

In describing the relationship between a cruise ship operator and an interior designer, Fredrik Johansson, partner and senior architect with Swedish practice Tillberg Design, says, 'There are as many facets to this as there are clients.'

For a designer, the dynamic of the client relationship is one of the key features of how a project develops. 'There are clients who completely rely on us, others know pretty much what they want and give us a clear, initial brief to stick to, and then there are those who will need to see a few options before deciding,' Johansson notes. 'Those in the first category are, of course, our favourites, but the latter is nonetheless totally rational.'

Johansson explains that Tillberg Design, which in its 40-year lifespan has planned and designed the interiors of 130 vessels, understands that, from a client's point of view, building a ship represents a huge investment. 'No wonder there is sometimes hesitation half way through, especially if we have designed something that has not been tried and tested,' he says.

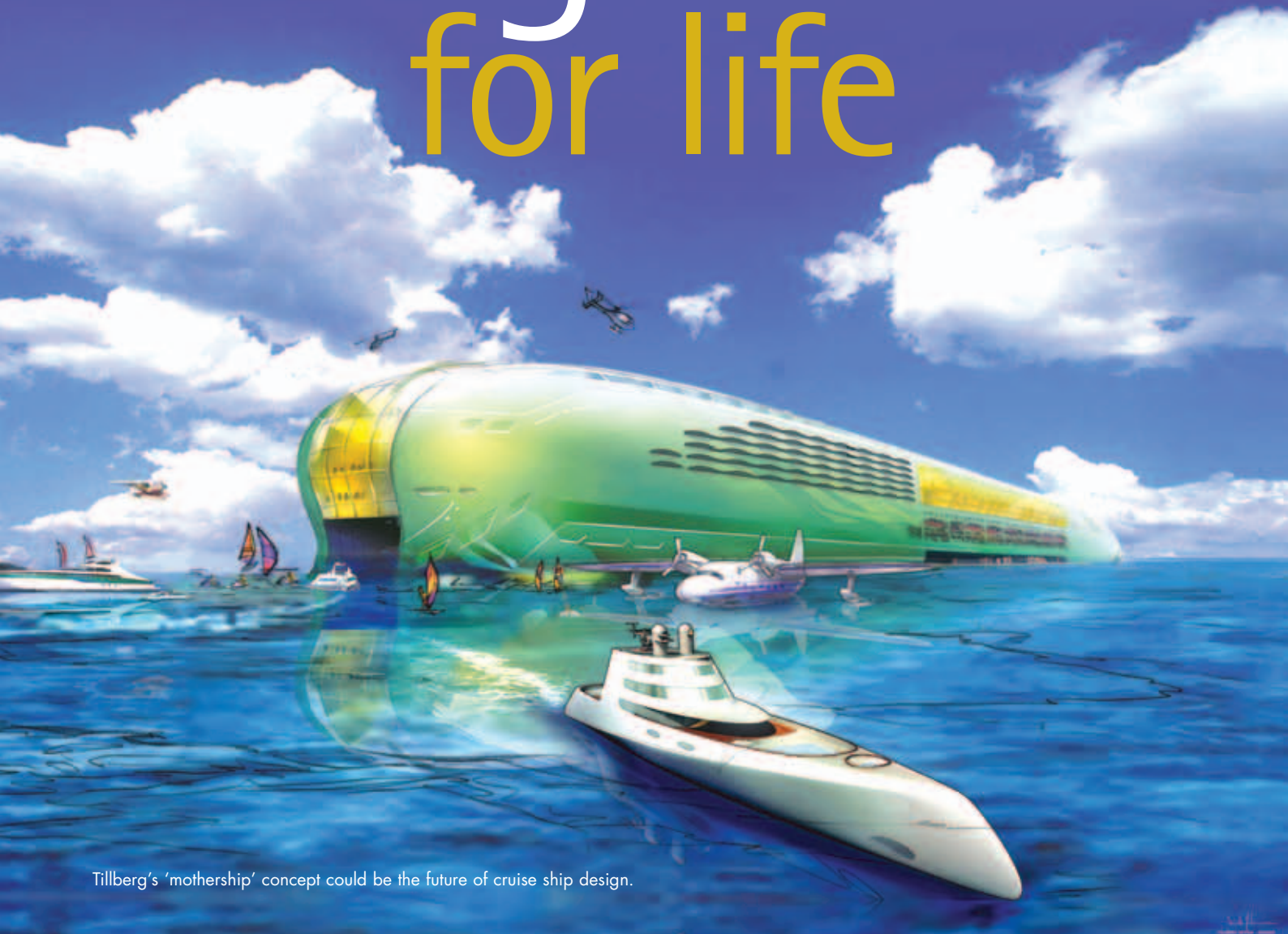
Tillberg Design works with the client from the first GA outlines through to the concept phase and the project's final detailing, such as Viking Line's *Viking XPRS*, which was completed at Aker Yards in 2008. In keeping with the ship's heritage, the choice of artwork and materials

reflected the idea of Scandinavian modernity. Similarly, Tillberg Design's inspiration for the dining rooms aboard Royal Caribbean International's *Liberty of the Seas*, also completed at Aker Yards, drew from the Renaissance artists Rembrandt, Michelangelo and Botticelli.

