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The Falcon and the Businessman

A whirlwind redo gets a private jet off the ground in style.

BY JAKE TOWNSEND







“IT ISN’T EVERY DAY that one gets a call to work on a private jet,” says San Francisco-based interior designer Gary Hutton of his work on a recently completed Falcon 50. “I jumped at the chance.” The client, a major real estate developer based in Nevada, had been a fractional jet owner, but had come to decide it was time to buy a plane of his own.

For anyone even slightly familiar with private aircraft, red tape and complication can be par for the course—even the slightest modification to the interior requires FAA approval, which can take up to a year in some cases. “Some friends of mine had worked on the interior of the Getty family’s 737, so I knew what kinds of complications can arise with all of the regulations involved in aircraft interiors,” Hutton says. “I was told stories about building and upholstering seats and sending them to be approved by the FAA, who would then burn them up,” he notes of the agency’s rigorous testing process. “Just getting to the point where they could begin to build the interior took a year and a half.”

Neither Hutton nor his client had time to spare. The owner gave the designer a scant 12 weeks to get the plane in the air. “The amazing thing about working on a jet is that vendors and suppliers really hop to it when they hear what you’re creating,” says Hutton.



In order to streamline the process, Hutton and his client decided to keep the interior configuration standard to the Falcon 50, thereby eliminating the need for extensive FAA structural approval. Though all materials had to pass government muster, using the plane’s existing architecture would keep them within the narrow time frame. “We approached Premier Air,” Hutton says, “which is one of only two companies in the United States that specializes in the interiors of this type of jet.” Hutton got right to work on the task at hand with the company’s in-house interior designer, Debbi Cunningham.

Initially, the client asked for his jet, which was to be used for business, to reflect his corporate colors and logo. “When we presented the first concept, a bold vision in burgundy and gray,” says Hutton, “the client realized

Designer Gary Hutton outfitted an entrepreneur’s private jet—in a scant 12 weeks—in soft leather, muted hues, and Macassar ebony.



Above: Leather swivel seats are embossed with the owner's corporate logo. Right: Undulating cabinets maximize space and provide an elegant flow to the interior.



he wanted something more simple and refined.”

Hutton and his team of five designers came up with an elegant interior in light gray, cream leather, and Macassar ebony, the striking dark hardwood that feels at once rich and dynamic—and wholly unexpected aboard an aircraft. Subtle personal touches include embossed leather seats with the client's corporate logo, and the addition of patterns reminiscent of his fleet of Ferraris.

Rich, bold texture is further layered with understated color accents throughout the cabin, and is most luxurious in the use of a velvety soft mohair for the settee—which invites extended power naps during trips from New York to Rome, one of the owner's favorite routes. “We wanted to use some color, but didn't want it to be overpowering,” explains Hutton. “We used burgundy accents on pillows, with a fabric that complements the client's corporate logo.”

In contrast to the softness of the seats, walls, and floors, various hardwood and stone veneers were used to create an interplay of form and function. “When you enter the plane, the first thing you see,” notes Hutton, “is the galley. You see the undulating cabinets: If we did full depth all the way across, it would have taken up too much room, so we swept it back and made it open and more spacious with the curved design.” This sinuous shape gives the space a flow that is unusual for an aircraft interior. The countertop was created from granite that “they had to slice into one sixteenth of an inch-thick slabs and apply as a stone veneer, because of the weight,” says

Hutton. The same stone was applied to surfaces in the bathroom, as well. Because weight is such a paramount concern on an aircraft, even the dishes had to be individually weighed, with drawers and cabinets specially designed to hold them. New fixtures were purchased, then stripped of all inner components to render them feather-light. The stone, metal fixtures, and custom dishware gives the interior a feeling of permanence, a highly refreshing experience in a plane.

As planned, the aircraft was ready to fly within 12 weeks of purchase—a practically unheard-of schedule. The client, whose other diversions include his Ferraris, several boats, and many beautiful homes, was very pleased with the result. Upon seeing the completed jet, his wife remarked, “Of all the toys we have, this is the best one.” □

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