

tailor made

CATHAY PACIFIC HAS REPLACED ALL THREE CLASSES AT ONCE ON BOARD ITS LONG-HAUL FLEET WITH A NEW PRODUCT INSPIRED BY THE BRIEF: 'ASIAN SPA MEETS SAVILE ROW'



It's bad enough having to overhaul just one single class across a fleet of aircraft, but Cathay Pacific has decided to introduce new product in all three classes across the majority of its long-haul fleet – and all at the same time! The new cabin equipment will be installed on the airline's announced new deliveries (18 777-300ERs and 5 A330-300s), as well as being retrofitted to its existing long-haul fleet (22 747-400s, 7 A330-300s, 15 A340-300s) already in operation. The installation for the 67-aircraft programme will be complete by mid 2010.

"It's not often that you get airlines that do projects like this in all three classes simultaneously," says Cathay's product manager, Sarah Blomfield, who puts the aircraft downtime for the product retrofit at about 40 days. To maximise efficiency and minimise downtime, Cathay is aligning the product installation with other essential maintenance requirements.

Despite the huge workload involved, Blomfield reckons there are advantages to such an approach: "Doing everything at once gives you the ability to be much more coherent in how you approach the design and carry out the customer research, as well as how it all hangs together in the aircraft cabin – but ultimately, the biggest advantage is you don't have to retrofit it all three times over, reducing aircraft downtime, as well as certification efforts."

Fortunately for Blomfield, not every aircraft will feature all three classes: Cathay is actually ditching first class and switching to a two-class configuration on five A340-300 aircraft, while seven A330-300s will also be converted from a three-class to a two-class configuration.



1. Cathay's new first-class cabin consists of nine suites, each of which features a seat that converts into a 36 x 81in bed
2. The suite features a lighter colour carpet treatment and a smart bamboo finish
3. Carry-on baggage can be stowed below the ottoman

The airline is also reducing the overall seat count in its premium cabins on some of its three-class aircraft. "We've lost three first-class seats and one business-class seat on our 747-400s as a result of the changes, but we don't intend to increase our fares to make up for any potential shortfall," claims Blomfield. "Instead, what we've tried to do is provide a better product that will sell out more often."

Cathay's B747-400s will feature nine first-class seats in Zone A on the main deck in a 1-1-1 configuration; 46 business-class seats, split between a 1-2-1 layout on the main deck and 1-1 on the upper deck; and 324 economy seats in a 3-4-3 pattern. Its A330s will house 41 business seats in a 1-1-1 layout, with 223 economy seats in a 2-4-2 configuration; while its A340s will feature 26 business-class seats and 257 economy seats.

Form, function and feeling Cathay Pacific worked with leading transport design consultancy, Design Q, to come up with the overall long-haul product design concept, with the key aim being to design a fresh, inspirational interior for all three cabin classes. "The idea was to create a cabin environment that is both natural and soothing, and at the same time very well-appointed," explains Blomfield.

With a specific brief of 'Asian Spa meets Savile Row', Howard Guy, managing director of Design Q, got to work. "It had to be

right for Cathay and the brand, and for what Hong Kong is all about," explains Guy. "There are a lot of opposites in Hong Kong: you've got the natural, more traditional ways of life rubbing up against high-rise glass and steel skyscrapers and neon lighting – the interior was therefore quite a challenge, as we had to pick colours and materials capable of transmitting these feelings."

The best manifestation of this philosophy is found in Cathay's new first-class cabin, which combines sleek and sophisticated dark leathers with brushed metals, and satin finishes with organic, textured fabrics. The natural elements of the spa are everywhere to be seen in the first-class colour scheme: the green-blue representative of water, the browns of timber and earthy, the dark blue inspired by the deep ocean and the more neutral, light shades of the sidewall, ceiling and coving panel evocative of sky and clouds.

Private affair Cathay Pacific's research indicated a strong expectation among passengers that the first-class product should be taken to a new level by increasing individual privacy, creating the ambience and convenience of a five-star hotel room, and giving passengers greater individual control over their immediate environment. The result is a first-class cabin consisting of nine individual suites, which Cathay believes is a match for anyone: "I think you would definitely put our first





4

class a step ahead of the suites offered by some of our competitors,” says Blomfield. “We’ve got an 81in bed, personal closets, individual cabins – it’s up there leading the pack.”

