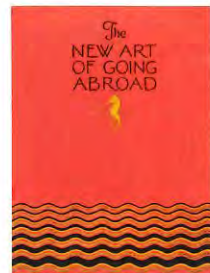


Making a Splash

It's anything but plain sailing when four contemporary designers reimagine seaborne luxury



Once the largest moving structures crafted by humans, ocean-going passenger liners represented the apogee of sleek, glamorous modernity. Each vessel was a bubble of opulence—cocktails, games on deck, lavish balls, wardrobes to match—played out to a soundtrack of seagulls and string quartets. A Cunard book of 1929 trumpeting *The New Art of Going Abroad* described life aboard these



Above: guests in the first-class grand salon of the Art Deco liner *SS Normandie*. **Far left:** the French liner arrives in New York in 1935. **Left:** a 1929 Cunard book promotes *The New Art of Going Abroad*

ADCC-PICTOS/ORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES (NORMANDIE SALON); KEYSTONE-FRANCE/GAMMA-KEYSTONE VIA GETTY IMAGES (NORMANDIE NYC); WORTHPOINT.COM (CUNARD BOOK)



Each vessel was a *bubble* of opulence with a soundtrack of seagulls and string quartets

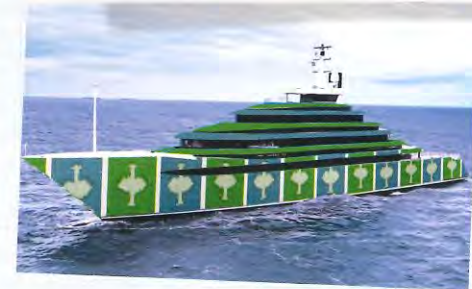
ships as “a little world between two worlds... a week of existence suddenly cast adrift”. Celebrated actors, society figures and ostentatious magnates added their inimitable endorsement.

In their grandeur, cruise ships showcased above all a commitment to astounding design on a par with the new skyscrapers of New York. The challenges posed by motion and limited space inspired interiors that borrowed both from the grand European palace hotels and the spirit of the times: the *SS Normandie*, for example, was a perfect encapsulation of Art Deco élan. To board a ship was to walk into a world of transformative glamour, an escapist fantasy (requiring a fabulous wardrobe, natch). The Duke and Duchess of Windsor once boarded the *SS United States* with 100 pieces of personalised luggage.

Vanity Fair asked four contemporary designers how they would liven, enhance, decorate or remodel a liner or an aspect of cruise travel for today. Kit Kemp readdresses the notion of travelling in style with her glorious compartmentalised luggage and livery. Rachel Chudley brings the outdoors indoors by introducing a surreal interior for an immersive voyage through an ocean landscape. Tara Bernerd taps into the connection with water and organic spaces to promote wellbeing while Beata Heuman takes a playful stance on poolside languor. It's all about the bon voyage...

—SARAH EDWORTHY

SIMON BROWN (KEMP); BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES (KELLY AND FRIENDS); MOTTET MUSEUM BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA © PEABODY ESSEX MUSEUM, SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS. PHOTO BY LUKE ABIOL (LUGGAGE)



Tapping into the spirit of Grace Kelly (above), Kit Kemp has decked out luggage and hull in bright prints. The Duke of Windsor's luggage (top left)

Kit Kemp Design Team



CREATIVE FORCE
The co-owner and creative director of Firdale Hotels is also a successful textiles, fragrance and homewares designer

Cruise ships were once the primary means of long-distance travel. They were grand vessels decked in the finest wood, carved and embellished on the inside, smooth and slick on the outside. Unfortunately, that aura of glamour is fading. Modern ships often look like oversized electric kettles, failing to exude the mystique of bygone days.

In essence, cruise liners are floating hotels that accompany guests on their travels. Suitcases are packed for the voyage, to be unpacked just the once, despite the multitude of places one can explore en route. Returning to the era of romance, when cruising was not so much about the destination but about the journey—and inspired by the nautical jaunts of Elizabeth Taylor and

Richard Burton, Grace Kelly, Jackie and Aristotle Onassis—I want to put forward a vision of how to travel in style.

