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Invitation to Travel

Interview by **Christine Van**
Images by **T3 Architects**

Oi speaks to Charles Gallavardin, Founder, General Director and Architect at T3 Architects, on their first project designing the cruise ship Emerald Harmony

What was it like to work on the design of a ship compared to a land-based project?

It is very exciting to work on a river cruise ship project as it was a new challenge for T3 Architects (t3architects.com). The main difference is about the constraints that we had compare to a land-based building because the space must be very well optimized and details must anticipate any problems because the partitions of a ship are made in welded metal and participate to the general structure, so there's no way to move it or demolish it when it is built.

You've designed luxury hotels (for example, Bioclimatic 4-star Hotel Myanmar) and restaurants (Spice Viet Organic Hue, etc). In designing Emerald Harmony, what were you able to adapt from those venue types and what had to be rethought to meet the demands of a ship?

Compare to any land-based project, T3 could not make the ship "bioclimatic" knowing that sun orientation, main winds, and surroundings are "moving" all the time. We know that it had been designed by a naval architect from Croatia to be as sustainable as possible in terms of energy consumption, waste water

treatment system, no use of plastic on board, etc. and on our end we tried to use materials that follow specifications that promote "safety first", especially fire safety, which is the main risk on a ship.

Of course, you have to take into consideration the elements when designing a ship, so how did you decide what building materials to use for long-lasting durability against the extreme sunlight and water damage?

Our client owns several other cruise ships, both in Europe and Southeast Asia, so we had their feedbacks and experiences to make this ship very sustainable and resistant to tropical conditions. It is probably one of the most luxurious and sustainable cruise ship in the region.

We have used Low-E glass to reduce sun exposure and save energy, the white color of the ship is also a manner to reflect the sun and limit energy consumption. All materials used have some international certification to get proper "air quality" and limit chemicals as much as possible. Water treatment has also been considered to offer the cleanest system as possible.



Did you use elements or materials that we don't usually see aboard a ship?

We have design a specific oversized pending lamp, inspired by the conic hats, but installed it upside down and with the possibility to dim the light and change the color to create different ambiances in the main Lobby. Sebastien SICOT, the best art ironmaker in Vietnam, tailor made the metal structure while the Barrisol team did a great job by supplying the specific textile and under-structure.

What was your overall concept for the design of interiors onboard Emerald Harmony?

The main challenge in terms of interior design was to follow Emerald Brand standards (based in Europe and quite minimalist) but bringing the Indochina atmosphere carefully, considering that the main brief was "Saigon River".

Furniture, art pieces, tropical plants and color palette bring you into Vietnam and Cambodia but the general feeling is also Western minimalist.

T3 wanted to create a "chic" atmosphere in reference to a private yacht and absolutely avoid the impression of a "floating hotel". Acoustic, comfort and privacy have been carefully considered to give the impression of a privileged person experiencing the connection from Vietnam to Cambodia through the charms of the Saigon River. In terms of facilities, Emerald Harmony offers an amazing lobby spread over four stories, a comfortable lounge, a nice restaurant, a library with board games and books available, a pool with a nice wooden and outdoor bar, an authentic spa, a hair-dresser and a gym, and even a mini-golf on the rooftop.



Where did you look for design inspiration, in general, and specifically for Emerald Harmony?

T3 inspiration coming from curiosity first, a lot of traveling around the world, good connection with artists, a real conviction that we, architects and interior designers, must be a model in terms of sustainability and be an example to others.

For Emerald specifically, I would say that T3 had to carefully bring together Vietnamese and Khmer cultures, but with a really good understanding of the client's expectations (mainly from Anglo-Saxon culture) in terms of comfort, standards and needs but also not to be too conservative as to surprise them and make their experience unique.

What room or feature presented the most challenges?

The most important challenge when designing a cruise ship is to give the impression of space and offer the widest panorama view of the river wherever you are in the ship, even if the rooms are usually smaller than a similar land-built hotel. Similar challenges with the ceilings, which are quite low in a ship so we created several designs to maximize it from a guest's point of view: installation of mirrors or reflective materials, openings between the different floors to get double or even triple height (lobby), etc.

So, what's the most rewarding aspect of designing a cruise ship?

The most rewarding aspect of designing a ship is to see it to cast off and see it start its real life on the water. A ship is a great "invitation to travel" and T3 is proud to have designed such a poetic project. ■

