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Dream jet gives ultimate high for US\$177 million

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Vivian Chen

Enjoy a life of opulence in a home that is 9,000 metres above ground

AS TOLD TO VIVIAN CHEN ILLUSTRATION AIRJET DESIGNS & ANZON WONG

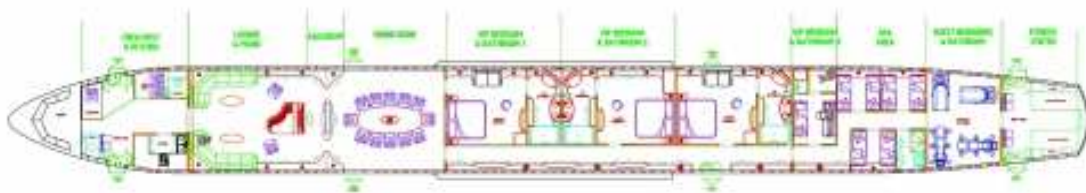


WHAT: Ultimate Luxury Private Jet Customisation

WHO: Jean-Pierre Alfano

Founder and creative director of AirJet Designs

Trained in product design and engineering, Alfano chose to work with Nasa after completing his studies in 1997. It wasn't until three years later that his return to France inspired him to join the trade of luxury aircraft cabin design. After earning his EASA Compliance Verification for aircraft interior design and airframe modifications, he founded AirJet Designs in 2010. His award-winning firm has since worked on numerous projects, including corporate jets and aircraft for VIPs and heads of state. The firm is headquartered in Toulouse, France, and also has a satellite office in Shanghai.



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A home 9,000 metres above the earth? Taking the Airbus A300-500, which as a commercial aircraft can seat up to 313 passengers, and transforming it into an airborne dream house for an exclusive party of 12 is exactly what veteran designer Jean-Pierre Alfano has in mind for the client seeking the utmost opulence.

"Space is an absolute luxury on an airplane," Alfano says. "The plane, with our planned layout, will make one feel as if they are travelling in a small hotel."

Alfano and his team have indeed turned the aircraft into a boutique hotel - think spacious guest

rooms, a dining area, lounge, gym, spa treatment room, gourmet kitchen and rest areas for a crew of nine that includes pilots, a gourmet chef and flight attendants.

"We want to push the limits of the current conventions of private aircraft luxury by increasing the sensation of space, which enables having amenities in the cabin never seen before on an aircraft," Alfano says.

Once on board, you'll enter the lounge area where a grand piano, custom-made to comply with airworthiness regulations, is fitted for the owner to impress and entertain.

The true star of the space, however, is a tropical aquarium, inspired by one of Alfano's recent projects for a private client who is passionate about scuba diving.

To fit an aquarium takes tenfold the work when it's done in an aircraft. In order to withstand flight turbulence loads and changing cabin pressure during the journey, special mechanisms were designed for the tank.

"The engineering and airworthiness certification are some of the most expensive aspects outfitting a new private jet," Alfano says. "Each new design is unique and therefore has significant nonrecurring costs involved in creating it."

The aquarium connects the lounge area and main dining room, which can seat 12 to wine and dine at the same time. A private chef will prepare food from a gourmet kitchen at the front of the aircraft.

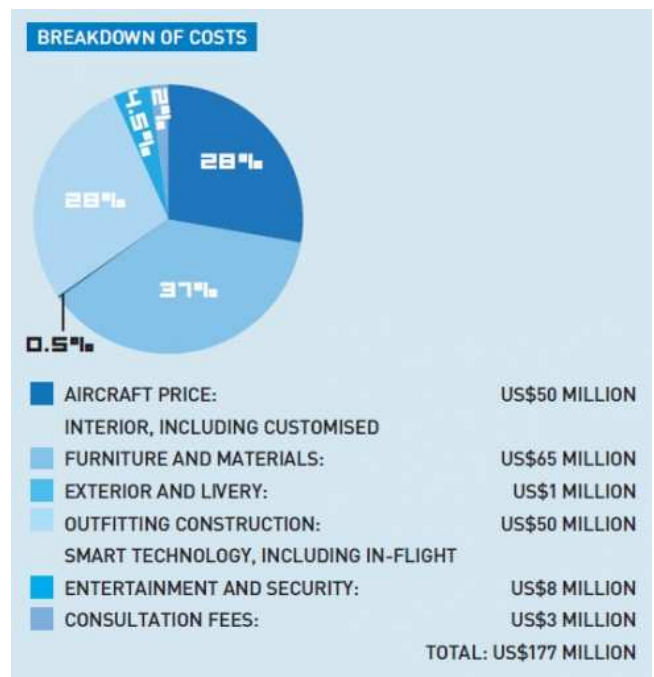
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The middle section of the aircraft is designed for accommodation. Three main bedrooms with en-suite bathrooms and showers are available for the owner and guests. "They'll have plenty of room to breathe," Alfano says.

The designer included a special surprise in the main bedroom. First, a bathroom with a transparent shower stall was installed. In between the bedroom and bathroom, he placed a special glass partition which is integrated with a transparent OLED TV monitor. The TV connects to the onboard Wi-fi system. Once it's turned off, the partition becomes transparent again.

To pamper guests, Alfano designed a private spa area where on-board massage therapists can work their magic. "Such services will give an additional feeling of being cared for in the lap of luxury while travelling to a destination," he says.

A gym equipped with treadmills and strength-training equipment allows the jet-setters to keep up with their fitness routines.



State-of-the-art smart technology makes the journey even sweeter. Passengers can connect to the outside world during long-haul flights with a Wi-fi network by ID Air providing internet connections and video-on-demand, while GSM and satellite TV communications supplied by OnAir will allow guests to make calls from their mobile phones.

To make passengers feel more at home, Alfano chose electronically dimmable windows and an active noise-reduction system by Hutchinson Aerospace.

"This is highly sophisticated technology to make a jet less noisy and more pleasant to be in the cabin by using a combination of microphones, speakers and specialised computer software that cancels the noise in real time," he says.

In addition, an incorporated smart cabin-management system will allow passengers to control different features on the plane using a tablet device, and it can also be activated with voice commands.

Last but not least, security on board - often one of the top concerns with private jet owners - is addressed with Otonomy Aviation's high-performance security cameras fixed to the exterior of the plane, providing a 360-degree view of the surroundings with a sensor alert system to detect unwanted intruders approaching the aircraft on the ground.

"I designed this customised private jet only with comfort and luxury in mind, not with optimisation of passenger numbers, as is often done for private jets that are also used for charter," Alfano says.

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