



Designer Adam Tihany said the inspiration for his work on Holland America Line's Koningsdam was the "architecture of music." Among his interpretations was designing the atrium to look like a harp. Photo Credit: TW photo by Tom Stieghorst

Stein Kruse, CEO of the Holland America Group, said the ship and its look have been a success, validating the decision to prioritize interior design, an emphasis that is increasing industrywide.

"This has been an evolution, not like a sudden change," Kruse said. "But I think that we are indeed moving the design aspect of our ships up a notch in terms of its overall relevance."

Once working behind the scenes, designers today are entering the limelight when new ships are introduced. Virgin Voyages recently hired an unprecedented 10 design firms to work on its first ship, due out in 2020. Holland America and Seabourn have both employed Tihany, with his trademark red eyeglasses, to design and promote their new ships.

And Celebrity Cruises named Nate Berkus, a New York designer and TV host, as "design ambassador" for its upcoming Edge-class ships, underscoring the value placed on design at that line.

There are several reasons design has emerged as a more important amenity in the cruise space.

First, competitive pressure is growing from land products such as W Hotels, which have made design a priority. New technologies, such as computer-aided design, have multiplied the creative possibilities. Some cruise lines are using design to make a statement about their brand identities. And the overall sophistication of interior design has grown as the industry matures.

Perhaps no line has embraced design as an amenity more than Celebrity, the "modern luxury" brand owned by Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd (RCCL).

RCCL used the 2017 Seatrade Cruise Global convention as a coming-out party for its Edge class of ships, hosting trade and media representatives for two days of tours at its Miami headquarters.

Observers were taken through RCCL's Innovation Lab, where full-scale mock-ups of Edge balcony cabins and suites had been built. One area had a mock-up of the Retreat relaxation area for suite guests, and outside there were full-scale reproductions of the 20-foot-tall cabanas and the Edge class' novel Magic Carpet moving platform.

There were blueprints fixed to the walls and display cases full of material samples and fabric swatches. Celebrity showed off the 3-D and virtual reality simulators that are increasingly employed to refine cruise ship designs.



A full mock-up of the Penthouse Suite on the Celebrity Edge helps designers envision possible changes even before construction starts. Photo Credit: TW photo by Tom Stieghorst

On hand were Kelly Hoppen and Tom Wright, top-name designers who have been commissioned by Celebrity to create different parts of the ships. And like a sort of ringmaster, Berkus was there to orchestrate the whole effort and highlight how various design concepts work.

"He's just terrific," said Celebrity president and CEO Lisa Lutloff-Perlo. "Nate's been designing since he was 24 years old. He's transformed thousands of homes around the world. He's a real modern luxury guy."

Edge is not the first ship class at Celebrity to be fashion-forward. In fact, some observers date the new emphasis on design at sea to the introduction of Celebrity's Solstice class of ships in 2008.

"They really put forth design as a brand pillar," said Greg Walton, a veteran ship interior designer, who along with three other former designers at CallisonRTKL in Miami recently started a firm, Studio Dado.

Solstice ships featured unusual spaces, such as a dramatic two-story library and a Hideaway area of nooks and nestlike seating pods as well as a real lawn complete with whimsical, oversize Adirondack chairs.

Other cruise lines have picked up the challenge of using design to make a statement about their brand.

When Regent Seven Seas Cruises wanted to market its Seven Seas Explorer as the most luxurious ship ever, it bought a prodigious supply of Carrara marble and hired three top design firms that were featured in a panel discussion when Regent introduced the ship in 2016.



A lounge on Regent Seven Seas' Seven Seas Explorer. Photo Credit: TW photo by Tom Stieghorst

Virgin Voyages has already marked its territory as "different from the rest" in the list of 10 hip design firms recently announced, most of which haven't designed ships before. One of the firms, London-based Softroom, worked for Virgin founder Richard Branson in designing the Heathrow Clubhouse and innovative first-class accommodations for Virgin Atlantic Airways.

Silversea Cruises used a quiet beige-and-brown design on its new Silver Muse to signal its European discretion, chairman Manfredi Lefebvre said.

