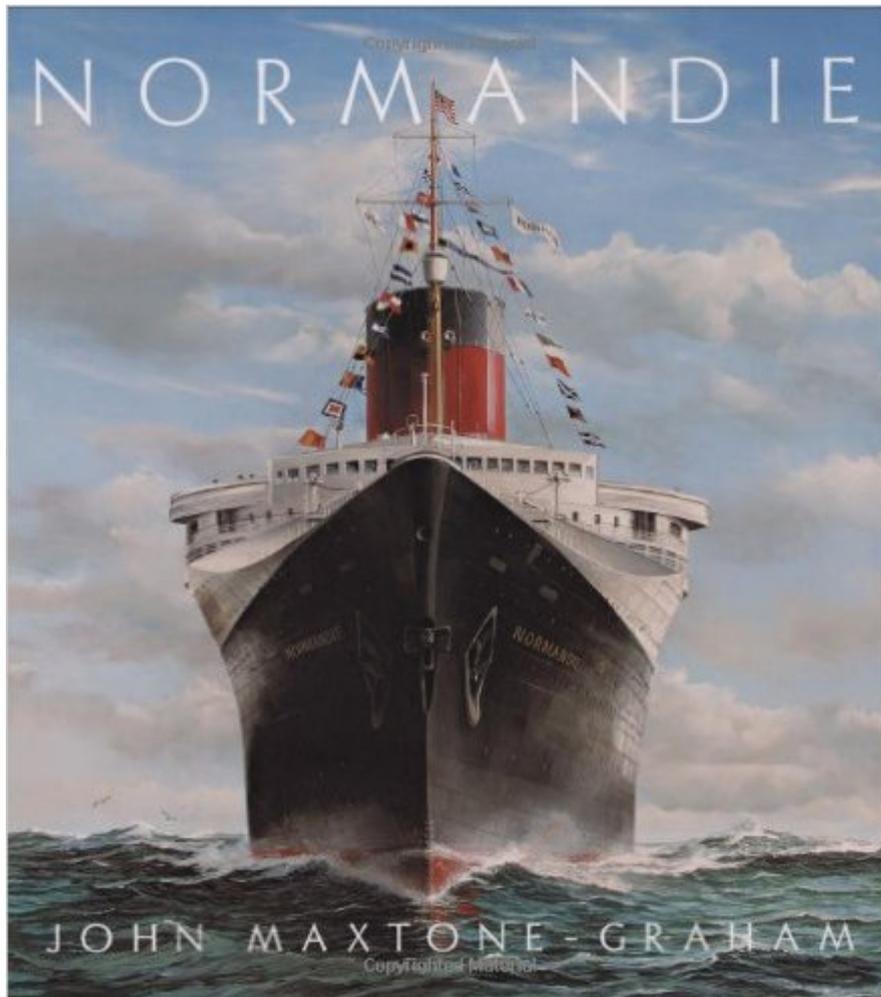


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# Normandie: France's Legendary Art Deco Ocean Liner



## Synopsis

A magnificent tribute to the illustrious and ill-fated steamship Normandie was unquestionably the most beautiful ocean liner ever built. The world's largest at the time, she also became the world's fastest. Her art deco interiors were unrivaled: capacious, elegant, and chic, decorated by teams of France's most talented artists. Yet Normandie was plagued with frustrations—never attracting more passengers than the competition and tragically ending her days in flames at New York's Pier 88. Celebrated maritime historian John Maxtone-Graham confesses to a hypnotic fascination with Normandie. In this comprehensive volume, enriched by over 200 photographs and illustrations, he documents every aspect of the vessel's decorative antecedents, design, construction, and service. Always articulate, entertaining, and devastatingly well informed, Maxtone-Graham has created the definitive Normandie panegyric, a comprehensive and, at times, heartbreaking account of this fabled liner. 200+ photographs and illustrations

