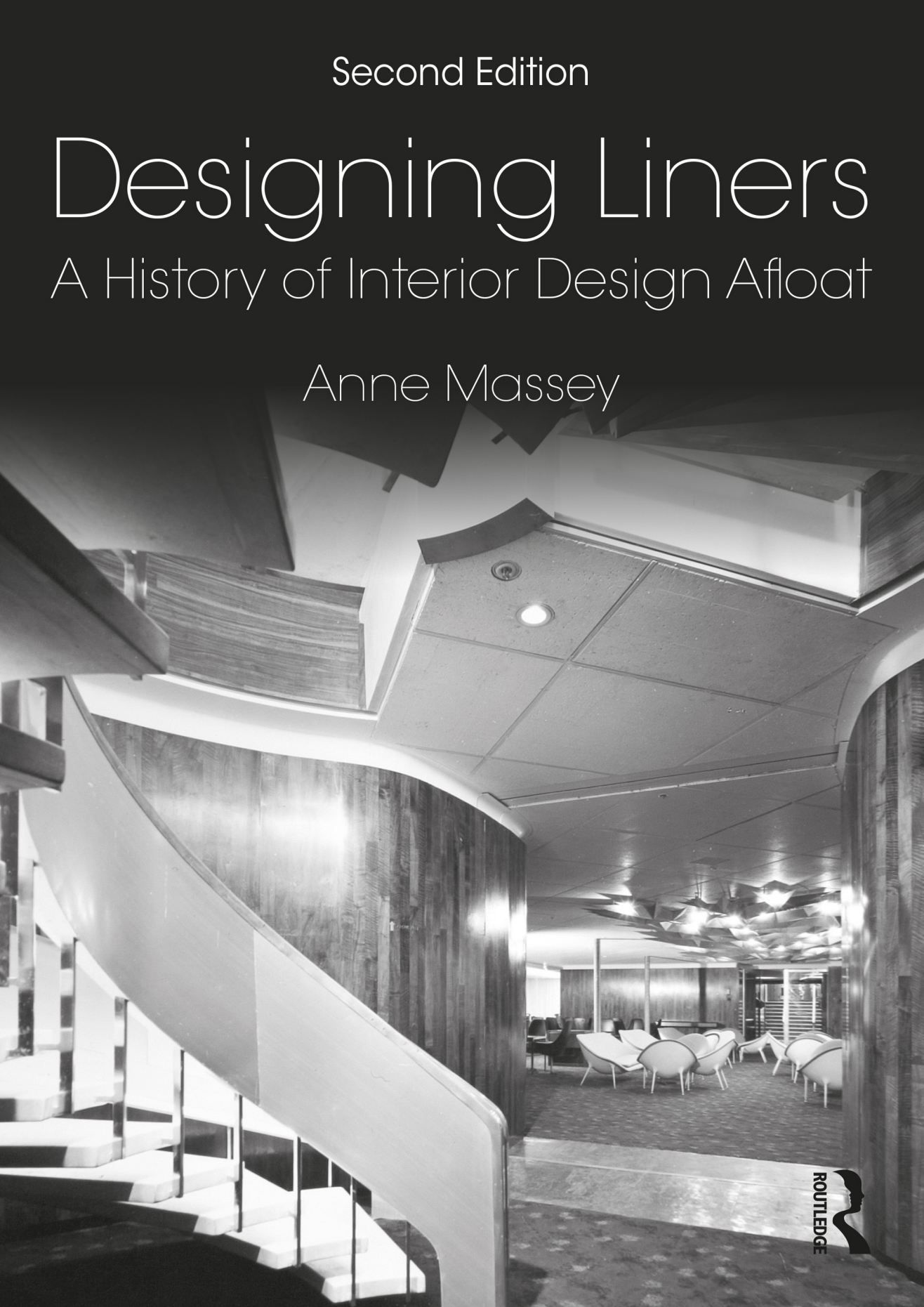
Second Edition

Designing Liners

A History of Interior Design Afloat

Anne Massey



ROUTLEDGE

DESIGNING LINERS

Designing Liners: A History of Interior Design Afloat covers the interior design of these floating palaces from the mid-nineteenth century to the twenty-first century.

In this new edition, the design heritage of the ocean liner is also explored in this age of a growing holiday cruise market. The book offers the first history and analysis of this highly significant aspect of the design of interiors, which mirrors and reinforces cultural assumptions about national identity, gender, class, and ethnicity. The interiors of ocean liners reflect the changing hierarchies of society and shifting patterns of globalization. The trajectory of the professionalization of interior design is the connecting narrative of the book, from the local decorating firm to the internationally renowned architect. It is an important addition to interior design research and takes this transitory building type as its subject.

