

### Celebrity Edge

Kelly Hoppen, Patricia Urquiola and Tom Wright  
join The Celebrity Revolution

### Belmond Andean Explorer

Rich artisanal detailing takes centre stage  
aboard Peru's first luxury sleeper train

### Virgin Voyages

Virgin Group ventures into the cruise sector  
with a new fleet of Lady Ships

# STARBOARD

STYLE IN TRAVEL

ISSUE 1





# CHANGING LANES

With cruise operators increasingly turning to hotel designers to create their vessels, Starboard asks those behind a new era of ships how land-based hospitality translates to the high-seas.

Words Kristofer Thomas



## THE PANEL



**Terry McGillicuddy**  
Director, Richmond International

**Projects**  
Britannia - P&O Cruises



**Nathan Hutchins**  
Founder, Muza Lab

**Projects**  
Pivoine and Lilas - Belmond



**Elizabeth Lane**  
Partner, RPW Design

**Projects**  
Arcadia and Oceana - P&O Cruises



**James Dilley**  
Director, Jestico + Whiles

**Projects**  
Iona - P&O Cruises



**Paul Priestman**  
Director, PriestmanGoode

**Clients**  
Airbus, TFL, United Airlines

In its evolution from people-carrying mode of transport to veritable ocean-crawling city, the cruise ship has become something akin to a moving hotel, providing guests with casinos, restaurants, nightclubs, terrace decks and staterooms, as part of an experience closer to a week at a resort than a transatlantic crossing.

Having drawn content and hospitality influences from their static brethren, the medium has now suitably turned to those with experience in hotel design to ensure that its ships are instilled with all the elements guests seek out on land – comfort, luxury, visually coherent schemes – and to further replicate the ability of contemporary hotels to feel like much more than just accommodation.

The role of the hospitality designer has, as such, produced a thematic, aesthetic and experiential link between the two mediums, with the presence of hotel designers through this era of change arguably a key catalyst for much of what is on board now.

In conversation with a number of leading hotel design practices who are bringing their expertise to the world of luxury travel, Starboard asks what one medium can learn from the other, which of their skills has proved most valuable, and what guests can expect from this new iteration of hospitality.

With a plethora of international projects under their belts including cruise liners, river barges, sleeper trains and land-based vehicles, the panel boasts a wealth of design talent. But which of their skills developed in the creation of hotels translated best to the high seas?

**Terry McGillicuddy:** We are used to responding to creative project briefs and understand the aspirations of the cruise ship client, enabling us to create exciting passenger experiences, focus, drama and ambience within our interior spaces. Our experience in architectural, structural and planning design helps us to understand the importance of passenger circulation and flow throughout the ship, and to appreciate the limitations of shipbuilding and construction.

**Elizabeth Lane:** All the skills that we use in hotel design are directly relevant to cruise ship projects. Guests expect a beautiful and comfortable environment to enhance their trip and operators expect a design that meets their needs, whether the hotel happens to be floating or static. With ship work however, there are unique, technical and logistical considerations to factor in.



“While the approach to each space is quite different and full of surprises individually, the journey has to remain coherent and legible. The ship is a small town, so exploration and discovery are really important.”

**JAMES DILLEY**

**Nathan Hutchins:** As hospitality designers we have an understanding of the guests and how they inhabit different spaces through day and night; ultimately, supreme comfort is the end goal for design in both hotels and leisure transportation.

**James Dilley:** While the approach to each space is quite different and full of surprises individually, the journey has to remain coherent and legible. The ship is a small town, so exploration and discovery are really important.

Having designed extensively for guests on land with projects including Four Seasons Hotel Moscow and The Langham London, Richmond International was enlisted by P&O Cruises to create an interior scheme for the operator’s largest ship thus far – Britannia. Applying decades of experience within the medium of hotels, and approaching the task from many of the same angles, the result is a vessel that incorporates elements of P&O’s heritage alongside accents that resonate with the operator’s loyal base of customers. A three-tier atrium was designed in the mould of a hotel lobby, and could easily slot into many landlocked projects as a grand introductory statement, bringing together restaurants, cafés, bars and a sizeable lighting installation that spans all three decks. Similarly, Britannia’s 1,800 cabins have been designed with the flair of luxury guestrooms, with Richmond’s reimagining of their layout affording each space its own identity, an important feature for travellers seeking out unique experiences whilst offering returning guests a degree of variety. Richmond’s history in the luxury hotel sector no doubt played a large role in the design; the vessel takes on an elegant atmosphere not dissimilar to that of the studio’s city-based projects. However, with an

unfamiliar environment to tackle, climates that change with each journey and guests who hold existing expectations of what to do and find aboard, not every skill gleaned from hotel design can be translated perfectly to the seas. So what new challenges await those designers crossing over?

