

STORY DANIEL SCHEFFLER

AIR OF OPULENCE

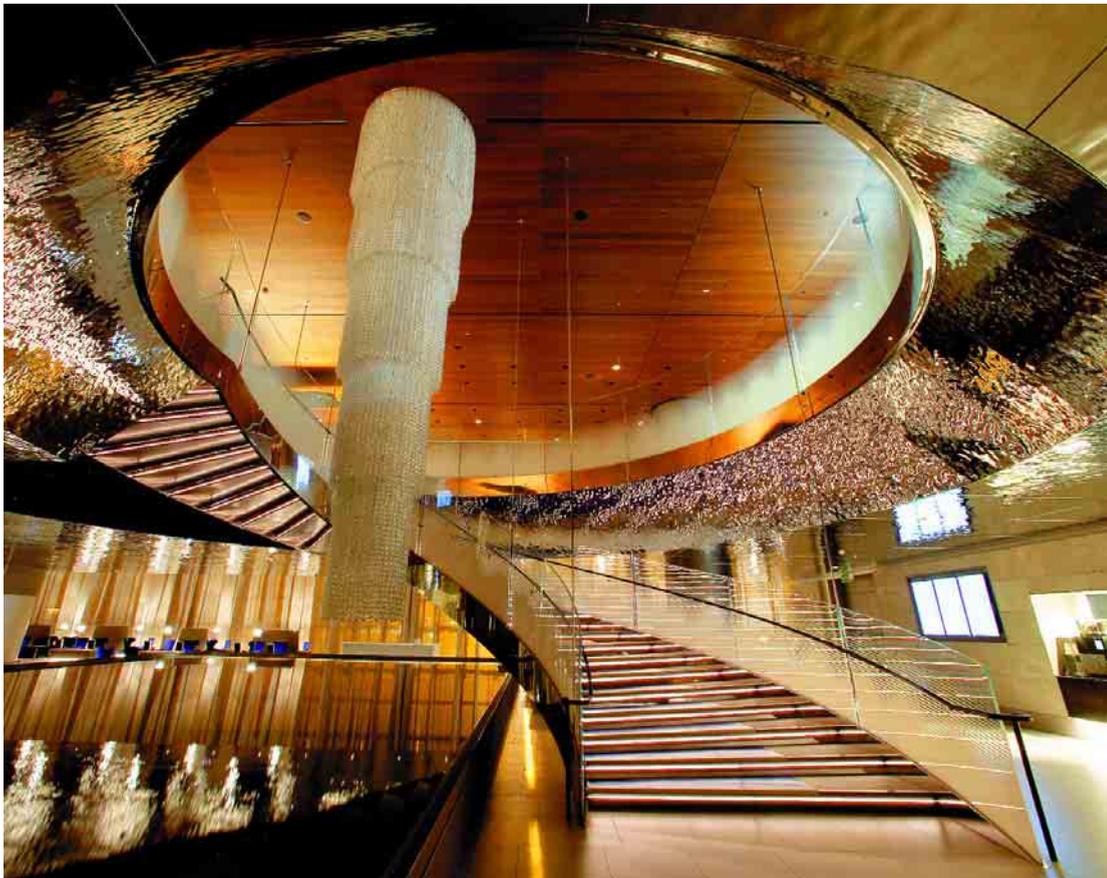
FLYING HIGH IN LUXURY IS BACK IN VOGUE, AND COMMERCIAL AND PRIVATE AIRLINES ARE BECOMING CREATIVE IN THEIR OFFERINGS



Brazilian-owned private executive jet company Embraer's Lineage 1000 E comes with a master suite and has access to exclusive airports such as London City.

The height of glamorous travelling used to be the luxury of being as far away from the plane's noisy rotating propeller as possible. But that was the beginning of the 20th century and things have changed dramatically – fortunately for the better.

Today, first class in commercial planes and private jet travel are competing on every possible level to dazzle on all fronts even before boarding the plane, to enable any requests and to take to the beauty of the wondrous skies.