Unlike Emirates and Jet Airways, Cathay doesn’t see any need to further reinforce the idea of an individual space with actual suite doors that the passenger can open and close. “The passengers wanted privacy, but they didn’t want to feel completely isolated,” explains Blomfield. “As long as they were not subject to anyone’s direct gaze, they didn’t see the need for doors. Also, from an operational perspective, doors are a nightmare, so we were glad when the passengers told us they didn’t want them either.”

Cathay and Design Q worked with Acumen Design Associates on the realisation of the first-class suite, which is manufactured by Contour. At first, Cathay looked at a luxurious eight-seat configuration in Zone A on its Boeing 747-400s, but later decided to introduce a ninth seat to meet demand and increase potential yield. “Initially, the product was 40in wide, but we simply switched to 36in width to get the ninth seat in the middle,” reveals Nigel Lawson, an associate at Acumen.

The new seat can be used as an armchair, a chaise longue or an extra long and wide bed. To give the passenger the flexibility to use all the space, the design includes an extendable side chair with drop-down armrests. The main seat, which extends

fully into the bed, is 24in wide, while the side chair is 12in wide. When the main seat is fully extended into bed mode, the leg rest of the smaller portion flips up, extending the bed area.

“We did several ergonomic trials to ascertain how high the screens needed to be,” adds Lawson. “We went from 46in to 50in and back down to 48in – that’s the upper most height of the privacy screen. We also included a personal closet – we wanted to create an environment that was more akin to a hotel room, where passengers can store everything they need without it being on show.”

Flying carpet Further details include an individual flower vase, as well as a bespoke reading light. An ottoman in the suite and an extendable table means passengers can invite friends or colleagues to join them during the flight. There’s also an interesting carpet treatment, with a more opulent, lighter shade inside the suite compared to a darker carpet in the aisle. “We wanted to make the suites look like individual living rooms,” explains Guy. “At the start, we looked at having little rugs in there, but we dropped that because we were worried about passengers tripping over the edges!”

With nine suites squeezed into first class, there simply wasn’t any room left over for a dedicated bar or social zone. “From a security perspective, those sort of features are no



4. A personal closet allows for storage of personal items within easy reach
5. The side chair’s leg rest can be deployed to provide an even greater sleeping surface

WE WANTED TO CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT THAT WAS MORE AKIN TO A HOTEL ROOM, WHERE PASSENGERS CAN STORE EVERYTHING THEY NEED WITHOUT IT BEING ON SHOW



5



6



longer encouraged,” says Blomfield. However, the first-class cabin does include mood lighting and a more spacious VIP washroom with its own custom lighting, a black-and-white colour scheme and gloss finishes: “It’s more like what you would find in a funky restaurant than on an aircraft.”

Business decision Meanwhile, Cathay’s research into the business-class market revealed a strong expectation among passengers for a full lie-flat bed, improved living space and enhanced individual privacy. In response, the airline is the latest to opt for a ‘fishbone’ layout that allows unrestricted aisle access from each seat. Partitions between the seats ensure each passenger can enjoy their own private area, while lighter fabrics and metallic finishes help to create a feeling of space.

Business class now features a new seat that transforms into a totally flat bed, designed and manufactured by B/E Aerospace. Ergonomically tested foams further improve sitting/lounging comfort and promote restful sleep. Simple seat controls allow full adjustment, including lumbar support, while a two-way massage function aids blood circulation. A magazine pocket and trinket tray allows for the storage of inflight essentials within easy reach, while multi-directional lighting with dimmer control lets passengers create just the right ambiance.

A personal 15in IFE monitor and a generous, bi-fold meal tray table help create what Guy describes as “a journey within a journey” within each bay. “We’ve introduced features that passengers might not notice at first or where it’s clear that somebody has spent a lot of effort thinking about how they work. The passenger basically interrogates everything around him while flying, to discover whether it’s been done well or badly.”

