

down the Nile

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For repeat client Viking Cruises, Rottet Studio designs an elegantly serene ship for exploring Egypt's cultural treasures and stunning riverscape





Previous spread: The aft deck of the Aton, a Viking Cruises ship by Rottet Studio that sails Egypt's Nile River, culminates in a mosaic-tiled pool fronted by a single acrylic slab.

Left: The entry foyer and reception, located at the base of the atrium on the middle deck, features terrazzo flooring, oak-look laminate, and pillars of Egyptian-sourced stone that reference ancient monuments. **Opposite bottom:** Visible in an overhead view of the aft deck is the glass roof that caps the aquavit dining terrace.

Top: A shaded seating area on the topmost sundeck is enclosed by painted stainless-steel planters sprouting faux grasses. **Bottom:** The decor of the main restaurant, on the upper deck, nods to traditional Egyptian arts via a woven-cord screen and, at rear, a wood-look plastic-laminate partition, both framed in stained oak.



How, exactly, do you top the spectacle of the Pyramids of Giza, the Luxor Temple, and King Tut's tomb? "You don't," says Rottet Studio cofounding principal Richard Riveire. He was the lead designer for the Aton, Viking Cruises's newest ship that sails along the Nile River in Egypt. "One could never compete," he continues. "You're dealing with 4,000 years' worth of history!"

Speaking of history, Rottet Studio began collaborating with Viking on its global fleet of new ships 13 years ago and has now completed more than 80. "Our team has spent many years perfecting the design of the ships, learning from the original schemes, tweaking them, and staying fresh while maintaining the intrinsic culture and brand identity," founding principal and CEO and *Interior Design* Hall of Fame member Lauren Rottet adds. A case in point: One of the studio's very first meetings with Viking chairman Torstein Hagen took place at a giant table covered with myriad swatches and samples, at which he homed in on a single piece of fabric, Hella Jongerius's *Borders for Maharam*. "I love this," Hagen said. The embroidered wool-blend textile now features on the walls of every ship; it swathes the Aton's main lounge, among other places.

Viking's design ethos, Rottet notes, "is very aligned with ours: a truth to materials and expression. It is a serious company devoted to the experience of travel, not made-up entertainment." In other words, there can be drama, but it shouldn't be in-your-face. Indeed, when conceiving the Aton, Riveire ➤



Left, from top: Synthetic turf paves the sundeck, its shades recalling traditional dahabiya sailboats that ply the Nile. Hella Jongerius's Borders wallcovering graces the explorers lounge, with custom tables topped in Taj Mahal quartzite. The library's Christophe Delcort seating units, upholstered in leather and acrylic, are ideal for taking in the view through floor-to-ceiling windows. **Top right:** A watercolor by Aubrey Herbert and a Linc side table by Chase Wills outfit a veranda suite living space.

Opposite: Custom guardrails fitted with low-iron glass panels surround the three-story, skylit atrium.



imagined a homelike refuge. After a busy day being awed by trips to historic marvels, he explains, "You come back and have a chance to relax and recharge in an atmosphere that feels familiar."

The 82-passenger cruiser—named for an ancient Egyptian sun god—is 236 feet long, encompassing 47,715 square feet on five decks. Riveire eschewed what he calls the typical "pancake" layout of most ships by creating a three-story central atrium, with skylights above and windows on both sides, imparting a sense of volume and connection. "The abundance of natural light and the verticality distracts you from the fact that you're in a closed steel box," Riveire says. Public spaces and stateroom hallways feed off the atrium. "Resort architecture works best when there is a sense that there's something wonderful right next to where you are," he continues. "You move from space to space with a sense of anticipation."

Public areas are numerous and host abundant seating, so they never feel crowded—even the two eateries. The main restaurant's decor reflects Egyptian daily life: Screen patterns are based on wooden crates used to transport goods around rural areas by bicycle and the peels used in flatbread baking, and woven cords that decorate the entrance nod to traditional looms. A second dining area can be opened to the elements on cooler days for an indoor-outdoor experience. It leads to a terrace at the ship's stern, traced by an infinity-edge pool with a full-width tiled bench for watching the scenery.

The topmost sundeck gives the opportunity to lounge outside and watch the world go by under the cover of shade. As elsewhere, there are abundant seating options, itself a luxury: Tables and chairs, loungers, sectionals, and armchairs are all on offer. There are rocking chairs, too—a detail Riveire had to fight for on a previous project: "Everyone thought I was insane when I first suggested them." Now they're on all Viking ships and are enormously popular with passengers.

While a degree of consistency from ship to ship is important for branding—and to make Viking's legion of repeat customers feel at home—the design of each cruiser reflects its unique location. In Aton's atrium, for instance, four monolithic columns crafted of locally quarried stone relate to monumental Egyptian architecture, in particular the ancient site of Abu Simbel on the bank of Lake Nasser, which is fronted by four statues of Ramses II. The library on the upper deck is replete with themed volumes curated by London bookshop >





Main image: At 236 feet long, encompassing nearly 50,000 square feet, the cruiser has 41 staterooms, those on the middle and upper decks featuring private verandas. Inset, from left: The atrium-adjacent portside sitting area is furnished with Carlo Colombo's Aton sofas, Umberto Asnago Mobius chairs, and walnut side tables. A pair of teak rocking chairs on the topmost sun deck, right at the ship's forward, have front-row views of hot-air balloons soaring over the Valley of the Kings (an activity Aton passengers partake of). Leather-clad chairs flank the desk in a veranda suite, with millwork combining timber and wood-look laminate. ➤



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PROJECT TEAM HAROUT DEDEYAN; MARK BORKOWSKI; MINH PHAM; BROOKE WALKER; NOGA SMERKOWITZ; HOKULEA DUFFETT; SILVIYA BROWN; OMID GOLZAR; YI YANG; JIAN-MIN (RACHEL) CHEN; JISOO KIM; YIFAN (DANNY) CHEN; ADAM POON; CHRIS JONES; ERI KAWAGUCHI; ROTTET STUDIO. ANKERBEER B.V.: NAVAL ARCHITECT. DFI DAUERFLORA INTERNATIONAL: LANDSCAPE DESIGN. MARAHRENS GROUP: CUSTOM SIGNAGE. DECKMA: LIGHTING.

