

THE ART OF DESIGNING CRUISE SHIPS

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Joe Farcus has been involved in the interior design of every Carnival Cruise Lines ship since CARNIVALE, which entered service for Carnival in 1975. He has also designed interiors for Costa Cruises and has contributed to the designs of some Holland America ships as well as to the planning for QUEEN MARY 2. His style is distinct and sometimes controversial. It is always creative.

The interiors of the Carnival ships do not look like traditional ships or even like hotels. But then, they were not intended to be. "When guests make a decision to book a cruise, whether it is consciously or unconsciously, they are stepping off the earth. They are stepping off what normally feels comfortable to them. When you are on a ship, the decks move, you are sailing, you can't go out the front door and go someplace else at any time you want as you can with a hotel. I take that as a real sign of what people are looking for. They are looking to get away in a way in the strongest sense of the word and still be in a normal situation."

Accordingly, the interior public spaces on the Carnival ships are often flamboyant and powerful. For each ship, Farcus starts with a central concept idea that he then uses as inspiration in designing the various public rooms. The net result is that not only are the public rooms in each ship distinct from each other but they are distinct from the corresponding public rooms in each of that ship's sisters. "I try to make designs so that people onboard will experience things that they just don't experience in their real life. I think that that creates interest and I try to put in a wide range of design feelings throughout the ship so that people will be constantly discovering. In other words, on the first day of the cruise they haven't seen everything on the ship and hopefully on the last day they will still notice something that they hadn't seen before because of the myriad of details that are onboard. I believe that that creates interest. Interest takes you away from boredom and allows you to get into the environment. I think that is the road to enjoyment.

"It is like going to some interesting, fantastic place that you have never seen before. You might travel to some place that you are used to going to and you

might enjoy it very much. But when you go someplace that you have never been before and it is interesting and it is exciting, it creates a kind of feeling that you don't get in the former situation. This is what I am going for."

Farcus' interiors often pay tribute to artwork and design styles from the past. For example, on CARNIVAL PRIDE, Farcus made extensive use of Renaissance masterpieces blown up to giant proportions in the ship's atrium. On the same ship, the art deco dining room pays homage to the ocean liner NORMANDIE. Another room places the guests inside a Van Gogh painting while next door a collection of Japanese netsuke figurines decorates a karaoke bar. "When I was studying, a very big part of the architectural education had to do with architectural history. I think it is very, very important - - I believed it then and I believe it more so now - - that to be a good designer you need a broad base. You have to have an understanding of what has been done. I think unless you have had a really good understanding of what has been done in the past, you're ability to transcend that is limited, believe it or not. So, I have always been completely interested in design from pre-historic times right up into the present.

"Designers need a good understanding of history - - and history of architecture and design especially - - to be able to create something new. Very few things spring from the head of Zeus completely in a new form. Everything that a person does is related to their experience in one way or another. So if you can intellectually prepare yourself in the broadest possible sense then I think it just makes your palette that much broader to create designs.

"In the days of Rome and before that some really interesting things were done without the technology of today. If you go into the Pantheon, for example, it is an amazing space. Even with all the technology of today in special terms you could not have done better. Even the decorations are quite interesting and unique. But if you do not know that and you think 'Oh, classical architecture is just old . . .', then you are tying one hand behind your back from a design point of view.

"As a designer you have to have that ability to

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feel the awesomeness of it and not look at it as an old pile of stones. That is one reason why I love to travel; I love to see these things. You can only learn a certain amount by seeing photographs or videos. You have to experience that, and I get a charge out of that apart from actually seeing it, just being in the spot and feeling it."

Farcus' interiors, however, are not reproductions of rooms from the past. Rather, he takes elements from earlier styles and utilizes them in designs that are uniquely his own. "Architecture is an art and it should be practiced as an art. Therefore, to me you need to find your artistic muse within yourself and do your utmost to create individual design work that is not beholden to fashion or from this designer or that designer. So the designers that I have admired the most are the ones who have lived that kind of life.

"To me, the best example of that and the one that I have admired the most is Antonio Gaudi. If you go to Barcelona and you see the *Sagrada Familia*, you see a building that isn't even completed yet - - a building that was designed in the latter part of the 19th century and that has been under construction for more than 100 years - - and you see people respond to that. People are waiting in long queues every day to go through the building, see it from the inside and climb up the towers and ooh and ah admire.

"If you want to think of what the greatest success could be as an architect or designer that would surely be it for me. The people just totally respond to your work and the work itself is as humanly individualistic as it could possibly be. Gaudi was influenced by the world that he grew up in and the times but he managed to create a completely unique Gaudi style. I think that is admirable and hard to do because civilization is like erosion; it pressures you to be neutral in a way. To be individualistic, you have to be willing to swim upstream. You have to be willing to take a pie in the face. You are out there with what you do. You are expressing what you have inside of you as a designer. When you do it in an individualistic way, you don't know how people are going to respond to it until it is actually seen. That is the trick and difficulty of doing that kind of work."

The ships Farcus designs may be in service for 30 years, and thus he has to take into account the fact that tastes will change over time. "I never follow fashion. Fashion by definition means a relatively short period of time of life and then it moves on. Whereas architectural design or interior design I think should be apart

from fashion. The only time fashion applies in that area is when you are designing a store, for example. A store has a relatively short life in terms of its décor because they have to continually move forward and they are closely associated with fashion.

"For cruise ship design where the downtime is very, very limited for obvious reasons and the expense of doing work on a ship is incredibly high, you really want to get it right the first time. If you make designs that are, at least from my view, interesting and not something that people are going to see in their normal life every day, it is always relatable in a way. A good idea is a good idea and a good feeling is a good feeling. As a designer, I try to tap into that more than what is happening now today, so to speak. You can't divorce yourself from it completely and I don't make a fetish out of it completely, but I really try to make things in a way classical in the definition that I try to be timeless in the design."

A design limitation is the materials that can be used in a ship. "It is very challenging on a ship because the fire regulations are quite strict and the amount of combustible materials that can be used is miniscule. So you have to be very clever and experienced in how to use them. Weight is a problem. To have a marble column is pretty much impossible because marble columns are huge blocks of masonry. But that is the art and the skill of being an experienced ship architect. You have to know what is out there and you have to know how to achieve the effects with the materials that are available, practical or allowable to be used on a ship. It is an interesting process. It is a craft in a way. You go by experience, technical expertise, and then feeling. You always have to be able to look at things with fresh eyes, not as an experienced professional but how a guest might see it. That is kind of a discipline also. That is what makes up the individual characteristics of the designers who are doing this kind of work."

Farcus is aware of what other cruise ship designers are doing but declined to name either those whose work he admires or those he dislikes. "There are definitely some talented people out there doing work. The things that I respond to most are those things that to me express an individual design - - they don't come from anything. I can even like things in a way that I don't like as a result of the admiration of seeing something that has been created by an individual. When I see architecture or design practiced as art then I find that admirable."