This book provides the first survey of the transient history of interior design in relation to the development of passenger shipping. The history of these great ship interiors is tracked, from their commissioning by the line owners; the materials, methods, and sources for the initial creation; their construction; their use; and their reception. The demise and re-purposing of the interiors is also covered in this new edition, with additional material on the South African Union Castle and P & O Lines.

Drawing on a broad range of original research, Anne Massey's approach combines interior design studies, design history, architectural history, and maritime studies. The new edition has been carefully designed to include black and white and colour illustrations.

Anne Massey is Professorial Fellow at the University for the Creative Arts. She has written eight books, including *Interior Design Since 1900*, *The Independent Group: Modernism and Mass Culture in Britain, 1945–59* and *ICA 1946–68*.

"*Designing Liners* was the first study of ocean liner interior design. This revised edition adds detailed analysis of the glamorous, nostalgic interiors designed for today's giant cruise ships, while also considering growing concerns over the environmental impact of these behemoths and anticipating their future in an age of pandemic. It remains the definitive study of passenger ship interiors."

Dr Gregory Votolato, *Victoria & Albert Museum and Royal College of Art*

"Wonderful to see this seminal text in its second edition; updates on enduring popular fascination with ocean liners and the current compelling discussion of the cruise industry."

Dr Harriet Mckay, *The Cass School of Art, Architecture & Design, London*

DESIGNING LINERS

A History of Interior Design Afloat

Second Edition

Anne Massey

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PREFACE

This is the second edition of *Designing Liners: A History of Interior Design Afloat*. The book was first published in 2006 and has become the standard work on the subject, continuing to be referenced and eliciting interest from readers. An email enquiry from Milo Hicks, a reader based in Canada, prompted me to think about working on a new edition. Happily the publishers agreed to the idea and I began work. So much has changed over the preceeding fourteen years. The *QE2* no longer sails the oceans but is a floating hotel in Dubai. New museums and exhibitions devoted to the history of the ocean liner have opened. The cruising market has expanded massively, with opportunities to revisit the heritage of the ocean liner in their interior designs. The ships have also attracted criticism from locals who found the disturbance of thousands of passengers spilling out into their ancient sites overwhelming, with little positive benefit. The environmental impact of cruise ships was also cause for criticism due to concerns of poor waste disposal and high emissions. These concerns were compounded by the outbreak of the Coronavirus in 2020, when I worked on this edition in lock down. There will be no return to normal, as the pandemic has touched every facet of human life. Trade and travel, communication and the community, and manufacturing and consumerism look set to be revolutionised. The world is on reset. But the joy of looking at the history and heritage of the ocean liner remains for me, and I hope for you. With improved production values and colour images, and a new chapter, I trust that you will enjoy this contribution to understanding the fascinating history of interior design at sea – a human achievement to be celebrated in very different times.

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INTRODUCTION

This book looks at the process of designing the interiors of ocean liners. This has never been attempted before, as histories of liners tend to celebrate the image of glamorous travel, on a trajectory of modernity viewed within the schemata of technological determinism. I consider the process of the design of the liners, from the commissioning of the designers through to execution and reception. Key changes in design trends are illustrated by the analysis of representative examples. The work is situated within the developing field of the history of interior design, and as such, it considers the work of the designers in the context of the power and ownership of the shipping lines and the developing sense of national identities, the boundaries of social class, and the challenge of modernity. The central theme is an exploration of the developing role of the interior designer, from local decorating firm to international designer heroes, which is mapped against the clearly demarcated social hierarchies of liner interior design.

Roland Barthes has written incisively about sea travel in his text, 'The *Nautilus* and the Drunken Boat': 'An inclination for ships always means the joy of perfectly enclosing oneself, of having at hand the greatest possibly number of objects, and having at one's disposal an absolutely finite space. To like ships is first and foremost to like a house, a superlative one since it is unremittingly closed, and not at all vague sailings into the unknown: a ship is a habitat before being a means of transport.' (1973: 66). The interior design of ocean liners exemplifies spaces carefully constructed to give a sense of security in an uncertain world, challenged by the forces of modernity. The ship interior offered a clear-cut representation of social distinctions and national identities, which lulled the passenger like the gentle motion of the waves, rocking you to sleep in a cosy bunk. The vagaries of etiquette and the threat of the 'other' were safely contained on board the ocean-going liner. The risk of the chance encounter with elements of society which were not like you were minimised within the confines of the ship, where steerage was kept below deck, women and men had their own social spaces, and non-white crew were kept out of sight.

The concept of heterotopias described by Foucault in his lecture 'Of Other Spaces' is useful when considering the history of the ocean liner:

> Brothels and colonies are two extreme types of heterotopia, and if we think, after all, that the boat is a floating piece of space, a place without a space, that exists by itself, that

> is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea and that, from port to port, from tack to tack, from brothel to brothel, it goes as far as the colonies in search of the most precious treasures they conceal in their gardens, you will understand why the boat has not only been for our civilization, from the sixteenth century until the present, the great instrument of economic development….but has been simultaneously the greatest reserve of the imagination. The ship is the heterotopia par excellence. In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates. (1967: 6)

The perfect and privileged space of the ship interior, this heterotopia of the high seas, symbolises society and nations as they would like to see themselves. A perfect representation of how people should be organised, how the ruling elite located their place in the world in relation to others, and how others were defined through their identity and place on the ship.

