



The 'Les Amis' à la carte restaurant on the *Superfast III*. (Bruce Peter)

clam shell-type bow doors, which opened outwards and back to the sides, instead of a lifting visor as on the earlier vessels. Costis Stamboulelis recalls that 'the opening and closing of the 45-ton visor of the *Superfast I* and *Superfast II* was a scary operation that I did not like. We only ever used it three or four times, but that was enough for me.'

Inboard, more consideration was given to a cruise-style passenger environment with a larger number of cabin berths (810 versus 686 on the initial pair) and a lido area, surrounded by protective glass screens, between the mast and funnel where the earlier vessels had a set of rather utilitarian ventilators protruding from the top of the centreline casing. Although the final design was produced in Finland, Knud E. Hansen A/S was retained to evaluate the plans on behalf of the owner and to suggest improvements (this work was again carried out by Holger Terpet).

The interiors of the *Superfast III* and *Superfast IV* were designed by a young Athens-based architect, Apostolos Molindris, who for the previous ten years had been an employee of AMK, the design firm



Part of the newly-completed hallway and the shop (with the shelves not yet stocked) on the *Superfast III*. (Meyer Turku)

owned by Michalis Katzourakis and his wife, Agni, which in the past had produced artworks and interiors for Royal Cruise Line's vessels. Molindris had studied architecture at the University of Thessaloniki, working thereafter in the firms of Tzonos and Hoipel & Hoipel before joining AMK. When in 1996 Katzourakis was approached by Pericles and Alexander Panagopoulos to request that he take on the commission to produce interiors for the vessels, he was at first hesitant as, although he was well-known for cruise ship interiors, he had never previously worked on any ro-pax ferries. It was in fact Molindris who persuaded him and who ultimately became responsible for the design work. At the same time Yran and Storbraaten were invited to submit a proposal and, subsequently, the submissions were presented one after the other by the two firms of architects at a high-level meeting attended by Pericles and Alexander Panagopoulos and Costis Stamboulelis and by a five-person team from Kværner Masa. The Panagopouloses chose the design by Michalis Katzourakis's firm, which Molindris presented. In particular, Alexander Panagopoulos and Molindris found that they



The mast of the *Superfast III* with wings matching those on the funnel casing. (Bruce Peter)

got on well at a personal level and they were also about the same age. As he observes, 'I was extremely fortunate to get to know Pericles and Alexander Panagopoulos. If Alexander hadn't introduced himself as a client, I would have thought of him as a colleague. We very quickly had a rapport and he contributed to the design process his very sharp perception of space, colour and texture, as well as valuable business insight.' Molindris's approach appeared warmer and more slickly up-to-date than Yran & Storbraaten's interiors for the earlier ships had been. In particular, he made inventive use of ceiling finishes and lighting to lend distinctive atmospheres to the public rooms and passageways. In the stairways, saturated colours and bold number graphics identified each deck to aid orientation.

Molindris had already established his own design consultancy, Molindris + Associates, while continuing to work with Katzourakis and he was keen to find his own clients. Besides, he already had expertise in working with other ship owners, having recently designed the interiors of the Chandris shipping company's headquarters in Piraeus. Shortly after the *Superfast III* and *Superfast IV* commissions

were awarded to him, he was invited by Alexander Panagopoulos also to design a new headquarters for Attica, which was located in the Athens district of Voula. Thereafter, Molindris + Associates were commissioned to produce the interiors for all of the subsequent Superfast vessels.

Meanwhile, construction of the *Superfast III* and *Superfast IV* commenced in Turku. As Costis Stamboulelis recalls, although these projects generally progressed very smoothly, there were occasional fundamental issues of disagreement between Attica's team and the shipyard's management:

'I once had a strong confrontation with Martin Saarikangas when apart from concerns about extra costs there were worries about the first vessel's increasing weight. Our problems actually began shortly after the contract had been signed. The classification society we had selected was the American Bureau of Shipping and the yard had accepted this but, before signing the contract, they had already calculated the steel weight of the vessels according to the rules of a different classification society, Lloyd's Register of Shipping, and it apparently did not occur to them that there could be differences between the methods employed by the two classification societies. They soon found out that applying the rules of American Bureau of Shipping would result in a heavier steel construction and they got alarmed when seeing that their own margin was rapidly consumed not by additional requirements from our side but only by applying ABS's rules.'

