

INSIDE VIEW:

CREATING FUN

A Conversation with Donato Becce, Hotel Director, Carnival Dream

By

Richard H. Wagner

Donato Becce had the privilege of being Carnival Dream's first hotel director. A veteran of Cunard Line and Renaissance Cruises as well as several shoreside hotels, Becce arrived at the shipyard four months before Carnival took ownership of the Dream in order to oversee the fitting out of the ship's hotel and to meld the hotel staff into a team. As such, he played a major role in shaping the vacation experience that Dream offers.

"My goal is that we become a ship that will shine out there. We are the first in this class of ship and we should make a difference. Our guests expect it to be different. We are the Carnival Dream so we have to make a brand new experience. We have always been very good with [service] but we should give a little bit more experience and magical moments onboard."

"We are trying to create opportunities for all kinds of guests - - the ones who want to be quiet, the ones who want the fun; the more active, the less active. Nowadays, you want to cater to a variety of people."

Carnival Dream is the largest ship in the Carnival fleet. She is based on a design that began with the Carnival Destiny. That

design evolved and grew larger, becoming the mainstay of the Carnival fleet with the 110,000 gross ton Carnival Conquest and her sister ships. However, as Mr. Becce pointed out, from a hotel perspective, the Dream is significantly different than the Conquest-class ships.

The centerpiece of the Conquest-class ships is the lobby. At the base of a multi-story atrium, the lobby contains the guest services desk, the shore excursions desk and a bar. It also lies between the main theater and the entrance to one of the dining rooms. The lobby thus is a crossroads with lots of activity.

On Carnival Dream, the lobby has been redesigned. "It is a very beautiful lobby. To me, it is one of the best looking lobbies that I have seen on all the Conquest-class ships. We created more space near the bar by moving the stage and placing the singers on top of the bar."

Since the stage is now more visible from the balconies surrounding the lobby, couches have been placed on those decks overlooking the lobby. "You can actually be on the upper decks and have a view. You can be below or you can be up."

In addition to the live music and activities that take place in the lobby, there are special shows. "Late in the evening, we might have the G-Force, the acrobats, in there to entertain. We like to do something different for those guests who may not feel like moving from a couch or who just like to be there."

A new focal point on Carnival Dream is the Ocean Plaza. Because the Dream is longer than the Conquest-class ships, there was room on Deck Five for an additional public area. Rather than just add another bar or lounge, Carnival made the area into a new crossroads - - the indoor promenade intersects a new corridor that links the doors to the outdoor promenade (the Lanai). At this intersection, there is the ship's specialty coffee bar, the Plaza Bar, a stage, dance floor and tables and chairs. Within close proximity are the sushi bar and the ship's largest internet café.

"It is a great place to sit down, relax and do activities. We use it a lot for activities - for trivia [and for theme nights]. We do different things - - a variety of things. We have a Latin band there but we also try to give variations with the music as well."

Between the specialty coffee bar and the Ocean Plaza Bar is a bar area with no specific designation. "We use it for specials. Before dinner, we put items there like cheese cubes so if somebody is sitting there for a drink and wants to have something to snack on, it is available. Sometimes we run some specials cocktails from there as well. They are not necessarily on the ship's cocktail list. We try to give a little variation."

The Lanai is a unique outdoor promenade. Whereas the outdoor promenades on the Conquest-class ships are located in recesses in the ship's sides under the lifeboats, the Lanai projects out from the sides of the ship over the water some 20 feet with the lifeboats suspended below it. The result is a wide outdoor boulevard that wraps around the ship providing an area for exercise and relaxation in the sun. In addition to premium deck furniture, the Lanai has four whirlpools and two outdoor

seating areas where guests can bring drinks and/or food from the Ocean Plaza.



Hotel Director Donato Becce

"Guests were missing something [on earlier ships - - a place] where they go out and walk around. You walk around [the Lanai] and you feel: 'Wow, I am in a building.' You look up and the staterooms look like an apartment building. It is a great thing to feel."

The indoor Deck Five promenade "is also a little bit different. [On the Conquest class] it used to go outside the casino. Now it goes through the casino."

"It is a much bigger casino. One thing we have done on this ship that is different is that we have only one area of the casino that is smoking. Before, it used to be that all of the casino was smoking with one area non-smoking."