Carnival Cruise Line, too, has used design as a signal that its brand is evolving from its youth when its interiors were filled with bar stools shaped like giant hands and bare-breasted sphinxes.

"In the past it was more themey," said Petu Kummala, director of interior design and architecture at Carnival.

"The theme was Venice, and then you could have a room that looked like Venice," Kummala said. "Back in the day, 20 years ago, that was popular, and that was cool and in some ways new. Nowadays, there is no theme; it's just the design."

For three decades, Carnival's exclusive interior designer was Joe Farcus, who started his own firm after working for famed Miami Beach architect Morris Lapidus. That began to change with the Carnival Magic in 2010, when other firms did some of the rooms for the first time.

Farcus has retired. An international team, including Toronto-based Launch by Design, Germany-based Partner Ship Design, Bigtime Design Studios of Miami and Kummala's in-house staff at Carnival, designed the latest Carnival ship, the Vista.

Team members were assigned to create different parts of the ship, an increasingly common practice industrywide.

"You want to have variety in the spaces, and interest, but obviously when you're doing a whole ship you want to have a certain cohesiveness, as well," Kummala said. "I think it's just to bring fresh thinking, different thinking, see different designers. And in some cases you go back, and in some cases the new one is successful, and you continue."

Embracing design on the seas

Some outside firms have a niche. For example, Bigtime Design specializes in restaurants and nightclubs, bringing a freshness but also facing a steep learning curve when it comes to the peculiarities of vessel design.

Ship safety rules, for one thing, in many cases, limit the types of materials that can be used. Fabrics, for example, have to be fire retardant and certified by the International Maritime Organization.

Unlike buildings, ships move through the water, up and down, side to side, constantly bending and twisting, which requires things such as connectors to be flexible and to withstand dynamic forces.

Weight can be an important issue, especially for materials like stone used toward the top of the ship.

"The other thing we contend with is the vibration of the engines constantly running," said Studio Dado's Walton. "And they will vibrate so much that we don't feel it, but it's the reason we can't use a light source that has a screw-in socket, because the light bulb will literally unscrew and fall out. Everything has to be thought out on that basis, and that's one of the biggest challenges we have."

The dimensions of cruise ship spaces are also different than on land. An average cruise ship cabin is less than 200 square feet, smaller than most hotel rooms. Ceiling heights of 11 feet are the bane of cruise ship designers, who said low ceilings heighten the need to make every detail perfect.

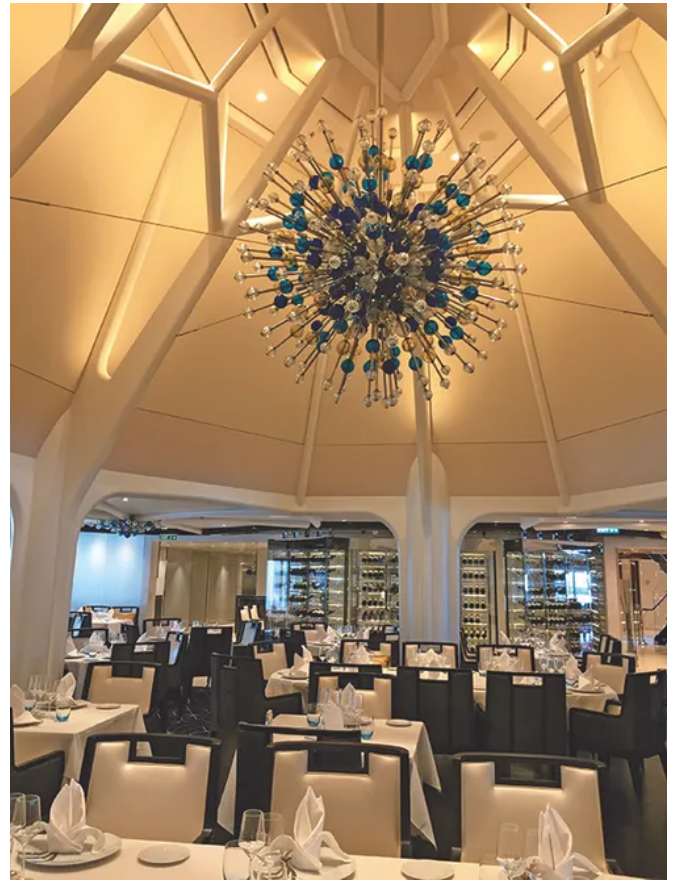
"That's why not every land-based architect or interior designer can design ships," said Michal Jackiewicz, owner and executive project director at Tillberg Design of Sweden, a leading cruise ship design firm. "There's a lot of hidden knowledge which you just learn by doing, more or less."