'In contrast to most of the schemes we developed for Royal Caribbean's earlier dining rooms, we introduced a bit more contrast and drama, with richer and more daring colours, darker woods and artwork that resembles pieces from that era,' explains Johansson.

Swedish firm Tillberg Design boasts an enviable history, having worked on over 130 vessels in 40 years. Helen Parton talks to senior architect Fredrik Johansson about the skill of delivering a successful brief and the future of cruise ship design.

Design for life



Tillberg's 'mothership' concept could be the future of cruise ship design.

Dining areas are an essential part of the interior of a cruise ship and are at the heart of the relationship between designer and operator. Johansson explains that Tillberg Design aims to strike a balance between grandeur and intimacy, making the area work by analysing the flow of people and the function of the space. 'The design of a ship is only as strong as its weakest link,' he says. 'For instance, if the planning of a restaurant is off, the waiters will suffer, as will the service and the attendance. Add in some gloomy lighting and cheap and uncomfortable dining chairs and you may have saved money on the design, but you have missed an opportunity to impress your guests. It always puzzles me when this happens as it's such a small part of the overall cost.'

Also in Tillberg Design's portfolio is Norwegian Cruise Line's *Norwegian Gem*, the last of a series of vessels the firm worked on at the Meyer Werft Yard in Germany. Johansson says the project was 'sheer fun' and featured a lot of playful reinvention. 'The use of colours and materials has matured a bit compared to the first vessels and we believe the Ultra Lounge has really redefined clubbing in the cruise industry,' he says.

Although there are many aspects that need to come together during a cruise ship project, such as meeting the client's budget and delivering the vessel on time, to satisfying the designer's aesthetic ideals, Johansson believes that, above all, the design should be absolutely passenger-focused. 'I realise this sounds like a cliché, but our philosophy will always be to put the passenger experience first, regardless of who the client is, or what kind of concepts we develop.'

'Sometimes this is overlooked. No matter if it's a hotel, a club or a cruise ship, if the guests like and identify with the place they stay in, they will recommend it to others and will quite likely come back.'

On land and sea

At present Tillberg Design, which is based in the harbour of the village of Viken, operates primarily in the marine interior design sector, which represents 85% of its annual £5 million turnover.

Johansson notes, however, that the firm is expanding rapidly, producing designs for hotels and land-based projects. These include a project for the Equip'Hotel in



A glimpse of the future? Tillberg's modern living.

Paris, which uses the concept of 'modules', in which cuisine is served in colour-themed 'cocoon', featuring music and video sequences of landscapes and art, which alter depending on food being served, enhancing the dining experience.

Other projects include the ice hotel and bar concept for warmer climates such as Dubai and Las Vegas, which will use snow and artificial lighting, plus the refurbishment of the Hotel Marina Plaza in Helsingborg and the Grand Hotel Plaza in Gothenburg.

Back at sea, Tillberg Design also produced a concept relating to the history of the Aland Islands, an autonomous state off the coast of Sweden for the *Viking ADCC* ferry, which will be complete in 2009 and is being worked on at Astilleros de Sevilla shipyard in Spain.

'It was decided early on, not to do this in an old fashioned way,' Johansson says. 'The interiors are of contemporary Alandian culture, nature and history presented in a colourful, intriguing style.' Tillberg Design has also been responsible for the interiors of a number of yachts and superyachts for the likes of Storebro and Austal/Boro Boro Cruises.

Mothership connection

The company also has ambitious plans for a 'mothership' concept. Because it is widely regarded that ships will probably not be able to continue to get any bigger, (otherwise they will not be able to dock easily), this vessel would be capable of launching a fleet of smaller ships. 'You might have guessed that the mothership

idea was more the result of a surplus of creative imagination in our office, than any scientific analysis,' explains Johansson wryly. 'The concept hinges around the idea that the main vessel could anchor centrally in, for example, an archipelago, and then several smaller vessels could then sail off to different islands.'

This reduces the headache of too many large ships trying to reach the same point at the same time and also gives passengers more choice about where they want to go. Indeed, in terms of people movement, the concept could prove a real boon if successfully realised. 'The whole tendering exercise is also rather primitive and uncomfortable, and what we have imagined is not only a new way of bringing people on and off the ship, but also bringing visitors to the ship.'

Because similar technology is already used by the navy, Tillberg Design reasons it could be possible to use yacht-like tenders or an amphibious air cushion vessel that enters the aft of the ship.

While this concept is one for the future, Johansson says it must conform to the same design rules: the best way to satisfy a client and maintain the operator/designer relationship is simply to 'do it right and do it well from the beginning.' [wc](#)

Fredrik Johansson

Since joining Tillberg Design in 1994, Fredrik Johansson has worked on projects from yachts to ocean liners and was joint project manager during the interior design of the

