

DARDEN RESTAURANTS INC
Form DFAN14A
July 15, 2014

UNITED STATES
SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION
Washington, D.C. 20549

SCHEDULE 14A
(Rule 14a-101)

INFORMATION REQUIRED IN PROXY STATEMENT

SCHEDULE 14A INFORMATION

Proxy Statement Pursuant to Section 14(a) of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934

(Amendment No.)

Filed by the Registrant

Filed by a Party other than the Registrant

Check the appropriate box:

- Preliminary Proxy Statement
- Confidential, for Use of the Commission Only (as permitted by Rule 14a-6(e)(2))
- Definitive Proxy Statement
- Definitive Additional Materials
- Soliciting Material Under Rule 14a-12

DARDEN RESTAURANTS, INC.
(Name of Registrant as Specified in Its Charter)

STARBOARD VALUE AND OPPORTUNITY MASTER FUND LTD
STARBOARD VALUE AND OPPORTUNITY S LLC
STARBOARD VALUE AND OPPORTUNITY C LP
STARBOARD LEADERS DELTA LLC
STARBOARD LEADERS FUND LP
STARBOARD VALUE GP LLC
STARBOARD PRINCIPAL CO LP
STARBOARD PRINCIPAL CO GP LLC
STARBOARD VALUE A LP
STARBOARD VALUE A GP LLC
STARBOARD VALUE R LP
STARBOARD VALUE R GP LLC
JEFFREY C. SMITH
MARK R. MITCHELL

PETER A. FELD
BRADLEY D. BLUM
CHARLES M. SONSTEBY
ROBERT MOCK
CRAIG S. MILLER
BETSY S. ATKINS
MARGARET SHÂN ATKINS
JEAN M. BIRCH
JAMES P. FOGARTY
CYNTHIA T. JAMISON
WILLIAM H. LENEHAN
LIONEL L. NOWELL, III
ALAN N. STILLMAN

(Name of Persons(s) Filing Proxy Statement, if Other Than the Registrant)

Payment of Filing Fee (Check the appropriate box):

- No fee required.
- Fee computed on table below per Exchange Act Rules 14a-6(i)(1) and 0-11.
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(1) Title of each class of securities to which transaction applies:

(2) Aggregate number of securities to which transaction applies:

(3) Per unit price or other underlying value of transaction computed pursuant to Exchange Act Rule 0-11 (set forth the amount on which the filing fee is calculated and state how it was determined):

(4) Proposed maximum aggregate value of transaction:

(5) Total fee paid:

.. Fee paid previously with preliminary materials:

.. Check box if any part of the fee is offset as provided by Exchange Act Rule 0-11(a)(2) and identify the filing for which the offsetting fee was paid previously. Identify the previous filing by registration statement number, or the form or schedule and the date of its filing.

(1) Amount previously paid:

(2) Form, Schedule or Registration Statement No.:

(3) Filing Party:

(4) Date Filed:

Starboard Value LP, together with the other participants named herein, intends to make a preliminary filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission of a proxy statement and accompanying proxy card to be used to solicit votes for the election of a slate of director nominees at the 2014 annual meeting of shareholders of Darden Restaurants, Inc., a Florida corporation (the “Company”).

On July 15, 2014, Starboard Value LP issued the following press release.

STARBOARD DELIVERS LETTER TO DARDEN BOARD

Highlights Need for a New Direction and New Leadership at Darden

Condemns Board for Recent Value Destruction – Since Red Lobster Sale \$1 Billion of Market Value Has Been Lost Relative to Peers

Believes Red Lobster Sale is the Latest in a String of Bad Decisions Made by Management and the Board That Has Led to Massive Stock Price Underperformance Relative to Peers over Past Five Years

Urges Board to Take Responsibility for its Actions and Allow Starboard's Highly Qualified Nominees to Begin Darden's Much-Needed Turnaround without Unnecessary Delay

NEW YORK, July 15, 2014 /PRNewswire/ -- Starboard Value LP (together with its affiliates, “Starboard”), one of the largest shareholders of Darden Restaurants, Inc. (“Darden” or the “Company”) (NYSE: DRI), with beneficial ownership of approximately 7.1% of the outstanding common stock of the Company, today announced it has delivered a letter to Darden's Board of Directors.

The full text of the letter to the Board is available for viewing at the following link:
<http://tinyurl.com/LettertoDRIBoard>

About Starboard Value LP

Starboard Value LP is a New York-based investment adviser with a focused and differentiated fundamental approach to investing in publicly traded U.S. small cap companies. Starboard invests in deeply undervalued small cap companies and actively engages with management teams and boards of directors to identify and execute on opportunities to unlock value for the benefit of all shareholders.

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Okapi Partners

Bruce H. Goldfarb/Patrick McHugh

(212) 297-0720

CERTAIN INFORMATION CONCERNING THE PARTICIPANTS

Starboard Value LP, together with the other participants named herein (collectively, “Starboard”), intends to make a preliminary filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission (“SEC”) of a proxy statement and an accompanying proxy card to be used to solicit votes for the election of a slate of director nominees at the 2014 annual meeting of shareholders of Darden Restaurants, Inc. (the “Company”).