"We also have an additional promenade on Deck Four, which goes from the front to the back of the ship." This addresses a passenger flow problem on the Conquest-class. On those ships, the public rooms are primarily on decks four and five with a few on deck three. Due to the fact that one of the dining rooms is in the middle of the ship, guests could only get from the public areas in the front of the ship to those in the aft sections via the deck five promenade. This meant having to go upstairs and then down again if one wanted to get from a public room in the front of deck four to a public room on the same deck

in the back Taking advantage of Carnival Dream's extra width, the new promenade runs along side the midship dining room, thus connecting fore to aft.

Dream's additional length also created more space on Deck Four and that area is occupied primarily by "the conference center, which is pretty big. It can accommodate large groups."

"Then we have Club O2 for the 15 to 17 year olds and the Circle C for the 12 to 14 year olds. Teens don't like to be on display. They like to have their own little zone for comfort. And the Arcade is right behind [the teen clubs]. It is the largest Arcade that we have built in the Carnival fleet."

The teen area takes the place of what is the large cigar bar on the Conquest-class ships. "We really don't want to have cigar smoke inside so we decided just to have [cigar smoking] outside. A lot of people appreciate cigars but the majority does not. It really has not been missed."

At the aft end of the ship, the large lounge has become a comedy club. "We [usually] have five shows a night - - two family and three adult. Again, we are trying to have variety." For example, repeat passengers who may have already seen the production show in the main theater on an earlier cruise "might want to have something different. Since we have different comedians coming aboard, it is something new, something different. Again, you are given a choice in where to go and what to do."

Guests also have a choice with dining. Recently, Carnival has been rolling out a flexible dining option across its fleet. Carnival Dream is the first ship to be built with the flexible dining option in mind. The ship has two main dining rooms. One dining room and lower level of the other dining room adhere to the traditional two-seating dining system. The upper level of the latter dining room is on the flexible system.

"It is called 'Your Time Dining.' A percentage of our guests do not like to go to an assigned seating. They want to eat at

different times. That is a thing we are able to provide. We have an average of about 500 guests in Your Time Dining. They chose any time they feel like from 5:30 onwards."

"We know that NCL [i.e. Norwegian Cruise Line] does it but I think we have actually gone one step above. The guests can request the same waiter if they want. If they have a bottle of wine, their names go on the bottle and it is set aside for them. If they are having a celebration, we can gather all the information and accommodate that."

Traditionally, the dining experience on a Carnival ship has included nightly singing and dancing by the restaurant staff preceding the dessert course. With guests coming and going at different times, there is no one time that is convenient for all of the guests and all of the staff for such performances.

"It is a little bit difficult to do in the Your Time Dining." Guests who do want to see such performances can always go and watch it in the traditional dining rooms. Some guests may not want to see these shows. "Now there is a choice for them not to be there as well. Again, it is giving different choices to the guests. That is what it comes down to - - choices, having choices."

There are also options with regard to the formality of the dining experience. "Some guests like to dress up, some do not. If they like to dress up, we have the [Chef's Art] Steakhouse where they can have a little more ambiance with dinner. But we do not encourage people to dress up with tie and jacket in the [main] dining rooms. What are they doing on a daily basis - - working. Break away from the routine. Basically, come onboard and have fun, enjoy it. There is something for everyone to enjoy."

Everyone most definitely includes families. In addition to the teen clubs discussed earlier, Carnival Dream has a 5,000 square-foot children's play area for its Camp Carnival program. There is also an extensive water park and an array of water slide on the open decks.

“We have expanded ourselves to accommodate families. What better product for them to go [on vacation] on than a cruise ship? I hear guests saying that they can leave the kids at Camp Carnival and not worry - - they are safe and having a good time. You see them together for dinner as a family and that is great but during the day, everybody does his own thing.”

“But there is a choice. Some families like to be together on a vacation. Some parents might take the opportunity to have a little bit of quieter time as well.”

Dream also has options for those looking for a more self-focused vacation experience. “Carnival Splendor was the first ship to have this but Carnival Dream also has spa suites.” Guests in these suites have “private access to the spa’s thermal suites, Jacuzzis and so on. It is one of those things that we have created for people who like to go to spa resorts.”

In conclusion, “creating fun - - I guess that is what we are about.”

