

Airworld

DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE
FOR AIR TRAVEL

by Luigi Vallero

'Airplanes and airports have my favorite kind of food service, my favorite kind of entertainment, my favorite graphics and colors, the best security checks, the best views, the best employees and the best optimism.'
(The Philosophy of Andy Warhol, 1977)



Regular air travellers usually take for granted the internal configuration of an airliner cabin, the layout of airports, onboard service standards, or the corporate image of an individual carrier. They often forget how these represent the ultimate evolution in a chain of developments that started when the St Petersburg-Tampa Airboat Line became the world's first scheduled airline operation on New Year's Day, 1914.

Possibly no other means of transport has been so radically transformed in such a short time-span, changing from an elitist and exclusive way of travelling to a mass phenomenon of worldwide extent. And, as arguably the most significant and exciting advancement of the 20th century, aviation has progressed rapidly with the involvement of the most talented engineering and industrial designers of the era.

After an initial period when the airplane tried to emulate other means of transport, such as the train or the ship, or even tried to recreate the homely atmosphere of a living room—as in the Dornier Do X flying boat—commercial aviation developed a completely distinctive and characteristic style that, more recently, culminated in becoming an influence on the rest of the industry.

To celebrate the first 100 years of aviation, and 90 years of commercial air transport, the Vitra Design Museum—a leading German-based firm producing 'designer' industrial furniture, including airport seating—on May 15, 2004, inaugurated Airworld: Design and Architecture for Air Travel at its Frank O Gehry building in Weil am Rhein. Put simply, the exhibit, which



Caption

runs through January 9, 2005, traces the achievements and developments of design as applied to commercial aviation.

But Airworld is more than that. It chronicles and depicts the long trail that developed distinctive styles in terms of aircraft layout, cabin interiors, corporate image, onboard service, and



Charles Eames, tandem seating, 1962. Designed for John Foster Dulles International Airport, Washington DC by Eero Saarinen.

(Facing page) Eero Saarinen, TWA Terminal, Idlewild Airport (today John F Kennedy International Airport), New York, 1956-62.

PHOTOS: VITRA DESIGN MUSEUM



NATIONAL AIR AND SPACE MUSEUM

Aluminium aircraft seat in the Ford Tri-Motor, ca. 1930.



LUFTHANSA

Passenger cabin of the flying boat Dornier DO-X, 1929.

airport architecture; in other words, all the elements that constitute the visual side of commercial air transport.

Since the Twenties, several of the most imaginative and prominent industrial designers had a say in the new field of aeronautical transport. One of them was Norman Bel Geddes, whose visionary *Airliner #4* was a proposal for a gigantic seaplane with a basic concept and style (except for its propulsion system) that is as modern today as the futuristic *Blended Wing Body* or Swiss designer Luigi Colani's proposals for an aircraft of the future.

The interior look of an airliner is the result of years of fine-tuned research and development. A number of great names in industrial design such as Henry Dreyfuss, Walter Dorwin Teague, and Raymond Loewy were instrumental in recreating aloft an ambience that needed to be cozy, soothing, modern, and, in the meantime, extremely efficient—within the confined space represented by the cabin of an airliner.

Airworld's exhibit traces all this development with photographs, models, and historical film material, including an extremely interesting Sixties-era Boeing film showing the flexibility of the cabin of their 'new' 707, for which Teague had created the passenger service unit, thus setting a new standard for the industry.

With the importance of comfort being paramount, the development undergone by in-flight seating has also been extremely significant. Less than a century has passed since the wicker seats of the Farman Goliath, through the first seats made of aluminum and magnesium, and the first 'sleeperettes', to modern 'SkySuites', that provide maximum comfort and privacy for first class passengers.

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Hans Luckhardt, aircraft seat for Air France, 1937/38.