At a certain point when the disagreement between Attica Enterprises and the yard about extra costs had multiplied, Martin Saarikangas communicated with Pericles Panagopoulos and a meeting was arranged in Turku. Meanwhile, Alexander Panagopoulos and I had prepared our figures and arguments regarding costs but the discussion got a bit intense when he associated the extra costs problem with the extra weight one. Martin Saarikangas said to me 'As a naval architect you should know what weight distribution means to the stability of a vessel' to which I replied 'I do know what it means, but I do not know the results of your calculations about which you have not informed us, so in fact I do not know where we stand at this moment'. 'We are at the limit' he said.

It was then when Pericles Panagopoulos took Martin into another room leaving Alexander, me and the rest of us Fins and Greeks waiting at the table. A short while afterwards, the



The *Superfast III* is seen alongside at Patras; in comparison with the *Superfast I*, illustrated on page 26, it will be seen that the design details are considerably more refined and harmonious. (Bruce Peter)

two gentlemen walked out of the room looking pleased and relaxed. The matter of the extra costs had been settled. When a few days later I complained to Mr. P. that he had not given us the chance to present our case, he told me that Saarikangas and I had looked like cocks ready to fight and he had to stop it.'

For the Greek supervisory team, another major challenge was the cold Finnish climate, which southern Europeans found very uncomfortable:

'The initial visit in winter of Alexander Panagopoulos, the interior architect Apostolos Molindris and myself to Kværner Masa-Yards' Pijikio works, where ships' cabins were prefabricated, for the inspection of mock up cabins was fortunately brief, but the permanent stay in Turku for 13 months during the construction and outfitting period was a hard test for Attica's permanent project team. I personally had also the bad feeling of being isolated from the rest of Europe, especially after the evening departures of cruise ferries to Stockholm. Fortunately, progress on the construction of the vessels was interrupted in the building dock only two or three times during the 1997 winter because of extremely low temperatures which meant that even the Finns had to down tools and retreat indoors.'

The sea trials of the two vessels were completed successfully, although those of *Superfast III* took longer than had been anticipated because of repeated breakdowns of various pieces of machinery and equipment. It was necessary for the yard to borrow a tug to shuttle several times to the ship to bring out replacement parts or pieces of equipment removed from *Superfast IV*, which the Attica supervisory team eventually started referring to as 'the spare ship'.

When these challenges were resolved, the vessels departed on their delivery voyages, *Superfast III* entering service between Patras and Ancona in February 1998 and the *Superfast IV* – on the delivery voyage of which Pericles and Alexander Panagopoulos travelled – commencing operation two months thereafter in April. With these developments, Superfast now could offer two daily Adriatic routes using four ports of call – Patras and Igoumenitsa in Greece and Ancona and Bari in Italy. The departures from Italy were scheduled in the early and late evening so that trucks coming from the country's industrial north had enough time to get to the ports for embarkation. The Panagopouloses were extremely pleased with the vessels, as a speech by Alexander Panagopoulos, made at the delivery of the *Superfast III*, demonstrates: 'For the first time I can honestly say that all our expectations have been surpassed... We are getting ships that are faster, larger, more economic and more comfortable than we expected.'