The historiography of the ocean liners further reinforces this perception. The greatest volume of published work on the subject celebrates the development of the liner in terms of modernity and techno determinism. Maritime historians have produced some excellent work on the history of the ocean liner, which tends to focus on the technical marvels and national rivalries as symbols of modernity. Of course, this is pertinent to the history of the interior design of ocean liners, and has provided some excellent background material. However, the designers involved in the creation of the interiors are rarely, if ever, mentioned. The focus is largely on the technical details of the ship, its construction and engines. When attention is paid to the interior design, it is the luxury end of the accommodation which receives the most attention (Miller 1985; Brinnin 1982). These popular books are based on uncritical reading of sources such as *The Shipbuilder*, which always contain glowing descriptions of the ships and their interiors, drawn largely from the prodigious press information produced by companies such as Cunard and P & O. Publications which focus more on the social and literary aspects of ocean liner travel are descriptive, enthusiastic, and positive rather than academic and critical (Brinnin 1972; Maxtone-Graham 1972).

Signalling the beginning of the cult of nostalgia which surrounds the ocean liner, the two (Brinnin 1972; Maxtone-Graham 1972) classic texts were produced at the time when ocean liners had finally been eclipsed by the airplane for long-distance travel. John Maxtone-Graham described his regrets over this loss: 'As I complete this book, there is every indication that the airplane rather than the ship will shortly be the only way to cross. Liners still in service will presumably confine their activities to the Caribbean. Like so many other civilized delights, the elegance and enjoyment, the comfort and convenience of that legendary passenger service on the North Atlantic will pass into history' (1972: xiv). The cult of nostalgia continues to hold sway when considering the history of the liner and has, until recently, informed the dominant discourse of contemporary cruising, a very different type of activity than travelling by liner. The liner offered transport by sea on various lines, between different ports, for a variety of passengers, whether business travellers or immigrants. Cruising is travel by ship for leisure purposes, but the notion of heterotopia also underpinned the popular perception of cruising. *Berlitz Ocean Cruising and Cruise Ships* allays potential passenger fears: 'Cruising is popular today because it takes you away from the pressures and strains of contemporary life by offering an escape from reality. Cruise ships are really self-contained resorts, without the crime, which can take you to several destinations in the space of just a few days…..The hassles of ordinary travel are almost eliminated in one pleasant little package' (Ward 2005: 7).

Following the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, cruising no longer represents a safe retreat. A new and tragic narrative has replaced the nostalgia of leisurely travel by floating hotels. The new, massive cruise ships such as *The Diamond Princess* have become sites of containment, as huge numbers of passengers are stranded on board, in quarantine. By 10 April 2020, 28 cruises which used US ports, had reported outbreaks of the deadly virus. The effect on the cruise market is devastating, as Carnival reported on 1 April 2020, the '…resulting illness and loss of life… could have a long-term impact on the appeal of our brands, which would diminish demand for vacations' (Topham: 2020: 16). Whilst the burgeoning cruise industry was the subject of criticism from the perspective of environmental impact and damage, it is now facing a precarious future as global priorities are being overturned.

In the past, the special heterotopia of the ocean liner has inspired and informed architectural and design writing. Le Corbusier idolised the technology of the steamship; in 1923 he argued, 'A seriously-minded architect, looking at it as an architect (*i.e.* a creator of organisms), will find in a steamship his freedom from an age-long but contemptible enslavement to the past' (1987:103) Le Corbusier used illustrations of the exterior of Cunard's *Aquitania* and Companie Generale Transatlantique's (CGT's) *France* to illustrate his point. He did not choose to illustrate the luscious interiors. He urged architects to learn from the engineering of ships, from their rationality, unity of materials, powerful masses, and solid forms. Le Corbusier's major point was that ship design liberated architects from using the styles of the past, and enabled them to embrace new technology and create a contemporary form of architecture which was essentialist and functional. It was also in the section devoted to steamships of *Vers une Architecture* that Le Corbusier argued that, 'The house is a machine for living in. Baths, sun, hot-water, cold-water, warmth at will, conservation of food, hygiene, beauty in the sense of a good sense of proportion…. Our modern life, when we are active and about…has created its own objects: its costume, its fountain pen, its eversharp pencil, its typewriter, its telephone, its admirable office furniture, its plate-glass and its "Innovation" trunks, the safety razor and the briar pipe, the bowler hat and the limousine, the steamship and the airplane' (1987: 95).