LEFT
Qatar Airlines' opulent lounge at Hamad International Airport

BELOW LEFT
Travellers have access to entertainment in Qatar Airlines' Al Mourjan Business Class Lounge Game Room.



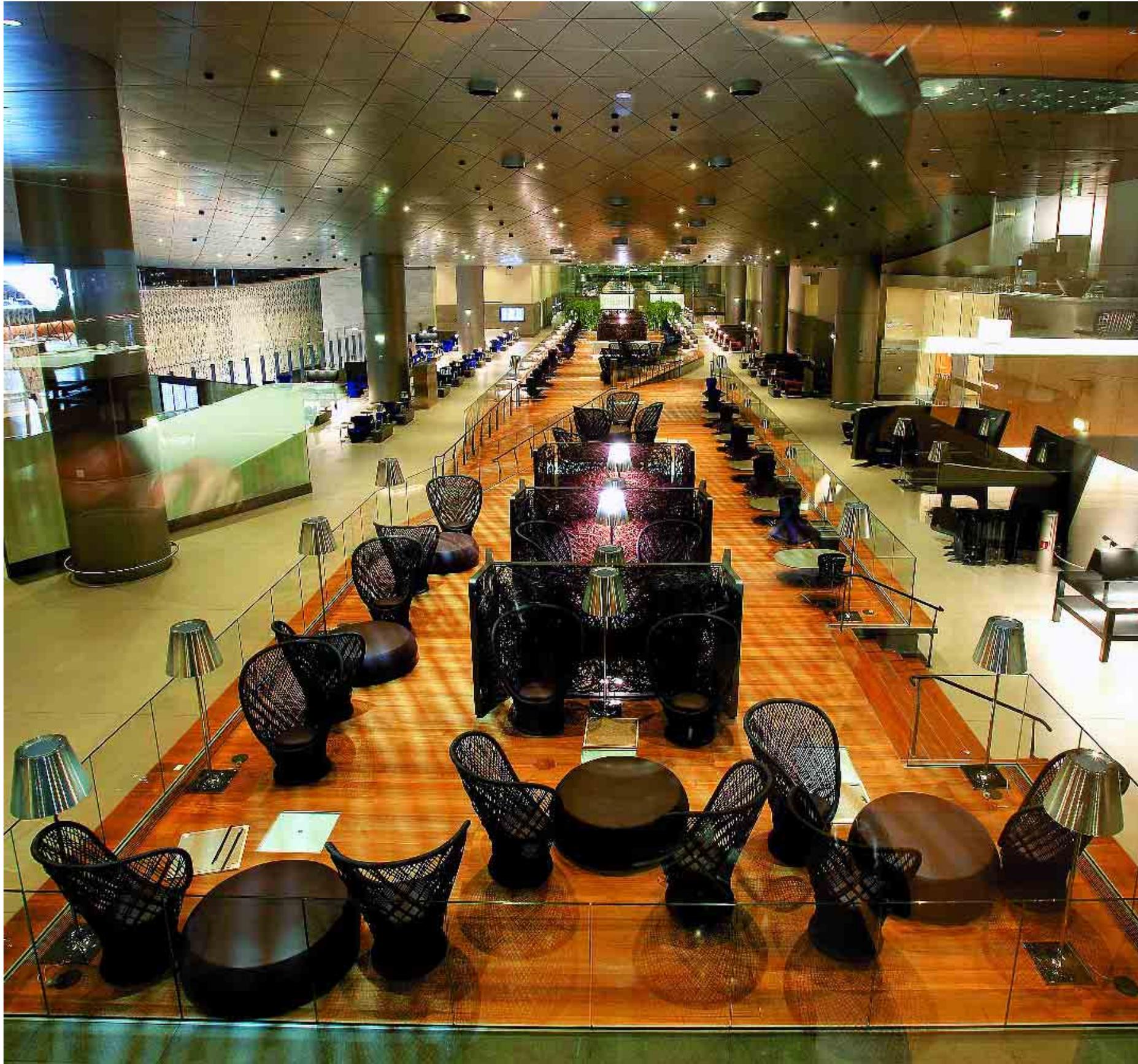
“The glamour of air travel is back – affluent travellers are looking for memorable experiences and airlines are getting more creative with their offerings” says Gabriele Sappok-Klink, a luxury travel specialist at Imagine, a global creative communications agency.

