

The Wings of the Crane



50 Years of
Lufthansa
Design

report & photography by Luigi Vallero



“You are what you show, and what you show reveals what you are”—Otl Aicher, 1962

This year marks the 50th anniversary of Lufthansa. After the collapse of the original German flag carrier at the end of World War II, the reborn Deutsche Lufthansa returned to the air on April 1, 1955, when two Convair 340s departed simultaneously from Hamburg and Munich [München] on reciprocal domestic flights. Since then, Lufthansa has consistently maintained a distinctive corporate image, using visual components to reflect the company's embodiment of a safe, reliable, comfortable, and punctual airline.

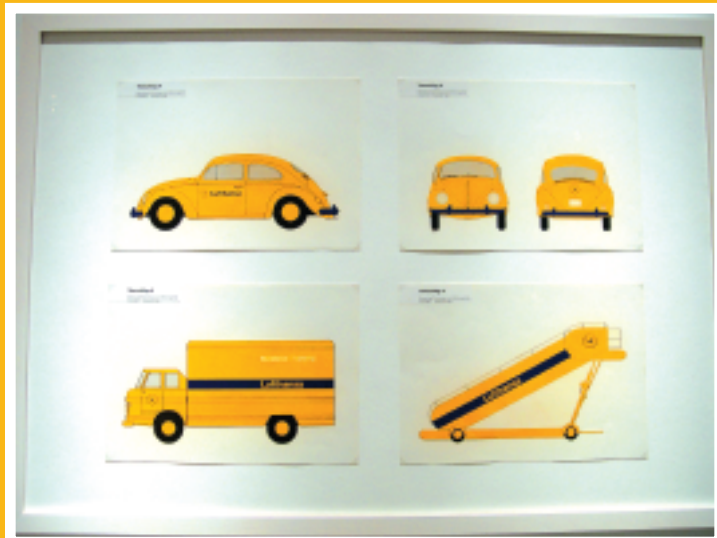
Today, Lufthansa is one of the world's most successful airlines and one of the best-known German brand names, associated with the highest standards. The crane logo—the original *art nouveau* version of which was created by Otto Firlé in 1919 for predecessor carrier Deutsche Luft Reederei—has always represented the airline's forward-looking spirit and its lofty standards, whilst adding an easily recognizable element to the flying experience.

To celebrate the first 50 years of its postwar image, Lufthansa commissioned Professor Volker Fischer, curator of the Frankfurt Museum of Applied Arts (*Museum für Angewandte Kunst*, Frankfurt) to publish a book about the era. To assist him, the airline gave Fischer—who began this task in September 2004—access to its vast archives and documentation center, where thousands of items have been assembled and catalogued. Even though the archives are meticulously maintained, it was not easy to browse through the large quantity of documents available, as well as to gather additional items from individual collectors, according to Fischer. Once all items had been gathered, the text written, and the book made ready for press, the next step was to use a selection of the artifacts to constitute an exhibit celebrating the event. Thus, 'The Wings of the Crane' (*Die Schwingen des Kranichs*) exhibit opened its doors on June 16, 2005, at the Museum of Applied Arts, located in the famous Frankfurt Museum Quai area, overlooking the Main river.

Fischer identified five different phases in the development of Lufthansa's corporate image from 1955 to the present day. The first coincided with the unveiling of the original blue-and-yellow *parabel* (parabola) tail design with superimposed crane and 'Schadow Antiqua' logotype. It was intended to portray the airline at a time when a 'free spirit' advertising approach prevailed, reflecting the optimistic and light-hearted mood in the 'economic miracle Germany' of the Fifties. The livery itself, a stylish old-fashioned combination of curved lines, was inspired by so-called 'naturalistic' *art nouveau* forms, sought to distinguish the company's image from the straight lines which had epitomized the Nazi era. A reincarnation of this livery is currently worn by an Airbus A321 (D-AIRX), as part of the airline's 50th anniversary celebrations (*Mailbag*, June 2005).

The second phase took place in 1962, when German designer Otl Aicher and his E5 team at the Ulm College of Design were commissioned to cooperate with the newly formed Lufthansa Advertising Department. Aicher's team was assigned to what was then dubbed 'Project 1400', with the aim of rendering the airline's overall identity significantly more professional. All the visual 'tools' employed by Lufthansa—ranging from corporate lettering and symbol to uniforms, stationery, dinnerware, interior appointments of offices and lounges, as well as advertising photographic styles—were reviewed or developed and codified by Aicher and his associates.

