

Dreamweaver



As Royal Caribbean continues to drip-feed details of the *Oasis of the Seas*, Nigel Ash speaks to architect **Jan Akerblad** about the challenges posed to his firm, Arkitektbyran, by the mighty Genesis concept.

It has always been about 'wow factors', says Jan Akerblad. Over the last two decades, his firm in Gothenburg, Sweden, has worked with Royal Caribbean International, most recently on its Voyager and Freedom-class vessels, creating stunning facilities and developing concepts such as the Adventure Ocean youth programme, with its dedicated children's areas and activities.

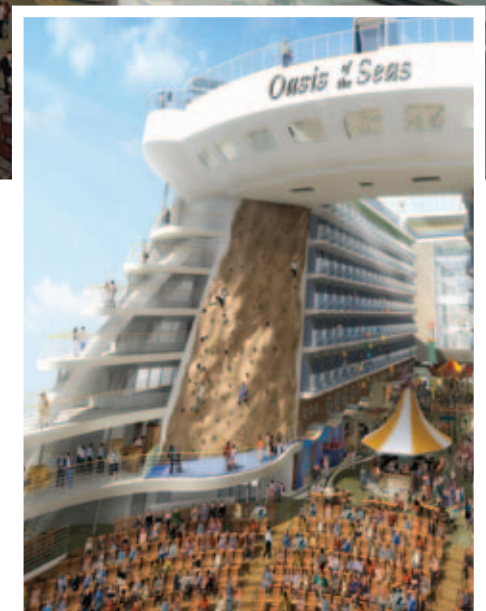
Analysing how his team seeks out new 'wow factors', Akerblad says: 'You have to be clever. You have to have knowledge of what's going on in the world, and sometimes you have to take a land-based concept and try to put it on board. It's not just having a dip in the pool or a fine dining experience or going to the sports quarter for a basketball competition. You need something more, something that actually surprises people.'

'On the Genesis project we have been responsible for all the open decks and their

facilities. Our original vision included the idea of having glass-bottomed aqueducts running over the void across Central Park. You would actually have been able to swim between the pools on each side of the ship, rather than have to get out and go down and across and up to them on foot. We thought it was a great concept and did a couple of treatments but Royal Caribbean rejected them, either because they thought they were a little bit too dangerous or perhaps they were not ready for the idea. It was also a question of economics.'

Another early design, says Akerblad, was to have the Flow Riders coming down to the family area of the boardwalk at the stern, near the restaurants, playgrounds and carousel. 'But it turned out to be the amphitheatre instead, so we put the Flow Riders on the top decks,' he says.

This, however, was a challenge because of the weight of the water and the



A graphic impression of the *Oasis of the Seas*.

increased movement it would undergo at the greater height. 'We were therefore asked to cut the weight. The solution was to reduce the amount of teak wood in the decking. We tried to do this without losing the feeling and atmosphere of the top decks, by using a lighter weight deck covering. We also had to look at the size and depth of the pools, well aware that if, for instance, we made them too small, we would lose the ambience of the pool areas. By working on small parts of the design everywhere, we have been trying to minimise the weight.'

Onboard turbulence has been another factor with which Akerblad and his team

have been concerned: 'We did a lot of work on different wind factors because turbulence is a very real issue. If you have a headwind that is blowing 25 knots and the ship is making 22 knots, it gets windy.

tunnel test to depend on,' he notes. 'Now you have computer programmes that can take care of most things.'

There had been no temptation to cover Central Park, Akerblad explains, as

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So there were a lot of studies for the open decks and for Central Park in the middle of the ship, just to be sure that it was not going to be uncomfortable to sit outside. There was work using computer studies to ensure we had the right wind screens and design features on the open decks that would not create any turbulence.'