Top: The *Superfast VII* amid winter ice off the Finnish port of Hanko. (Attica Group)

Above: The *Superfast IX* passes beneath the Forth Railway Bridge inbound to Rosyth. (Attica Group)

Right: The *Superfast VIII* is seen approaching Rostock. (Bruce Peter collection)





The lounge and cocktail bar on the *Superfast IX*. (Bruce Peter)



The spa area on the *Superfast IX*. (Bruce Peter)



Another view of the *Superfast IX*'s lounge. (Bruce Peter)



The a la carte restaurant on the *Superfast IX*. (Bruce Peter)



A standard outside cabin on the *Superfast IX*. (Bruce Peter)



One of the *Superfast IX*'s luxury suites, overlooking the bow. (Attica Group)



The cafeteria on the *Superfast XI*. (Apostolos Molindris)



A dramatic aerial view of the *Superfast XI* at sea, showing the extensive sheltered areas of outside deck. (Attica Group)



The a la carte restaurant on the *Superfast XI*. (Apostolos Molindris)



A bow-quarter view of the *Superfast XI*. (Attica Group)

to us their points and understand our requests and comments. In building the interior, they did face additional problems because they had never before worked with some of the materials specified by the architects. They were however always ready to accept when something was not done correctly and do it again by ordering new material.

Complicated and unfamiliar as our vessel was to most of them, it was still a very small ship compared with the giant oil tankers and big container ships they were building at the same time. When approaching the yard one morning, I saw the newly-completed *Blue Star Paros* lying alongside a white-painted Greek-owned VLCC and from a distance the ferry looked like the tanker's bunker vessel. The size of the yard itself was impressive – in an aerial photo of the yard and the town of Okpo, the yard occupied more space than the town. Daewoo is indeed the biggest yard I have ever visited and experienced anywhere in the world. It is a wonder of human organisational ingenuity.'

The *Blue Star Paros* was delivered in April 2002 and was placed in service between Piraeus, Paros, Naxos and Santorini. The *Blue Star Naxos* followed in June and was placed on the same popular and busy

route. According to Costis Stamboulelis,

'The new Blue Star brand name and ships received an enthusiastic reception from the Greek travelling public and none of us – dare I say it not even Alexander Panagopoulos – expected such a good outcome. The people of the Cyclades islands did not refer to the ships by their names (*Ithaki, Paros, Naxos, etc.*), but by the generic name 'Blue Star' and this spread all over the country and to non-Greek passengers too. Only much later, when there were so many Blue Star Ferries in operation that travel agents issuing tickets had to ask prospective passengers which Blue Star ferry they wanted to travel on, or had to explain to them which Blue Star ferry was going to their destination, did the full names come to be widely used.'

In 2002, Superfast was operating a ten-strong fleet and Blue Star Ferries had five conventional ships plus two catamarans, while another six older conventional ferries were operating under the Blue Ferries brand with two in addition chartered out (the former *Blue Galaxy* and *Blue Island*). Altogether, Attica Enterprises had full or part ownership of no fewer than twenty-five ferries, seventeen of which were less than a decade old. In the context of a Greek ferry industry



The *Blue Star Paros* navigates amid the spectacular scenery of the Caldera at Santorini. (Bruce Peter)



The large forward-facing lounge on the *Blue Star Naxos*, featuring soothing colours and low partitions to engender a greater sense of intimacy in each section. (Apostolos Molindris)



The reception area on the *Blue Star Naxos* which, as with all of Apostolos Molindris's ferry interiors for Attica-owned ships featured comfortable seating adjacent to the counter. (Apostolos Molindris)



The view looking aft in the forward lounge on the *Blue Star Naxos*. (Apostolos Molindris)



The same space, looking forward and showing the two-deck-high forward-facing windows covered in blinds for night-time navigation. (Apostolos Molindris)

had subsided we returned to the drawing board and revised our design in the hope that the state would not implement all the controls they had announced.

With Daewoo no longer in the picture, we sent fresh enquiries to many other shipyards in Europe and South Korea. Most of the European yards were far too expensive and so we did not pursue our negotiations. Only a couple of them – namely Barreras in Spain and ENVC in Portugal – made offers we felt worth pursuing further. Barreras, located in Vigo, had valuable experience from building numerous ferries of various types for Spanish operators and was actually a good candidate for obtaining our order. Yet, in spite of taking advantage of a special Spanish tax lease scheme, it was not much less expensive than the other contenders. ENVC, on the other hand, was a small yard in Viana do Castelo with practically no experience in ferry building. We did however visit it and had a number of meetings, but at the end of every meeting their price was increased. The limited capacity of the yard, coupled with rumours about a possible change of ownership and the successive price increases were not promising signs so we decided to look elsewhere.

