

Transforming the Disney Dream: From Evolutionary Changes to Revolutionary Designs

by Dave Marx, PassPorter Guidebooks Author

Imagination can be a magical thing, taking you places that don't exist and helping you to anticipate experiences you've yet to have. Imagination is definitely a linchpin of the Disney experience, and my imagination had a whole lot to work with since Disney Cruise Line announced the Disney Dream in 2009.

But artist's renderings, deck plans, press releases, and even computer-animated 3-D walk-throughs can only take us so far. And nothing has brought that home to me more than my first-hand experiences during the Disney Dream's Christening Cruise.

My own knowledge of Disney Imagineering, Disney Parks and Resorts operating practices, and Disney Cruise Line history had a huge impact on my interpretation of the ocean of information the cruise line released to the public about the Dream. Even as I stood in the viewing stands at the Disney Dream's christening ceremony, the ship floating a few hundred yards away was still a bundle of pre-conceptions and imaginings waiting for an up-close and personal encounter. I must admit, my expectations for the ship were somewhat conservative.

From the beginning, I expected that the ship, despite its greater size and the changes that have taken place in the very competitive cruise ship business in the 12-plus years since the Disney Magic was launched, would show just incremental changes and upgrades. After all, if the Dream (and Fantasy) were too much grander than the Disney Magic and Disney Wonder, the cruise line would have a harder time attracting passengers to its older ships. Whenever Disney's Imagineers create a new version of a classic they manage to add to it, but sometimes those additions can be very subtle.

Well, from the moment I stepped foot into the Atrium Lobby ("[Disney Cruise Line welcomes the Marx family!](#)"), I knew I was wrong. I ignored an important maxim of Disney design and hospitality, "Exceed expectations!" It wasn't that the lobby was bigger -- it had to be, to accommodate the ship's 50% more guests. The impression (and maybe even the reality) is of a space twice as spacious and grand, closer to the idea of a glittering ballroom than a lobby. And first impressions were only reinforced with each visit to the lobby during the Christening Cruise.

As we turned from the lobby towards the midship elevators to head to our stateroom, I knew there would be 50% more elevators, but I didn't expect that each of those [elevators would be so much larger](#). It's always possible to pack an elevator like a sardine tin, and on the Disney Magic's and Disney Wonder's midship elevators, "packed" is a way of life. It was hard to find enough sardines to pack the Dream's lifts.

As I visited the [Concierge areas on Deck 11 and 12 forward](#), I was surprised by the steps taken to make the area more exclusive, secure, and comfortable for the Concierge guests. While most of the increased space dedicated to the Royal suites was out on their expansive verandahs (and their new hot tubs), the change to indoor and outdoor proportions (a giant, 1/4-pie-sized wedge) made all the living spaces far more inviting, constantly drawing the eye outward to the ever-widening space. I've been to parties in the Walt Disney and Roy Disney suites on the Magic and Wonder, and the relatively long and narrow suites seemed crowded, and the narrow verandah a barely-used appendage to the social spaces. On the Dream, I had the impression of a great party home in the Hollywood Hills, offering expansive views and space, and a seamless merging and utilization of outdoors and indoors.

The [teen club, Vibe](#), and the [tween club, Edge](#), were also eye-openers. Not only were they larger than I imagined, but their upgraded facilities immediately suggested that, well, teens especially, would become nearly invisible on the ship. Any fan of Disney cruising knows that the ships never feel over-run by kids, except around the pools -- the kids programs do a far better job of attracting and holding kids' attentions than on any other cruise line I've experienced. Teens on other cruise lines often end up congregating near favored adult-focused areas, whether pool, or the lounges outside the casino area. Vibe, with its own sun deck sporting two generously-sized hot tubs and a wide range of first-class electronic entertainments indoors, leaves teens with very few reasons to hang out anywhere else. Tweens inherit the space teens very successfully occupied on the Magic and Wonder, but that space in the forward smokestack is sunnier and more expansive than its precursors -- definitely more inviting.

What can I say of the dining rooms that I haven't said previously ([see Dining on the Disney Dream: Exceeding Expectations](#))? That the food was excellent? That each restaurant is more inviting? That the designs manage to be more "adult" on the surface, yet incorporate more Disney magic and whimsy than ever? Disney's restaurants in the theme parks and land-based resorts include amazing examples of special scene-setting magic, including Blue Bayou's perpetually night-time, bayou-side outdoor-dining-indoors at Disneyland, and its cousin, San Angel Inn at Epcot's Mexico; the Grand Floridian Resort's elegant

Victoria and Albert's, and Magic Kingdom's Cinderella's Royal Table among them. On the Magic and Wonder, only Animator's Palate fit in that exalted category. However, on the Dream, all three main dining rooms qualify as "special," with [Enchanted Garden](#) my particular favorite, yet another example of Imagineering bringing "outdoors" indoors. I'm hereby nominating all three dining rooms as special Imagineering accomplishments. I shouldn't ignore Remy and Palo, the adult-only restaurants, only my expectations were more in line with reality. Still, they both exceed the design of Palo on the Magic and Wonder.

These are just a few of the true transformations in Disney cruising that have taken place on the Dream. I'm blown away by the evolution of the [on-board photo gallery, Shutters](#), from a frustrating place to hunt for your photos to a place where your photos are automatically gathered together and saved for you in a portfolio. The apparently simple act of placing the kids and family pool areas into one space between the smokestacks (instead of being separated by the aft stack) not only makes it easy for one parent to ride herd on all the kids, but makes deck parties all the more inviting. I love the entirely unheralded quiet sun deck up on deck 13 with separate family, adults-only, and concierge areas and great views forward (compared to the cramped forward viewing areas by the Magic and Wonder's sports deck). And I have to mention the whimsy added by the [Enchanted Artwork](#) throughout the ship. So far, Imagineering is only scratching the surface of what they'll be doing with these interactive video screens throughout the ship, yet their ability to amuse and entertain adults and kids, each in their own ways, is remarkable.

All these and more are transformational changes for Disney (even if they're not all original to Disney), and I'm looking forward to experiencing them a second time (and discovering others for the first time) when I board the Dream in four days for my second cruise!

About The Author: Dave is a the co-founder of PassPorter Travel Press, as well as co-author of PassPorter's Disney Cruise Line and Its Ports of Call guidebook.

Article last updated: 02-02-2011

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