Designers said the first step in creating a design is to find an inspiration – Tihany calls it a "story." On the Koningsdam, the story was "the architecture of music," while on Seabourn Encore it was "private yacht." For a recent refurbishment of the Cunard Line's Queen Mary 2, designers took their cue from several historical offices buildings in New York, London and other places where Cunard once sold tickets and transacted business.

On the Seven Seas Explorer, the inspiration was a single photo ripped from a magazine by Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings CEO Frank Del Rio that showed a hotel corridor with a chandelier, which to him embodied a classic style of luxury.

"When we all saw that photograph and we talked to him, it was very easy to say, 'We understand your vision,' " said Walton, who helped design the Explorer when he was at CallisonRTKL. "It really did signify things to us, like quality, level of finish and stylistically the direction the ship needed to go in."

Once a ship has a story or theme, designers get down to the detail work of drawing and modeling. They've been aided immensely in recent years by new technologies that make the design process more sophisticated and accessible.



The Restaurant on the Seabourn Encore is curved. Tihany said his theme for the Encore was "private yacht." Photo Credit: TW photo by Tom Stieghorst

Powered by computer processing and software, designers have been able to work in 3-D for about the past decade, so that objects can be easily seen from different angles and in relation to the space. Virtual reality simulators are adding another dimension. Advances in telecommunications mean that designers in different parts of the globe are increasingly able to see VR simulations together.

"The beauty of the 3-D is that we can actually walk around this," said RCCL chairman and CEO Richard Fain. "It is no longer one rendering. It is, 'How does this feel? Does this feel gracious? Does this feel comfortable?'"

Fain said that 3-D and VR "democratize" the design process and "it's no longer only for people who can look at architectural drawings. Anybody can do this."

Kummala said, "Today's renderings, they look like photographs, so you basically get to see the design before it's even realized."

With each generation of ship, cruise lines are also investing more money to build physical mock-ups of suites, bathrooms, even big parts of public rooms, to refine the design before rendering it in steel.

Some lines do that at the shipyard, while others, like RCCL and Carnival Corp., maintain facilities at or near their Miami headquarters. Designers said their ultimate aim is to enhance the guest experience and facilitate the overall goals of the cruise line.

For passenger cabins, that increasingly means making them homelike, comfortable and relaxing.

"It used to be in the cruise industry [the cruise line operators] really didn't want you to stay in your stateroom or suite," said Studio Dado's Walton. "They wanted you out in the ship, especially buying drinks and spending money to build onboard revenue."

But starting about 10 years ago, that began to change, so cabins are designed more as a home away from home, he said.



The elevator lobby on the Carnival Vista. Photo Credit: TW photo by Tom Stieghorst

In the public spaces, many designers said their goal is to create rooms that promote interaction among the passengers and between passengers and crew.

"We want to make it conducive to social interaction and for people to get together and meet people they've never met on a cruise before," Walton said.

Or by making a casino inviting, nonthreatening and fun looking, designers can draw in passengers who are considered wallflowers or low-rollers into the space to play a few machines or a few hands they might not otherwise try, he said.

Kummala said that another hallmark of designs at Carnival, whether by himself or Farcus, was to give people more than they bargained for. Born out of the Lapidus aphorism, "too much is never enough," Carnival designs are feature-rich.

"If you can design it in such a way that even on the last day the guest discovers something new -- the detail of the design or something like that -- if you can achieve that, it's very good," Kummala said. Conversely, he said, a clean design with minimal detail might be fully comprehended and experienced on day one.

A related goal, Kummala said, is to give passengers a vivid sense that they've left their everyday reality behind.

"When you go on vacation, you kind of go away from your normal life," he said. "So you want to go to somewhere unique, somewhere different. You don't want your daily life for your vacation."

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