VITRA DESIGN MUSEUM





Captions
 Manfred Bingle, poster for Swissair, 1962. (Bottom)

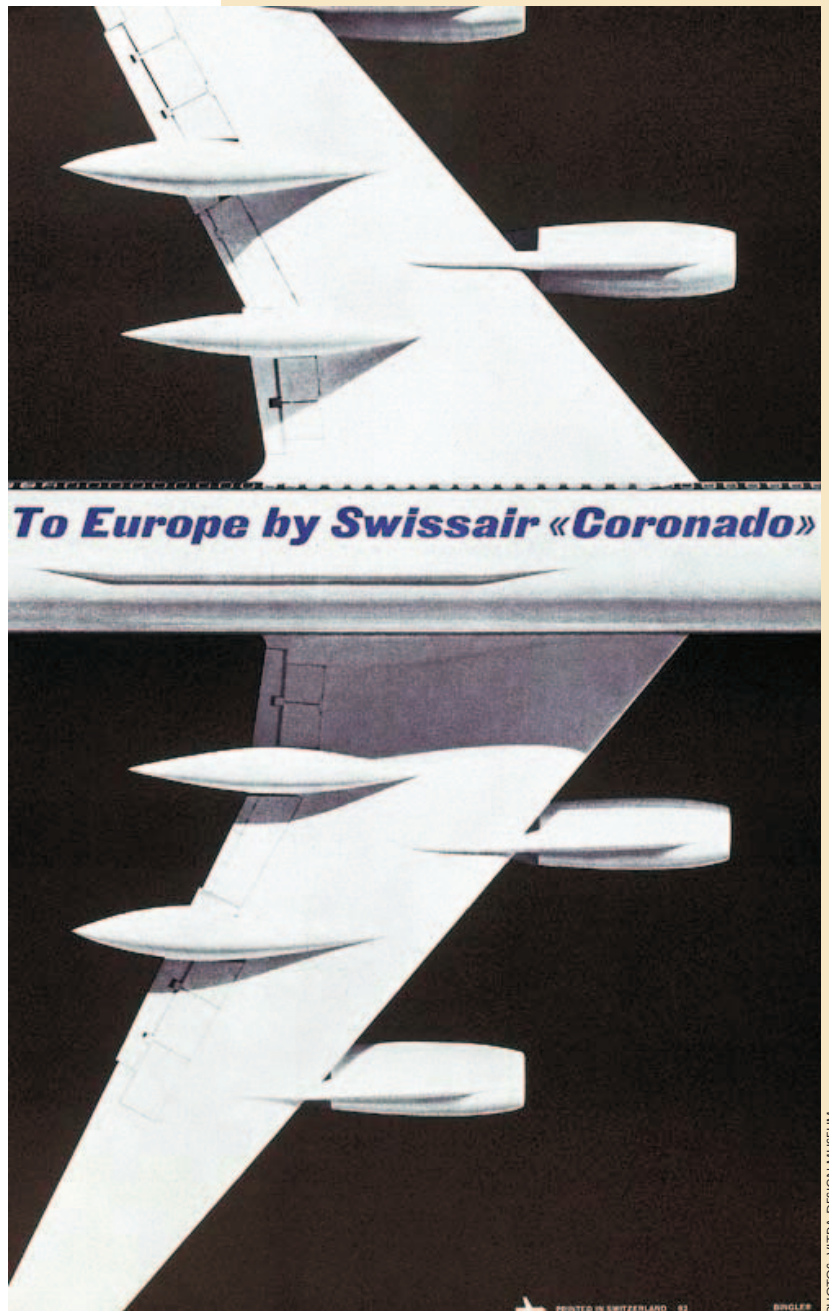
Along with aircraft layout, corporate image has always been vital for any company, and airlines were among the first businesses to hire prominent designers to develop a coordinated look.

After years of standardization—that saw nearly all airlines adorning their fleets with a standard scheme entailing a white top, gray or silver belly, and colored ‘cheatline’—in the Sixties a bold decision was taken by a Texas-based company, culminating in what is possibly the most notable shake-up in terms of corporate image revamp. That happened in 1965, when Braniff International hired the famous American designer Alexander Girard and Italian *stilista* Emilio Pucci. Their brief was to literally throw away the traditional image the company had adopted until then, and redesign every item used within the airline, from aircraft liveries to toilet paper, in what was dubbed the ‘end of the plain plane’ campaign.

The result was selection of an extravagant ‘palette’ of colors that was used to paint the fleet in seven different hues, as well as being used in the airline’s stationery and signage, together with distinctive and plush lounges and utterly non-conventional uniforms that revolutionized the air travel experience for millions of passengers.

Despite being ‘less revolutionary’, other trademarks that were destined to become household items, such as Lufthansa’s ‘flying crane’ logo (originally conceived by Otto Firlie in 1918, and still flying today) or Pan Am’s globe (by Charles Forberg and Edward L Barnes in 1955) are still in use today, despite their designers being now almost entirely unknown.

