

VIEW

Tropical
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Holiday
GIFT GUIDE

November 17-November 23, 2018
LOS ANGELES, SANTA BARBARA & VENTURA COUNTIES

Cover Represented by ARAM AFSHAR
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Mile-High Master: Conversation with AirJet Design

Published on November 10, 2015 • At Home • Share: [f](#) [t](#) [in](#) [p](#)

When an international billionaire commissioned Jean-Pierre Alfano, founder and creative director at [AirJet Designs](#), to design a truly unique interior for his Airbus ACJ320 aircraft, he could have never predicted that Alfano was going to integrate a tropical aquarium into his design. Alfano had gotten wind his client's passion — scuba diving — and devised a special mechanism that made the tank able to withstand flight turbulence loads and changing cabin pressure during the journey. Explains Alfano: "Our clients want us to dream, to push the limits and be creative so we can design a spectacular jet interior for them."

Based out of Toulouse, France, Alfano has been designing luxury aircraft cabins since 2000. He founded AirJet Designs in 2010 and has since worked on numerous projects, including corporate jets and aircraft for VIPs and heads of state. We recently caught up with him and asked him to elaborate on mastering modern mile-high design.



Previews Inside Out **Had you designed other types of interior spaces before moving your designs to the sky?**

Jean-Pierre Alfano I came into aviation interior design after years of experience as a aircraft interior certification expert. I studied product design and engineering, and after having been involved on the certification side of VIP aircraft interiors, I decided to create my own design studio and design my own interiors. I felt there was a need to bring a more creative offer to aircraft owners.

Previews Inside Out **What is the most significant difference between designing for, say, a home versus a private**

jet?

Jean-Pierre Alfano The environment of an aircraft is very unique and very different from any other kind of space interiors designers typically work on. The living space inside most aircraft is usually rather small with a fixed cylinder shape and limited natural light sources. As a consequence, the initial design requirements for an aircraft are very demanding, because at the end of the design process, the passenger has to feel good within the cabin environment and forget about the very nature of its limitations (for example, we can't open windows on an airplane to get fresh air, so we have to design in such a way as to get past this limitation). Also, weight limitations, possible flight turbulence and airworthiness regulations have to be taken into consideration during the design process. This leads to technical solutions and material choices that are very demanding and only seen in aviation.

Previews Inside Out **What is your personal philosophy when it comes to private jet design?**

Jean-Pierre Alfano I approach every project from a clean slate in order to create unique, personalized spaces that combine innovation, creativity, airworthiness and safety.

Previews Inside Out **Can you describe your typical design process? Do you come up with a design first, or does a client come to you with a specific vision?**

Jean-Pierre Alfano The typical design process starts with an interview in which the client will explain his or her expectations and desires with regard to the project; what kind of design styles the client likes; and what kind of amenities the client wishes to have. During this interview, I also usually explain the technical limitations of what we can currently do within an aircraft cabin (no bathtub at this time, for example), and the rest of the design process, which includes preliminary design, preliminary design review, final design and technical follow-up.



Previews Inside Out **How closely do you work with a client, typically?**

Jean-Pierre Alfano We meet in person and try to connect in a way that will allow me to truly understand the personality and expectations of the client. The objective is to create a design that will appeal to the client right away without the need for major changes.

Previews Inside Out **What are some of the biggest challenges you must solve in your designs?**

Jean-Pierre Alfano The biggest challenge is usually to ensure that the actual aircraft interior will reflect my drawings and renderings, in terms of craftsmanship quality, finishing details, lighting effects and so on. That is why I place a great deal of importance on communicating effectively with the artisans and suppliers that will create all the bespoke elements that will go into the aircraft interior.

Previews Inside Out **How long does it take from start to finish?**

Jean-Pierre Alfano It all depends on the size of the aircraft and the nature of the interior project (complete or partial refurbishment), but the design phase duration typically varies from two months to up to one year for VIP airliners.

Previews Inside Out **In terms of what you do, how do you define luxury?**

Jean-Pierre Alfano I define luxury in private aviation as a balanced combination of space, comfort, personalization and service on-board.



Previews Inside Out **Where does the gift of silence — i.e., noise reduction — fit into the design?**

Jean-Pierre Alfano Most clients understand the limitations of the current state-of-the-art technology concerning noise reduction. Like everything in this business, we can either go with standard products offered by the industry at standard prices, or push the technological boundaries, which will also push the budgetary boundaries of the project. Most people choose the first option.

Previews Inside Out **How do you go about reducing noise?**

Jean-Pierre Alfano We approach noise reduction generally by combining several design features, such as optimized placement of sleeping areas, noise-insulation blankets (placed behind cabin lining panels), and noise-absorbing materials in the cabin (bulkheads, carpet backing).

Previews Inside Out **How quiet is “quiet”?**

Jean-Pierre Alfano Typical noise levels on private aircraft usually don't go below 45 decibels.

Previews Inside Out **Can you give us some recent examples of how you've dreamed and pushed the limits of creativity?**

Jean-Pierre Alfano Integrating a fireplace or an aquarium in an aircraft are things that can sound crazy at first but that, with my team, we were the first to create.



Previews Inside Out **Tell us more about that aquarium! How did you come up with the idea? Was the client surprised? Has the design actually been built out yet? What was the biggest challenge in that design?**

Jean-Pierre Alfano After the initial design briefing, the idea to incorporate sea inspiration in the design came, and it developed into the possibility of having an aquarium on board. After exploring several possibilities, I decided to make the aquarium the central focus of the interior, placing it over the wing box of the aircraft, thus addressing weight and balance certification issues. The aquarium is located in the central area of an A320 aircraft, between the dining and lounge area, and features several species of freshwater tropical fish, such as the discus and angelfish. The lighting, filtration, heating and feeding features of the aquarium have been integrated into the surrounding credenza. A motorized mechanism for raising and lowering the aquarium facilitates the cleaning and maintenance of the tank. The biggest challenge in that design was to make it airworthy in terms of structural strength and safety in case of turbulence and emergency landing. This aircraft is currently in the process of being outfitted.



Previews Inside Out **What is the most common design element you are asked to incorporate into your designs?**

Jean-Pierre Alfano For smaller jets, we are often asked to include a comfortable seating area coupled with a dining table, and for bigger jets, a bedroom with an en suite bathroom and shower. These features are always designed and customized to the client's wishes — for example, seat dimensions (designed around the person's body dimensions) and degree of support, commands, mattress firmness, shower amenities, etc.

Previews Inside Out **What are the must-haves in today's private jet?**

Jean-Pierre Alfano The big demand from clients is for the latest in on-board connectivity technology, whether it is for communication purposes or for what we in the industry call the "Cabin Management System." This would allow clients, for example, to dim the cabin lights, adjust the temperature, or close the window blinds at the touch of a button on their smartphone.

Previews Inside Out **What are some of the most over-the-top features you've been asked to include in a design?**

Jean-Pierre Alfano Round beds, saunas, gym equipment and airworthy grand pianos are all things we are dealing with on a regular basis.



Previews Inside Out **Can you provide us with a cost range for one of your private jets?**

Jean-Pierre Alfano Private aircraft prices can range from several hundreds of thousand dollars to tens of millions.

Previews Inside Out **Looking ahead, what will the future private jet look like?**

Jean-Pierre Alfano I think private aircraft interiors will get closer to home interiors in terms of technologies and features. Technological progress is ongoing, even if sometimes it is slow and steady. Maybe someday we will be able to have a bathtub on board! 🏠

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