



AIR FRANCE, PARIS

Architect Mathieu Lehanneur's refurbishment of the national carrier's lounge is designed to offer a VIP business experience whilst also helping frequent fliers mentally prepare for the journey ahead.
mathieulehanneur.fr

The Airport Office



Felipe Ribon, courtesy of Mathieu Lehanneur and Air France

Airlines pinpoint the business lounge as the next field of action for attracting new customers.

Words
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CONSCIOUS OF THE VARIOUS NEEDS of business travellers – to unwind, work, socialize, negotiate and more – airlines are tapping leading designers to create stylish, versatile spaces for these activities. A glance at data provided by the Global Business Travel Association indicates why airlines are so keen to invest: annual business travel was forecast to increase 25 per cent between 2013 and 2018, ultimately reaching US\$341 billion. In response, carriers such as Air Canada, Lufthansa and Singapore Airlines have been culling their first-class offerings in favour of extending and improving their more lucrative business-class seats. Subsequently, many are turning to the design of their business lounges in an attempt to gain an added advantage in this hyper-competitive market. The focus is on facilities that blend the sociability and productive potential demanded by today's business community.

'Until now, airports were mere spaces of transition, but we're beginning to understand them as places of entertainment, rest and even work,' says Spanish designer Francesc Rifé, whose Barcelona studio was commissioned by Colombian airline Avianca to come up with a 'polyvalent, warm design' for its business

lounge at El Dorado Luis Carlos Galán Sarmiento International Airport in Bogotá.

'One of the great challenges facing the studio was to achieve an intimate atmosphere within two large open spaces,' says Rifé, explaining the relatively few restrictions he had to work with in terms of enclosures. His minimalist proposal for Avianca includes workspaces with projector screens and computers, as well as bar and seating areas, all rendered in a palette of greys, black and ochre. He accentuated certain surfaces with the textile braiding common to Colombia.

Intimacy is *the* buzzword in business-lounge design. When Air France asked Mathieu Lehanneur to refurbish the interior of its business lounge at Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport, he drew inspiration from spectator boxes at the Opera Garnier and Roland Garros. Positioned around a central bar – Le Balcon, which features a golden mirrored ceiling – are 'boxes' in deep-blue velvet, referencing the trademark blue of Air France. An LED screen integrated into the parquet floor depicts a real-time image of the sky, a visual element intended to help passengers mentally prepare for their journey. »



David Zarzo

AVIANCA, BOGOTÁ

The challenge facing interior designer Francesc Rifé was to create intimate spaces for conversation and work within a large, open and unstructured plan. rife-design.com

'Intimacy is the buzzword in business-lounge design'



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Ilya Ivanov



STRIGINO, NIZHNY NOVGOROD

For Nefa Architects, it was important that its lounge design act as a 'business card' that would provide an appealing gateway for executives traveling to western Russia. nefa-architects.com

'I thought about the question of intimacy in a public space: you're surrounded by people you don't know, and soon you'll be asleep on a plane next to a stranger,' says Lehanneur. 'The business lounge represents a strange moment: some people change into their pyjamas, while others are after the VIP or business experience.'

Lehanneur employed controlled lighting, 'so it would be like a business space during the day and a hotel bar in the evening'. The boxes both enhance intimacy and encourage conversation. 'Paradoxically,' he adds, 'it's easier to talk to a stranger if I'm in a box instead of in the middle of a crowd.'

Capturing the French chic-yet-relaxed *art de vivre* was important. 'At the first meeting with Air France, I showed three objects: an apple, because of its beauty, generosity and simplicity; a lolly, because of its quirkiness; and a macaroon, which stood for gastronomy,' says Lehanneur. 'I see the business lounge as an embassy. When I'm in the Air France business lounge in Hong Kong, I should already be in France.'

Nefa Architects also considered travellers' multiple needs when designing the business lounge at Strigino International Airport's new terminal in Nizhny Novgorod, a city in western Russia. Nefa's Dmitry Ovcharov and Elena Mertsalova point out that 'the space is divided into a busy public zone and a quiet zone for phone calls, conversation and private relaxation'. Reflecting on Nizhny Novgorod's identity as an industrial city, they combined steel and 'blued metal' with a shade of burgundy associated with the Kremlin's brick walls. They conclude that 'an airport is like the business card of a city'.

Lehanneur says that business-lounge design calls for a great deal of flexibility: 'Rather than having one big waiting room, several rooms could be spread out, each with a different mood or atmosphere, allowing me to go to the one that suits me best, according to the time of day and my state of mind.' ●