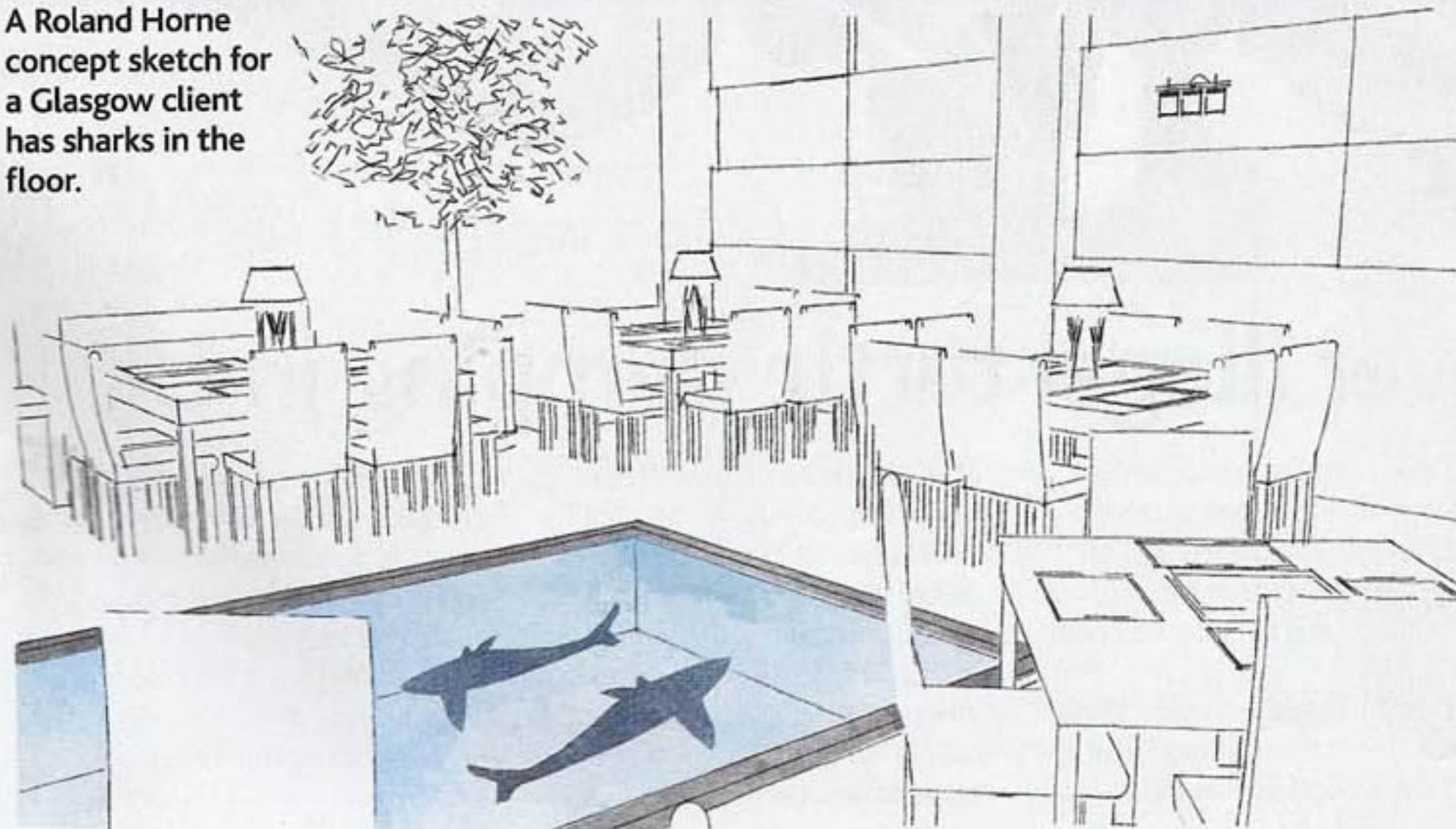
Ex-boxer Nigel Benn, comedian Les Dennis, actor Brian Blessed, ex new romantic singer Adam Ant, Latino pop singer Gloria Estefan and Playboy chief Hugh Hefner have all been avid Koi keepers. Pop guru Pete Waterman is a big fan of Koi, reportedly

spending more than £150,000 in the 1990s on breeding them in Japan. Comedian Jim Davidson's house featured the largest filtered Koi pond in the country, with £300,000 worth of fish, until he sold it in 2004.

TV show host Andrea McLean and designers Oliver Heath, Lawrence Llewellyn Bowen and TV DIY team leader Nick Knowles all own BiOrb nano aquariums. The Life Collection, in gloss black, red and white, has been dubbed by Oliver as 'the aquarium of the iPod generation'.



A Roland Horne concept sketch for a Glasgow client has sharks in the floor.



EXPERT Q&A

Justin Muir is founder and chief designer of City Aquarium, a US-based company specialising in high-end aquariums that are simply works of art.

Can you tell us more about the tanks you design?

I design aquariums for special clients or do projects worldwide, doing some 50 installations a year. Clients tend to be celebrities and high-worth individuals, as installations typically cost \$25,000-\$100,000/£15,000-£60,000. We also do larger installations for events, museums or TV and for movies such as Men in Black 3.

How did you come to this line of work?

I have a marine biology and environmental background and my family is related to John Muir, a famous American environmental pioneer.

I started on conservation projects and reef restoration. I then got my Masters degree in aquaculture and built eel and shrimp farms. This is where I learned how to build life support and aquatic mechanical systems.

I moved to New York in 2000, started my business and studied architecture and interior design along with furniture design. My design experience is really over the past ten years, but I consult with some of the best interior designers worldwide.

Where do you get your inspiration?

Most from the natural environment. I dive often and many of my new reef designs will come from images that I took while doing so. Those designs will display living Vase sponges and gorgonian forests.

Have you designed any particularly unusual tanks?

I designed a \$37,000/£23,000 freshwater aquarium for former US banker and race car driver Alan Wilzig. His wife couldn't decide on a colour scheme, so we based it around crystals with LED lights that can turn the fish one of 64 colours.