It was then that a new shipyard from the Far East suddenly appeared, expressing their strong interest in our project. We had never heard of the Singapore Technologies Marine Shipyard, but nonetheless its sales people appeared to know a lot about our company and our business. We discussed the project with their delegation and were pleased to see that they could accommodate our requirements. Following numerous exchanges we finally reached an agreement on price and delivery time as well as on the terms of the contract and we set a date for signing the contract in Singapore.

A big group of Attica and Blue Star executives – consisting of Alexander Panagopoulos, Michael Sakellis, Michael Gialouris, Spiros Paschalis, Panagiotis Papadodimas, Maria Stamouli, my colleague George Anagnostou and myself – flew to Singapore in November 2006 for the signing ceremony – but, alas, it was not to be. When George Anagnostou and I met with the yard's designers, they opened their copy of our specification in which they had made changes and added remarks to practically every single line. There appeared to be nothing in what we had supplied that they would accept without making changes. Among all the points, they would not even accept the specified limits for noise and vibration levels which were the same as on the reference ship *Blue Star Paros* and they continued refusing

The *Blue Star Paros* is shown making an evening departure from Piraeus during the busy summer tourist season in 2010.
(Bruce Peter)





The interior architect, Apostolos Molindris, and his colleagues Evangelia Kintou and Maria Alibranti pose in front of a large section of superstructure for the *Blue Star Delos* at the Daewoo shipyard at Okpo. (Apostolos Molindris collection)

longer route from Piraeus to the Dodecanese. Consequently, it needed more cabins and reclining seats both self service and a la carte restaurants.

When Attica's newbuilding team began their post-contract exchanges with Daewoo to fine-tune and agree the details of numerous plans and diagrams, they were surprised to discover that none of the engineers who had been involved in the design and building of the previous Blue Star vessels were there anymore. Every one of them had been transferred to other departments and some had even gone to other shipyards. The management had not considered it necessary to at least maintain a nucleus of people with knowledge of passenger ship construction since the delivery of the *Blue Star Naxos* in 2002. As Costis Stamboulelis recalls, 'We quickly realised that we would have to go back to basics and explain in detail and from scratch what we were aiming at and how things should be done - and this was not just confined to the interior outfitting, but concerned almost every aspect of the entire vessel.' Furthermore, in the eight years that had elapsed, the Okpo yard had grown even bigger than before and was now building mainly large container ships, drill ships and liquid natural gas carriers, but fewer large oil tankers. Attica's ferries were the only passenger ships in the order book.

Early in 2010, Attica established a site office at the yard, which was headed by John Revelas, assisted by, among others, Vassilis Toumazatos, Captain Spyros Pefanis, Superintendent Chief



The handing-over day for the *Blue Star Patmos* with, left to right, the naval architects Chris-Alexander Korfiatis and Costis Stamboulelis, the head of Attica Group's Legal Department, Panayotis Papadodimas and its CEO, Spiros Paschalis. (Costis Stamboulelis collection)

Electrician Constantinos Damianakis and local surveyors for steel construction, preservation and painting. Later on, as the construction was advancing, Charalambos Nikolaides supervised the interior outfitting and the officers of the two ships joined the team. Costis Stamboulelis and his colleagues from Attica's Athens headquarters visited on a monthly basis and, in between, dealt with all of the correspondence regarding progress. In some of these frequent visits they were joined by Apostolos Molindris and some of his associates who had to make sure of the accurate implementation of approved drawings and of the appropriate use of materials selected after lengthy discussions with the yard and its subcontractors. The requirement in the specification for mock ups of the interiors to be built by the yard was a new departure in their usual production process and their subsequent inspection led both to some aggravation and amusing discussions. While cooperation was generally good and the yard's approach was professional and dedicated, according to Costis Stamboulelis,

'Their desire to do everything in-house without seeking assistance from expert consultants caused some mistakes to be made which were costly to correct. In the end, consultants were brought in after all, but it took time and many heated debates. We usually had continuous meetings to resolve various issues, so at certain points there could be between 20 and 30 people waiting for their turn outside our site office. We really came



Costis Stamboulelis (centre) and his colleagues Myron Vergis and Chris-Alexander Korfiatis at the Daewoo shipyard. (Apostolos Molindris)

very close to issuing priority tickets! All in all, it was a nerve testing project for both parties but in the end the yard displayed an exemplary performance in the delivery formalities and Attica acquired two high-quality beautiful vessels.'