This modernist approach underpinned design writing about the interior design of ocean liners from the 1930s onwards. Designers and critics were of the opinion that using styles from the past was outdated and that a more modern, contemporary style was a more appropriate expression of the age. And this adoption of a modern look also carried with it overtones of class and gender distinctions. Just as the level of knowledge of historical styles revealed social class in the earlier part of the century, so rejection of revivalist design and adoption of modernism became a symbol of middle-class knowingness from the 1930s onwards. For example, the speech and article which guaranteed *Orion* a place in history as the pioneer of modern design, 'The Interior Design of Passenger Ships' was delivered by Sir Colin Anderson at the Royal Society of Arts in 1966 and published in its journal in May of that year, when Anderson was also president of the Design and Industries Association (DIA) (Anderson 1966). By this point P & O had absorbed the Orient Line, and although Anderson was still a director of P & O, the valorization of the past which permeates the article may have been prompted by this 1960 takeover by Orient's arch-rivals. Anderson reinforced the message of *Orion* as the pioneer of modern ship interior design in 1967 in an article entitled 'Ship Interiors: When the Breakthrough Came' for *Architectural Review* in which he stated, 'As a new ship, in 1935, the 'Orion' was revolutionary as far as British ships were concerned. She not only influenced the interior design of passenger ships in general but also of hotels, including their furnishing, lighting and general equipment, and of other kinds of transport including train and aeroplane interiors' (Anderson 1967: 452).

Anderson selected significant images of P & O ships to contrast with the modernist splendors of the *Orion*. For the *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* he chose the baronial smoking room of the *Viceroy of India* (see Figure 4.4), and for the *Architectural Review*, the first class reading and writing room of the *Stratheden*.

Anderson's assertion that the *Orion* was the pioneer of modern design in ships entered circulation as accepted fact and informed all subsequent writing on the subject. For example, in the special edition of *Architectural Review* to mark the introduction of the *QE2* in 1969, it was proclaimed, 'Her company's design policy of full coordination, admirable as this is, represents a belated acceptance of a philosophy spelled out by the Modern Movement in architecture half a century ago and put into practice by a merchant shipping company (the Orient Line, when building the 'Orion') as long ago as 1935' (*Architectural Review* 1969: 397). More recently, Veronica Sekules, in an article on Sir Colin Anderson, argued, 'He was justifiably proud of the *Orion*, and its place as a landmark in the history of design has been long acknowledged' (Sekules 1985–6: 22).

However, such a modernist view of the history of design serves to reinforce existing hierarchies. Design history as a discipline had tended to pay more attention to the development of modernism, and its attendant pioneers, than to other aspects of production and consumption or styles (Pevsner 1991). The case of the *Orion* focuses on one ship, designed by a male, modernist architect with overall control and support of a sympathetic client. Recent work in the fields of architectural and design history have challenged this type of hegemony by including the work of women and acknowledging the existence of other styles and other responses to modernity (Colomino 1994; Heynan 1999; Potvin 2015; Sparke 1995, 2004, 2005). When examining the history of the interior design of ocean liners, more avenues need to be explored than that of modernism. Using the concept of heterotopia, is it possible to see the first class smoking room on the *Viceroy of India* as an early example of a space designed by a woman, Elsie Mackay, for the exclusive use of male passengers. It is also an appropriation of British aristocratic tradition, created at a time when the powers of that particular elite were in severe decline, and as an expression of British national identity (Cannadine 2005). So the consideration of a broader set of precepts, including identity, enriches our understanding of the history of the interior design of ocean liners.

Writing the history of ocean liner interior design is a challenging task. As Sir George G.V. Holmes lamented in 1906 in his Victoria and Albert Museum Science Handbook, *Ancient and Modern Ships*,

> An endeavour has been made in this handbook, as far as space and scantiness of material would permit, to trace the history of the development of wooden ships from the earliest times down to our own. Unfortunately, the task has been exceedingly difficult; for the annals of shipbuilding have been very badly kept down to a quite recent period, and the statements made by old writers concerning ships are not only meagre but often extremely inaccurate. Moreover, the drawings and paintings of vessels which have survived from the classical period are few and far between, and were made by artists who thought more of pictorial effect than of accuracy of detail. (1906: pvii)

This book, '*Designing Liners: Interior Design Afloat*' is located within the field of design history, but the research has been a matter of piecing together fragments of information from maritime history, art history, industrial archaeology, local studies, and travel history.

