



A book for today (and tomorrow)

In *Jetliner Cabins: Evolution & Innovation*, author Jennifer Coutts Clay has produced an all-encompassing paean to the aircraft cabin environment. Review by Steve Lodewyke.

In a year like no other, when our industry has been locked in a struggle to make the right procedural shifts and introduce technical innovations to mitigate the disastrous effects of a global pandemic on the way we have grown accustomed to fly, it has been immensely comforting to plot a route through an extraordinary book which charts the development of the modern cabin environment in great detail, and in a style that evokes the sheer pleasure and excitement of the best in-flight experiences.

Written and curated by aviation consultant and former British Airways and Pan Am executive Jennifer Coutts Clay, *Jetliner Cabins: Evolution & Innovation* was first published as a coffee table hardback in 2003 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the first powered flight by the Wright Brothers. The book was successfully

republished in paperback in 2006. It is now available as a fully interactive app for Apple, Kindle and Android-based mobile devices. Its 240-plus page count is set out over four main sections – Product Branding; Passenger Experience; Cabin Maintenance and Marketing Challenge – and separated into 16 detailed chapters, finished off with a full directory of specialist companies, bibliography and index, including company websites. Each chapter is assiduously illustrated with full-colour photography throughout, including easy-to-scroll picture galleries and app videos.

Coutts Clay invites us on a journey of discovery from the very first chapters, looking into the luxury on offer in first-class cabins and specifically into the evolution of the seating itself. From the hotel lobby-like cabins of the chic Seventies, appointed with comfy seats and footstools, to the electronically-

operated extendable leg-rest panels of the Eighties, similar to those “used on dentists’ chairs”, to the “great leap forward” when in 1995 British Airways introduced its full-length lie-flat sleeper seats as part of a US\$800 million product improvement plan for its long-haul, widebody, twin-aisle fleet. It became the benchmark of quality for the entire industry and helped to further the veracity of the airline’s claim to be the World’s Favourite Airline.

PITCH PERFECT

The sectional theme of Product Branding is continued across the following chapters including the comfort imperatives of business-class services and the ever-changing face of economy class, with commentary on its profit-making principles of pitch angles and on the recent upmarket vector of premium economy cabins.



There's also plenty for the history buff and aviation geek to get excited about throughout the pages of *Jetliner Cabins*. There are extensive picture galleries showcasing air travel ephemera such as bag tags and timetables and fascinating exclusive case studies focused on seminal design projects such as the Pan Am Blue corporate identity programme (think of the mighty 747 and what livery springs to mind?) and the simple, yet iconic, cabin design of Concorde – “the supersonic salon in the sky”.

Coutts Clay has fully utilised her seniority within the aviation industry to garner comments and recollections from other senior airline and design company executives who worked on these and other projects to compile an impressive treasure trove of knowledge and first-hand insight.

But it's not just a look back at past highs. While this book is undeniably a paean to the

modern commercial air travel industry and the skill and ingenuity of its design and maintenance personnel, it also takes a considered look forward, beyond a time of coronavirus, to the challenges ahead. For example, the ongoing quest to reassure passengers and crew of their health and safety at all times is addressed in a new 2020 update within the chapter on cabin cleanliness, and the issues of durability and 21st century materials are covered within a series of chapters within the Cabin Maintenance section – the segment titled “Magic Carpet” on the virtues of the humble and often unnoticed aircraft floor covering is a particular favourite of mine.

But it is the closing sections on Green Advances (sustainability) and Ways Ahead (increased connectivity and economic factors) that are most prescient. Coutts Clay leads a thought-provoking exploration of

issues such as the phasing out of single-use plastics; the development and use of increasingly lighter materials within the cabin in order to save on jet fuel and cut carbon emissions; the proliferation of low-energy LED lighting; and the introduction of space-age innovations such as hi-tech temperature-stabilising fabrics, ‘smart windows’ and ‘clever coatings’.

In truth, I have only scratched the surface of this comprehensive book here, and I encourage readers of *Inflight* to get their own copy, buckle up, sit back and enjoy the journey. ■

Jetliner Cabins: Evolution & Innovation by Jennifer Coutts Clay is available as an E-book app via the Apple App Store, Google Play and Amazon. ISBN 0-991-41011-4.