For the delivery voyages to Greece, which involved passing the pirate-infested waters off Somalia and Yemen, temporary camouflage measures had to be implemented - for example, the upper garage deck side openings were sealed with plywood panels painted white so as to look from a distance like continuous steel shell plating. Similar panels were prepared to seal the front lounge deck windows.

The *Blue Star Delos* left Okpo in October 2011 under the command of Captain Pefanis. When in the sea lane south of Yemen an attempt to approach the vessel was made by a single pirate boat which quickly gave up due to the ferry's speed and instead attacked a Turkish bulk carrier which was following. Fortunately a safe arrival was made in Piraeus in early-November.

When the *Blue Star Patmos* was nearing completion in March 2012, alas, John Revelas suffered a stroke while standing on the stern ramp and he passed away a few hours later in the local hospital. The vessel left Okpo in June 2012, also under the command of Captain Pefanis, and arrived in Piraeus in July. *En route*, she encountered



Dressed overall with signal flags, the *Blue Star Patmos* arrives in Piraeus for the first time at the end of its long delivery voyage from South Korea in July 2012. (Apostolos Molindris)

persistently heavy seas and when close to Aden was approached by three pirate boats. When the speed was increased from 21 to 25.5 knots they gave up the chase, however, and another successful delivery was achieved.

Upon entering service, the *Blue Star Delos* and the *Blue Star Patmos* came quickly to be widely regarded by passengers and ferry industry observers alike as the best vessels ever seen on Greek domestic routes, offering an unprecedented level of spaciousness and comfort. In 2012, their design won a ShipPax award for its excellence - an achievement of which Attica is very proud.

While the projects to build these vessels had been under development, in the autumn of 2008, a global economic downturn began in the United States of America where unsustainable levels of debt caused a rapid loss of confidence. The suddenly difficult times spread to Europe and Greece, which had accumulated a very large debt burden, was particularly exposed. The circumstances of these events were complex and fall out with the scope of the present work but in order to reduce Greece's level of borrowing, the European Central Bank, the European Commission and the International Monetary Fund imposed a draconian regime of austerity on the country. This led to a decline of trade across the Adriatic, affecting all ferry operators there, but the domestic ferry market was less harmed as islanders still needed to commute back and forth to the mainland. Thus, in the years after 2008, Attica Group rescheduled its operations in the Adriatic and the Aegean a part of the Superfast

The very elegant a-la carte restaurant on the *Blue Star Patmos* features a wavy ceiling, covered in silver leaf.
(Bruce Peter)



Part of the 'Goody's' fast food restaurant on the *Blue Star Delos*, showing a partition clad in a photo mural of cutlery – one of several unusual wall decorations found throughout the ship. (Bruce Peter)



Part of the cafeteria on the *Blue Star Patmos* with a photo mural of trees on the bulkhead and matching patterned glass partitions between the seating groups. (Bruce Peter)



Another view of the 'Goody's' restaurant on the *Blue Star Delos*, in which the cutlery motif is repeated on the glazed partitions. (Bruce Peter)



One of the toilets on the *Blue Star Patmos*, showing the precise detailing and very high standard of fit and finish achieved on board. (Apostolos Molindris)



An inside cabin on the *Blue Star Patmos*, offering great comfort and relaxation while the ship speeds across the Aegean. (Apostolos Molindris)



The 'Flo Café' for deck passengers on the *Blue Star Delos*, with an air conditioned servery area behind the glazed partition. (Apostolos Molindris)

The funnel of the *Blue Star Delos* at night. (Bruce Peter)

