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brand refresh

"THE TASK WAS TO SEEK OUT COLOURS AND TEXTURES THAT WOULD COMMUNICATE A STORY – CONNECTING PEOPLE TO THE DESTINATION OF NEW ZEALAND"

AIRCRAFT INTERIORS
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SHOW PREVIEW



IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE AIRBUS RECEIVES ITS FIRST ORDER FOR AN A380 WITH A CUSTOMISED VIP INTERIOR – EDESE DORET PROVIDES A GLIMPSE INTO THIS FANTASY WORLD

Who do you turn to if you happen to be a multimillionaire considering the purchase of an A380 for your very own personal use? As rare in number as those individuals rich enough to seriously entertain such a proposition, only a handful of skilled designers exist with the necessary pedigree and experience to deliver the ultimate flying fantasy.

New York-based Edése Doret is one such designer – in fact Doret has already worked on two A380 VVIP concepts, the first of which was featured in the April 2002 issue of *Aircraft Interiors International* magazine. That particular project is unlikely to get off the drawing board, never mind the runway. Doret cites “financial reasons” as an explanation – hardly surprising considering the sort of sums likely to be involved. As an indicator, Doret estimates that a VIP interior for a Boeing 747-400 currently costs around US\$70 million. A luxury A380 interior would cost somewhere nearer the US\$100 million mark. “That’s for a really lavish interior,” reassures Doret, upon noticing my stunned silence. Thank heavens for that, I think. “That sort of money would buy you the best entertainment systems and high-class finishes expected of a VVIP aircraft – the finest woods, leathers and gold plating.”

Doret’s most recent A380 project has also been put on ice – if it hadn’t, we wouldn’t be talking about it right now. Privacy and confidentiality are the watch words of this sort of work – designers risk severing extremely lucrative contracts should they blab on the details. Fortunately Doret owns the rights to the designs he has carried out to this stage, and with the client no longer interested in pursuing the scheme further, he is free to discuss the project with the press. Unsurprisingly, there’s

Image: 3Dviz.com

I LEFT THE OUTSIDE WALLS TO FOLLOW THE CONTOUR OF THE AIRCRAFT TO ACCENTUATE THE LINES AND THE CURVATURE OF THE FUSELAGE ITSELF



been no shortage of interest: “I got a call from Newsweek last week who spent two hours with me; and then ABC News – I think there must have been a leak during the Paris Air Show!”

Quiet and unassuming, I imagine Doret would require extreme coaxing to deliver the sort of copy that might light up the eyes of a jaded features editor at a major media player. Ever aware of the need to preserve his client’s anonymity and privacy, Doret refuses to even reveal the finer details as to why the latest A380 project has folded.

One reason could be the lack of completion centres in a position to actually make such a project happen. To date, no one has obviously ever attempted to deliver a VVIP A380 interior, and only a very few companies in all likelihood ever could. Unfortunately those individuals rich enough to be interested in such a scheme would likely pay more should they choose to take the plunge and be first – despite their wealth, this would no doubt offend their shrewd business sense.

At some point, however, it is likely Airbus will receive their first order for a VIP A380. “There has indeed been some robust interest from many parties in a VIP application of the A380,” admits Stephen Berry, Airbus’ VIP & corporate aircraft cabin definition manager. “Unfortunately I can not give you any more details or assistance as you will probably understand that any VIP application of a magnitude such as this is extremely sensitive and cannot be disclosed.”

Eastern promise: Perhaps Doret can reveal more from his most recent A380 VIP project. As the interview proceeds, a surprising number of details begin to emerge. For starters, the project was carried out for a head-of-state customer based in the Middle East, who happens to already own a VIP wide-

body Airbus jet, as well as other aircraft. As for the brief, Doret was handed a blank piece of paper. “I was free to do what I wanted to do – there was very little input from the client – it was quite strange in that sense.” In fact the only consideration that the client did stress was the need to keep an eye on the cabin’s overall weight, to ensure the aircraft stayed within the required operational range envelope.

