



Cabin Creativity

While the more extreme cabin features once envisaged for the A380 have not materialised, the aircraft nevertheless presents designers with tremendous possibilities, as PriestmanGoode director Luke Hawes reveals.

After Airbus announced its intention to create a capacious double-deck airliner, bold new cabin concepts began emerging from airlines, cabin designers and Airbus itself. Many featured luxurious First-Class products and Business-Class seats providing expansive space in which to work and relax; others were more radical. There were suggestions of gyms, cinemas and even swimming pools.

Those predictions of extreme high-end premium accommodation and optimised Business-Class seating have become a reality in various forms, but other thoughts have failed to mature into hardware. The rapid improvement in in-flight entertainment (IFE) and connectivity over the past decade or so has perhaps put paid to the chances of an A380 cinema, although this particular concept is an old one – the

TOP LEFT • The transition from lounge to cabin was an important aspect of PriestmanGoode's First-Class product for Lufthansa. There is little on the stairway up to First Class to indicate it is inside an airliner. VIA PRIESTMANGOODE

TOP RIGHT AND BOTH BELOW • Achieving quality in First Class is all about fine materials and detail design. Well provisioned wardrobe space, thick carpets and understated chrome and leather finishing give the look and feel of a business jet or high-end luxury automobile interior. ALL VIA PRIESTMANGOODE

abortive Bristol Brabazon featured a cinema back in the late 1940s – while no airline has yet included a gym or pool in its A380 product. The realities of operating economics have scuppered the extreme cabin concepts, while designers have been more conservative in their work than early studies suggested, but the A380 is nonetheless attracting imaginative design and new technologies.

Among the design houses associated with the aircraft, PriestmanGoode is responsible for the Superjumbo cabins of Lufthansa, Malaysia Airlines and Qatar Airways, as well as the First-Class product on Air France's 777-300. PriestmanGoode director Luke Hawes says that the level of ingenuity expressed in an A380 cabin is down to individual carriers. "Only a handful of airlines around the world actually have the capital to invest in new concepts. Most of the time, it's not up to

designers; we respond to the airline's brief. We do of course develop new concepts, but always within the remit of the client's brief and their particular brand identity and culture.

"There are a number of difficulties in developing truly ground-breaking cabin designs. The first is purely in terms of research and development, the logistics of dealing with the stringent safety regulations and weight requirements of an aircraft. Beyond all of these practical issues though, it's important to remember that the A380 is a commercial aircraft, and space needs to be maximised to create revenue. So while gyms and cinemas sound appealing and are great for concepts, the reality of the airline industry is such that it's about seat count. But there might be one feature per airline, such as a bar, or a lounge that offers a good marketing story, which sits with the airline brand."



ABOVE AND LEFT • Early Airbus cabin mock-ups demonstrated the airframer's thinking on possible premium accommodation for the A380, circa 2005. The emphasis on personal space and dining is expressed in today's cabins, but few airlines have been able to devote quite so much area to individual travellers. ALL AIRBUS

Grand Palette

Given these restrictions and the undoubted focus on First Class and even beyond, does the A380 manage to inspire designers to seek new ideas for business and economy? Luke Hawes says: "Yes, in as much as the architecture of the aircraft allows us to design in such a way to improve passenger experience. For instance, the main deck has almost straight side walls/window panels, which makes it feel more spacious and provides more living space in Economy Class. There is also great scope for using lighting to improve experience and instil a sense of brand identity.

"The most competitive market for airlines is Business Class. As a design studio, we generally design interiors for an airline's entire fleet, not just the A380, so we'll design Business-Class seats for the smallest widebody. This design is then applied to different aircraft. On the A380 this might mean that you can fit an extra seat across the width of the aircraft which, commercially, is very important for airlines."

TOP • Qatar Airways' extremely long bar and luxurious premium lavatories come very close to the promise that designers saw for A380 accommodation standards when the aircraft itself remained but a concept. QATAR AIRWAYS/ PRIESTMANGOODE





ABOVE: Qatar Airways' luxurious premium lavatories closely resemble the original ideas when the aircraft was just a concept. QATAR AIRWAYS/ PRIESTMANGOODE

TOP LEFT • Lufthansa's corporate palette and the iconic crane logo also carry over into the Economy cabin. VIA PRIESTMANGOODE

LEFT • PriestmanGoode created Lufthansa's Business-Cass cabin with the carrier's signature colours in mind. Detail touches, including individual reading lights and cup holders. VIA PRIESTMANGOODE

BELOW • Airlines strive for individuality across their products. This is PriestmanGoode's efforts in Malaysia Airlines' First-Class A380 cabin. VIA PRIESTMANGOODE

With carriers looking to establish a brand image across their fleets and maximise their investment in cabin design, Hawes feels, "the days of designing with a blank canvas are gone", so that larger or more radical design features are unlikely to find their way into a commercial A380, since they might not transition well into smaller aircraft. He believes the future is bright for improving the passenger experience though: "Airbus is constantly working on research and developing new aircraft, which will offer great capabilities in terms of creating exceptional passenger experiences, while being efficient for airlines to run."

Superjumbo Experience

Asked to describe PriestmanGoode's approach to A380 cabin design, Luke Hawes lists the company's extensive experience with the aircraft. "The majority of our work is for national carriers, and we try to instil each one of our projects with a unique identity that not only reflects the airline's existing brand, but also the country's culture and heritage.

"The first A380 commercial cabin we worked on, which launched in 2010, was for Lufthansa, for which we designed complete interiors across all classes, including seats, lighting, and so on. We've worked with Lufthansa on many of its aircraft and part of what we wanted to do with the A380 was not

just create a great passenger experience for their flagship aircraft, but to create an interior that was consistent with Lufthansa's brand messages, and in line with other aircraft we had designed for them.

"The First-Class cabin we designed stands out especially, as it was about creating a smoother transition from airport lounge to aircraft. So we developed a neutral palette in line with that of the First-Class lounge at Frankfurt Airport, and designed

seating to be more akin to lounge furniture than aircraft seating. Since then, we've worked on many projects that bring the lounge on board the aircraft, and creating interiors that are similar to contemporary interior design, than what you'd normally see on an aircraft."

PriestmanGoode subsequently applied its talents to Malaysia Airlines' A380 cabin, launched in 2013, and last year its designs for Qatar Airways reached the market. "Our premium cabin and lounge for Qatar Airways was a particularly rewarding project to work on, since every element of the cabin was designed bespoke for the airline. It includes a number of innovations, such as the first waterfall tap on an aircraft and the longest bar in the sky. The experience across the cabin is one of refined luxury, with rich, warm textures and finishes, infused with subtle lighting. We also modernised traditional Arabic patterns to create elegant bespoke features, creating a culturally sensitive cabin suited for discerning global passengers." 

