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Cruise Industry News

Q U A R T E R L Y

THE CRUISE EXPERIENCE

EUROPEAN CRUISE LINES

ITALIAN SHIPBUILDING



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SYMPHONY AT SEA



The Crystal Symphony sailed that cruise line's first world cruise this past winter. (credit: Ocean Images)

Last January 17, Crystal Symphony, second of the Harmony-class, departed Los Angeles on the company's first world cruise. In so doing, she joined a select flotilla of upscale vessels, some from Cunard's Anglo-Nordic stable — Queen Elizabeth 2, Royal Viking Sun and Sagafjord — as well as Holland America Line's venerable Rotterdam or newer Statendam; in fact, QE2 was embarking her world cruise shipload at an adjacent pier. In common, lucky passengers aboard all of these vessels annually evade winter while completing a languid global circumnavigation or portion thereof.

Is there a dwindling reservoir of prospective passengers for these ultimate cruises? No one in marketing is quite sure. Certainly, there is no actuarial dearth of retired, affluent Americans. Most have already embraced a sunbelt existence, how-

ever, so that finding sufficient numbers of them anxious to embark on a voyage that consumes a quarter of their year is challenging. For its maiden venture, Crystal Cruises recruited a hundred full world cruise passengers, a creditable score for the opening round of what I hope will be a long-sustained campaign. Mind you, not only signing but also retaining global recidivists is a serious, if not cutthroat, business. Competition for their patronage is fierce and addicted world cruisers who change or even threaten to change company allegiance must be courted assiduously.

Crystal's President Joseph Watters enters the market at a propitious moment. Both the Rotterdam and Sagafjord are due for withdrawal and although their passengers will predictably migrate to the Statendam or Royal Viking Sun respectively, some may well transfer their allegiance to the Crystal Symphony. They will

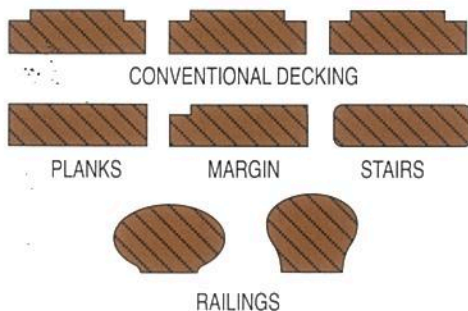
find an impressive conveyance: She offers not only glitter and sybaritic ambiance, but also a beguiling world cruise atmosphere that extends throughout the vessel.

The World Cruise Experience

Although present-day cruising is, simplistically, touted as one class, it patently is not. World cruise vessels adhere to demanding standards of catering, service and behavior that dictate the attitude of every staff and crew member on board, from captain to busboy. Passengers flocking aboard seven-day Caribbean tonnage are seldom welcomed with the gratifying, practiced solicitude that greeted Crystal Symphony's world cruise "guests" — the company's preferred nomenclature — embarking that bright January day in Los Angeles.

Moreover, their on-board tenancy of several weeks or months fosters an

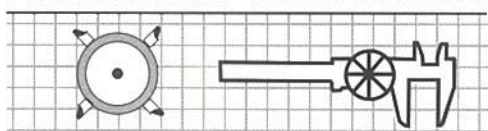
Teak Decking For Newbuildings



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irreplaceable passenger/crew symbiosis. "I love world cruises," confessed Crystal Symphony's sports director Kim Walters, "because you really have time to make friends." She has made a lot, for this would be her sixth world cruise, all of them aboard Royal Viking Sun.

Symphony's Refinements

This second Crystal vessel entered service in April 1995, five years after the debut of the prototype. Finnish- rather than Japanese-built, incorporated within her are many refinements and improvements. One is apparent from the moment of boarding. The embarkation lobby — Crystal Plaza — is more commodious on this second vessel, dominated by a towering, spiral glass sculpture enfolded within a crescent or perpetual rainfall and flanked by a single, giant Ionic column. A loop of shops embraces Crystal Plaza's upper level as well as an expanded Bistro, that admirable little watering hole where coffee and pastry or light luncheons of cheese, meat, bread and fruit can be taken while watching the world go by. Both levels of Crystal Plaza are Symphony's social cross-roads; throughout the day and evening, everyone passes by, to shop, to dine, to gamble, to book another cruise or shore excursion and deal with the concierge or purser.

