



# HIGH DESIGN

Marc Newson has made long-haul travel cool again. The revered Australian designer invites Christopher Kanal on board.

When Qantas' first Airbus A380 took to the sky in October 2008 for its inaugural flight from Melbourne to LA, business and first-class passengers were given a signed copy of a new book by industrial designer Marc Newson, the man responsible for interior design throughout the double-decker 'superjumbo' jet.

'I am always in the air,' admits the jetsetting Newson. 'The more you fly, the more you look around as a designer.' Although Qantas' A380 project started six years ago, the Australian carrier's creative director has long been fascinated by aviation. 'This is where so much technology is born, but on an aesthetic and cultural level they are in the dark ages.'

Aviation has had a significant influence on Newson's career. 'I have always loved the aerospace industry,' he tells me. Indeed, the design piece that made his name, the 1986 Lockheed Lounge, a curvaceous fluid divan made from aluminum, was inspired as much by fetishised aerodynamics as 18th century French rococo interiors.

The Qantas A380 project was not just the largest commission the 45-year old Australian-born designer has ever undertaken, it's also his most ambitious. Newson was responsible for the design of the cabin as well as the seating, lighting, toilets, handles and even the cutlery.

Inside the world's largest airliner you will be hard pressed to find anything that has not been touched by the creative hand of the London and Paris-based designer.

While best known for his sculptural creations, Newson spends most of his time on complex industrial commissions for companies like Alessi and Cappellini. He has applied his creativity to aircraft before with his styling of the Dassault Falcon 900B executive jet in 1998 and his Kelvin 40 concept jet for Fondation Cartier in 2004. In 2007 he even designed a spaceplane for Airbus parent company EADS Astrium. As well as the A380, Newson is responsible for the striking first-class lounge at Sydney Airport.

The Airbus A380 is the biggest civil aviation project since the Boeing 747 Jumbo jet and Newson approached it with an eager sense of enterprise. 'It's a once in a lifetime opportunity,' he explains. 'Planes like this don't appear that often.'

Alongside Qantas, the launch customer for the A380 – they have ordered 20 of the flying behemoths – Newson pioneered a new type of design path on the huge 560 tonne aircraft. Leaving behind the drab conservatism that has characterised aircraft interiors for decades, Newson approached the project in a completely different way. 'An airplane is a wonderful thing,'

he enthuses. 'Why would you want to make it look like a living room?'

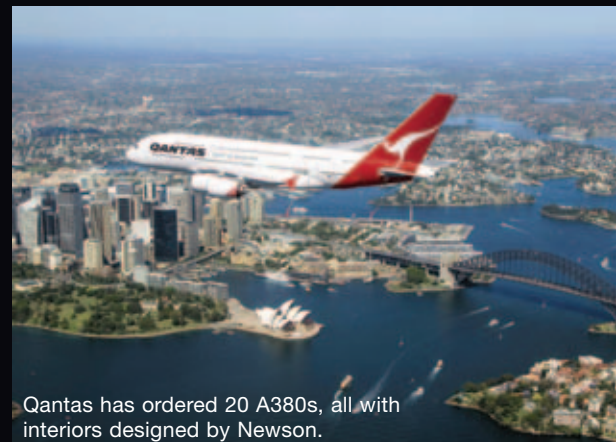
Despite super-strict regulations, the sheer size of the interior – the A380 has 49 percent more cabin space than the Boeing 747 and significantly quieter cabins – gave Newson plenty to play with. Qantas A380s have 450 seats across four classes (14 in First, 72 in Business, 32 in a spacious Premium Economy and 332 in Economy). This is fewer than Emirates with 489 seats and Singapore Airlines with 471 – the aircraft's other two initial customers.

When you step onboard one of Qantas' shiny new 'superjumbos', the first thing that strikes you are the earthy colours: subdued greens and reds blended with soft greys. Newson has evolved a soberer version of the decadent 'retro-futurist' style that he developed in the 1990s (ruthlessly imitated ever since), but the cabin design's real impact is in the less showy details – the slimmer economy seat that gives you an extra inch of legroom and diodes that subtly illuminate the cabin with light that changes in tone through the course of a flight.

Newson has also combined materials like carbon fibre and sheepskin in a simple but unique way. Throughout the cabin there are custom-made finishes for seat backs, wall panels and floor coverings that feature his signature touches such as honeycomb patterning. It is



Passengers can adjust seats, privacy screens, massage systems and entertainment on the touch-screen.



Qantas has ordered 20 A380s, all with interiors designed by Newson.



One of the 14 first class suites.

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understated and intelligent, in contrast to the ostentatious approach that has been taken by other A380 operators.

The designer admits that he is a control-freak and describes to me how he thought long and hard about materials, finishes and functionality – criteria that airlines are not renowned for paying much attention to. Economy class is state-of-the-art and simple. Carbonfibre seats manufactured by Recaro, synonymous with luxury auto brands such as Aston Martin, are extremely light and compact.

Each of the 14 first class suites provides its occupant with his or her own zone, decked out in beige and ottoman and featuring a 21.5 inch wide armchair that swivels or rolls out to form a flat 2.12m bed complete with a foam mattress, exclusive sheep overlay and fitted cotton sheets. One can adjust seat, privacy

screens, massage system and entertainment on the touch-screen 17 inch LCD TV. The Suites are finished in Edelman leather and wood. business class features an enhanced Skybed sleeper seat that converts electronically into a fully flat, 80 inch long bed. Its fixed cocoon design and large electronically deployed screens provide plenty of privacy. All passengers, whatever class, are supplied with cotton-covered pillows, lambswool blankets and a Panasonic entertainment system complete with internet access.

At present, Newson's A380 serves flights between Sydney or Melbourne and Los Angeles and the 'Kangaroo route' of London to Sydney. Does the designer have any tips for dealing with long-haul flights? 'I think the trick is not to fly terribly often,' he says. For a man as in demand as Newson, that must be easier said than done. ■



Business class seats 72.



One of the Newson-designed Skybeds.