PRODUCT SOURCES

FROM FRONT WALTERS: CUSTOM SIDE TABLES (AFT DECK). LINK: PILLOW FABRIC. MAHARAM: CUSHION FABRIC (AFT DECK), DRAPERY (RESTAURANT), WALLCOVERING (LOUNGE, SITTING AREA). FLOWCRETE: FLOORING (FOYER). BRISA CASA: SOFA. BBB ITALIA: CHAIRS. COSTANTINI DESIGN: COCKTAIL TABLES. BLU DOT: SIDE TABLE. J.D. STARON: RUGS (FOYER, EXPLORERS SUITE). VESCOM: CEILING TREATMENT (FOYER, LIBRARY), BLACKOUT DRAPERY (VERANDA SUITE). ETHIMO: TEAK-BASE TABLE (SUNDECK). LEOLORI: RUG. MINOTTI: CORIAN-TOP TABLES (SUNDECK), SOFA, SIDE TABLES (LIBRARY). STONE.DE: COUNTERTOP (RESTAURANT). CARNEGIE FABRICS: CHAIR FABRIC. LAUTEX: CEILING PANELS (RESTAURANT, LIBRARY, HALL). SYNLAWN: TURF (SUNDECK). SLETTVOLL: SOFA (VERANDA SUITE). WOLF-GORDON: WALLCOVERING. BERNHARDT DESIGN: TABLE (VERANDA SUITE), BANQUETTE FABRIC (EXPLORERS SUITE). GRUPPO MASTROTTO: SEATING UPHOLSTERY (LOUNGE, LIBRARY). MURASPEC: WALLCOVERING (LIBRARY). TARKETT: CARPET (LIBRARY, SITTING AREA, HALL). NIKARI: TABLE (ATRIUM). MAJILITE: DISPLAY CASES. GIORGETTI: SOFA, CHAIRS (SITTING AREA). DESIGNTEX: SOFA FABRIC. MOBITAL: TABLES. CRATE & BARREL: ROCKING CHAIRS (SUNDECK). KETTAL: TABLE. CASSINA: CHAIRS (VERANDA SUITE). HOLLY HUNT: CUSTOM BANQUETTE (EXPLORERS SUITE). MAYA ROMANOFF: WALLCOVERING. POLTRONA FRAU: TABLE. POLIFORM: CHAIR. PHILLIP JEFFRIES: WALLCOVERING (STAIR). TIGER LEATHER: HANDRAIL LEATHER. PORCELANOSA: TREADS. MAXWELL RODGERS FABRICS: CUSTOM BEDCOVER (VERANDA SUITE). GISLAVED FOLIE: WHITE-FOIL WALLCOVERING (HALL). THROUGHOUT HEICK BY KZWO: CUSTOM OUTDOOR FURNITURE SUPPLIER. HIGHCLERE ENTERPRISES: ARTWORK. BOLIDT: DECKING. EGGER; PFLEIDERER; RESOPAL: LAMINATES, VENEERS. ARCHITEX; CLARENCE HOUSE; JAMES DUNLOP TEXTILES; JANUS ET CIE; KNOLL TEXTILES; KRAVET; LOOM SOURCE; MAXWELL; OPUZEN; POLLOCK; RUBELLA; SCHUMACHER; SILVER STATE FABRICS; WEITZNER: FABRIC.



Heywood Hill. (Yes, there are several copies of Agatha Christie's *Death on the Nile*.) Even the structure itself reflects the location, as it was partially dictated by constraints including the Nile's shallow depth and low bridges. Riveire originally wanted narrower walkways across the atrium, for instance, but the engineers needed the extra width for stability.

Site-specific, too, are the evocative 1920's black-and-white photographs of Cairo, rural Egypt, and the expedition that discovered King Tut's Tomb, all of which line walls in public spaces as well as the 41 passenger accommodations. The four sizes of staterooms range from 239 to 525 square feet, all but those on the main deck boasting private outdoor space. The larger suites are more like apartments than cabins, with floor-to-ceiling windows, sitting areas, desks, stocked bookshelves, walk-in dressing rooms, and surprisingly large bathrooms.

Throughout the Aton, everything from bedding to menu covers to the flowers is top tier and has been carefully thought out to maintain a consistent mood. A stairwell wall is covered in a real wood-vener wallpaper, in an aqua colorway suggesting faience; elegant leather-clad chairs pull up to stateroom desks; hallway carpet in deep blue with geometric patterning is a rich wool-blend. Says Riveire, "You don't want to pull people out of the moment with something that doesn't feel like it was part of the experience." 🍷

Top: In the living zone of an explorers suite—one of two—a leather-trimmed rug anchors a custom banquette and a Robert Lazzeroni Fidelio table, which is accented with a Henning Koppel bonbonniere. **Bottom:** Wood-vener wallcovering lines the atrium's porcelain-tread feature staircase.

Opposite top: A veranda suite bedroom showcases artwork by a student from a local Egyptian school that Viking supports. **Opposite bottom:** Photographs of the 1920's excavation of King Tutankhamun's tomb by the 5th Earl of Carnarvon flank a custom-carpeted stateroom corridor.