As a result, Design Q spent a great deal of time ensuring the bamboo-like finish of the partition conveyed the correct sense of quality. “Originally, I wasn’t keen on bamboo, as it seemed too much of a cliché and there was the risk it could be perceived as being cheap,” remembers Guy. He changed his mind, however, when given a bamboo chopping board as a present. “The way in which the block was made with its variation in colour convinced me early on that bamboo could really work.”

Guy and the team worked with Schneller Inc, the decorative laminate manufacturer, to replicate the surface grain texture of bamboo, despite the fact it was actually made out of plastic. “Schneller had recently developed a small press tool that could emboss any of its finishes with a brushed aluminium effect,” he says. “We found that when we applied the same tool to our bamboo finish, it looked less glossy and more convincing as a wood finish.”

- 6. Business-class includes a 15in adjustable IFE monitor
- 7. Cathay is the latest carrier to opt for a ‘fishbone’ layout in business class

Entertainment overload

Cathay's new AVOD IFE system enables a huge amount of entertainment options across all classes: 50 movies, more than 100 TV shows, over 160 CDs, 22 radio channels, and 96 games for first/business and 83 for economy. New features include a detailed destination guide for each CX online city and a calendar that highlights major events happening around the world. Movies are available with alternative soundtracks in English, Cantonese, Mandarin, Japanese, Korean, Hindi, French, Italian or German; TV programmes are broadcast in English, Cantonese, Mandarin, Japanese and Hindi respectively.



7



8

- 8. A new AVOD IFE system gives passengers in every class a wide range of entertainment options
- 9. Cathay has selected B/E Aerospace's ICON seating for its economy cabin

Healthy difference Finally, Cathay's research for its new economy class revealed that passengers were increasingly concerned about travel-related health issues on long-haul flights as well as living space and legroom. To address these concerns, Cathay has chosen B/E Aerospace's 'Icon' economy seat, which features a fixed back design in combination with a cradle mechanism that allows the passenger to recline without intruding into the space of those seated behind.

The seats are installed at 32in pitch, with the seat frame and structure designed to maximise knee and shin clearance and remove awkward fixtures and fittings that undermine comfort.

Economy-class seating also features exclusive 'LEAPLive Back' technology, designed for an award-winning office chair, which provides dynamic and continuous support for the spine in all positions. Other features include a bigger personal television and the introduction of audio and video entertainment on demand.

"We wanted to make a real step change in economy," says Blomfield. "Apart from relatively minor stuff, nothing much has changed in over 20 years. The Icon seat brings some of the learning and technology from other areas and applies it judiciously to the economy environment."

First class

- Nine personal suites featuring "the biggest bed in the sky" (81 x 36in) with built-in massage function
- Ottoman feature provides additional stowage for carry-on baggage
- Extendable side chair with drop-down armrest that can be used as a cocktail table or work surface
- Fully adjustable seat with four-way lumbar support
- A large (17in) fully adjustable 16:9 personal TV screen
- Personal closet for storage of belongings within reach
- Extendable meal table that transforms into a workstation

Business class

- Fully adjustable seat that transforms into a fully flat 80 x 23.5in-wide bed (35in width at the shoulder)
- A 15in 16:9 personal TV screen, noise-cancelling headset and integrated handset that doubles as a personal phone
- Additional stowage space includes a magazine pocket and trinket tray, putting inflight essentials within easy reach
- New bi-fold table for dining or work needs
- 110V AC power socket for computers, PDAs, MP3 players and other electronic devices

With a new AVOD IFE system from Panasonic completing the package, Cathay's long-haul passengers should have plenty to keep them entertained during the flight, while the new seating and Asian spa-influenced cabin should ensure they arrive relaxed and refreshed at their chosen destination. **END**

Contact Howard Guy, Design Q, Email: howard.guy@designq.co.uk, www.designq.co.uk; Nigel Lawson, Acumen Design Associates, Email: info@acumen-da.com, Web: www.acumen-da.com

ECONOMY-CLASS SEATING FEATURES EXCLUSIVE 'LEAPLIVE BACK' TECHNOLOGY, DESIGNED FOR AN AWARD-WINNING OFFICE CHAIR



9