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As executive chef of The World, the largest private residential ship on the planet, Geoffrey Murray has one of the most extraordinary jobs in the business

The man who feeds **The World**

It might look like a cruise ship, but it isn't. The World's 165 'residences' are owned by people who are, simultaneously, mildly adventurous and seriously rich.

In the ship's 14-year history, she has circumnavigated the globe several times; unlike a cruise ship, a committee of the residences' owners decides her routes three years in advance. Owners have a free hand to decorate their quarters as they see fit, and also decide how to allocate the ship's public spaces. It is less of a cruise ship, more of a floating private members club.

On board for much of this time, except when he hops off to visit local markets, is Geoffrey Murray, The World's executive chef. With a thorough grounding in restaurants on terra firma over the past 20 years, Murray now has one of the most extraordinary jobs that the catering industry can offer.

His responsibilities include six on-board restaurants, a deli, a plethora of private dinner

Words/Bill Knott

parties - many of the residences have fully equipped kitchens - in-room dining and, above all, a clientele thoroughly acquainted with the best restaurants on the planet, and not afraid to demand the same standards at sea.

The job demands that Murray is expert in a huge range of cuisines: classic French, Italian, Chinese, Japanese, and whatever style of cooking pertains in the latest port The World visits. Many of the residents have adventurous palates, and expect the menu to change as often as the scenery.

Beneath the residents' elegant

decks - housing swimming pools, a tennis court, a cinema, a spa and a jewellery store, as well as the restaurants - 280 staff occupy the lower decks. Since the average resident and guest population of the ship is about 180, they are well catered for - in every sense.

"I don't think so much in terms of food costs," says Murray, "because we're not here to make money, we're here to provide a service. It's

actually an operating budget. But I can't stand waste. I still bargain in the markets just as though it were my own restaurant. We have to think cleverly. We often use the same produce in several restaurants but in different ways. And we have teatime twice a day for the staff, so all the pastries get eaten up."

Inevitably, there are compromises. When Murray ran a boutique hotel and restaurant in

Many of the residents have adventurous palates and expect the menu to change as often as the scenery



All at sea: The World is home to around 180 residents and 280 staff



Top cellar: there are more than 1,000 wines on board, mostly top-end



Grand designs: the opulent dining area

South Africa, he had a nose-to-tail philosophy and would butcher whole pigs, or Black Angus cattle, but admits that you can't break down whole carcasses on board. "In New York, my restaurants were known for a field-to-fork approach and for having great relationships with farmers," he says. "Now, my farm is global - I go to markets with my chefs in every port we visit. We bring back lots of produce, spread it all out on a big table, explain what it is, and I say 'OK, who wants to do something with this?'"

Currently docked in Marseille, Murray says that finding fresh produce doesn't present too many problems, but admits it isn't always that easy to come by suitable ingredients. "When you're sailing for six weeks to Japan, or south to the Antarctic, it's a little trickier."

At these times, Murray makes much use of curing, smoking, pickling and preserving, but his dream is to grow produce on board. "There's a putting green on the top deck (next to the state-of-the-art golf simulator: it has a golf pro on



Roe the boat: sales of caviar rise at the end of the food-budget period

board, too) that rarely gets used, so I'm trying to put a greenhouse there." He also recently visited Koppert Cress in Holland, which supplies micro salads all over Europe, which has also inspired him to get green fingered on the ocean blue. "I'd love to have an incubator on board so we can grow them ourselves."

High tech on the high seas

Murray's galleys have plenty of high-tech kit. There are 10 Rational combi ovens ("it's amazing what they can do") as well as dehydrators, a Thermomix, Pacojets and the like. Yet even though he sees one of his responsibilities as keeping up with modern trends in cuisine, and admits that aspects of molecular gastronomy have been interesting and useful, he says it's not really what the residents want.

He had the chance to redesign his galleys when the ship was in dry dock earlier this year and realised that what he really wanted was "fire everywhere", although for safety reasons the only place a naked flame is allowed in the ship's public areas is in the Cigar Lounge. As a result, all his equipment is induction, even the woks, the Bradley smoker and his new stack of bread ovens.

