

NEW GIANTS OF THE SEA:

CRISIS OF THE AMERICAN MODEL AND NEW ETHICS IN DESIGN, FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF THE MSC FANTASIA

We have seen how the recent crisis of the stock exchanges and international financial system has brought about important changes in companies and in the objectives of family expenditure, generating enormous contractions in many economic sectors but also creating, thanks to greater selectivity in the expense balance sheets, unexpected chances for growth in others. One of these is that of cruises, already in incredible expansion before the crisis, and which today is identified almost as a shelter good by the consumer-tourist, both for the irreplaceable convenience, for the high degree of reliability of the services offered aboard and for the different destinations.

This particular aspect linked with the crisis pushes us to reflect on its deepest meanings, imposing a cultural renewal and a more ethical approach in strategic choices on all those employed in the sector. The great expectations of a public that is ever more differentiated and demanding, represent a clear demand for progress and improvement in terms of quality, evolution and innovation even in design.

From the designers' point of view, ever more imposing post-panamax cuts allow the introduction of important novelties on cruise ships, in the spatial, typological and layout planes, which in themselves do not necessarily constitute – with the exception of the increase in the number of external cabins – progress in terms of quality, or innovation of pure design, and risk reproposing, for their typological affiliation with the building industry, the same characteristics of speculation and dehumanisation. Indeed, one is dealing with novelties of an essentially structural and commercial type – *increase in external cabins, new uncovered "malls", new spaces suitable for the creation of revenue points, swimming pool areas, ever vaster and more elaborate sports and aqua parks and, in general, an ever greater independence between internal architecture and structural constraints* – which, without the indispensable cultural change of the designers of this

sector, risks eliminating all the innovative potential linked with the gigantism of future prototypes, binding them once more to a secondary role compared to similar experiments on land and at sea.

Today in this sector, it is now recognised that the crisis of the “American model”, where by American we don’t mean the rich creative potential of the American people in a strict sense, but the model still imposed by the main monopolist of the sector. A model that applies archaic methods, long since overtaken in the most successful land projects, and which in its principles continues to favour an abstract and distorted search for special effects at all costs, with a single clear obsession: that of theorising – despite certain incoherent, vaguely “committed” advertising slogans – the mass global village, an artificial hotchpotch lacking any cultural reference or artistic depth.

So many, too many, ships are denied all the creative and cultural potential represented today by the evolved design product, now the truly recognised driver of qualitative growth of design in every creative environment, from land to sea, from fashion to pleasure yachting and artistic experimentation. The absence of the fundamental value in contemporary interior design – like that dedicated to cruise ships – is equivalent to the total absence of ethics with regard to the passenger-user, too often considered as a battery hen to distract and shock to optimise exploitation, rather than a human being with his/her own cultural appetite and sensitivity. We well know how demanding and worldly wise the European public is, and to which the cruise market still offers to little that is appropriate for its taste.

It is undeniable that it is on this new sensitivity that MSC is moving today, having entered the cruise world with the clear objective of leaving an important mark, in the sense of innovation of the cruise sector, as only an outsider – considering its leadership in a different field – could do.

From this premise a fruitful relationship has been born and has developed between MSC and our studio, as ever committed to formal research and a more refined language than that normally expressed in this sector, which has allowed us to reach those synergies useful for identification of a globally new product, more ethical and more sensitive to the evolution of a market that, as we recall, does not concern only that of cruises, but especially that of escapism and holidays, of which a cruise is – a fact that today amplifies its moral and driving role – the cutting edge.

MSC FANTASIA is quite rightly “new”, being the first building – since the last of their kind built in the 1930s – to express in a complete and homogeneous way the refined spirit of its time, the best spirit and culture of today’s society.

Wishing to summarise the primary aspects connected with this new project

from the interior design point of view, the following values can be listed:

- ASSERTION OF INTERIOR DESIGN AS ONE OF THE CRUCIAL RESPONSES TO THE DEMAND FOR ESCAPISM, AND THUS AS AN UNPRECEDENTED, "ETHICAL" ECONOMIC DRIVER (NEW FORM OF PRODUCT).
- IMPOSITION OF HIGH QUALITY DESIGN, OBTAINED THROUGH HETEROGENEOUS AND ORIGINAL CREATIVE EXPERIMENTATION, RICH IN THEMATIC MEANING AND ARTISTIC CONTENT, MEDIATED BY RIGOROUS CONTROL OF THE ITALIAN DESIGN CULTURE.
INTERVENTIONS THAT SYNTHESISE, EVEN IN THEIR MOST COURAGEOUS AND INNOVATIVE FORMS, THE NEW WAY OF LIVING CONTEMPORANEITY, ACCORDING TO THE WINNING INTERPRETATION OF THE PUREST MADE IN ITALY.
- INTRINSIC AND TANGIBLE HIGH QUALITY:
FOR THE FIRST TIME ON A MODERN PASSENGER SHIP THE SAME QUALITY AND EXPRESSIVE RICHNESS IS APPLIED TO 100% OF THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPACES. NO OTHER SHIP IN THE WORLD – NOT EVEN IN THE CLASS OF LUXURY CRUISE SHIPS – OFFERS SUCH A WIDE DEGREE OF PERSONALISATION AND QUALITY OF DESIGN AND MATERIALS AS ON THE MSC FANTASIA .
EVEN THE SMALLEST AND ACCESSORY ENVIRONMENT HAS BEEN STUDIED IN DETAIL AND FINALISED, TO OBTAIN UNPRECEDENTED LEVELS OF QUALITY AND EXPRESSIVITY, WITH THE SAME CRITERIA AND THE SAME COMMITMENT WITH WHICH ONE DESIGNS A PRIVATE YACHT.
THE GENERALISED USE OF NATURAL MATERIALS AND COMPOSITES OF A VERY HIGH RANGE – WITHIN THE LIMITS IMPOSED BY THE REGULATIONS IN FORCE – SUCH AS FOR INSTANCE THE *PORTORO* MARBLE IN THE CAFETERIA, THE SWAROVSKI FLOORING ON THE LARGE STAIRWAYS IN THE MAIN FOYER , OR THE NATURAL ROCKS FOR THE WALLS OF THE SPA AREA, BEAR WITNESS TO THE PRECISE WILL TO OFFER ALL PASSENGERS LUXURIOUS SERVICES AND ENVIRONMENTS BUT WITH REAL AND SINCERE MATERIALS, A LONG WAY FROM THE PREVAILING PRACTICE OF THE EASY AND VULGAR "RESIN EVERYWHERE".

More and more these new profiles, added to a real and honest, formal experimentation of design, will make up the new parameters to take into consideration for the building of great ships of quality.

Beyond them there will neither be the indispensable affirmation of new models of shareable projects, nor the tangible demonstration of the new progress reached in the moralisation of commercial buildings.

From now on the challenge will no longer be in the pure demonstration of physical superiority or in the spasmodic attempt to attract attention, much rather in knowing how to keep abreast of the times.

Hitting the target by educating, as well as amusing, giving that particular and unique meaning to every building able to make it eternal at least in the historical and iconographical memory, considered the ineluctable

transitoriness that characterises the most fascinating industry that there is.

DE JORIO DESIGN INTERNATIONAL

Marco de Jorio Project Manager