

Petter Yran and Bjørn Storbraaten of Oslo-based Yran & Storbraaten Architects (Y&S) are a modest pair. Arguably the most reputable ship designers and architects in the deluxe cruise market, they prefer to keep any mention of their involvement in the industry contained to design bylines or to the credits of award-winning ships. The pair have never been marketed,

securing contracts with major brands such as Regent Seven Seas, Hapag-Lloyd, ResidenSea, Silversea, Residential Cruise Lines (RCL), Oceania Cruises and the Yachts of Seabourn on the strength of their reputation.

Yran was one of the first designers to bring high-end sumptuousness to the seas, yet when asked what it is about the firm's design style that makes it so sought after,

Yran remains impartial. He believes his role as designer has never been a vehicle to spawn his signature style, but rather one through which the ship owner's vision and passengers' desires can be realised.

There will be no Y&S signatures on the design of Seabourn's next addition to its fleet – the first in 17 years – the *Seabourn Odyssey*, a \$275 million deluxe yacht due to sail in June 2009. Nor will there be any

Redefining Luxury

From suites to dining options, the next generation of deluxe cruise-goer wants more of everything. So how is luxury design firm Yran & Storbraaten developing its visions for the future? Jodie McLeod speaks with designer **Petter Yran** to find out.

Wet and wild: a Y&S pool deck design.



stamps on the \$750-million *Magellan* by RCL, which will take to the ocean in 2010.

'We are commercial designers, following the dreams and ambition of the owner,' says Yran. An exact thoroughness in reading the owners needs and realising their dreams is the only thing, in Yran's view, that characterises Y&S's designs. But it becomes clear when looking at just how many luxury cruise ships it has had a hand in designing over the years (around 80 ships across all categories) that while its signature may be imperceptible, Y&S has helped shape what deluxe cruise design has become, and continues to have a firm hand on its helm. For an insight into the desires of the luxury cruise market, and the challenges and solutions these create, Y&S's work is the first point of call.



Y&S's onboard greenhouse design.



Modern luxury: a Y&S-designed spa.

Inner space

A higher space-to-passenger ratio is one of the distinctive features of smaller, luxury cruise ships, but Yran says the luxury cruise market wants even more. On the 450-capacity *Seabourn Odyssey* there will be an unprecedented (for Seabourn) amount of room. The ship's 225 suites start at 290ft², which is larger than the suites on existing yachts, and 90% have private verandas large enough to dine on.

The ship is 650ft long with facilities spread over ten decks, including more dining options than other Seabourn yachts, the largest spa facility on any luxury vessel (11,400ft² over two decks) and overall increased public space.

But the increase in space on the *Odyssey* brought a host of design challenges. 'When you increase public space per passenger, you can also make the ship more empty, which is counterproductive for a nice experience,' says Yran. A lack of people, he says, makes for a lack of atmosphere. When designing the public spaces, Y&S had to be careful to make the activity areas small enough to discourage passengers from congregating, and tried to channel the traffic in a way that encouraged the dispersion of people around the ship.

The call for more balcony suites from Seabourn's high-end market meant that Y&S had to rearrange the structure of the ship by pushing public spaces and other functions down to ensure that most of the suites were on the upper levels, and on the outside of the ship. With the *Magellan*, which has 210 ocean-view units, Y&S designed a retractable marina to increase activity space when the boat is moored.

'How you fill the lower part of a ship is a challenge,' Yran says. 'With smaller ships it's not so hard, but we have designs on the table for all-balcony ships that have 3,000 passengers. Then it becomes difficult. You just have to be clever. It's about being disciplined on not losing any façade space that you can use for balconies to anything else.'

Longitudinal space is a burden for any ship designer, but Yran has a range of solutions on board the *Odyssey* to relieve the oppressive feeling of low ceilings. The ship has higher-than-normal ceilings in its dining rooms, but in other public rooms Yran has incorporated domes cut into the ceiling, creating the illusion the ceiling has disappeared. In the cabins, effective use of lighting and mirrors help lengthen the space.

Function over form

One of the challenges of designing for smaller ships is overcoming the yearning as a designer for form over function.

'As a designer, you often want to make form the footprint plan, but then function comes in and stops you,' says Yran.

'You have to use every square foot in a functional manner.'

But on luxury ships, the function-over-form hierarchy is not so delineated. 'That form follows function is of course a truth, but not the complete truth,' says Yran. 'Sometimes it's the other way round. Function is important, but the design and the feeling of the people moving through spaces are also important.'

There is another dichotomy that Y&S finds challenging in luxury ship design, that of cost versus quality. Ship design contracts are different to most land-based architecture contracts in that they're signed before the planning process begins. What materials are used in the design, then, must be negotiated between Y&S and the ship owner. Often Yran finds himself fighting for the standards he wants to achieve.

'The owner doesn't want extra costs, and the yard will try to use as cheap materials and solutions as they can,' says Yran. 'Our task is to fight for the things we think are important from a design point of view.' During these negotiations, Yran says he must become more of a diplomat than a designer to enthruse the parties involved.

'There are pluses and minuses in all contracts, and you have to make compromises, but that's part of life, and the workplace,' he says.

If there have been any compromises made on the *Seabourn Odyssey* or the *Magellan*, dripping in lavishness as the ships are, they will, as with any distinctive design trademarks of Y&S, be entirely imperceptible. [wc](#)