One constant concern for Murray is hygiene: The World's residents are hardly packed in like sardines, but bugs and viruses can easily spread. "We are scrupulous about the produce we bring on board, and just as careful when we prepare food." The ship needs to conform to the regulations applicable in each jurisdiction it passes through. "Last year, we were in British, Canadian, American and Brazilian waters, and we achieved 100% at each inspection."

Although Murray joined the ship only a couple of years ago, more than half of the galley team have been on board for the whole 14 years. "The World is very strong at developing people and promoting from within: Gerry, for example, whose job is to cook for all the staff, used to drive people to and from the ship," he says.

There is, according to Murray, quite a good

budget for staff food. "They eat well. And if I see something I like at a good price (he recently found some terrific mackerel in a wholesale market outside Barcelona) we'll buy it for them."

Morale is important in any hotel or restaurant, but even more so on a ship, with staff living and working together for months at a time. To keep things interesting for his team he encourages top chefs to come on board and cook, with two-Michelin-star chefs Viki Geunes from 't Zilte, in Antwerp, and Nico Boreas, from Boreas in Heeze, Holland, as well as Curtis Duffy, from Grace in Chicago, the most recent to try their hand at cooking on the waves.

"It's great when these guys come on board," he says. "I see my job as encouraging and shaping my chefs' creativity, developing their palates and making them stronger."

The upper decks, of course, do not miss out. Not only do visiting chefs cook dinner for them, but Murray uses his contacts on dry land to ensure that they get the best tables at the best restaurants. "I wasn't here then, but shortly

before El Bulli closed, we arranged a private dinner for 40 of the ship's residents."

For the staff, there are some attractive perks to working on The World. As Murray explains: "The basic service charge for each residence is \$68,000 (£51,000) a year, of which \$27,000 (£20,000) can be spent on food and beverages, but that's non-refundable. So towards the end of the year sales of caviar go through the roof! But the residents also use any leftover budget to throw parties for the staff."

Demanding though some of the residents can be, there are others for whom life is a little simpler. Unsurprisingly, the ship has a particularly fine wine cellar, with more than 1,000 bins, decidedly skewed toward the top end of the market.

One resident had the same diet every day, troubling the kitchen only for a ham sandwich... and the sommelier for three bottles of Domaine de la Romanée Conti, at several thousand dollars a pop. It really is another world. 🍷

The basic service charge for each residence is £51,000 a year, of which £20,000 can be spent on food

New wave cooking - chefs who have taken to the high seas

Some of the world's top chefs - and James Martin - have been recruited to cook on board ocean liners in recent years as the journey becomes as important as the destination

Thomas Keller

The owner of two three-Michelin-starred restaurants surprised a few people when he teamed up with the luxury cruise line Seabourne. Not only has he developed numerous dishes for the company's Odyssey, Sojourn, and Quest luxury liners but, this year, he launched a signature restaurant on Quest as well as the newly launched Encore. The Grill by Thomas Keller is inspired by the classic American chophouse and serves dishes such as table-side preparations of caesar salad and ice cream sundaes as well as steaks and lobster thermidor.

Jamie Oliver

In 2014, Jamie Oliver took his Jamie's Italian brand into open waters with the launch of the restaurant on Royal Caribbean's Quantum of the Seas and Anthem of the Seas liners. The menus feature many of the dishes found in the Jamie's Italian restaurants on dry land, with the notable exception of its wood-fired pizzas.

Marco Pierre White

MPW is the jewel in P&O Ferry's culinary crown, with the cruise liner company having recruited a number of top chefs to its ranks in order to beat off competition from its rivals. When he's on board, Marco oversees the gala night menus in the ships' main restaurants, namely Café Jardin on board Oceana, and the Ocean Grill on board Arcadia. Chef Atul Kochhar also works with P&O for his Sindhu restaurant as does master pâtissier Eric Lanlard, who has created afternoon tea on board the liners. James Martin, meanwhile, runs The Cookery Club on P&O Britannia, and made two appearances on board last month.

Jean-Christophe Novelli

Last year, the French chef undertook a series of cookery demonstrations on board the Saga Pearl II cruise ship.

Guy Fieri

The Food Network loudmouth and hair peroxide abuser teamed up with Carnival Cruise Lines back in 2011 to launch Guy's Burger Joint, a US-style restaurant that celebrates the roadside burger.

