All Dressed Up and Everywhere to Go

Boeing Airplanes Take 'Haute Couture' to New Heights

At this fashion show, there's a little something for everyone -- you can see styles ranging from colorfully wild and crazy to ultra-conservative to retro. But we're not in New York City watching models strut the runway. We're at the airport, and we're talking airplane liveries.

That's right, airplanes.

People make statements with their outward appearances, and commercial airline carriers are no different. Just about every model of Boeing airplane currently in production has sported a unique paint scheme in recent years. From domestic carriers such as American Airlines to international customers Bangkok Airways of Thailand and Qantas in Australia, and even the Boeing house livery, creativity and color abound. Customers clamor for custom liveries ranging from drop-dead gorgeous to retro-classic and, like haute couture houses on the Champs Elysées in Paris, Boeing Commercial Airplanes paints jets with designer touches.

Qantas Airways commissioned Balarinji, a design studio in Sydney, and collaborated with a celebrated (Australian Western Desert) Uluru-based indigenous artist, Rene Kulitja, to create a custom livery for the third in its series of "art planes". Balarinji translated the artist's ideas and passed them along to Boeing Commercial Airplanes to make this dream a reality. The plane is dubbed Yananyi Dreaming, meaning "going-travelling".

The biggest buzz in the industry is coming from what is likely the most colorful creation painted by Boeing -- the third in a series of "art planes" for Qantas Airways. From nose to tail this jet is unlike any other in the skies.

At many fashion design houses in the United States and Europe, the artist's vision ultimately is translated by experts and designed by talented craftsmen. Qantas commissioned Balarinji, a design studio in Sydney, and collaborated with a celebrated (Australian Western Desert) Uluru-based indigenous artist, Rene Kulitja, to do just that.

"Our firm worked with Rene to design a totally unique fuselage layout, using original motifs painted by Rene," said Katie Jordan, Balarinji studio manager in Sydney.

Boeing Commercial Airplanes last year delivered to Qantas Airways the third in a series of 737-800 art planes. Dubbed "Yananyi Dreaming," the paint scheme required the development of an entirely new process, with Boeing painters doing the detailed painting by hand -- similar to work performed by talented artisans such as those at the couture houses of Coco Chanel or Christian Dior. Attention to detail is crucial, and the work is held to an impeccable standard. When presented the unique design, the talented, seasoned Boeing painters took it in stride and beautifully met the challenge of custom work.

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"The Yananyi Dreaming scheme required the development of an entirely new process," said Larry St.Laurent, Decorative Paint manager at North Boeing Field in Seattle. "Our processes are very lean and efficient, and we can usually paint any airplane in two or three days. This one took us twice that long."

At the couture houses of Coco Chanel and Christian Dior, creations are done by hand by very talented artisans. Attention to detail is crucial, and the work is held to an impeccable standard. Similarly, when presented the unique design, the talented, seasoned Boeing painters took it in stride and met the challenge of custom work.

"We used 22.2 miles of tape to get those designs on there -- every inch of it was hand-laid -- and the design took 215 different templates and overlays," said St.Laurent.

Taking six days to complete, the Qantas 737 truly was a labor of love and a chance for Boeing painters to flex their creative muscles, resulting in a one-of-a-kind airplane.

However, not all designs are as involved as Yananyi Dreaming. Many designs reflect a carrier's desire to help shape lifestyles and proudly display its brand.

Bangkok Airways wears this philosophy as conspicuously as a teenager wears a Tommy Hilfiger label. Thailand's first privatized airline vividly displays its vision for air travel through distinctive liveries on its flagship aircraft, the Boeing 717-200. Boeing delivered two of the 100-seat twinjets in October 2002, painted to celebrate the region's rich culture and history -- and the Bangkok Airways brand.

Bangkok Airways of Thailand is a holiday carrier that proudly serves destinations throughout Southeast Asia with its Boeing 717s, and its liveries reflect that pride. Bangkok's 717s feature tropical images such as trees and fish, while others display

golden temples reflecting the rich, ancient heritage that can be found in those Southeast Asian destinations served by the carrier.

"We cater mostly to tourists," said M. L. Nandhika Varavarn, senior director of Corporate Communications for Bangkok Airways. "We chose to design our aircraft as unique and colorful rather than with common, traditional liveries so people can distinguish our airline as a 'holiday airline' when they see us at the airports."

Proudly displaying the destination labels Sukhothai, Samui, Angkor and Luang Prabang, Bangkok's 717s feature tropical images such as trees and fish, while others display golden temples reflecting the rich, ancient heritage that can be found in those Southeast Asian destinations.

"Because we brand our airline as a holiday airline, each aircraft livery is designed to represent holiday beach destinations and cultural destinations where we fly," Varavarn said.

Feeling nostalgic and looking for a little retro-fashion? Then hop on American Airlines' Astrojet for a trip down memory lane. In 2000, American Airlines recreated the feel of the '50s and early '60s with the Astrojet, coinciding with the delivery of the carrier's 50th Next-Generation 737 airplane and commemorating the expanded legroom now standard in coach on all American Airlines jets. The Boeing 737-800 sports the same vintage livery that American's first 727s had in 1964.

Similar to the work done by design assistants at fashion houses such as Ralph Lauren, Boeing payload engineering, tooling and the paint shop collaborate to make customers' visions, dreams and brands a reality.

And it's not just customers who order up custom liveries. Boeing has one of its own as well. Boeing Commercial Airplanes leaders knew they wanted to make an impact beyond the sheer size of the newest twin-aisle jetliner when they debuted the new 777-300ER. So they called on their own crew of experts in Everett, Wash., to commission an all-new, unique Boeing livery.

"We work out a new process for each customer," said St.Laurent. "Changes to their standard paint schemes mean new processes. Our goal is to manage flow time and minimize impacts to the schedule. It's up to us to do what the customer wants us to do."

Regardless of whether the style is highly polished aluminum skins or layer upon layer of precisely laid color, the Boeing house of fashion is always prêt-a-porter -- ready-to-wear and ready to bring ... people to their destinations!

For more information on Boeing and its products, visit the Web site at www.boeing.com and see the Boeing 777-300ER's groundbreaking underbelly paint scheme with flowing stripes by reading the article about the creative work done on the 777-300ER in the December 2002 edition of *Frontiers* magazine.

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