STARBOARD ADVISES ALL SHAREHOLDERS OF THE COMPANY TO READ THE PROXY STATEMENT AND OTHER PROXY MATERIALS AS THEY BECOME AVAILABLE BECAUSE THEY WILL CONTAIN IMPORTANT INFORMATION. SUCH PROXY MATERIALS WILL BE AVAILABLE AT NO CHARGE ON THE SEC'S WEB SITE AT [HTTP://WWW.SEC.GOV](http://www.sec.gov). IN ADDITION, THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE SOLICITATION WILL PROVIDE COPIES OF THESE MATERIALS WITHOUT CHARGE UPON REQUEST.

The participants in this solicitation are Starboard Value and Opportunity Master Fund Ltd (“Starboard V&O Fund”), Starboard Value and Opportunity S LLC (“Starboard S LLC”), Starboard Value and Opportunity C LP (“Starboard C LP”), Starboard Leaders Delta LLC (“Delta LLC”), Starboard Leaders Fund LP (“Leaders Fund”), Starboard Value LP, Starboard Value GP LLC (“Starboard Value GP”), Starboard Principal Co LP (“Principal Co”), Starboard Principal Co GP LLC (“Principal GP”), Starboard Value A LP (“Starboard A LP”), Starboard Value A GP LLC (“Starboard A GP”), Starboard Value R LP (“Starboard R LP”), Starboard Value R GP LLC (“Starboard R GP”), Jeffrey C. Smith, Mark R. Mitchell, Peter A. Feld, Bradley D. Blum, Charles M. Sonstebly, Robert Mock, Craig S. Miller, Betsy S. Atkins, Margaret Shan Atkins, Jean M. Birch, James P. Fogarty, Cynthia T. Jamison, William H. Lenehan, Lionel L. Nowell, III, and Alan N. Stillman.

As of the date hereof, Starboard V&O Fund directly beneficially owns 2,506,267 shares of common stock, no par value of the Company (the “Common Stock”), which includes 979,939 shares of Common Stock underlying call options exercisable within 60 days hereof. As of the date hereof, Starboard S LLC directly owns 573,216 shares of Common Stock. As of the date hereof, Starboard C LP directly owns 314,202 shares of Common Stock. Starboard R LP, as the general partner of Starboard C LP, may be deemed the beneficial owner of the 314,202 shares owned by Starboard C LP. Starboard R GP, as the general partner of Starboard R LP, may be deemed the beneficial owner of the 314,202 shares owned by Starboard C LP. As of the date hereof, Delta LLC directly owns 1,272,025 shares of Common Stock. Leaders Fund, as a member of Delta LLC, may be deemed the beneficial owner of the 1,272,025 shares owned by Delta LLC. Starboard A LP, as the general partner of Leaders Fund and the managing member of Delta LLC, may be deemed the beneficial owner of the 1,272,025 shares owned by Delta LLC. Starboard A GP, as the general partner of Starboard A LP, may be deemed the beneficial owner of the 1,272,025 shares owned by Delta LLC. As of the date hereof, Starboard Value LP beneficially owns 9,400,000 shares of Common Stock, consisting of shares of Common Stock owned directly by Starboard V&O Fund, Starboard S LLC, Starboard C LP and Delta LLC, and 4,734,290 shares of Common Stock held in certain managed accounts (the “Starboard Value LP Accounts”). Each of Starboard Value GP, as the general partner of Starboard Value LP, Principal Co, as a member of Starboard Value GP, Principal GP, as the general partner of Principal Co, and Messrs. Smith, Feld and Mitchell, each as a member of Principal GP and as a member of the Management Committee of Starboard Value GP and the Management Committee of Principal GP, may be deemed to be the beneficial owner of the aggregate of 9,400,000 shares of Common Stock owned directly by Starboard V&O Fund, Starboard S LLC, Starboard C LP, Delta LLC and held in the Starboard Value LP Accounts. As of the date hereof, Mr. Blum directly owns 2,250 shares of Common Stock. As of the date hereof, Mr. Sonstebly directly owns 3,000 shares of Common Stock. As of the date hereof, Mr. Mock directly owns 1,318 shares of Common Stock. As of the date hereof, Mr. Miller directly owns 1,000 shares of Common Stock. As of the date hereof, Ms. Betsy Atkins directly owns 200 shares of Common Stock. As of the date hereof, Ms. Shân Atkins directly owns 150 shares of Common Stock. As of the date hereof, Ms. Birch directly owns 450 shares of Common Stock. As of the date hereof, Ms. Jamison directly owns 420 shares of Common Stock. As of the date hereof, Mr. Lenehan directly owns 1,108 shares of Common Stock. As of the date hereof, Mr. Stillman directly owns 100 shares of Common Stock. As of the date hereof, Mr. Fogarty directly owns 1,990 shares of Common Stock. As of the date hereof, Mr. Nowell directly owns 400 shares of Common Stock.