Symphony is two feet wider overall than the Harmony, which delights her master, Captain Helge Brudvik, save when he transits the Panama Canal. Up atop the vessel, more open deck space has been provided around the forward pool. On a world cruise, Hotel Manager Joseph Matt pointed out, extra sunning space is scarcely necessary, but on shorter, more popular Caribbean or trans-Canal cruises, the amplified acreage has proved essential.

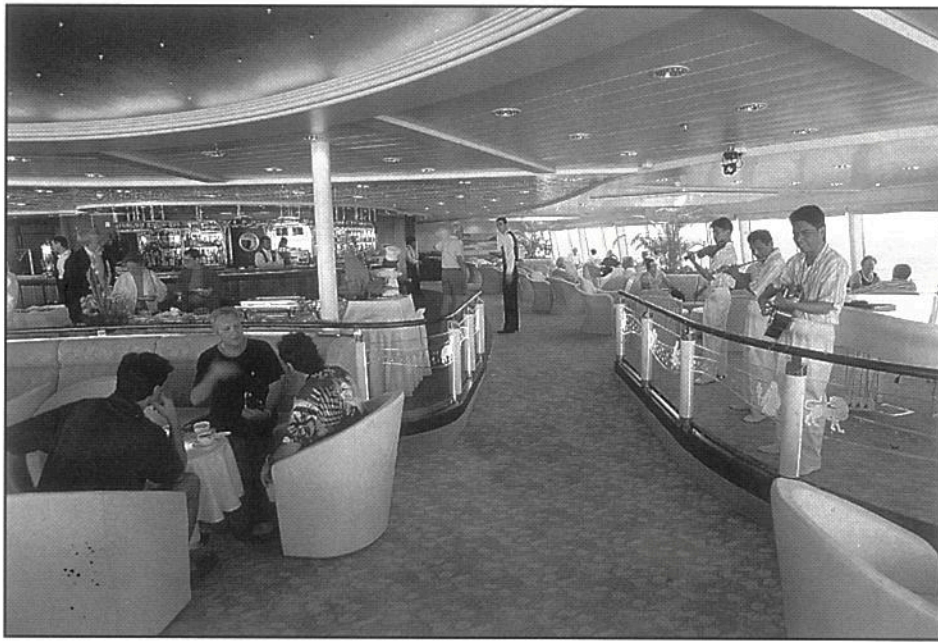
However, that exterior largesse has been achieved at the expense of a noteworthy Sun Deck interior further forward. Harmony's separate Palm Court and Vista Lounge have, on board Symphony, been combined into an abbreviated Palm Court incorporating a sweep of glass overlooking the bow. Does it really matter? I am afraid it does. I sailed on Harmony's 1990 delivery crossing from Yokohama to Hawaii; to my mind, her Palm Court remains one of cruising's most successful public rooms, a serene, mahogany-floored expanse of white wicker, potted palms and skylights, complete with vistas to both sides of the vessel high above the sea. It is sad to have that kind of prime shipboard space truncated.

However, Symphony scores better with her expanse of forward glass; its height is lower, the windows can be optionally curtained to reduce glare and the view forward is unobstructed since the slightly narrower apron of deck beyond the glass is inaccessible to passengers.

Dining

At the after end of Sun Deck, the Lido Cafe across the stern has garden wings extending forward on both sides, greatly increasing capacity for breakfasts and luncheons in this busy facility. On board Harmony, the Lido's starboard wing accommodated Crystal Cruise's great secret dining weapon, alternative restaurants Prego and Kyoto. On the second ship, these two popular eating places, sharing a common galley, have been placed lower in the hull, readily accessible within the dense spread of public rooms occupying deck six. On board this second ship, however, it is Prego and Jade Garden rather than Kyoto; Jade Garden offers not merely Japanese dishes but generic Oriental fare.

Almost unique among the world's cruising fleets, these lavish dining rooms add a marvelous dimension to Crystal's evening meal offerings. Passengers may book in either restaurant with new-made friends at an hour of their own choosing. Prego, the more popular of the two, has been deftly decorated by one of Crystal's resident designers, **Dr. Vittorio Garroni**. He has filled the space with a swagged Venetian pastiche of extravagantly decorated chairs, striped red and white columns aping gondola mooring posts and clusters of Venetian prints adorning pale ocher walls. The sum total creates a bewitchingly elegant evening glow, as irresistible as it is nearly flawless. Matching the excellence of the decor, service and food are exceptional, although maitre d'hotel Shaun Herbert should advise his waiters that seafood pasta is never garnished with Parmesan. Miraculously, this lavish gastro-



Tea is a welcome daily ritual in the Crystal Symphony's Palm Court. (credit: John Maxtone-Graham)

conomic extra costs nothing save a minimal, \$5-per-head tip for your obliging, hard-working steward. Here is innovative yet classic shipboard dining at its very best, reminiscent of those glory days up in Queen Mary's memorable Verandah Grill.