Whether you’re looking for an exclusive three-room suite in the sky complete with your own butler and inflight chef – à la Etihad Airways’ The Residence – or a fully individualised private jet in your colour of choice, it’s all about making the journey as luxurious as – if not more than – your holiday experience itself.

This is a concept that has been revived from some of the earliest days of commercial flying. Pan Am, the largest carrier in the United States from 1927 until its demise in 1991, was the cognoscenti when it came to premium travel. Endless alluring stories emerge from travellers across the world who hit the clouds in the finest luxury with Pan Am’s commercial offering. “Nobody was that chic, nobody,” says Elaine De Santos, a retired Pan Am flight attendant who is working on a book about her life in the skies.

At the height of its reign in the era of the television series, *Mad Men*, Pan Am modernised its fleet with bridal suites, dining areas and salons to cater to the glitz associated with flying. Pan Am also filled its planes with the world’s most beautiful people as crew – evident in the television series on ABC titled *Pan Am* starring Margot Robbie – who could all speak ➔

JETSETTERS HAVE ADJUSTED THEIR LIFESTYLES TO FLYING IN FIVE-STAR HOTELS STEPHEN MCGEE OF LUXURY ATTACHÉ



Travellers can totally relax before their flight at Qatar Airlines' spacious Al Mourjan Business Class Lounge.

multiple languages, dressed in famous designer garb and charm everyone holding a cocktail. Corey Kilgannon, in his *New York Times* piece, "When Flying Was Caviar", says that Pan Am's service and cuisine were inspired by the famous Maxim's of Paris with an additional "personal flair".

"When it comes to flying, the most important aspects for VIPs are access, convenience and luxury amenities," says Stephen McGee, attaché at Luxury Attaché in New York. Top travellers, the ones not in private, require butlers, chefs, masseurs and even Hermès sheets at 30,000 ft. McGee says "jetsetters have adjusted their lifestyles to flying in five-star

hotels rather than cattle cars". It's as much about the preflight experience as it is about your time in the sky. Qatar Airlines can certainly impress in the air, with their new Airbus A380 with just eight first class cabins, complete with extra wide seats, Christian Dior and Giorgio Armani amenity kits, the extra length flat bed and spa-like bathrooms. The entire experience feels like a "sanctuary in the sky". What gives Qatar Airlines an extra advantage, however, is



LEFT
The extravagant cabin of Air France's La Première programme

BELOW
SHA Wellness Clinic has added an Esenza Mini-Clinic at the Adolfo Suárez Madrid-Barajas Airport.

THE TREND IS MOVING TOWARDS PRIVACY AND STANDARDS ARE CLOSER TO PRIVATE AVIATION VÉRONIQUE JEANCLERC OF AIR FRANCE

its special care services. Besides the Savoy-trained butler in the air, its on-the-ground experience is equally extravagant. First-class passengers are accompanied by a private concierge through a special, much faster, customs and security check point and then are led to the lounge area with dining and pampering options.

Qatar's flagship lounge, which is only for first-class passengers at the Hamad International Airport, opens in the next few months.

The lounge will take expectations to a new high with full spa facilities and private cocoons for resting and refreshing, all the while being serviced by private butlers. This is something that private jet travel has yet to replicate.

The idea is that everything needs to be as streamlined as possible. Véronique Jeanclerc, Air France La Première's product manager, says, "the quality is higher and higher, not only about the product, but also about the services delivered. It is not only a first-class trip, but a real first-class experience".

