

Ferry fitout a rite of passage for designers

Designing interiors for a boat is like creating hotel spaces - just with extra passengers, writes **Stephen Crafti**.

Renovating a catamaran must be a once in a lifetime opportunity for designers.

It's not like a house or apartment, a commission that regularly appears on the office whiteboard.

While delighted with the opportunity, there was perhaps some trepidation for Nexus Designs when asked to refit a catamaran that ferries passengers from Queenscliff to Sorrento.

"Designing interiors for a boat is probably not unlike designing interiors for a hotel but, with up to 700 passengers arriving on the hour, our brief included spaces that were robust as well as relaxing," interior designer Lucy Marczyk says.

"The design had to be efficient, given the trip is only 40 minutes long," says Marczyk, who has worked closely with Nexus creative director Sonia Simpfordorfer.

Previously renovated about 15 years ago, the brief from Searoad Ferries chief executive Matt McDonald was to heighten the experience of being on the water.

With the new fit-out also came a food choice upgrade, from fish and chips to now showcasing local

produce and wines.

"It was important to create a sense of place, as much as creating a memorable experience on the water," Marczyk says.

A lighter and restricted range of contemporary materials replaced the faux timber finishes. Plywood, which is often used to line boats, was one of the materials selected, along with rope detailing for joinery and screens. The striped carpets, in various widths and colours, also defined the spaces.

"Beige formed the base tone, with green and red being an obvious contrast for the carpets," Marczyk says, referring to the red and green indicator lights used by the captain.

To accommodate up to 700 people comfortably on one level requires skill. The movement of people needs to be fluid and there must be several seating options.

While passengers are restricted to one level (there's also a roof deck), there are several ways to enjoy the journey. There's the Port cafe/lounge with several seating options, including a dream deck. There's also the Starboard lounge, with bench-style seating for those who want to spread out a newspaper or use their laptop. For



Nexus Designs' fitout of the Queenscliff to Sorrento ferry, MV Sorrento. Photo: James Geer

those seeking something a little more quirky, there's the adjacent "coffee collection", a space with rope-sided stools and screen divider.

One of the most coveted spaces is the Portsea lounge, which features navy and cream pinstripe carpet and deep royal blue club-style chairs. Complete with a kitchen, roped display counter and plywood walls, the area can be reconfigured (with doors) to cater for private groups and functions.

As well as ensuring views

weren't impeded, Nexus Designs was mindful of the logistics in fitting out a catamaran. Furniture such as the "Navy Chair" by Emeco, designed in the 1950s, was as suitable as Artek bar stools. Konstantin Grcic's "May Day" lights, with their rope-like detailing, also created a strong nautical feel without providing a sense of pastiche. Even more invisible is the special latch behind each door to ensure it remains shut.

"The design had to be extremely

functional. There was no point in creating an experience if maintenance was an issue for staff on every trip," Marczyk says, pointing out the customised bins. "When you're on the water, fixtures and fittings can't afford to sway."

While commissions of this nature are rare, when they do arrive there's a level of excitement.

"These projects tend to take you out of your comfort zone but, for passengers, they are a chance to 'escape', even though it's only for 40 minutes," Marczyk says.

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- Opportunity for owner occupier/developers
- Former medical centre plus residence to Lavidge Street

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