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

As a huge fan of the Normandie, and an avid reader of Maxtone-Graham's classic "The Only Way to Cross," I pre-ordered NORMANDIE with great expectations. Unfortunately, the book's promise was not met. In fact, this volume comes as close as any liner book can to being downright irritating. How so? A grab bag of complaints, in no particular order: the illustrations, by and large, are fairly common images of the Normandie - there is very little novelty here, and even more annoyingly, the pictures and captions don't relate to the nearby text. Find something of interest, and you'll have to

search through the pages to locate the relevant passage, often chapters away. The text itself is pompous, pedantic and preachy, full of absurd phrases such as "nay," and "let us away," which might actually be amusing if they weren't merely indications of a strangely disjointed and dissatisfying narrative that delves into excruciating levels of detail one moment, then glosses entire subjects the next. (All the more surprising from Maxtone-Graham, whose earlier works are master examples of witty, concise prose.) Worst of all, Maxtone-Graham has fallen into that most hideous of modern affectations, influenced no doubt by the Cameron-Winslet-DiCaprio set, of dropping the determiner before ships' names, as if vessels somehow were living people. While referring to liners in this way might make for more vivid movie-making, in a work with scholarly pretensions, it's merely exasperating, especially when taken by the author to new, more ridiculous heights. In the current volume, even the Normandie's deck names come alive, in lines such as: "Sun deck sported," "Promenade deck boasted." O tempora, o mores!

Thank you Mr. Maxtone-Graham for this eagerly anticipated tome for my collection. When you first told me of its imminent release, during a QE2 crossing almost two years ago, I've been on pins and needles. It's been one of the highlights of my season, and I'm not at all disappointed. I received the book before lunchtime and listened to my hunger pangs as I turned each page unable to put it down. This book is a good balance of text with photos I have never seen before. Being an artist and designer, I am impressed with the layout and design, noting especially the cover and inside composite illustration. And it's printed in Italy! The historical perspective is complete and accurate as always. It's a must have for the SS Normandie enthusiast, design student, or maritime historian. I love chapter two with your inclusion of the Exposition des Arts Décoratifs of 1925. I had the privilege of seeing an art deco exhibit in London at the V&A, and one of the exhibits was brief film footage of a crossing on Normandie in colour. What a treat. The fold outs of the deck plans are very interesting showing how CGT had a complete vision of the deco style that didn't end with the furniture or interior embellishments, but extended to the overall architecture of the ship. It's also interesting to see the overviews of the cabins on those decks, and as to the whereabouts of the surviving relics today. Someone told me how he once had seen a friend off on Normandie, commenting how it was the most beautiful ship he had ever seen. The generous photos in this book give me an idea of what he experienced. Especially the large photo of the lift, which is wonderfully placed at the end. These photos are all nicely restored with nice tonal balance.

After being disappointed by John Maxtone-Graham's recent book on the SS "United States," but

enjoying my rereading of "The Only Way to Cross," I thought I'd give this book a shot. I'll admit that I didn't really quite understand the appeal of the "Normandie" until recently, and it wasn't until the last couple of months that I've started to fall in love with her. Now I can't seem to get enough of this wonderful ship. Despite his occasionally self-indulgent writing style, Mr. Maxtone-Graham really is a tremendously good storyteller, and he manages to bring the ship's tragically short career vividly to life. He truly loves the "Normandie," and seems to luxuriate in simply writing about her. If he comes across as pretentious from time to time, I can forgive him. He is, after all, writing about the biggest, fastest, most luxurious, and most modern ocean liner of the time. He avoids the pitfall of focusing solely on the rich and famous, instead choosing to depict the ship's life largely from the perspective of common passengers and crew members. The construction and fitting out of the ship receives ample space, as does the creation of her beautiful public spaces and interior decor. What technical material is here doesn't overwhelm the text, but as someone interested in naval architecture, I wouldn't have minded a bit more. On the whole, this is a beautifully produced, fascinatingly written, and loving tribute to the "Normandie." After reading it from cover to cover, I finally understand what made her such a "big deal" at the time, and what keeps drawing people in.

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