Incidentally, this paean to Crystal's additional restaurants in no way negates my enthusiasm for Symphony's day-to-day dining room menus, the excellent lido spreads and the occasional thematic midday buffets that Crystal mounts so well around the covered aft pool. One eats uncommonly well — too well! — on board Crystal tonnage.

Cabins

However important to document a vessel's public rooms, her private rooms cry out for evaluation as well. Whereas the impact of the show lounge, dining room or lido cafe may blur, shipboard cabins remain in sharp focus, subject as they are to the kind of daily scrutiny that larger shipboard spaces seldom endure. Sweden's Robert Tillberg's design scheme for the vessel's modular cabins (none inside and all prefabricated save for the largest suites) is exemplary. In the sanitary block, as naval architects refer to cabin bathrooms, vast improvements have been wrought. Harmony's infamous, too-

short oval tubs, with their excruciating mirrored surrounds, are no more: a conventional tub, twin sinks and bountiful shelf and cabinet space distinguish these successful new Crystal bathrooms.

Beds are double, if required, and furnished with duvets as well as two mohair lap-rugs. The safe has been cleverly sited above the icebox within a storage tower to the left of the dressing table; to the right are, *mirabile dictu*, four commodious, railed bookshelves. Sensibly, a VCR is incorporated within every cabin television. Thanks to an inspired suggestion by the ship's executive housekeeper, Leena Hietanen, passenger lifejackets are stowed in a cunning secret compartment beneath the sofa's seat cushions. One small but endearing cabin perk is provision each port day of a plate of cookies, a boon for dilatory passengers returned from ashore too late for tea. A vastly improved closet design, complete with sliding louvered doors and interior lighting, is just sufficient to accommodate notoriously extensive world cruise wardrobes; hangers are, thankfully, conventional rather than the irritating ringed variety, although a stewardess told me that pilferage by "guests" is a recurring problem.

Echos of Royal Viking

It is essential to realize that Symphony's, as well as Harmony's, superb floating cosmos remains in pandemic debt to a hallowed predecessor. Echoes of Royal Viking Line resonate throughout both vessels, typifying the company's socio-philosophical core. Many crew and staff sailed formerly with Royal Viking; in fact, every person mentioned by name in this article, from the president on down, is a Royal Viking alumnus, as were countless numbers of my fellow passengers on the two segments between Los Angeles and Hong Kong. Crystal has assumed RVL's enviable mantle of acceptability for many of the world's cruising elite, not only full world cruisers documented above, but for thousands of upscale, country-clubbed, golfing, peripatetic Americans who rejoice in Crystal's winning combination of polished luxe and global itineraries. Crystal's optimum passenger pool is made up of experienced ship aficionados who expect and appreciate the kind of dedicated attention that, within only five years, has emerged as the company's hallmark. I encountered only two disappointments: one, a mystifying absence of promenade deck chairs and two, the jarring vulgarity of Caesar's Palace Casino; a cruise line with Crystal's pretensions should embrace a tonier gaming partner.



Captain Helge Brudvik maneuvers his vessel forward of the Royal Viking Sun at the Philippine port of Cebu. (credit: John Maxtone-Graham)

Two memorable days — one at sea, the other in port — remain indelibly in the mind. Trans-Pacific passage offers an irreplaceable geographical advantage, enormous distances between ports that translate into that Caribbean rarity, multiples of successive sea days. Perhaps our most unforgettable sea day aboard Crystal Symphony followed a call at Cairns on Australia's northeastern coast. We sailed languidly north, paralleling the Great Barrier Reef, threading through idyllic waters studded with an endless archipelago — densely wooded elevations, rocky outcrops or simple sand spits. I am always struck at how passage aboard a deep water vessel is never more appealing than during paradoxical adjacency to land.

