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TALKING HOME &
HERITAGE WITH
THE WORLD'S FIRST
AFRICAN FEMALE
HIGH JEWELLER

VANIA LELES



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WHEN THE SIX-STAR RESIDENTIAL MEGA YACHT, THE WORLD, RESIDENCES AT SEA, DOCKED IN CAPE TOWN, WE WERE GIVEN A GUIDED TOUR AND FOUND IT IS SO MUCH MORE THAN JUST ANY CRUISE SHIP

WORDS DEBBIE HATHWAY



ABOVE & RIGHT: Life on board The World leaves residents wanting for nothing with their luxurious homes, superb facilities and memorable experiences

When you have the privilege of entering the home of a person whose net worth is as closely guarded as their identity, it's like treading on hallowed ground. One might be inclined to tiptoe in one's handmade Fratelli Rossettis if it weren't for the plush carpets cushioning footfall inside said sumptuous permanent residence on The World, Residences at Sea.

The only private residential mega yacht in operation today has been home to ultra-high-net-worth individuals, statesmen, sheikhs, and inheritors, all of whom have experienced the unparalleled delight of sailing around the world – often more than once and not in the same sequence – during their time as homeowners. However, most residents who have met the rigorous entrance criteria to join this close-knit community of adventurers are self-made.

Wealth is not the only clincher for potential investors. New homeowners must be the right fit for this very exclusive group, who bond through experiences, explorations, and common interests while sharing their palatial floating home. Any changes or innovations to life on board are voted in by the community, and their power is determined by the number of square metres they own. Residences range in size from around 30sqm to 301sqm.

More than the purchase price, which ranges from US\$2 million to US\$15 million, it's the annual ownership costs covering operational and administrative expenses, fuel, capital reserves contribution, and a food and beverage

minimum (valid at any of the restaurants, bars, onboard grocery or room service) that make or break the deal. It's no wonder, though, because it's clear that no expense is spared in keeping The World immaculate, in line with uncompromising six-star standards and assisted by a scheduled renovation in the dry dock every three years. That's when homeowners can renovate, refurbish, and redecorate using materials compliant with fire and safety regulations. Structural changes are off-limits.

There are usually a handful of residences for sale, negotiations for which are handled by the long-serving residence director Andy Dinsdale, who entertains me with memorable anecdotes during a guided tour. As we wander through homes decorated by the likes of Hirsch Bender Associates, JP Molyneux, Yran & Storbraaten Design, and TMT Design, I marvel at the expansive space, artworks, objets d'art, woodwork, furnishings, and mother-of-pearl wallcoverings, among others.



IMAGIS SUPPLIED



“It's clear that no expense is spared in keeping The World immaculate”



A studio featuring bright woodwork and a neutral colour palette is large enough for a king-size bed. At the same time, a two-bedroom, two-and-a-half-bathroom home has a formal dining area that seats 10 and an expansive veranda for alfresco dining. Here, classic features come alive with decorative accents, beautiful furnishings, ornate mouldings, and rich colours, while another residence for sale is decorated in rich wood tones and bright, airy colours.

Another two-bedroom, two-bathroom home is decorated with white oak panelling, mirrored walls, Italian furnishing, and subtle neutral tones.

However, a chat with one of the few owners in residence over lunch surprised me with one of her most notable decor items – yellow onyx. The effort that must have gone into sourcing and crafting a wall covering in this precious stone known for its healing properties is mind-boggling. What made her choose it? She explains that it was already installed, and she liked it so much that she decided to leave it intact. “It's very zen,” she smiles. She's also the proud instigator of the book club and walked us through the beautiful library overlooking the main foyer on our way out.

While the mega yacht sails to more than 100 ports each year, following an itinerary agreed three years in advance by the resident owners, there is plenty to do – or not – on board, with or without company. There are spa and exercise facilities that include a full-size tennis court, pickleball court, yoga studio and jogging track, as well as six casual and four fine-dining restaurants, a wine cellar storing up to 15 000 bottles (some signed by the most esteemed winemakers on the planet), cocktail lounges, bars, a library, poker room, Cigar Club (the only space where smoking is permitted on board), and a theatre for enrichment lectures and perhaps a film screening.

The average age of residents onboard is 64. While some have owned their luxurious home on The World since her maiden voyage in 2002, others tend to retain ownership for around seven years – the time it takes to properly explore Earth as we know it. They commit to adventuring for three to four months at a time, sometimes longer, inviting approved guests to visit or even offer their home into the rental pool so that others may enjoy the experience, albeit more briefly.

Having docked in Cape Town recently, where The World spent more nights than any other ship in port, resident owners were excited to be in the Mother City during the current voyage that will take them to six continents and expeditions in Antarctica, South Georgia, and the Falkland Islands; then Kimberley, Australia; Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands.

Visit aboardtheworld.com for more details. ■

FACTS AND FIGURES

- Maiden voyage: 2002
- Homeowners: around 150 families from 20 countries
- Average occupancy: 150-200 residents and guests
- Average stay: three to four months per year
- 165 residences: 40 studio, 19 one- and two-bedroom studio apartments; 106 two and three-bedroom apartments
- Staff-to-guest ratio: around 2:1
- Crew: up to 300 from 42 countries
- Decks: 12
- Maximum speed: 18.5 knots
- Tonnage: 43,188 gross tons
- Length: 196.35m