

The World remains the standard bearer for residences at sea



# NO FIXED ADDRESS

For those with a passion for the sea and seeing the globe, residential ships like *The World* and newcomers *Somnio* and *Njord* are unmatched. Josh Sims takes a look at what the ships share – and what makes each one unique.

**O**n first thought, a 196m-long, 43,000-tonne ship carrying only 150 passengers might seem like a woeful mismanagement of space. Indeed, a cruise liner of this size would normally carry closer to 900 passengers. But then, this is *The World* – the first-of-its-kind vessel comprising not berths but 165 apartments.

It's what the emerging industry calls a "residential ship", where apartment owners live aboard, often for months at a time. It's a concept – now almost 20 years after *The World* was launched – that is now taking off. Or, rather, setting sail.

"This is such a niche market that not many people know that such things as residential ships exist, but I think the idea is a proven model now, given that demand for the apartments still remains strong – we've had people trying to buy apartments this past year even though they haven't been able to sail," says Pamela Conover, CEO of The World Residences at Sea, and former president of Cunard, where she oversaw the building of the *Queen Mary 2*. >



Somnio, the Winch Studio-designed residential superyacht

“I love being by the water, on the water. And I think for some people what it offers as a way of living will be a dream come true.” — ESPEN ØINO

“After all, this is the chance to travel while being in your own home, with your own furniture, if you like,” she adds. “It’s an option that appeals to people who may have considered buying their own private yacht for the same reason but decide the hassle [of ownership] is too much.”

Add in advances in communications technology – which, as the pandemic revealed, allow for remote working when required – and the appeal of security and isolation, and the concept of the residential ship looks to have come of age.

Other projects have, over the past two decades, sought to replicate *The World* but – typically for reasons of financing – they

never quite made it to the shipbuilder’s yard. But two new ships are now set to offer fresh spins on the residential-ship concept and show early signs of success. Take, for one, *Somnio*, currently being built by VARD of Norway and set to launch mid-2024. She’s styled more like a superyacht than a liner, thanks to the work of Winch Design and Tillberg Design, both major names in the superyacht sector. Indeed, at 222m long and 33,500 tonnes, she’s already claiming the title of the world’s largest yacht – and, says co-founder Captain Erik Bredhe, the only residential superyacht.

Bredhe knows of what he speaks. He was, after all, previously Master of *The World*, a

job title that’s hard to beat. “Getting these projects to work is not an easy ride – the planning, the financial risk, establishing partnerships with shipyards, and so on. And while *The World* had a very fresh idea back then, to enter the residential ship market now, you need a special proposition,” he explains. “Obviously, the yacht look of *Somnio* is a very important part of its appeal. It has that pizzazz: it’s a beautiful shell for a beautiful platform. But our idea is also to offer owners all the privacy they need, so they should be able to go to the deli in their slippers without being bothered at all”, which is why *Somnio* will have only 39 apartments. >



Left: the 289m *Njord*, which includes contemporary stylings from Denniston, above, and chic designs from Kelly Hoppen, below



Then there is the 289m *Njord*, which is being built by Meyer Werft and is due to be delivered in 2025. Further indicating just what a niche sector this is, it is being interior designed by Jean-Louis Stutzmann, who also designed *The World*, together with Malaysian studio Denniston and British designer Kelly Hoppen, among others, while the sleek exterior is the work of superyacht design supremo Espen Øino. He calls *Njord* “*The World* on steroids”. It will have 117 apartments, some with five bedrooms.

That ensures space enough for owners to have private family time, but it also keeps the collective of owners small enough to form a merry band of grand buccaneers. Indeed, the operators behind *The World*, *Somnio* and *Njord* all speak of residents wishing to be members of an exclusive floating community, or, as Kristian Stensby, CEO of *Njord*'s operator Ocean Residences

Development, puts it, “a bit of a mini Davos – with the chance for residents to, at times, attend major events around the world, but then on occasion to be as far away from the rest of the world as possible”.

“We’ve learned that it’s the sense of camaraderie that has owners keeping their apartments,” notes Conover. *The World* once allowed some apartments to be rented, until an owner buyout stopped that. “It’s why we think continuity in the staff is really important too: the residents get to know them, and the staff get to know the needs of the residents. It’s all part of what makes them feel at home.”

That, of course, and all the home comforts. Owners travel in well-appointed spaces that can resemble those they have in their more land-lubbing lives, which, with apartments on these vessels priced at anywhere between

US\$2m and \$15m, one might expect. There are also cinemas, lecture halls, spas and Michelin-standard restaurants.

With *Somnio*'s superyacht label comes superyacht amenities, not least – should you ever need to cast a hopeful message into the sea – a 10,000-bottle capacity wine cellar. *Njord* adds in two helicopters and two submarines as well as a lab, atmospheric research station, observatory and science team. After all, if you’re going where ships don’t often go, it makes sense to make your travels an endeavour of knowledge too, perhaps helping to map some more of the largely unmapped seafloor.

“Think of it as a world unto itself, but also as a ship with a purpose,” suggests Stensby. “We want this ship to have a positive impact, which is something that appeals to our owners too.”

And certainly these seafarers will go where no cruise ship would typically go: the route may have to be planned three years in advance – to ensure port availability, among other logistics – but *The World*, for example, edges towards the spectacular bergs of Antarctica, sails the famous Northwest Passage and stops off at remote and exotic spots in the likes of French Polynesia. Or, indeed, wherever its residents’ committee argues a case for. *Njord*, similarly, has consciously been built with an ice-strengthened hull, but also with a draft narrow enough to allow it to navigate larger river systems.

Still, it doesn’t have everything. To really ramp up the long lines of its elegant aesthetic, Øino wanted it to be 100 metres longer. But, alas, that was deemed too expensive. He holds no grudges. “This is an extraordinary vessel by any standards,” he enthuses. “I love being by the water, on the water. And I think, for some people, what it offers as a way of living will be a dream come true.” –