**TM:** We had to develop an appreciation for the limitations of the ship in terms of space constrictions and minimal ceiling heights, designing the interiors around such issues. Material specification was also a challenge as there are restrictions on weight, as well as strict marine international standards and fire regulations; therefore the selection of materials is vital and very different to land-based projects. The constant vibration of the ship’s engines is also a major challenge, as all suspended items need to be specially designed and manufactured to be securely supported.

**NH:** The interiors of transportation vessels have to be practical and purposeful. We are designing within fixed and constrained parameters, so everything has to have its place and nothing should be superfluous to either need or narrative.

**EL:** Unlike hotel deadlines, which usually slip and slip, a ship refit deadline is set in stone. There’s a window in a shipyard when the ship is in a dry dock and that’s when all the major work takes place. Everything has to be lined up and ready. All teams have to be incredibly focused.

**JD:** The exciting point is that the ship owners and operators are increasingly delivering a variety of experiences for their guests. There is an understanding that there is no room for generic or universal interiors. The design needs to help shape the brand in new and exciting ways, and vice versa.

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Arcadia | RPW Design | Parrott Photography

“Taking a boat journey is about the experience of the journey itself, rather than the final destination. It is about the joy of slow travel, which enables people to relax and find rejuvenation in a complete alternative to their everyday lives.”

**NATHAN HUTCHINS**

Undertaking the refit of P&O Cruises’ Arcadia and Oceana vessels, RPW Design looked to its portfolio of completed projects for hotel brands including Hyatt, Mandarin Oriental and Aloft for guidance in modernising the ships. The two were approached from different design angles for aesthetic profiles that honour P&O’s identity whilst taking the experience in separate directions. Arcadia was upgraded to include new entertainment and dining venues including the Aquarius Pool & Bar at the stern and a cocktail and champagne bar on the deck, whilst Oceana’s plaza buffet was given a makeover with new carpets, tiling and banquet seating. With guests unable to leave the ship for the duration of the journey, entertainment and F&B venues have become increasingly vital, especially in the context of incoming millennial guests and a shift towards experiential hospitality offers. Where hotel guests have the option of taking a stroll round the neighbourhood and ducking out to a local restaurant, sailors must be considered differently, and – despite budget, design and concept – kept entertained within the boundaries of the ship. How, then, to make a captive audience feel less captured?

**JD:** People live in a different way on board a ship and have very high expectations, particularly in how they eat and drink and in their desire for choice. They’re on board for days at a time, so there has to be identifiable differences between restaurants both in terms of the offer and of the environment, much more so than in a static hotel.

**EL:** Where sometimes it is important for a hotel to have a certain level of continuity throughout the property, in cruise ships there is more impetus on having spaces with their own identities. Us as designers need to ensure that these identities are carried throughout every level of design to meet the operator’s brand for each space. This way guests have a more enriched and varied stay while on long trips.

**TM:** The easy facilitation of large passenger numbers is key throughout the ship, and it is essential to ensure that

circulation is carefully addressed. The entertainment programme also plays a huge part in this, and is vital to aiding passenger movement. A larger percentage of entertainment and F&B venues are needed, therefore creativity and versatility of design to stimulate guests is important to create a variety of personal experiences utilising lighting, textures pattern and colour.

**NH:** Taking a boat journey is about the experience of the journey itself, rather than the final destination. It is about the joy of slow travel, which enables people to relax and find rejuvenation in a complete alternative to their everyday lives. In the case of Belmond Pivoine for instance, the cruising pace along the French canals provided the ideal opportunity to kindle an intense connection with the living, breathing natural world through which the barge passes.

Whilst previous experience in hotel design can certainly come in handy when creating the 100,000 tonne beasts that roam the oceans, many of the skills inherent to hospitality design can also be translated into more compact vessels, or different modes of transport entirely. When designing Belmond Pivoine and Lilas – two luxury barges that crawl a route of French canals – Nathan Hutchins and Inge Moore of Muza Lab applied an intimate knowledge of hotel interiors, resulting in something close to a cluster of floating suites, each featuring four bedrooms, a dining deck and a swimming pool. Large windows and a palette informed by the flowers from which each barge takes its name – peonies and lilacs – contribute to a biophilic aesthetic, whilst restrictions presented by the conversion of two grain shipping hulls resulted in a variety of unique floor plans and layouts. Inspired by the tendency of hotels to reflect local culture through design, Moore and Hutchins chose to include touches of colour drawn from the landscape. However, with larger sea-faring vessels often seeing nothing but horizon for days on end, this raises an interesting issue regarding place; how to channel local ideas and aesthetics without a consistent, or even visible, locale.