Luggage trunks were the preferred means of storage for transits in the golden age. Passengers would fill the assortment of compartments with their finest gear and all their treasured possessions. Reinventing these types of trunks, I have decked them in our specially designed vibrant fabrics, capturing the imagination and conjuring a sense of adventure and whimsy.

On the outside, I have used our Ozone design in green; on the inside, Travelling Light linen adorns the drawer compartments, and Peace and Love stripe creates a fresh lining. The bold patterns of these fabrics, designed for Christopher Farr, tell the tales of nomads and travellers from faraway lands. The small suitcase within the trunk, worked in Over the Moon denim fabric created for Andrew Martin, is detachable—perfect for an overnight shore outing.

The trunk would not exist without an equally vibrant and impressive vessel to travel the far-flung seas in... A slick, smart and sophisticated modern ship veiled in audacious prints with decks in eye-catching colours.



Beata Heuman



POOL DECK PARADISE

Beata Heuman was named *House & Garden's* inaugural Interior Designer of the Year in 2018

Above: Beata Heuman's sketch of a dreamy pool deck inspired by the fanciful world conjured on board the *SS Normandie* (below) in the 1930s



Sailing in the '30s, the *SS Normandie*

boasted a winter garden, aviary, even a mechanical puppet theatre in the playroom. I wanted my pool deck design to provide a floating oasis where passengers could enjoy a similar spirit of escapism. This sense of entering a fantastical world is something I aim to evoke with my interior design through unexpected, playful details.

The day bed (*far left in illustration*) is upholstered in my *Asteria's Folly* fabric, which features mythological creatures leaping through space—perfect for inspiring daydreams as guests doze in the sun. I also incorporated my *Luckdragon Stool* (*inset*), with its carved wooden lion heads providing a touch of whimsical grandeur. A double day bed serves as the perfect place to lounge with a cocktail, upholstered in my *Farao Stripe* fabric—its candy-coloured stripes reminiscent of summer days spent savouring sticky lollies on the beach.

Bamboo furniture and striped canopies conjure the classic glamour of 1970s Californian poolsides, while the swimming area is inspired by *A Bigger Splash*. Luca Guadagnino's 2015 film is set on a Sicilian island, and the Italian-style tiles around my pool are modelled on a motif created by *Balineum*, one of my favourite tile companies.

Tara Bernerd & Partners



THE WELLNESS QUEST

Tara Bernerd heads a team of 30 architects and designers at her Belgravia-based international interiors practice

When reflecting on cruise design today, it is important to look to the history of ocean liners. Many of the core philosophies from the past still apply. First and foremost, understanding what is demanded operationally, beyond style and aesthetics, is key. Successful design should marry the scale and grandeur of these impressive vessels with a fresher, more personalised experience. A lifestyle element must be catered for through entertainment, restaurants and even retail. However, keeping this sleek and current to meet the demands of the modern luxury traveller is an important and interesting challenge.

The last few years have seen an almost tribal move towards health and wellbeing. With people spending more time exploring different wellbeing experiences, the increasing demand for gyms, clubs and spas is also being met with a design that enhances an energy and atmosphere of achievement. More of an emphasis is being put on relaxed, organic spaces that promote emotional

wellbeing and provide an experience of connection to oneself and to others. The scale of a cruise liner, combined with its innate connection to the water, certainly lends itself to this cultural Zeitgeist. The very act of being on the water is in itself physically and emotionally uplifting and is something that could be both played upon and challenged through design. This ethos can be continued through the food, drink and entertainment options: the large auditoria of times gone by could be reinterpreted as more intimate lounges, hosting key speaker events. I would layer and zone outdoor spaces to create individual areas for different wellbeing practices and pursuits, as well as design more traditional pool decks for water sports and sunbathing.

