

As the global financial malaise becomes more ingrained, the big beasts of business are talking downsizing. One current trend is to trade-in owner-occupied company jets for fractional schemes. Enter NetJets Europe, which continues to raise the bar for luxury air travel. It was only a few years ago that NetJets introduced gourmet cuisine courtesy of top restaurants including Hakkasan, Nobu and Le Meurice. Now NetJets is offering ultra-stylish design from star architect Lord Norman Foster.

NetJets commissioned Foster to design the interior of its 7X. The flagship of the 160-strong NetJets fleet, the 7X can fly non-stop from Paris to Tokyo. All 33 Falcon ZXs on order from NetJets will have a striking interior as well as livery designed by Foster; a bold, blue stripe running the length of the fuselage. So impressed were NetJets executives with the exterior livery that it will be replicated throughout the fleet.

NetJets needed something special to mark the introduction of the Falcon 7X, which at \$1.5 billion is the largest order in aviation history. Who better to approach than a Pritzker Prize-winning architect who is also a NetJets customer? 'I have piloted all kinds of aircraft; helicopters, racing sailplanes, microlights, historic aircraft and jets,' Lord Foster says. 'In the early days, I would fly myself to all my business destinations. I would do that as a single

pilot and I would chart the weather, draw up the flight plans, everything.'

Foster took on the project with relish, applying his architectural skill gleaned from such projects as Beijing Airport to the enclosed cabin of the jet, which can carry up to 13 passengers.

'Every design assignment is special,' Lord Foster says. 'It has nothing to do with the size or the complexity. You might assume that, say, Beijing Airport, as the biggest building in the world, would loom large, but as a design challenge the like 7X was just as special.'

Lord Foster did plenty of research for this project. He talked extensively to NetJets' clients and crew to get a well-rounded perspective. Lord Foster was able to combine the height of luxury with a stylish attention to detail, such as the seat belt buckles; black nickel for the crew, clear nickel for the cabin.

The interior of the Falcon 7X is thematically zoned into a 'well-being space' for customers and a work space for crew. The passenger cabin is light and tranquil and features a cream and tan colour scheme and Fiddleback Sycamore wood fittings. Lord Foster based the design of the seating arrangements on how NetJets owners and passengers use the aircraft, gearing it towards business meetings and a more comfortable sleeping and dining experience.

A DISTINGUISHED AIR

The NetJets Falcon 7X is an elegant masterclass in luxury design courtesy of Lord Norman Foster, who talks exclusively to **Christopher Kanal** about the project.



In stylish contrast, Lord Foster used robust materials such as carbon fibre for the crew areas. 'With the 7X, we tried to create an environment that would offer comfort and luxury of choice, to be quiet and undisturbed, but able to get whatever you need discreetly and without fuss,' explains Foster. 'It is about catering for the extremes of community and privacy.'

Raising the experience of flight to the level of art, all 7X owners and shareholders receive a unique book, *Horizons*, commissioned for the project by NetJets and published by Lord Foster's wife, Lady Elena Foster. *Horizons* has a specially edited selection of photographs by renowned travel photographers such as Lalla Essaydi and Ellen Kooi and submissions by writers including Mario Vargas Llosa. An insert includes an illuminating collection of Foster's sketches and notes from the 7X design process.

The 7X is the most advanced business jet flying today. Employing the same fly-by-wire technology used by Dassault Rafale fighters, the three-engined business jet is a considerable aviation achievement in its own right. It can fly faster, higher and longer than any other Falcon, but has the highest fuel efficiency in its class as well as being extremely agile in the air.

The meeting of Lord Foster and NetJets has produced an elegant masterclass in luxury design. ■

LORD FOSTER WITH THE NETJETS DASSAULT FALCON 7X

The NetJets 7X is available on the NetJets Europe Owner Programme, which allows owners to buy a share of an aircraft equal to the anticipated number of hours flying each year, starting with as little as 1/16th of an aircraft (50 hours).