Ultimately, the supremely rational design which emerged from the Project 1400 assignment was characterized by a strictly function-oriented philosophy, with minimal emphasis on 'emotions'. Among the many changes, Aicher selected a



darker shade of blue and a warmer yellow to identify the airline, introducing the Helvetica logotype which is still used today, besides enclosing the crane in the now-familiar circle. This perplexed Professor Firlé, then well advanced in years, who deemed it absurd to put the company symbol in a 'cage'.

During most of the Sixties and Seventies, the design guidelines



of Aicher and E5 were closely followed and further implemented in-house by Lufthansa's own Corporate Design Department. But at the beginning of the Eighties, market research revealed that the company was perceived as an elitist, purely business airline, with mediocre service levels. Recognizing a need to devise a new look, Lufthansa embarked on the third phase. In 1986, the Swiss agency Zintzmeyer & Lux was appointed for this task. In contrast to Aicher, who had selected the cool blue tone to represent the company, Zintzmeyer felt that yellow, supported by silver and gray, was the color that really distinguished Lufthansa from the competition, and came up with many livery change proposals based on this combination of hues. In 1989, a final decision was taken on the design, which focuses on the look which—withstanding minor revisions—is still in use today. It retains Lufthansa's traditional company colors of yellow and blue, enhanced by gray and silver tones. The same colors, in different patterns and combinations, were used to complement the aircraft cabins.

The mid-Nineties saw the fourth phase of corporate design development, to reflect the airline's recent revision of its service orientation, having changed from a state-owned carrier to that of a fully-privatized airline in 1997. Frog Design was chosen to spruce up the airline's image by designing new counters and lounges as well as reviewing cabin layouts and seating. The process followed the motto of Harmut Hesslinger, the head of the design company: 'form follows emotion', as opposed to the functionalist 'form follows function' approach.

To recreate the emotional aspects of air travel, Frog Design used a style known as 'retro-futurism', introducing elements inspired by the corrugated sheet-metal fuselage skin of the Junkers Ju 52/3m, as well as using more conventional and rounded forms in aircraft seats for all classes of service, as well as in counters and lounge and office design.

Starting in 2004, the fifth phase saw the introduction of a new business class seat by Priestman Goode, which can be easily converted into a comfortable 2m (6.5ft) bed (*Business Flyer*, April 2005). The project can also be defined as a refinement of the work carried out by Frog Design, with the use of more natural materials, including woods and leather, in order to enhance passengers' emotional and tactile experiences.

The Wings of the Crane exhibit (which closed on September 4) traced the developments of the airline image through photographs, printed material, models, original uniforms, dinnerware, and seat equipment, as well as a film created to celebrate the airline's 50th birthday.

Visitors learned about the humorous and light-hearted approach in 1955 to even matters like safety procedures—a safety card of the period depicted passengers in a dinghy, after a ditching incident, playing cards or fishing whilst awaiting their rescuers. There was also a glimpse of images of 'Senator Service' passengers enjoying cocktails aloft or napping in the then-modern 'Comforette' reclining seats.

The development of corporate image in the Sixties was very well documented with the complete review made by the Ulm school, including original designs and corporate manuals. Interesting images from the Eighties were testimony to a number of proposals for livery changes—even without the symbolic crane logo—which never materialized, probably being considered too radical and likely to distance the airline from its traditions. Crew uniforms ranged from the original classical elegance of Uli Richter, through the modern Seventies look of Werner Machnik, to the current sober Strenesse approach. Cabin interior development was also well-documented by a large number of aircraft seats,





developed for Lufthansa by such manufacturers as Keiper Recaro and Weber in the Seventies, up to Priestman Goode's 2004 long-haul business class standard.

Emphasizing that food and its presentation is fundamental to the wellbeing of passengers, and to the creation of a strong company image, dinnerware development was highlighted throughout the exhibit, with originals inspired by the Bauhaus movement alongside later examples developed by German masters of design like Hans Theo Baumann, Wolf Karnagel, and Topel und Pauser. Menu



card photography was well-detailed too, with beautiful 'still life' photographic images inspired by 16th century Italian Arcimboldo paintings. A part of the exhibit was dedicated to the merchandising aspects of the Lufthansa brand, which has been successfully developed through the airline's shopping catalogues.

Along with the Airworld exhibit (*Airways*, September 2004), *The Wings of the Crane* was a magnificent celebration of industrial design applied to air transport and there is hope that it can be displayed in other parts of the world. ➔