At Cebu, in the Philippines, thanks to a fortuitous itineraries coincidence, we tied up just ahead of Royal Viking Sun. Both masters — our Helge Brødvik and Royal Viking's Ola Harsheim — had agreed to an unprecedented program of inter-ship passenger visits. All afternoon, passengers and crew from both ships wandered congenially along decks and public rooms of their opposite number. It was only momentarily unsettling to see Royal Viking stewardesses strolling through Symphony's Palm Court at teatime. Any residual competitive edge between the two vessels was subordinate as occupants of those two world-cruise rivals idled away a tropical afternoon in amiable proximity. —
John Maxtone-Graham

CRUISER'S FACT SHEET

Ship: Crystal Symphony
Cruise Line: Crystal Cruises
Built: 1995
Passenger Capacity: 960
Tonnage: 50,000 grt

Ship layout and concept is basically similar to that of Crystal Harmony — with improvements. In terms of spaciousness, the Symphony has 51.6 gross tons per passenger. The verandah/cabin ratio is 57.5 percent.

TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Propulsion: Wartsila-Sulzer, ABB
Propellers: Kamewa
Steering: Ulstein Frydenbo
Rudder: Becker Rudder
Thrusters: KaMeWa

Stabilizers: Brown Brothers
Navigation: ECDIS
Lifeboats: Waterman, Viking
Galley equipment: Precetti SPA
Air conditioning: ABB Flakt Marine AB

OTHER INFORMATION

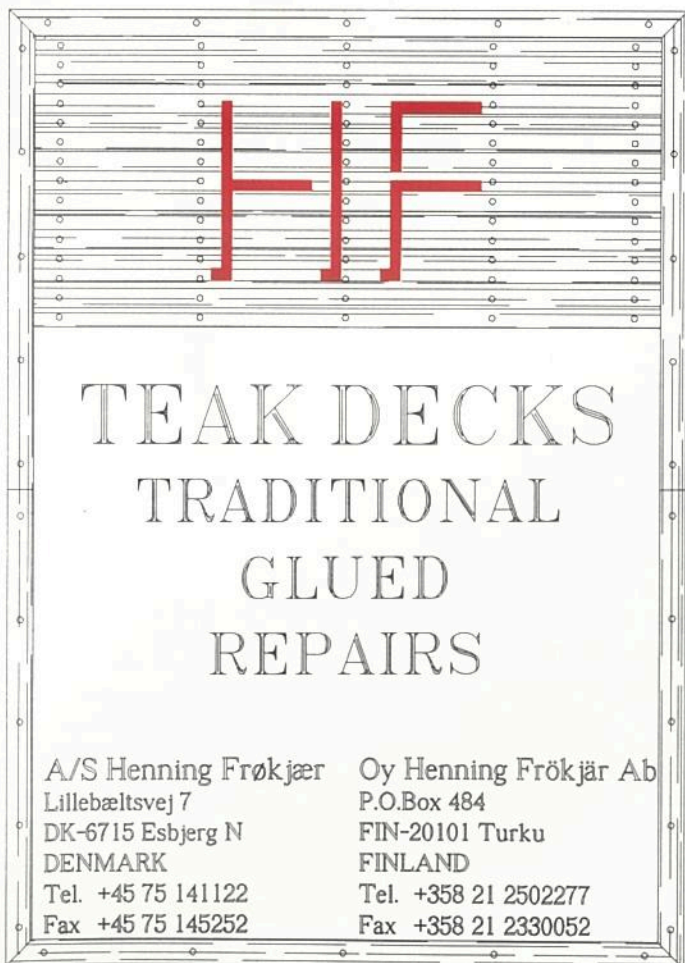
The Crystal Symphony is a twin-screw motor vessel with diesel-electric ACC-ACC-type machinery, with frequency converter system. The ship is equipped with six main engines, each of them driving an AC generator. Propellers are driven by two AC-propulsion motors.

Normal lighting is 220 volts, incandescent in cabins, with special lighting as well as incandescent in public areas.

Air conditioning in cabins is of the dual-duct, high-velocity type; in public areas, the single-duct, low-velocity type.

An automatic sprinkler, addressable fire alarm and detection system is installed throughout accommodations and public spaces, including staircases, corridors, entrances, galleys, all service spaces, garbage room, etc.

In terms of waste management, wet garbage is stored in silos and/or burnt in two incinerators. Burnable waste is shredded, stored in a silo and burnt in an incinerator. Glass is crushed and aluminum cans shredded, then stored in containers for recycling. Tin cans are shredded and stored in containers and discharged overboard where permissible.



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