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THE ART OF AIRCRAFT INTERIORS

The technical specs define the speed, range and altitude of an aircraft, but inside is where the individuality shines through, especially in the small art touches that bring a design to life. However, aircraft interior designers have to bring your dreams to reality within strict limitations. We spoke to three renowned designers about how they incorporate art into their designs.

By Jill Stockbridge



The interior design of an aircraft is very personal and often very passionate. Every new aircraft owner wants a design that is practical, yet reflects their unique lifestyle and personality. Incorporating art into a design is made challenging not just by individual preference, but by the many restrictions placed upon aircraft interior designers: balance, size, materials, weight, movement etc. Your favourite gold and onyx falcon statue may be beautiful, but would add cost to your every flight and could cause injury in an emergency.

Elisabeth Harvey, Director of Design, Basel Design Studio, Jet Aviation Basel, explained her approach: "Like private homes, art in private aircraft interiors is often a significant consideration for both aircraft interior designers and our clients. Art is the finishing element that creates the final ambience of an aircraft interior, raising the design to its final completion level.

"In aviation we tend to follow the same philosophy as in yachts or homes, where art can be treated as either an installation, an integral, built-in component of the interior design as a whole, or as a decorative or ornamental element to complement the interior design. Sometimes we are asked to design around an art piece the owner has chosen; alternatively, we're often asked to commission art that works with the design we developed for the cabin interior."

For Jean-Pierre Alfano, Founder and Creative Director of AirJet Designs, how art is incorporated into the design depends on how you define



Elisabeth Harvey



Jean-Pierre Alfano



Sylvain Mariat

art. He said: "We consider many of the elements we design for a cabin to be art. Therefore, it is not just paintings, but could be lighting fixtures, sculptures, or special artistic elements by artisans that we have commissioned for the cabin.

"Each cabin is custom designed and in so doing, we integrate artwork so that it blends with the overall design harmony of the cabin and corresponds to the taste of the owner. Everything is integrated into our design. Artwork is just one component of a global design."

At Airbus Corporate Jet Centre Creative Design Studio, Head Designer Sylvain Mariat also takes an integrated methodology. He said: "Taking a holistic approach to any design does tend to drive one towards a distinct approach to art within the interior. In the early stages of concept creation, we start to define the overall approach, including how any artwork may be integrated. It is at this stage that we start to evaluate where art should be installed. Wall space can be limited in an aircraft interior, but we are not

limited to this in our designs – art can feature in other areas, such as ceilings and floors. Sculptures can also be integrated within bulkheads or on top of cabinets and credenzas, or even entire pieces of furniture can uniquely be treated as pieces of art.



Subtle techniques are employed to secure sculpture and other moveable items.

stalled during some part of the flight, and stored in appropriate stowage during critical phases, including takeoff, landing and taxi,” he added.

While there can never be a compromise on safety, expertise and experience in the industry brings the ability to find solutions.

Harvey said: “When we install artwork, it needs to meet the same criteria as the rest of the interior in terms of flammability and correct fixation to the interior or it simply won’t be approved or certified. Finding or developing a solution often requires a creative approach. A bronze statue, for example, that appears to be a loose element on a credenza, may in fact be a lightweight substrate that was completed with a specialist paint or metallic composite finish to give the appearance of a cast metal sculpture.”

There are techniques used to subtly secure sculpture. Alfano explained: “Usually, we design special fittings that will hold the sculpture in place and mount it to the aircraft furniture. The fittings are designed to withstand turbulence and emergency landing loads as defined by airworthiness regulators and the aircraft OEM.

“We balance visual beauty and safety by designing the artwork attachment points so they are hidden and out of sight. We always design so that the functional aspects do not impact the aesthetics of the artwork,” he added.

COMMISSIONING CHALLENGE

Every design is unique and must cater to the individual tastes of the owner, usually requiring new commissions. Harvey enjoys the results this challenge brings. “In one design, we may focus more on sculptural elements; in another, specific framed canvasses. It very much depends on the client’s requirements, and the design language of the interior. We recently commissioned a wonderful silver-plated brass sculpture from a Spanish artist for the bathroom of a private A319. While we had to obtain a very high level of technical detail on the item and then create special fixations, the end result was the installation of a stunning and unique piece.”

She added: “Having the right art in an aircraft interior can really differentiate a design and give it a unique identity. Using art to create distinctive spaces also appeals to an ever more sophisticated clientele.”

Alfano works to match the artist’s unique style with the design concept: “We will commission special pieces that we design, or work with an artist to create something that corresponds to our artistic



Simple design can incorporate motifs such as the palm leaves and trunk elements from Airjet Design.

vision and uses their special talent. With regard to paintings, we work with the principal in deciding what they would like to include. Sometimes they have a preference for a painting in their personal art collection.”

Mariat matches the art form to the artist’s talent in his commissions. He said: “The commissions we undertake generally involve a combination of working with either our in-house artisans or known aviation suppliers in addition to our own research and development. We have commissioned a wide variety of art for our interiors, from fresco style paintings, mosaics and embroidered panels, to bronze sculptures and art on canvas.

“It’s about finding talented artists and working with them to create the perfect artwork for an individual interior.





While Alfano is famous for this more dramatically themed designs, including aquaria, fireplaces, golden palms and even a grand piano, design of individual features can stretch even the best designers and lighting can be key. Mariat recalled: “One of the most challenging art piece we designed and incorporated has been a modern Arabic motif that appears back-lit on a curved wooden partition, on an ACJ320. ACJC went beyond the usual limits of technology and materials to conceive this sculpture-like art piece.

“According to his mood, the passenger can light-

up, from a personal digital pad, this decorative divider, like a luminous mashrabiyya – the Arabesque latticework patterned screen.”

Harvey’s most memorable challenge was also about lighting. “A backlit feature artwork that was incorporated in one of our wide-body interiors presented challenges in terms of ensuring a homogenous light blend, with a minimum build-up behind. We are continually on the look-out for new techniques and new materials that will enable us to continue to create breath-taking art within a safe environment.”



The ACJC studio commissions a wide variety of art for their interiors.

“FINDING A SOLUTION OFTEN REQUIRES A CREATIVE APPROACH. A BRONZE STATUE, FOR EXAMPLE, MAY BE A LIGHTWEIGHT SUBSTRATE, COMPLETED WITH A SPECIALIST PAINT FINISH, TO GIVE THE APPEARANCE OF A CAST METAL SCULPTURE.”