

Oasis of the Seas deluxe suite and veranda suite (below).



# Suite future

Cruise liner suite design may be breaking away from the traditional, but can contemporary cabins for the luxury market endure? Jodie McLeod talks to **Petter Yran** of Yran & Storbraaten, **Maurizio Cergol** of Fincantieri, **Joe Farcus** of Carnival Cruise Lines and **Kelly Gonzalez** of Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines about the dream suites.

It has been said there are only two things one needs to enjoy life: money and time. But if you find yourself on board a cruise ship, island hopping around the Caribbean or floating past the exotic shores of Asia or Antarctica, you might want to add a few other ingredients to the pot.

Space, service and style equally contribute to the cruise experience and as cruise ship designs evolve to cater for high-end cruisers of the 21st century there will be more of each of these to

look forward to. The point at which your preferences may diverge, however, is in the design of the suite.

In the suites on board the latest builds, classic interiors are competing with contemporary rivals. Some cruise lines are staying loyal to the antique chic of the 1920s, with wooden furnishings and creamy-toned palettes, while others are breaking new ground with modernist layouts and daring colour schemes. With change notoriously difficult to catch on in the cruise industry, especially in the area of suite design, are the world's elite cruise clientele ready to greet contemporary suites with open arms?

Royal Caribbean Cruise Line is testing the waters with its much-anticipated *Oasis of the Seas*, due to set sail in autumn 2009. This 5,400-capacity mega-ship is the biggest the world has ever seen, and has innovations on board to match, including a set of 28 contemporary loft-style suites with private balconies. A first in the cruise industry, these dual-level suites (measuring up to 141m<sup>2</sup> in the Royal Loft

Suite) mix Caribbean-influenced modern décor with ocean-inspired colours, and are fitted with panoramic and double-deck-height windows. The next vessel to emerge from luxury line Yachts of Seabourn, the *Seabourn Odyssey*, has also taken a slightly more contemporary angle with its suites, opting for sleeker lines and modernist pieces. Petter Yran, one half of the Norwegian design team that worked on the *Odyssey*, Yran & Storbraaten, notes cruise liner interior design is gradually heading in this direction.

'It's getting more modern and less 'English countryside from the last century', in all aspects,' he says. 'But it's a long way to go from there to complete minimalism. We are somewhere in between. It's a modern interior, but it's not minimalist; it's warm and decorated.'

Maurizio Cergol, senior chief designer at ship builder Fincantieri believes that because of the economic fragility of the industry, radically contemporary designs are too risky. 'The problem with contemporary designs is, if it's not done correctly with a



The *Oasis of the Seas* loft suite.

good designer, it will go out of fashion very quickly,' he says. 'If you go for a standard classic, in a proven style, the [appreciation] of the ship will last longer.'

Experimenting with contemporary designs backfired on Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL), whose upcoming Freestyle-class ship, known as F3, featured a variety of industry-first staterooms that had curved walls. Due to construction costs the ship was nearly cancelled in late 2008 by the builder Aker Yards France (now STX France), which reportedly had difficulty selling the vessel because of its unworkable stateroom interiors. The ship is still going ahead, to be released in 2010.

Chief naval architect for Carnival Cruise Lines Joe Farcus says that the economics of the cruise industry will have a dampening effect on the potential for contemporary trends really taking off.

'Ships have to last a long time and they're very expensive to build,' he says. 'If you design according to trends, then you're likely to get into trouble, because what looked trendy and exciting yesterday will not last, and you can't afford to strip out the cabins and rebuild them in another way.'

Director of fleet design at Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines Kelly Gonzalez says *Oasis of the Seas*' loft suites are not playing up to design trends, but are tapping into desirable and lasting suite qualities that will stand the test of time.

'We like to think that our contemporary design for the loft suites is enduring and not trendy. Regardless of trends, [suites need] to be comfortable,' she says.

'We have had to pay much closer attention to the details so that the simplicity of the design is high quality, irrespective of whether it is contemporary or classic. The differentiator is that it is uncomplicated and allows the senses to take in the entire sea experience.'

There are advantages in the spaciousness that contemporary design affords but there's a danger in tipping the scale too far toward minimalism, which can create just as suffocating an ambience as too much clutter. Cergol says contemporary design on cruise ships should not be about leaving empty space: 'It's about using the volume, the height, and quality of materials, colour and light effects. It's the way you connect all these things together that creates the sense of luxury,' he says.

Farcus predicts that it will take a long time before the kind of contemporary design evident in luxury hotels such as the Bulgari

in Milan succeeds in the cruise context. 'That type of design doesn't lend itself to a ship, because in a way you need the space to give the minimalist look a sense of grandeur,' he says.

While prerequisite space is limited, suites are definitely getting bigger, but the cruise industry's notorious preference for evolution rather than revolution will see designers linger somewhere between traditional and minimal for a while yet.

'The industry does innovations step by step,' says Cergol. 'But if you ask me, I hope the contemporary of today will become the classic of tomorrow.' [wc](#)



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