

SPECIAL ISSUE



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Sky Palaces

*Designers turn drab aircraft interiors
into sumptuous personal spaces with all
the comforts of home.*

BY WILLIAM KISSEL

AMONG THE MORE memorable amenities that Edése Doret created recently in the interior of a private Boeing 747-400 was a cocktail bar that could disappear from view at a moment's notice. "My client, a Middle Eastern businessman, enjoys alcohol, but drinking is not allowed in his country, so he wanted a secret space built onboard to hide the bar," says the Haitian-born, New York-based designer. So Doret constructed a bar behind a bookshelf in a main-deck lounge that could be opened by flipping a hidden switch. "The owner has access to it during flight," he explains, "but it is completely disguised when the religious police get on board to inspect the plane."

Such requests are becoming routine these days for Doret and other residential and industrial designers, who now find their services in greater demand



from jet owners who are forgoing the bland blue or beige cookie-cutter designs offered by aircraft manufacturers. These individuals are opting instead for highly customized interiors that match their personal tastes and aesthetic passions.

Bespoke furnishings, intricate wall coverings, plush handmade carpets, and priceless works of art now grace the interiors of private aircraft. "We're using more materials like stone, wood, and sometimes leather on floors; various metallic finishes on bulkheads; and different metal textures on the doors," says Doret, who notes that he and other designers are moving away from furniture built into side walls—as in a



New York designer Edése Doret created the custom interior of this Boeing 747-400, which includes sleeping suites (this spread) and a main-deck lounge (previous spread).





The lounge (above) and dining area (left) of this Boeing 747 feature wood and leather.

Winnebago, he observes wryly—and toward freestanding pieces more reminiscent of those in an actual home. (For safety reasons, FAA regulations still require that aircraft furniture be bolted to the floor.)

Doret says some jet owners are also making requests that seem wholly impractical. Stripper poles, skylights, door-size windows, and see-through floors are popping up on client wish lists. “I was told by a very credible

source about one individual who supposedly had a lap pool in the back of his airplane,” he says.

Yet for all the requests that must go unmet, many more do make the final cut. Upgraded entertainment systems, including plasma movie screens, live television, and Internet access are de rigueur on many custom aircraft these days. Elevators are finding their way onboard aircraft as well. Doret recently designed a whirlpool tub for the interior of a private, wide-body Airbus. “We are treating it as we would a shower, by enclosing it and connecting the drain to the seat-belt call light,” he explains. “The water immediately drains into an empty, self-contained gray-water tank when the light turns on.”