



# Celebritystatus

Cruise ship interiors have long had a reputation for looking like Las Vegas in the 1970s; that is until Celebrity Cruises gave them a makeover, writes **Jodie McLeod**.

Ask a punter, a regular cruiser or a designer their thoughts on cruise ship interiors, and you're likely to receive a unanimous squirm in response. Glitzy decor, gaudy carpet and squeamish colour schemes have characterised cruise ships in past decades, and the unfortunate reputation has carried through to today. But as those in the cruiser market demographic become more discerning about their design tastes, and as passenger expectations rise, cruise lines – such as Celebrity Cruises – are paying more attention to their vessels' inner beauty.

Hans Galutera, Australian ex-pat and principal architect of New York-based BG Studio International, has been designing cruise ship interiors for ten years and knows all too well the poor image of cruise decor.

'When you think cruise ships, people usually think it'll be like Las Vegas 25 years ago,' Galutera says. 'For designers and architects as well, there's usually a snobbery towards cruise ship design – that it's tacky and unfashionable. But cruise ships are going through a renaissance. Designs are really innovative

and interesting, targeted toward modern passengers who are a lot more savvy than they were 20 years ago.'

It is this tuned-in passenger demographic that spurred Celebrity to not only update its existing ship interiors, but also develop a rigorous new design strategy that will guide its next generation of ships.

## Design strategy

Even though Celebrity's guests are more than satisfied (the cruise line was voted by readers of *Condé Nast Traveller* as being among the world's 'Best Cruise Lines in 2008'), the company wanted to blow passenger expectations out of the water for its next series of vessels.

To do this, Celebrity asked five female representatives of its key market (women over 50) to divulge their opinions on what design aspects make a superior cruise experience. Dubbed Celebrity's 'Leading Ladies', the women – made up of an experienced cruiser, a travel writer, a travel agent, a hotelier and a potential cruiser – revealed their design desires regarding colour, space, storage, atmosphere and mood.

The first product of the new design strategy is *Celebrity Solstice*: the first of five 122,000-tonne, 2,850-capacity vessels of Celebrity's new Solstice class.

Tim Magill, partner at design company 5+Design and lead designer on Solstice's Fortunes Casino as well as the art gallery and retail space, says the ladies' high-class design ideas were reflective of an overall stepping up of passenger tastes.

'People's awareness of what's available out there is pretty amazing,' Magill says. 'Ten years ago no one knew that they would want £400 Egyptian cotton bed linen in their stateroom. Now people can be very specific about that. Generally, the public – particularly the cruising public – are quite sophisticated and international, and as designers we have to keep up.'

With a host of prestigious land-based gaming room designs to his name (Wynn Las Vegas and Hotel Bellagio to mention a few), Magill had a fair idea of what made a good space great; but the Leading Ladies' input forced 5+Design to raise the bar even higher.

'One of the things [the Ladies] responded well to was the idea of light

and air being part of the cruise ship experience,' he says. 'For the retail gallery we thought it was very important to have natural light come in. So we have a high window on the side that brings light into the space. This is unique for the inside of the cruise ship retail space – because the shops like to have their merchandise around the perimeter, so generally they're darker on the inside.'

The women also called for warm and natural materials – influencing Magill to include more golden colours, as well as a lot of wood and stone.

### Overcoming design challenges

While it sounds simple to just give passengers exactly what they want, space limitations required clever design concepts. For Magill, designing the Fortunes casino – the biggest casino in Celebrity's fleet with 200 machines and 16 tables – presented challenges with space and movement. 'On a cruise ship everything is very compact, so the movement from venue to venue and space to space can be convoluted,' he says. 'It's easy to get lost on a ship, and so we tried to create a grander sense of clarity of movement from forward to aft. We also tried to make the casino warmer and more contemporary in its design so it had a feel of elegance and quality, and not as much flash and tacky gaming paraphernalia that Vegas used to be known for.'

For Galutera, lead designer on five areas aboard the *Celebrity Solstice* (Michael's Club, Cellar Masters, Ensemble Lounge, Passport Bar and the specialty restaurant Murano; as well as spaces on Celebrity's Millennium series and *Celebrity Century*), the greatest challenge in designing comfortable and elegant venues is the height of the ceilings.

'Because they're so low you have to try and make the space as entertaining and as beautiful as possible,' he says. The age-old 'trick of the trade' is to create distracting carpet designs to make the ceiling appear higher, but BG Studio

had other clever methods of diversion.

'[Cruise guests] expect to be entertained design-wise,' says Galutera. 'So we try to take everyone in the space on a journey. When you go from the foyer to sitting in the restaurant – you would have certain visual clues that would tell you a story.' In the Murano restaurant, for instance, Galutera hopes to invoke the feeling of walking into a Venetian piazza.

Giving the theme of each room a modern twist is another way to keep guests entertained with their surroundings, says Galutera. The design of the crystal-adorned Cellar Masters wine bar, for instance, was inspired by French Art Nouveau jeweller René Lalique, which overpowers any sense of an antique look.

'This particular generation is smart, savvy, and very knowledgeable about design,' Galutera says. 'They know their quality. Pleasing them is not just a matter of slapping on new paint. And that's what's great about this brand. They really have a formula for thoughtful design that makes sense to people.'

### Celebrity Solstice

Whoever said 'less is more' clearly wasn't talking about Celebrity Cruise ships. More rooms, more space and more atmosphere are what characterise the liner's first in a new class of five 122,000-tonne, 2,850-passenger vessels.

Of the *Celebrity Solstice*'s 1,425

#### Tim Magill profile

Tim Magill is a partner at architecture and design firm 5+Design. Magill has designed projects around the world for over 25 years, including retail, mixed-use, gaming resorts and urban regeneration projects. His experience in gaming interior design earned him a spot on Royal Caribbean's think tank panel and an invitation to design for Celebrity Cruises' Solstice class.



#### Hans Galutera profile

Hans Galutera is co-founder and principal MDIA IIDA associate of interior design company BG Studio International. Hans has worked with various architectural and interior design firms such as Birch Coffey Design Associates, Daniel Romualdez Architects, SK Chow Designs and CITE Design.



staterooms, 85% have verandas and 90% have ocean views. All staterooms are an average 15% larger than in the past, with some adjacent rooms featuring adjoining doors; and a new AquaClass-level of stateroom, situated almost amidst the spa facilities, will offer spa-lovers a more luxurious journey.

German shipbuilder Meyer Werft, which constructed the line's Century-class fleet, is building the ship, which will make its maiden voyage 14 December 2008, on a seven-night Eastern Caribbean cruise. *Celebrity Solstice* will be joined by *Celebrity Equinox* in 2009, *Celebrity Eclipse* in 2010, and a fourth Solstice-class ship in 2011. [wc](#)



Customers have demanded more natural light.



Cruise guests expect ship design to be entertaining.