



Everything's ship shape

A fixture on the Thames in London for the last 30 years, the RS Hispaniola was reopened for business last year with a restaurant and café on two decks – after a refurbishment programme which threw up some uniquely nautical problems

The RS Hispaniola has been moored at Victoria Embankment since 1973. In 2000 she changed hands and, after a period in dry dock, reopened for business last June, with work ongoing into the spring of this year.

Interac Design was employed to rebrand and refurbish the ship.



Visitors to the Hispaniola are longer put off by a daunting gangplank and, once aboard, can eat in the restaurant or sit on deck and savour the smell of the Thames



THE RS HISPANIOLA

- Built by Yarrow & Company shipyard and launched on February 11, 1953 – at the Moat of Aikton. She was 162ft long (later) with a beam of 28ft, weighing in at 508 gross tonnes.
- Owned by the Caledonian Steam Packet Company and worked as a passenger ferry around the Firth of Clyde and Western Isles of Scotland.
- Refitted in 1979 and renamed the RS

- Hispaniola before being moved to London's Victoria Embankment where she worked as a restaurant.
- In 2002 ownership changed again and she became part of the City Cruises fleet.
- Originally designed to carry 550 passengers, she now seats 200 in greater comfort.
- www.hispaniola.co.uk



with a brief to "make people want to go there and give it a complete overhaul in terms of image." That included opening up and totally reconstructing the 40-metre entrance tunnel, previously so scary that customers would get half way down and then bolt. Also a wooden ceiling was fitted

in the downstairs restaurant to give it a more nautical feel, along with a new lighting system.

Ships, however, present a unique set of design challenges, as director Susan Redgrave explains. "At low tide the walkway on to the ship was so steep it would be a safety hazard,

With signage I had to arrange for safety boats and there had to be two men in the boats."

Now that it's safely part of her portfolio, does Redgrave feel that she achieved what she set out to? "Within the limits of the budget I couldn't have done any better. It's working well." But she would

like to have put in new windows (the old ones can't be cleaned but replacing them was going to add £50,000 to the bill) and replace the old, Cuban-style timber chairs to make it more elegant.

Robert S Silver