An important factor in defining an airline’s



Henry Dreyfuss, interior design of the Lockheed Super Constellation of KLM, ca. 1949



Pan Am flight attendant in the galley of the Boeing B-377 Stratocruiser in the 1950s.



public image is in-flight service. Therefore, flight attendant uniforms have evolved from the simple and utilitarian nurse's or military look of the early years to the extraordinary creations of prominent fashion houses like Balenciaga, Dior, and Valentino, to name only a few. Other carriers decided to go down the ethnic path, hiring famous designers like Pierre Balmain, who amalgamated traditional motifs into new uniform concepts that set the standard and created airline myths like the legendary 'Singapore Girl'.

Likewise, in the sphere of onboard service, the development of cutlery and plates represented a challenge for industrial designers, who had to contend with weight and space restrictions, therefore needing to optimize the choice of materials whilst defining a distinctive style that had to be rational, modern, and appealing at the same time. Famous architects, for example Joe Colombo and Wolf Karnagel, have all contributed to the image of air transport by designing

Wolf Karnagel, inflight tableware for Lufthansa, 1985.



PHOTOS: VITRA DESIGN MUSEUM



Werner Machnick, Lufthansa flight attendant uniform, 1970-79.



Alexander Girard, corporate design for Braniff International, 1965.

tray sets for airlines such as Alitalia or Lufthansa.

Among the many other interesting features of the Airworld exhibit are Lockheed's *Flight 123*, a promotional film from late in the Sixties for the then-newly-launched L-1011 TriStar program; a Lufthansa Fifties-vintage movie describing an intercontinental flight by one of its Lockheed 1649A Starliner 'Super Stars'; and an FAA 'invitation' to fly, depicting the first-time air travel experience of two American kids on a flight from Chicago-Midway to New York-LaGuardia, aboard a TWA Constellation. Those were the elegant days of flying, when people actually dressed up for the flight and service was, even in tourist or economy (coach) class, an experience almost fit for a king.



PHOTOS: VITRA DESIGN MUSEUM

Jean Louis, United Airlines flight attendant uniform, 1968.

The development of airport architecture is also well documented in the exhibit. With the aid of large scale models, the most important airport projects of the century, including—among others—the most notable examples of Ernst Sagebiel's Berlin-Tempelhof, Eero Saarinen's futuristic TWA terminal at New York-Idlewild (now JFK—*Airways*, Jul/Aug 1996) and Washington Dulles Airport (July 1998), Paul Andreu's Paris-Charles de Gaulle (CDG), and Sir Norman Foster's Stansted Airport (June 2001). Together with large-size images and extremely interesting promotional footage—including a delightful and humorous DePatie-Freleng-style cartoon—especially conceived by Charles Eames for promoting Saarinen's work in developing the mobile lounge concept for Washington Dulles and, in general, the idea of an airport for the future.

The current times have introduced numerous constraints; therefore, innovative ideas that seemed revolutionary 40 years ago, now sometimes appear as fanciful solutions to the eye of the modern traveller.

Airworld celebrates the aesthetics of the golden age of air travel, and also looks toward what future travellers could expect. The exhibit is dedicated to the 'airworld' encountered by passengers during their flight, from the perspective of the history of design and architecture. This is definitely a 'must-see'

for all those interested in air transport, and the catalog, which features more than 400 illustrations, is a 'must-have'. After closing at the Vitra Design Museum, it is to be hoped that *Airworld: Design and Architecture for Air Travel* will travel to museums in other countries. ✈

(Airways acknowledges the cooperation and assistance of Ms Gabriella Gianoli, of Vitra PR, and Mr Jochen Eisenbrand, the exhibit curator.)



Captions for both pics

Airworld: Design and Architecture for Air Travel

Vitra Design Museum Tel: +49 (0) 7621 702 32 00
 Charles-Eames-Strasse 1 Fax: +49 (0) 7621 702 31 46
 D-79576 Weil am Rhein
 Germany

Website: www.design-museum.de

Nearest airport: EuroAirport Basel/Mulhouse/Freiburg (BSL) (15km/9mi)

When: May 15, 2004 to January 9, 2005

The exhibition catalog may be ordered from the Vitra Design Museum Shop; Tel: +49 (0) 7621 7023514, Email: shop@design-museum.com



PHOTOS: VITRA DESIGN MUSEUM