



Cruise News

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Celebrity Cruises to "Solsticize" Millennium-Class Ships

(7:55 a.m. EST) -- At a stylish cocktail party last night at New York's Museum for Arts & Design, Celebrity Cruises kicked off its 20th anniversary by announcing a new tagline -- Designed for You -- and a multiyear plan to revitalize other ships in the fleet with now-popular Solstice features.

The term used by Celebrity President and CEO Dan Hanrahan? "Solsticize."

Hanrahan told the assembled crowd of travel agents, press and invited members of Celebrity's past-passenger program, Captain's Club, that because the Solstice class has proven to be such a game-changer for Celebrity -- it introduced the industry's first real, growing grass at the Lawn Club as well as the first hot glass show at sea and an icy martini bar -- the line will give its four Millennium-class ships a Solstice-inspired overhaul.

The cruise line will renovate one ship per year starting with Constellation, which will enter its scheduled dry-dock in April 2010 (there's no concrete schedule yet for Infinity, Summit and Millennium). When all is said and done, it'll be an investment of nearly \$200 million; the major initiative is similar to that undertaken in recent years by lines like Carnival and Holland America.

So, what can you expect on Constellation this spring, after it emerges from its makeover? Hanrahan tells us it'll "look like a brand-new ship." Here's a rundown:

The Tuscan Grille -- an Italian steakhouse found on Celebrity Solstice and Celebrity Equinox -- will be installed onboard, replacing the golf simulator and Magnolia Garden conservatory (because, as Hanrahan joked, the line was lucky if three people a year bought an Emilio Robba silk flower). Editor's note: We're told the Grille will be up and running 10 days after the ship re-enters service, so consider booking the second cruise after the dry-dock if you want to eat here.

Another new dining option, Bistro on Five, will be installed, taking the place of the champagne bar; Bistro on Five is an open-kitchen creperie that debuted on Solstice, featuring sandwiches, soups, and -- of course -- crepes. It's open for breakfast, lunch and dinner and currently incurs a \$5 per-person service charge.

On Deck 4, the "cool" ice-topped Martini Bar found on Solstice-class vessels will be added, along with Crush, an ice-filled table that serves as an annex to the Martini Bar for vodka tastings.

The Cova Cafe will be replaced with Cafe al Bacio and Gelateria, a coffee bar complex that includes a counter for creamy scoops of gelato.

Look, too, for the Enomatic wine system, introduced on Solstice, which serves guests a single glass of wine with the touch of a button. The wine bar takes the place of the old martini bar on Deck 5, since the ship will get Martini and Crush one deck down.

Along with all the new features come new color schemes, and fresh carpeting and upholstery in every public venue, including Celebrity Theater, Seaside Grill, the main dining room and Michael's Club. Staterooms will be updated with new carpeting, flat-screen TV's, upholstery and bedding, with suites getting all that plus all-new furniture.

While supping on appetizers like mini crab cakes and crostini, attendees at last night's reveal were given the opportunity to try out some of the "liquid" offerings in a seventh-floor space overlooking still-lit-for-the-holidays Columbus Circle. Vodka and gin martinis were prepared on a bar carved entirely out of ice, a la Crush -- and it got so much traffic, the Celebrity "X" logo was quickly melting. Meanwhile, at another bar, a team of Liquid Chefs, who operate a mixology program on Solstice and are coming to the Millennium class with the upgrades, added liquid nitrogen to drinks to make them steam. The Berry Patch, made with Brazilian Cachaca, was a hot item.

Also on display was the Enomatic system, and a "green screen" photo booth for attendees to get a "vacation" snapshot of themselves with their choice of background, such as the green Lawn Club. That, more than anything else on display at the museum, speaks to Celebrity's new tagline Designed for You, the idea of which is to give each cruise traveler the idea that their cruise vacation was created exclusively for them.

The new branding and marketing strategy was devised after an in-depth survey of 10,000 cruisers and agents, including in-home interviews with past and prospective guests.

The line's new logo rolled out at 12:01 a.m. -- look for new global TV ads from the line, too.

--by Melissa Paloti, Managing Editor