Sleep is also a key touchpoint in the wellness quest, and yet cruise ship cabins can often feel overlooked in favour of the public areas. The sanctuary of the bedroom should never be underestimated and I would create a varied offering of styles and suites. Incorporating larger windows to enhance natural light and sliding doors that lead to private balconies would enable travellers to be enveloped by their oceanic surroundings.



Tara Bernerd advocates zones for wellbeing, including private cabin sanctuaries



In terms of interpreting this ethos aesthetically, the structure, materials and scale of a ship are a great source of inspiration for the interior design. The principles and industrial design elements often associated with loft-like properties on land can also be applied at sea given the incredible structures and support systems involved with these liners. I favour luxury finishes with an industrial edge, so cruise ships lend themselves perfectly to my style. I'd opt for a refined approach that plays on scale to create spaces with a gallery-like feel. The effect could embrace a loft-like atmosphere in a luxurious manner, marrying wide wooden floors, steel girders and Crittall doors to create timeless luxury on a grand scale.

I would introduce layer and texture in guest rooms through an eclectic

mix of furniture, fabrics and artwork to create a distinct design DNA that evokes a sense of place and identity. Exploring and expanding on this approach within cruising would result in ships that echo the atmosphere of a grand yet contemporary hotel.



SURREAL GARDEN

Courtauld graduate Rachel Chudley is known for her distinct use of colour and texture

Rachel Chudley

To cross time zones and arrive in a new land is disorientating. It involves casting aside the familiar comforts of home and entering a dream of suspended reality. You put your trust in a bubble, moving through the unknown. I have chosen to embrace this strange out-of-time feeling with a winter garden



Rachel Chudley's design (*far left*), puts the ocean centre stage with art inspired by Janine Janet's sculptures from *The Princess Grill* on board the *QE2* (*above*)

MARK HARRISON (BERNERD); SEAN MYERS (CHUDLEY); SWIM INK 2/LLO/GORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES (NORMANDIE POSTER); ARAM.CO.UK (E. GRAY STOOL)

DAILY MIRROR (MIRRORPIX VIA GETTY IMAGES (QE2)); NATIONAL RECORDS OF SCOTLAND (PRINCESS GRILL); MUSEUM OF NYC/GALLERY STOCK (GYM); PHILIP VILE (BERNERD CABINS)

grotto in which mirrors reflect light from the floor to the ceiling, and trees (real and fake) merge into the sea. I want to create the surreal notion of an internal, moving, living garden.

Nils Jean, the ocean liner aficionado, informed me that classic ocean liners were in part designed to distract passengers from the perils of the sea. The feeling of peace and serenity that

Playing with a fear of seeping water, we created calming ponds with swimming carp

comes with luxury travel is usually achieved by removing the passenger from the unknown nature of the elements outside. I wanted to flip this concept, putting the ocean centre stage. Instead of grand, windowless dining halls, we created an intimate space, open to its incredible surroundings by windows as large as can be. Playing with what must be the biggest fear of anyone in the bowels of the boat—seeping water—we have created calming interior ponds, complete with swimming carp.

For a generation valuing immersive experience, a voyage through the unfamiliar landscape of the ocean within the interior of a cruise ship could

be as rewarding as the destination. For thrill seekers, the idea of having a cocktail amid an ever-changing underwater landscape would surely appeal. In a time when our relationship with our environment is a daily discussion—and people contemplate their insignificance in an unpredictable universe—the idea of luxury is changing. The unique perspective from the bowels of a ship, decked out as an internal garden, would fascinate passengers.

In order to pay homage to the Art Nouveau and Art Deco eras that I am drawn to, I have included the curvaceous sea snakes of the beautiful Cox London tables, paired with twisting Adam Wallacavage lights.

I chose seating designed by Eileen Gray as it sits timelessly in any interior, and chandeliers designed by Cattelani and Smith as they appear to float in the air. Inspired by the wonderful sculptures of Janine Janet on the *QE2*, mollusc-encrusted statues pop up throughout the room. ■