The work uses primary sources wherever possible, most notably the excellent archives of Cunard held at Liverpool University, John Brown's held at Glasgow University, and the collection of the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich. But the work of the designers has remained the key constant, and their relationship with the line owners, passengers, and professional maritime and design press has provided the thread. The process of commissioning and fulfilling the creative briefs set by the line owners is an important component. What has emerged from this study is a complex picture of industrial progress and innovation, balanced by a desire to lavishly decorate the interiors of ocean liners with as broad an appeal as possible. The history of design has concentrated on the history of modernism, of reform, and of the avant-garde. The history of the interior design of ocean liners presents a different story, as few of the great figures of design history were involved. Instead, the trajectory offers a sequence of designers who were popular in their day, whose work was attractive to customers, and whose contribution has been unacknowledged to date. Names such as T.E. Collcutt, Arthur Davis, Charles Mewès, Johannes Poppe, Harold Peto, James Miller, Richard Bouwens Van der Boijen, Elsie Mackay, Jean Monro, Eugene Schoen, and Michael Inchbald are relatively obscure in the history of design and in the history of shipping. This account offers an insight into their work and contribution to the creation of floating heterotopias.

1

DECORATING TECHNOLOGY

The dominant discourse of ocean liner travel is one of luxury and glamour, high design and nostalgia. As the publication to accompany the exhibition *Ocean Liners: Glamour, Speed and Style* affirms, '*Ocean Liners* explores the design of Victorian and Art Deco "floating palaces", sleek post-war liners as well as these ships' impact on avant-garde artists and architects such as Le Corbusier' (Finamore and Wood 2017: inside cover). Whilst luxurious travel may have been the experience of a certain class of passenger from the late nineteenth century onwards, travellers, in total, before this time did not enjoy such an experience. Indeed, to travel at all was a sign of prestige: 'Until the nineteenth century being able to travel, particularly for non-work reasons, was only available to a narrow elite and was itself a mark of status' (Urry 1995: 130).

Travel by sea before and during most of the nineteenth century (and the advent of steam power, and attempts to provide luxurious surroundings) was a very uncomfortable experience for the majority of travellers. The Industrial Revolution gave rise to exceptional technological innovations in all areas of transport, beginning with train travel, which then impacted upon sailing, but the design of the interiors of both modes of transport mirrored social hierarchies and traditional terrestrial forms of decoration. Indeed, the initial stimulus to provide liners came from the need to transport mail and cargo more speedily, rather than the necessity to move passengers around the globe. Therefore, the interior design of the ships was considered less important than their safety and speed.

The nineteenth century witnessed the transformation of ship construction from timber to iron, as the impact of the Industrial Revolution and modernity was felt. This was paralleled by the transition from sail to steam power. It was during this period that the economic and political climate stimulated a growth in sea travel for the purposes of both trade and emigration, with the beginnings of the colonisation of many parts of the world by Britain, France, Holland, Portugal, and Spain. Before the era of mass passenger sea travel in the late nineteenth century, ships were designed to carry the optimum cargo and often incorporated means of defence, and considerations of passenger comfort were not a high priority.

For the majority of this period, responsibility for the interior design of the ships lay mainly with the shipbuilder, who would, in turn, delegate this work to the carpenters. As Adrian Forty argued in *Objects of Desire*, 'In every industry, design has become necessary as a separate activity in

production once a single craftsman ceases to be responsible for every stage of manufacture from conception to sale' (1986: 29). The British modernist John de la Valette concurred when he argued that in this era, 'The style of the "Foreman Joiner" developed from the fact that all the fittings and decoration of ships was at first carried out by the shipbuilders and consequently devolved upon their foreman joiner. The result was invariably suitable, thoroughly solid work. But where it came to working out a "high-class job", the tendency to "put a little more art" into it, usually meant adding extraneous ornament or using materials because they were expensive, often with garish result, albeit in the taste of the day' (1936: 706). The situation began to change during the second half of the nineteenth century, when the appearance of the interiors became an important commercial factor in attracting passengers, as the number of passenger lines and liners grew. This was paralleled by a marked escalation in the activity of the decorating firms, as upper and middle class taste in decoration blossomed. Decorating firms, such as the plasterers George Jacksons & Sons, were employed to add decorative plasterwork to the interiors of three significant ships, the SS *Great Western*, SS *Great Britain*, and SS *Great Eastern*. These early liners were highly significant in terms of technological innovation, and nineteenth century crowds marvelled at this spectacle of modernity; the huge machinery contrasting with the decoration on board. Just as the traditional skills of the shipwright/carpenter were perceived as being eroded by decorating firms, they were also eroded from a different direction – that of the replacement of wood by iron and sail by steam.

