



# FABULOUS FIT-OUTS

*Competition for the interior design of private jets is attracting some true high-flyers.*

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**W**hen it comes to luxury jet fit-outs, none comes more opulent than the work for Saudi Arabia's Prince Alwaleed bin Talal, one of the richest people in the world courtesy of his investments in property and the share market. He is believed to be spending more than \$200 million to furnish his private Airbus double-decker A380, the largest commercial aircraft available.

In a design job that is expected to take more than two years, the prince is insisting on elements such as throne rooms befitting his royal status. Not all private jet owners are as flush with

funds as the Saudi prince, but even the interior of a smaller aircraft can cost in the vicinity of \$15 million to \$30 million. Colour choices aside, the big decisions will centre around what features to include – the latest must-have items include gyms, steam showers and a cocktail lounge.

While budget is usually not an issue for truly rich clients, designers do not have carte blanche to include all features in a jet. The aircraft must still comply with rigorous safety standards and those that ignore aviation 'crash-survivability' standards can waste money on furnishings and appointments that ultimately will fail to get the okay from regulators.

**HEAVEN SENT:**  
THIS PAGE: A LUXURY FIT-OUT BY GORE DESIGN COMPLETIONS.  
OPPOSITE TOP LEFT: GORE DESIGN'S CASINO-THEMED INTERIOR CONCEPT.  
OPPOSITE TOP RIGHT: VERSACE DESIGN AND TAG AI COLLABORATE FOR A GLAMOROUS AIRCRAFT FIT-OUT.  
OPPOSITE BOTTOM LEFT: A GORE DESIGN GOLD-PLATED SINK.  
OPPOSITE BOTTOM RIGHT: GORE DESIGN KITCHEN STORAGE.

For the designers, there are risks, too, despite the potential for major contracts in the rarified air of the world of private jets. Bidding too low for a fit-out – or allowing a customer to change plans too many times – can quickly blow the budget.

Two of the biggest players in the fitout business are US companies Gore Design Completions, based in Texas, and Associated Air Center, in Dallas. The Wall Street Journal reports that Gore Design is negotiating for assignments that will keep it busy until 2015. The company has in the past retrofitted planes for the likes of Google founders Sergey Brin and Larry Page and heads



of state in Africa, Central Asia and China.

Associated Air Center has also been flooded with deals, with the majority of recent contracts coming from the Middle East and emerging markets such as China, India and Russia – confirming the start of a power shift in the private jet market away from the US and Europe.

As another sign of the growing ‘completions’ market for private jets, Jet Aviation has built one of the largest hangars in Basel, Switzerland, to handle fitouts for wide-body aircraft. Located at EuroAirport, the 9600sq m hangar can house an Airbus A380 and a Boeing 747-8 simultaneously. The hangar is the key to the growth of the respected company, which at any given time is working on refurbishment and maintenance of more than 60 head-of-state or corporate aircraft for completions.

### DARE TO BE DIFFERENT

Not surprisingly, given the clientele of the jet outfitting market, the emphasis is on creating designs that separate aircraft from the pack. For the mega-rich, having an interior design that is a copy of another aircraft is akin to two actresses wearing the same dress to the Oscars.

Hence the entry of the likes of leading fashion house Versace into the completions space, a move that continues the Italian company’s evolution beyond its well-known presence in the fashion industry as it tries to bring luxury to all aspects of life. In years past it has also been the first fashion house to offer a complete design package for the home, and it has opened branded hotels.

In a sign of the rising market for the fit-out of private super jets, Versace has become the first maison – or fashion house – to target the aviation business, teaming up with Geneva-based TAG Aircraft Interiors to offer exquisite makeovers for aircraft.

If you are fortunate enough to get a flight on one of these jets, expect to see the trademark



Versace Greek key motif and signature colour scheme that will translate to white leather chairs and black carpeting.

Through the collaboration, Versace and TAG will create interiors for Boeing BBJ, Bombardier Global Express and other private jets. They have secured an interior design project for an Airbus A319 corporate jet, one of the largest private aircraft on the market, with the jet scheduled to go into service later this year.

Laura Varani, a spokeswoman for Versace, says the shift into jet outfitting has occurred as a “quite natural” extension of the company’s well-documented work in fashion, jewellery and homeware. It is a perfect fit with the brand’s alignment with luxury products.

Varani says the design philosophy for which Versace is famous will carry over to jets.

“The interior design for jets follows the same aesthetic codes used in our maison and is inspired by the so-called Versace Couture collection,” she says.

“That means the same colours, chromatic lines and high-quality materials ... It is a unique tailor-made service to fulfil the needs of our VIP clientele.”

According to Varani, the combined strengths

### FIT(OUT) FOR A KING

+ In his heyday more than 30 years ago, Elvis Presley paid an aviation company to refurbish a Delta Air Lines Convair 880 so he could travel in style. It was considered stylish for its time and featured turquoise carpets, green suede sofas and gold-plated bathroom fixtures.

+ Appointments have moved with the times since the demise of The King. Today, interior options include communication systems such as an airborne cellular telephone that interfaces with ground networks and does not interfere with aircraft controls. Residential-type furniture such as king-size beds and walk-in closets have become standard fare, as have gourmet kitchens, fully appointed offices and theatre lounges if flyers want to take in the latest movie.

+ And for those who are a little paranoid about safety, there are reports that some jet owners are installing anti-missile systems.



of Versace Design and TAG Ai will deliver the “ultimate in terms of design and comfort along with the strictest attention to safety and the very [latest] technologies”.

It will come at a cost, however: the price for a Versace fit-out is likely to set you back \$20 million for a private jet and up to \$200 million for a large airliner such as a Boeing 747. The price tag makes the reported \$100,000 refurbishment requested by former Prime Minister John Howard for one of his air force jets pale in comparison.

Varani says Versace’s interior designs for jets will reflect the company’s “mood of elegance”.

“The package designed by Versace invokes the style of the fabled Versace Home collections,” she says.

That means materials of the highest quality: supple full-grain leather for the seating, high-quality crystal for lamps, refined padded ceiling trim, opulent bedclothes and lush bathroom towels. The dining and side tables are lacquered and embellished with glossy metal inserts, while the carpet is decorated with a handmade embroidered motif.

Varani says: “All components are fitted to express the Versace lifestyle.”\*