Doret eventually settled on a mix of modern, traditional and regional styling cues. “The scheme features a lot of earth tones, colours based on the geographical area, the natural fauna and flora of the country and the desert surroundings. I also combined more modern elements and styling with traditional Middle Eastern and Arabic accents within the cabin.”

One particularly striking feature adopted by Doret is a deliberately open cabin design. “I created little groupings or mini-vignettes in terms of seating arrangements and made a more intimate setting by bringing everyone into the centre of the aircraft in certain areas, particularly in the grand lounge, instead of having everyone far apart and towards the side-walls,” says Doret. “I left the outside walls to follow the contour of the aircraft to accentuate the lines and the curvature of the fuselage itself – it’s such a new and beautiful aircraft and I wanted to accentuate those qualities. Too often, the designer tries to hide the fact that you are in an aircraft – I wanted to bring this fact out by not using the traditional dado panels and window shades normally selected.”

True to his word, Doret instead opted for the latest window shade technology that applies a current to an electro-sensitive film to darken the window at the press of a button, and moulded sidewall panels similar to those used in commercial aircraft, but with an ultrasuede or leather finish.



SPECIALREPORT



YOU GET THE FEELING THAT YOU ARE IN A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT ENVIRONMENT – IT'S MORE LIKE SOMETHING OUT OF THE ARABIAN NIGHTS MOVIE

On a virtual cabin walk-through, Doret starts at the lower lobe, which itself features a crew rest, crew galley, cargo hold and communications room. A spiral staircase then leads up to the main deck entrance area and lounge, which also includes the grand stairway to the upper deck. Going aft on the main deck, the entrance lounge is followed by the grand lounge, followed by a dining and conference room, which includes two 42in pop-up monitors integrated into the outboard credenzas, and a large 50in monitor on the monument that divides the grand lounge from the dining and conference area.

Although the main deck is clearly divided into these separate areas, the open plan design ensures an uninterrupted visual line along the length of the aircraft. "Basically the flight attendant sitting in her jump seat at the number one door can actually see all the way back to the bulkhead of the dining area," explains Doret. "Instead of walls, I divided the rooms by using the monuments that house the monitors. These monuments stand floor to ceiling but they do not span the width of the aircraft – they are only about 80ins wide, which leaves a nice thoroughfare to go through, and accentuates the curvature of the aircraft."

Beyond the main deck's dining room, there is a galley area for the crew to prepare meals, as well as a staff seating area. After that is the rear stairwell, which leads to an upper deck lounge that Doret describes as a "complete departure" from the typical 'Majlis' face-to-face seating configuration popular on Middle Eastern VIP aircraft. "When you are sitting in this area you get the feeling that you are not in an aircraft but in a completely different environment – it's more like something out of the Arabian nights movie."

Instead of the open feeling pursued on the main deck, the upper deck is divided into separate compartments,

including a state room, dressing room, office, guest and master bedrooms and bathrooms, as well as a smaller lounge for the exclusive use of the aircraft principal and his family. There's also another galley, with plenty of storage for plates and dishes – "We always do lots of custom crockery on a project like this," says Doret.

Open and shut case: The open-plan cabin scheme helped Doret to meet the necessary weight targets, with cabinetry kept to a minimum. However such a unique design presented a number of challenges. Although only working on a preliminary scheme, Doret went to the trouble of calculating the correct positioning of speakers to prevent any potential problems. Such an open scheme also created havoc when generating the cabin renderings. "It took up to 15 hours for the computer to generate some of the renderings, because the cabin is so open there is more to process, which is complicated further by the number of reflective surfaces involved."

Despite the project now being put on hold, Doret is still optimistic with regard to his chances of working on a VIP A380 aircraft interior that finally gets to see the light of day. In fact as we went to press, Doret confirmed that he had been contacted to perhaps begin work on a third project of this nature. Should the project proceed into reality, it is unlikely we will ever get to see the final result, but at least these pages provide a few clues as to what the most expensive aircraft interior ever would look like.... **END**

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