Sea voyages up until the early nineteenth century were still dominated by the traditional wooden sailing ship. Built from oak, with complex rigging and canvas sails, the cabins and public spaces were comparatively sparse and not purpose built for passengers. The most prestigious areas to be decorated at all were the captain's and officers' quarters, as exemplified in the extant battleship *Victory* or the *Cutty Sark*. For example, during the 66 day voyage in 1620 of the *Mayflower* from Plymouth, England, to North America, the 102 passengers lived primarily on the gun deck. This was the deck sandwiched between the hold and the top deck. It offered cramped living space, measuring 80 feet from stem to stern, of which about 12 feet at the back belonged to the gun room and would have been off-limits to the passengers. The width at the widest part was approximately 24 feet. An assortment of hatches provided access to the cargo hold below. The windlass and capstan, both used to haul heavy items by rope between the decks, also took up floor space, as did the main mast in the middle and the sprit sail mast in the front. Many of the families built small "cabins" for themselves – simple wooden dividers nailed together to provide some privacy. Others, especially the single young men, slept where they could, some finding shelter in a shallop, a 30-foot sailing vessel that the passengers had brought with them and which was stowed on the gun deck. There was barely room for all the passengers to lie down and sleep in the 1,800 square feet of deck space. There was no concept of the ship needing to be designed to meet passenger needs, only those of the senior crew.

The wealthiest travellers could ensure a comparatively comfortable passage by paying the captain for a private cabin, as it was within his power to do so. As the majority of these passengers were emigrating, they brought their own furniture and furnishings with which to fill the cabin. This would usually include a bed and trunk. But the majority of those who travelled had few possessions and endured the cramped and dark conditions of steerage, where you were responsible for cooking your own food and the only sleeping accommodation was on the deck. The majority of emigrants in the nineteenth century travelled steerage class on sailing packets, transported more as cargo than human beings. The smell and noise on these ships was notoriously bad, from the constant creaking of the timbers and stench of so many human beings travelling in such close proximity for so long.

The sailing times of the sailing ships were completely unpredictable, and depended solely on the weather. As the Industrial Revolution gathered pace in Britain during the early nineteenth century the impetus to apply steam power to sailing grew, and the innovations of the railways were applied to ships. Also, the desire to make ships larger and more robust was a further pressing need as the volume of cargo and distances travelled increased. Hence, work began on applying steam power to sailing vessels. The immediate challenge was to make the engines efficient, so that the amount of coal that needed to be carried was not prohibitive. At first, steam power was applied to small vessels undertaking short trips. For example, the *Comet* was a wooden paddle steamer, the first to offer a regular service between Glasgow, Greenock, and Helensburgh on the Clyde from 1812. The ship was only 40 feet long and offered sparse accommodation. There were several wooden benches on deck and a small cabin aft, for which passengers paid the premium fare of four shillings to use. It contained a table with benches on either side. For a fare of three shillings there was also limited accommodation in a small forecastle, reached by a wooden ladder. The *Comet* ran ashore in 1820, but proved that offering a regular steam-powered service was a possibility, her small size restraining the possible profits. Steamers were launched on the Thames and were pioneered on route between Britain and Ireland during the early nineteenth century. In America, small-scale steamers appeared in the late eighteenth century, with the introduction of a steamboat service on the Delaware River by John Fitch. In 1807, Robert Fulton's *North River Steam Boat* (later renamed the *Clermont*) began operating on the Hudson River, from New York to Albany. The longer route from North America to Britain was first successfully completed with steam power by the American boat *Savannah* in 1819; however, the majority of the 30-day journey was made under sail and it carried no cargo or passengers. The ship had the appearance of a traditional square-rigger, complete with three masts and sails, but with the addition of a funnel, paddle wheels either side, and an engine below. The interior was reportedly sumptuous; the state cabin had mahogany wainscoting, rosewood and brass decorations, and full-length mirrors carefully placed to create the illusion of space, and it contained berths for 32 passengers. This was the style of the traditional river boat. The first voyage with paying passengers for the ship had been the short trip from Savannah to Charleston in April 1819, just before the *Savannah* sailed for Liverpool.

Apart from naval battles and travel to America and Australia, India was the other major destination for British ships. The expansion of trade with the East India Company and the deployment of the British in India to maintain the interests of the Empire meant a significant increase in sea travel. The growth in trade by sea in the nineteenth century was immense; in 1801, British mercantile shipping totalled 1,726,000 tons, and by 1846 it had reached 3,220,685 tons (Holmes 1906: 205). The most predominant shipping company in Britain was the East India Company, which traded mainly with India and through coercive action completely controlled the country by the late eighteenth century. The 1784 *India Act* had established the East India Company as the major trading arm of the British government. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the company's control extended across most of India, Burma, Singapore, and Hong Kong, and a fifth of the world's population was under its authority. In 1858, the company lost its administrative function to the Crown, and India became a formal Crown colony. The company was formally disbanded in 1874. By this stage, the East India Company had been eclipsed by the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company (P & O).

The Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company (renamed P & O in 1840) originated in 1837 and was founded to sail regular services to Portugal, Spain, and Gibraltar based on a mail contract with the British government. The delivery of overseas mail had formerly been

the responsibility of the Admiralty. This important source of income allowed the line owners, Arthur Anderson, Brodie McGhie Willcox, and Richard Bourne, to build up a successful fleet for the transport of mail, cargo, passengers, and cruises to the Mediterranean region, India, and Australia. The interiors of P & O ships differed from those designed for the trans-Atlantic trade or as mammoth symbols of modernity. The ships needed to be reliable and provide comfortable accommodation in tropical climates. The company bought two ships, the *Oriental* and the *Great Liverpool*, in 1840 for the newly won mail contract to Alexandria in Egypt. Both steamers were originally intended for sailing the Atlantic. In 1842, the company won an important contract from the British government to offer sailings between the Suez and India, the first regular and reliable service between Britain and India. For this they needed to commission two new ships, the *Hindostan* launched in 1842 and the *Bentick* launched one year later. The two ships were wooden hybrid steam paddles with the addition of sails and iron bulkheads, and provision for 102 first class and 50 second class passengers.

Traditional in design, with striking windows at the stern like traditional warships, they were more radical in their interior layout. The convention was to lay the cabins on either side of the saloon, as was the case with Isambard Kingdom Brunel's SS *Great Britain* (1843). This layout was reversed, with the saloon spanning the full width of the ship across the stern, two corridors leading from it on either side of the ship, and a double set of cabins either side – 60 in all. The theory was that the passengers would not be so close to the noises of the sea and the passages would provide extra ventilation during the heat of tropical journeys. The saloon, at the stern of the ship beneath the upper deck, was decorated with painted panels. One passenger who travelled on the *Hindostan* in 1844 complained,

> She had a superb saloon, every panel of which is decorated with an elegant and costly painting on *papier mache* by an artist of taste and skill. Perhaps too much money has been lavished on mere embellishments. Pictures and finely carved woodwork are on the whole of that part of the ship which is fitted up for passengers, most of whom would be glad to go in vessels with less costly decorations at a lower charge. All this finery makes the ship look as if she were meant rather for holiday pleasure-trips on a smooth lake, than to brave the dangers of the wide ocean. (P&O 1844: 2–3)

The saloon was the only public room for use by all first class passengers, so it was used for dining, reading, writing, and playing cards or board games, and for musical soirees. It was furnished with one central table with benches, a sideboard at the forward end, and a settee situated beneath the stern windows. Another contemporary commentator, a 'Madras Officer', published his reflections on travelling on the *Hindostan* in 1846 with a more favourable view of the grand saloon:

> The cuddy is a magnificent room, running as far aft as the stern posts, and as far forward as the situation of the engine room would permit. I forget the dimensions of this spacious apartment: suffice to say, that is large enough to hold four tables, with sufficient latitude to admit of the perambulations and running to and fro of the waiters, and a nice walk up and down of a rainy day. The sides, (or to be more explicit, the walls) of the *sale a manger,* are decorated with gaudy *papier mache* colourings, descriptive of various subjects: the stanchions and rudder-head, as well as the mast, (which was in the centre of the cabin) are all painted with flowers in the most Beautifully arranged groups I ever saw, tastefully embellished with fountains and *jetties d'eau*, and other ornaments. (A Madras Officer 1846: 11–12)

The cabins were similar in dimensions to those occupied by Charles Dickens, measuring a paltry seven by seven feet, with two to four bunks and the rudimentary washing facilities of a small sink, and they gained a very similar response from passengers:

> Her accommodations for passengers are poor, cramped, and badly ventilated, built with the intentions, evidently, of cramming as many living souls into as small a space as possible. The number of people between decks, to say nothing of the fires in the engine room, renders the heat insufferable, in spite of the wind-sails down each hatchway. (A Madras Officer 1846: 8)

Despite making the cabins uncomfortably hot, the addition of steam power speeded up the journey to Calcutta and gave a greater freedom for picking routes according to distance and convenience rather than the whim of the weather conditions. By the time of the collapse of the East India Company in 1874, P & O was the established company for travel to the British Empire in India. The ships were a microcosm of the Empire, with first class occupied by the privileged white senior administrators or by civil servants of the Raj and their families. In second class were the servants of the first class passengers, including batmen for the army officers and the Indian ayahs, plus poorer passengers, including priests and missionaries. Emigrants to India, who would be few in number compared to on the trans-Atlantic route, would not travel by P & O ships but by cheaper emigrant ships. P & O was occasionally obliged to carry third class passengers as part of the mail contract, usually low-ranking soldiers and sailors. These passengers were normally upgraded to second class (P & O circular 23.7.1889).

The emigrant trade from Ireland and Great Britain, Germany, Norway, Sweden, Italy, Austria-Hungary, Russia, Poland, Estonia and Lithuania, Greece, Albania, Serbia, Bulgaria, Syria, and Armenia to North America was also booming at this time. From 1820 to 1920, 35 million emigrants made the daunting journey across the Atlantic in desperate search of a better life. Although the new technology of steam was used to pack more passengers into larger, faster boats, the conditions for most emigrants were appalling. Packed into tiny spaces, with little or no privacy, they were prey to diseases such as cholera and typhus. On the return journey from America to Europe in as late as the 1890s, the same space used for human traffic was used to transport cattle.

