

Rotterdam V Cruises Into Retirement

Shipline collectors and world travelers alike will mark with a sigh the career's end of one of the high seas' great ladies. The *Rotterdam V* officially retired September 30th, as she tied up for the last time in Fort Lauderdale, FL. Across the globe, a brand new *Rotterdam VI* debuted on October 6th.

The *Rotterdam V* was introduced to the world on September 3rd, 1959—the new flagship of Holland -America Line. The 38,645 ton vessel made its maiden voyage from its name-sake city, sailing from Rotterdam to New York. During almost four decades of sailing, it had one of the most loyal followings in the shipline industry, carrying 1.2 million passengers. It made 29 world cruises, more than any other passenger ship in history.

The ship created quite a stir when it first set sail. It had a very unusual and, for the time, a very progressive design. It had a wrap-around promenade deck, for instance, and two-deck-high public rooms. Most notably, however, it lacked the traditional smokestack funnels, which were replaced with diesel exhaust stacks. This unique profile caused almost as much controversy then as had the earlier *Rotterdam* when it was launched without sails in the 1800s.

The *Rotterdam V* was built when ships had two classes of travel—first and tourist. One of its most distinguishing features is its central, double staircase, which replicates one designed for the Chateau de Chambord in France in the 1500s. A retractable etched glass wall extends up through the staircase for several decks, and someone descending the staircase on one side would not see anyone ascending the other, keeping the classes of passengers separate.

However, at the mid-century mark, the golden age of trans-Atlantic trade was fading, and old-style first- and tourist-class travel disappeared. Ships, then, needed to be compatible for one-class cruising, and the *Rotterdam V's* unique staircase allowed an easy conversion to a one-class vessel.

Ironically, that staircase was one of the reasons contributing to the ship's retirement. By Oct 1st, all ships had to have met the new Safety of Life at Sea requirements, and the *Rotterdam V* would have required major surgery—including the staircase.

It's not clear at this point what the future holds for the old girl, but she apparently will not go to the scrap yard. She may end up in Holland as a floating hotel, or she may even be given life again....as there is some speculation that a major cruise company may make a bid for her.

I don't think I've ever seen a cover that actually features *Rotterdam V*, but I did find this cover which at least mentions this queen of the seas.

