

The true value of art

Tal Danai, founder and CEO of ArtLink, speaks to us about the importance of art in helping to enrich the onboard guest experience

The Spice Wall onboard Seabourn Encore is made from 1,840 hand-cast glass bricks, dyed in colours ranging from turmeric to cinnamon

Let's begin with a blunt question.

Why place art on a cruise ship?

Because it naturally belongs there. Travel is about exploration, as much of the traveller's inner world as of the destinations, cultures and people encountered. Art is a powerful form of cultural expression; it records and communicates emotions and experiences. Art is therefore a natural companion to journey and exploration, finding an organic home onboard sea-going vessels.

After many years developing art collections for hotels, is curating and providing for a ship different?

There are fundamental differences that are integral to the experience of travelling on a cruise ship, which influence the art programme – both the curatorial work and its subsequent technical considerations – that makes art practice on sea a unique experience.

Take guest experience, for example; unlike most hotel guests, cruise guests stay onboard from one week to several months, encountering the art daily for an extended period, so it is even more important for the art to be multi-layered and content-rich, revealing a little at a time.

Then consider that when calling on destinations the world over, guests experience diverse cultures, exquisite arts and

Image: A. Pinchuk



fascinating people. Upon re-boarding, the art must still retain its vibrancy and interest.

Lastly are the many technical challenges that a ship poses – it's an environment that is constantly vibrating, so regular attachments cannot be used. Also, the immense steel structure distorts all dimensions when in water, creating an engineering challenge to anything connected to more than one surface. Add the strictest safety requirements to the mix, and it's an extremely complicated environment to work in.

'Storytelling' has recently been a buzz word within the design industry and I imagine art, an excellent vehicle to move a story, must have a significant role within this design approach. How do you select your stories?

I strongly believe that to create genuine guest experiences one should tell one's own story and not a story one thinks others would like to hear. We do not travel the world to have someone tell us our own

stories; we travel to experience others' stories, which in turn may enrich our own. To be impactful, a story should resonate emotionally or intellectually, or both.

With that in mind, I attempt to weave the ship's brand story along with those of the designer, artists and my own into an engaging and enriching collection.

Has there been a notable development of art within the cruise industry?

We are a relatively new player in this court, but I see a genuine effort to incorporate art into the overall guest experience, which ties into the ships' voyages and destinations. This development is undoubtedly leading to very creative outcomes.

ArtLink is currently launching a programme that will further tie art into the guest experience and dramatically challenge the traditional art-as-expense perspective. Art does have a great return on investment; it just needs to be harnessed properly. **C&F**

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