But the volume of the emigrant trade made it highly profitable, and it lay at the foundation of many companies which sailed the Atlantic. Cunard continued to service the mail contract, and in 1855, in response to competition from the Collins Line, built the *Persia*, the first iron paddle steamer to service the Atlantic route. The largest ship afloat at that time, it carried 200 first class and 50 second class passengers. Cunard was slow to meet the needs of the emigrant trade, and the company suffered, resulting in a financial crisis in 1878 which forced Cunard to review its approach to passenger accommodation, given the increased competition. The Dutch firm Holland America Line was founded in 1873 to provide sailings from Holland to America. Sailings from Germany to America were provided by Norddeutscher Lloyd (NDL), or North German Lloyd, founded in 1856, and the Hamburg-Amerikanische Packetfahrt Actien-Gessellschaft (HAPAG), or Hamburg-Amerika Line as it is better known, founded in 1847. The French founded the Compagnie Generale Transatlantique (CGT) in 1864. Conditions for the emigrants improved steadily, with measures such as the 1855 Carriage of British Passengers'Act. The profitable possibilities for providing mass emigrant travel were realized by William Inman, who founded the Inman Line and provided transport between Liverpool and Philadelphia from 1850. He targeted the Irish market and his was one of the

first lines to provide cooked food for steerage class passengers, offering improved facilities in advance of the 1855 Act.

It was Isambard Kingdom Brunel and his circle that pioneered the technology for global travel by steam, and he was the first to replace the paddle, located on either side of the vessel, with the screw at the stern of the ship. The first voyages entirely under steam power across the Atlantic from Britain to New York and Boston took place in 1838 by the *Sirius*, the *Great Western*, the Canadian *Royal William*, and the *Liverpool*. It was the *Great Western* which was specifically designed for the Atlantic passage by Brunel. The ship was 236 feet long and 35 feet wide, discounting the paddle boxes. It was constructed from an oak frame with iron trussing on the hull and wooden diagonals to withstand the challenges of the Atlantic, a route it traversed from 1838 to 1843. It carried an average of 90 passengers west and 79 east per voyage, although it had berths for 240 passengers, with six round trips made annually. There were 128 staterooms, which were all one class. The main public room, the saloon, was 75 feet long and decorated with vogue Gothic arches and painted murals representing bucolic scenes in the style of Watteau by the Royal Academician and fashionable portrait painter Edmund Thomas Parris (1793–1873). The room was lit by one skylight and had decorative plasterwork ceilings. But it was the rival *British Queen* which was most highly regarded from the perspective of interior design. It was larger than the *Great Western*, measuring 275 feet in length and 40 feet wide, and had been launched in 1838 by Junius Smith. Contemporary accounts praised her '…"spacious saloon or dining room", the length of which was 'upwards of 60 feet; the width 30 feet; and in the narrowest part 20 feet; height to ceiling 8 feet.' The ladies' cabin was about 16 feet square' (Holmes 1906: 20).

The interiors of ships were now taking the needs of the passengers into account as competition grew to attract paying customers and expectations were raised. The lucrative mail contract was offered by the British Admiralty in 1838 for travel between Britain and Canada. This was won, not by the *Great Western* or Junius Smith, but by Samuel Cunard of Halifax, Canada, who specialized in providing reliable but not highly decorated shipping. The lucrative mail contract meant there was less need to attract and impress the passenger part of the trans-Atlantic trade, since, as part of the contract with the Admiralty, the ship also had to be easily converted for wartime use. The first ship to be launched by Cunard, or the British & North American Royal Mail Steam Packet Company to give the precise title of the company, was the *Britannia*. It was a comparatively small wooden paddle steamer which could carry the all-important mail, 600 tons of coal, 89 crew, and 115 first class passengers – the emigrant traveller, or steerage, was restricted to the more unreliable sailing ships. The passengers' cabins were situated on the main deck, with two dining saloons. On the upper deck were the officers' cabins, galley, bakery, and cow house. Three more ships were built in Britain to augment the fleet – the *Acadia* and *Caledonia* launched in 1840 and the *Columbia* in 1841, to similar designs. One passenger summarized the experience of crossing the Atlantic on the *Britannia* thus: 'Despite the Spartan aspects of the voyage, the saving of time and the reliability of arrival augurs well for steam propelled trans-Atlantic travel'. Charles Dickens travelled on the *Britannia* in 1842 and complained that his room had the dimensions of a coffin, with

> … a very thin mattress, spread like a surgical plaster on a most inaccessible shelf. But that this was the state-room concerning which Charles Dickens, Esquire, and Lady, had held daily and nightly conferences for at least four months preceding: that this could by any possibility be that small snug chamber of the imagination, which Charles Dickens Esquire, with the spirit of prophecy strong upon him, had always foretold would contain