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CULTURE CLUB
BREAKING CONVENTION WHILE KEEPING WITH TRADITION

The first-class interior design concept utilizes red and gold accents to evoke a classic Italian style while maintaining a Middle Eastern appeal.
When Airljet Designs presented its concept for a Chinese-themed jet interior in 2011, the idea attracted widespread industry attention. More than just splashy of red, the concept for the Boeing Business Jet (BBJ) cabin incorporated carved wooden accents, Chinese floral motifs and Chinese accessories, such as vases, lacquered boxes and scrolls.

This year, Airljet Designs presented a cabin design envisaged for Middle Eastern clients — the modern-Baroque Dolce Vita. A black-and-white colour scheme is accentuated by red and gold details throughout the various rooms in the cabin. More importantly, it is culturally sensitive, with separate lounges and lavatories for men and women, as Arab jet owners often request. It is also different in that most of its furniture — notably the bed in the master’s bedroom — is circular instead of the typical angular or slightly curved designs used in most aircraft.

“We try to break the rules and be different from other conventional aircraft that you see,” says founder Jean-Pierre Alfano. He adds: “But we still want to have a foot in the real world. It’s important to consider the time needed to deliver the aircraft. And even in a multi-million dollar project, cost is important.” For instance, one can build a cargo area dedicated for horses traveling with their owner, as one Middle Eastern client requested. But imagine the effects of turbulence on a swimming pool or bowling alley inside an aircraft.

This experimental yet pragmatic approach may be attributed to Alfano’s background in product design...
“WE TRY TO BREAK THE RULES AND BE DIFFERENT FROM OTHER CONVENTIONAL AIRCRAFT THAT YOU SEE, BUT WE STILL WANT TO HAVE A FOOT IN THE REAL WORLD”

and engineering, which led him to work on NASA research before venturing into aircraft interior design. And a focus on detail is born out of his own culture — a French appreciation of luxury and, he says, a knowledge of brands from one of his Italian designers. In fact, even if Dolce Vita was conceptualised with a Middle Eastern jet owner in mind, the company describes it as “a tribute to classical Italian style and spirit”.

An elegant chandelier hangs above a dining or conference table for six, while a carved ceiling medallion — a typical feature of Italian rooms — draws interest above the bed in the master’s bedroom. The sofas and divans in the lounge areas use soft Italian leather with sides in matte crocodile leather. Middle Eastern design elements are seen in gold latches on windows, glass sliding doors decorated with gold relief, and gold finishing on the wall around a flat-panel TV.

If this mixture of two cultural references seems odd, the company explains: “The separate living areas are created to reflect space layout preferences often requested.

FROM TOP

Patterned fabrics and carpets are seen throughout the Dolce Vita jet interior.

The dual-sink bathroom features a black-and-white colour scheme with gold accents.

OPPOSITE PAGE

Wall panels with a wave-like texture add depth to the meeting and dining area, while decorative accents make the room feel like home.
by Arab clients, who tend to be fans of an Italian design style.” Alfano’s team also chose furniture and décor that you would normally find at home or at a luxury hotel, such as patterned carpets, dual-sink bathroom vanities and jewelled ornaments.

While some clients like traditional design references, others appreciate a modern take on cultural themes, which Dolce Vita achieves. As a few young Chinese clients said upon seeing AirJet Designs’ Chinese-themed BBJ cabin, even if they prefer more contemporary interiors, it’s nice to see a design that truly understands what their culture is all about.

AIRBORNE ALCHEMY

While all eyes are on China, India is also attracting much attention from business jet manufacturers. AirJet Designs emphasises the importance of learning about a client’s country as much as his personality before beginning a design. Founder Jean-Pierre Alfano explains: “If I were to design a jet interior for an Indian client, I would travel to India, stay there for a week, go to places and take notes on particular design features.” It is necessary to meet a client face-to-face to “see what personality and taste the person has”. A keen cook, Alfano throws in this comparison: “Designing is like cooking a new recipe. You have to have new ingredients and know the alchemy between the ingredients.”