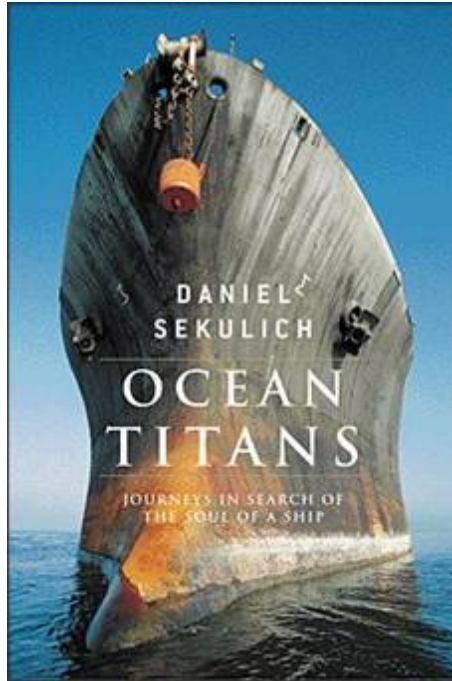




## Ocean Titans

### Journeys in Search of the Soul of a Ship



**By Daniel Sekulich**

Ocean Titans has been published in Canada by Penguin Books (Canada), 2006. For more information on this book and to write a review visit the [Canada Penguin Website](#)

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#### **From Chapter One - Dreamers**

In the beginning, a ship is a concept, nothing more. And, I might add, a somewhat adventurous concept for a species like ours that has evolved to live on dry land. We take it for granted today that anyone can step aboard a vessel - any vessel, whether it be a container ship, passenger liner, ferryboat or canoe - and put out upon the waters of the planet with a relative assurance of returning safely to shore. Yet the faith seagoing humans place in these craft is the result of many millennia of trial and error, with an inordinate amount of the latter having influenced marine design.

To create an ocean-going vessel entails the marshalling of great resources, capital and manpower. It requires vision, imagination, an understanding of the sea and its vicissitudes, an appreciation for the depredations that will be endured and an innate awareness of the technical challenges this feat of construction creates. The evolution of ships ranks as one of Mankind's greatest achievements, one that has allowed us to explore every corner of the globe, to successfully achieve heavier-than-air flight and even to explore space. But above all it begins with an individual and an idea.

Aboard a commuter jet outbound from Miami, the turquoise waters of the Straits of Florida glisten invitingly from my window seat. Most of the other passengers appear to be dreaming of a weekend filled with fun in the sun at the resorts and casinos of The Bahamas, but I am en route to Nassau to meet a very different sort of dreamer. Antony Prince is the head of G.T.R. Campbell Marine Consultants (better known as GTRC), an international firm specializing in ship design and project management and I want to find out from him just how one goes about envisioning and designing a commercial vessel. An elusive man constantly on the move, Antony Prince has been marooned at his home and head office in The Bahamas for the last couple of weeks providing me with a short opportunity to learn from a veteran of the business. While the jet banks over the northern tip of Andros Island, I idly scan my research notes before flipping open a small book written over a hundred years ago, one devoted to the detailed understanding of a vessel's strengths and weaknesses and to a dream.

## **From Chapter Five - Engineers**

I make it down the ladder without stumbling - barely - while the Chief stands there grinning proudly. Though the engine room is noisy and hot, it is also one of the cleanest and brightest parts of the Antwerpen. The bulkheads and ceilings are painted white, the floor plates and engine parts a dark shade of green and a latticework of pipes, conduits and wiring hover above me. Looking around, I see no oil stains or piles of rags or general signs of disorder such as you might find in an auto mechanic's garage. If given the choice between the sun-bleached main deck and the engine room floor, I'd eat a meal off the steel grating beneath me here. The Chief runs a tight ship down here.

The main engine is behind him, a green monster that has been trapped and confined to this industrial bestiary along with a trio of smaller generators and various other equipment required to maintain a ship on the high seas and in port. I ask Ostrowski about the particulars of his baby and he shouts answers at me.

"Is Sulzer engine. You know Sulzer? With six cylinders." He holds up six fingers to emphasize this. "It can generate...um...14,400 horses of power. Over there is three Daihatsu generators, diesel, for auxiliary power." He walks around the Sulzer engine and bellows statistics over the din of the machinery. The main power plant is fueled by a thick type of marine diesel fuel that has to be heated up before being injected into the firing chambers. The days of coal-fired, steam engines with their immense water boilers are long gone. Instead what you have are essentially really, really big truck engines like this one, a "straight six", with the cylinders in a line. Each piston is five metres high, as shown by a spare one that stands off to one side. The three smaller generators are aft and I can see someone fumbling around beneath the middle one. I follow Ostrowski as he climbs down to a narrow catwalk where a crewman is labouring to put an access panel back in place. The Chief shouts some instructions to the guy, a motorman about my age whose hands are coated in thick grease and oil. He is contorted into an uncomfortable position with one arm in the open portal and the other grasping a portable light to better see what lies inside the engine. Still he manages to give me a weak smile before the Chief leads me off to explore more of his world.

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