**EL:** Even though ships tend to move around different countries and oceans, the itinerary of the ship is usually set for a few years at a time. This way we can bring small details into the spaces that reference culture from some of those locations. For example, on the refit for P&O Arcadia, we developed an intricate carpet design for the main atrium space, subtly incorporating patterns that reference local crafts of many of the countries visited, creating a patchwork of the ship's itinerary.

**NH:** Generally speaking, a moving vessel needs to have its own personality, making it intrinsically meaningful, but without overwhelming the character of the landscape it is travelling through.

**TM:** The overall narrative for the project is important, but this should not develop into a theme park solution. Cruise ships are at sea for the majority of the passenger's trip and therefore the design experiences should always be focused on the sea and the movement of the water. A cruise experience is a slower living pace and interiors reflect this with calmer, comforting and residential design, colours, textures and ambiances creating aspirational spaces, unique experiences and memories.

**JD:** The locale is of course the sea, and the sea has been respected and referenced throughout our work on Iona, to the point where P&O Cruises' strapline "the sea is the star" has become the ultimate driver for all our design – the best example of which is in the heart of the ship, the Grand Atrium, which has triple-height windows with unobstructed, ever-changing panoramic views of the sea.

Jestico + Whiles, entered the sector with the design of P&O's forthcoming 5,200-capacity Iona, kicking off its work in cruise ships during a period of immense change for the medium. The new generation of cruise ship guests are the most connected thus far, with new expectations and desires to consider. As such, Jestico + Whiles has undertaken the design from an angle of immersive variety. Early renderings suggest that entertainment venues such as sophisticated wine bar The Glass House, The Keel & Cow gastro pub, and the casual Emerald Bar will each take on disparate forms to generate a wider range of options for guests, not only in terms of menu and aesthetic style, but atmosphere too. If guests cannot leave the ship, then perhaps they can be directed to feel like they're experiencing several different offers in the confines of one vessel. This has long been a tactic employed by hotels, but in the context of the cruise industry it could prove invaluable.

P&O Arcadia features an intricate carpet design in the main atrium space, subtly incorporating patterns that reference local crafts of the countries visited

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**PAUL PRIESTMAN**

With the design, execution and experiential offer of contemporary cruise ships evolving rapidly, taking cues from a hotel industry similarly pushing into new and disruptive territories along the way, the future seems bright for the sector. However, this progression of form and function is not only limited to the seas. As China’s Belt and Road Initiative rolls on, generating both new trade and leisure routes, the world as we know it will become more physically connected than ever before, with modes of existing transport such as trains and planes adjusting their offer and designs to welcome new travellers with new expectations, whilst innovative undertakings such as Elon Musk’s proposed Hyperloop will require entirely new aesthetic perspectives once normalised, democratised and widely available. With these progressions looming on the horizon, there are number of design companies specialising in hospitality transport that have seen a rise in demand for their services thanks to a changing society.

**Paul Priestman:** “Consumer expectation has changed greatly over the past ten years and we are now seeing transport environments – particularly in aviation – influenced by trends in hotel and domestic design. This has allowed transport environments to become more focused on passenger needs, moving the aesthetic away from the industrial plastic shells of the aircraft cabin to one more associated with comfort and service. The perennial condition of modern times is that everyone is too busy, therefore the greatest gift to the guest is an environment where they can enjoy the space to gain back some time to themselves.”

Priestman, Chairman of transport design specialist PriestmanGoode, whose projects include the Airspace for Airbus, B787 livery and cabin interiors for El Al Airlines, and carriages for Austrian Federal Railways’ Intercity and Nightjet trains, is ideally positioned at the forefront of contemporary transport design, with the firm having also recently created a series of initial design concepts to serve the Hyperloop technology.

**PP:** One of the things I enjoy most about transport design is that you’re creating designs that need to stand the test of time. Many technologies that will influence the passenger experience haven’t even been thought of yet so when designing a train that will be in service for 20 to 30 years, you need to create a shell which can be adapted and updated to whatever technologies will come to the market.

At its core, transport design serves much of the same purpose as hotel design. Guests expect comfort in unfamiliar surroundings, and a design that considers their presence and enjoyment of the journey just as much as it does pleasing aesthetics. A hotel can break ground visually and offer its guests moments of optic wonder aplenty, but if the bed is uncomfortable then much of that work is undermined. The new wave of hotel designers crossing into the transport industry perhaps signals not only a new way of approaching the medium, but a shift in the perspective of transport at large. No longer a means of getting from A to B, cruise ships, barges, planes, trains, as well as those modes not yet launched, are placing experience at the heart of the offer.