Akerblad says the computer modelling that Royal Caribbean has been able to do on the Genesis project has transformed and speeded up the design process. 'Only two years ago, you just had the wind

heat build-up in the park will be cooled down by computer-controlled ventilation. Akerblad says this will also be important for the well-being of the flowers and trees in the park. 'They will have a couple of dedicated gardeners on board because if the gardens do not look good all the time it will be awful. They will have to be careful with the choice of species. They will not however be bringing on their own plants in a greenhouse space but will replenish and replace the floral displays as necessary at each port of call.' **wc**

Can cruise liners get any bigger?

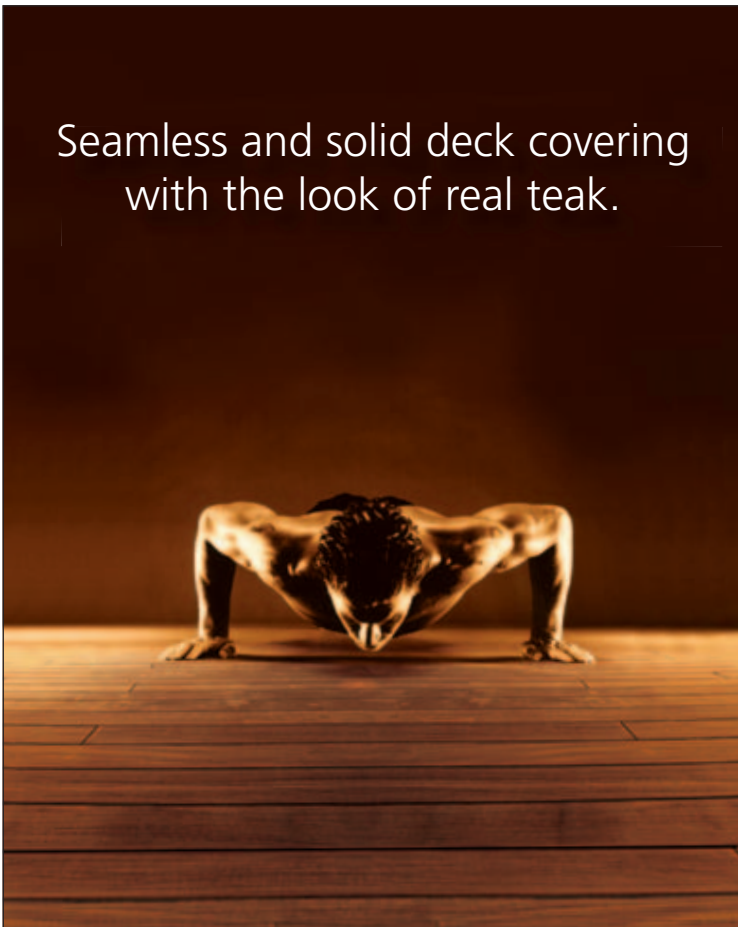
With 5,400 guests, *Oasis of the Seas* is a giant but Jan Akerblad doubts that many larger vessels will be built. The need to entertain, feed and provide for such a large number of passengers has been addressed by the 'neighbourhood' concept and a multiplication of traditional facilities such as pools.

Oasis of the Seas has seven distinctly different neighbourhoods which will absorb and distribute passengers throughout the vessel, with the intention that no single facility will become crowded. Equally, four separate pool areas cater for different passenger tastes, from sun-lounging indolence to sporty competitiveness. The single Flow Ride on the Freedom-class vessels proved so popular that there were complaints of the 30min queuing time. The Genesis-class, therefore, have two separate Flow Rides.

'There is also the question of port entry,' says Akerblad, 'with Genesis there is a telescopic funnel which, for instance, allows entry to New York. And with lifeboats taking 400 passengers at a time being used as tenders, ferrying people ashore is not an issue.'

Even though *Oasis of the Seas* is the current last word in floating cities with everything a vacationer demands, Akerblad says it is important that a cruise includes regular land falls. 'Even though Genesis is a destination in itself, it needs to move between ports and not just present endless sea horizons.'

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