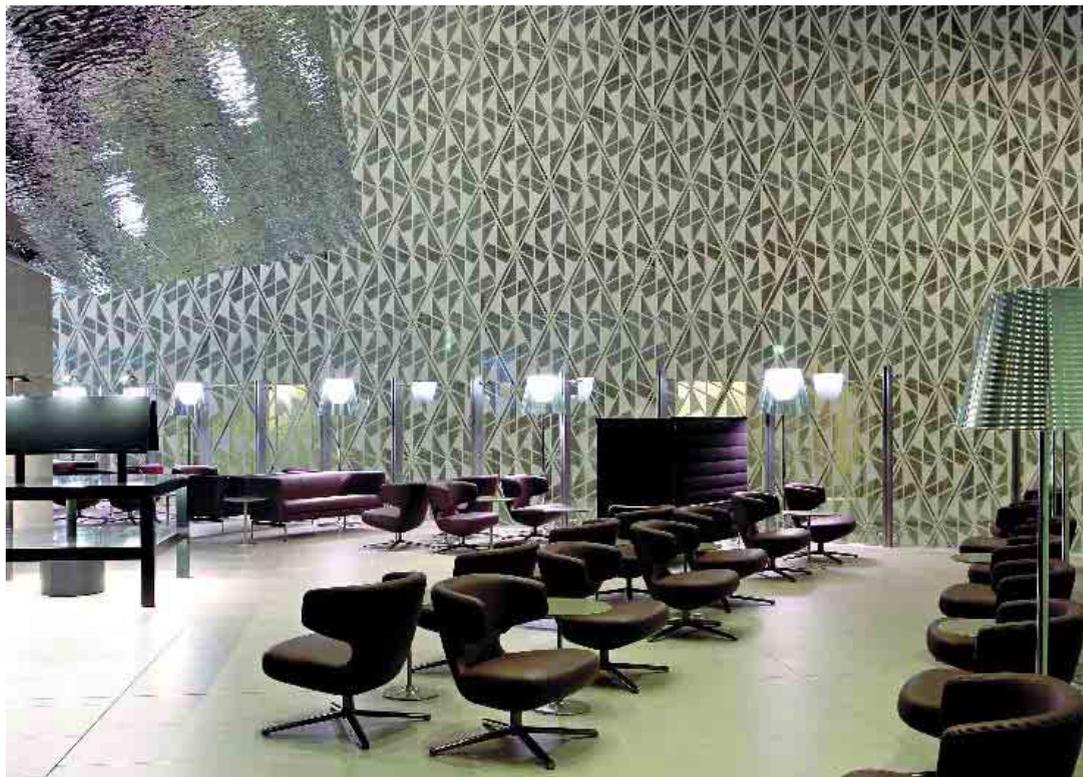
Flying, with all the delays, queues and extra security, has for a very long time become unpleasant and thus a desperate need for something chic came about. What Air France offers with its La Première project, for example, is everything from personalised service and Givenchy amenities in a tailored cabin

suite at one end of the spectrum, and an elite private jet experience at the other. The airline has partnered with business airline Wijet to offer a private jet service in which every step is streamlined and personalised as much as possible, from your chosen departure time to simplified security procedures.

Clearly, demand for service excellence applies across the board from commercial first class to private aviation. "The trend is moving towards ➔



ULTRA-HIGH-NET-WORTH INDIVIDUALS WILL PAY ABOVE AND BEYOND FOR EASE AND CONVENIENCE



more privacy and standards are closer to private aviation,” Jeanclerc says.

Embraer, the Brazilian-owned private executive jet company, has decked out its range with more than what many five-star hotel rooms can offer. For one, the Lineage 1000 E comes with a master suite and has access to exclusive airports like London City. More importantly, owners of these planes customise the inside to suit their every need: Lalique washbasins, gold rims everywhere, state of the art technology as a standard and, of course, the choice of what to feast on.

Guan Dongyuan, senior vice-president of Embraer and president of Embraer China, says: “Owning a private jet means that you have more flexibility of time. It is definitely a way to improve work efficiency. Our Chinese customers have now discovered all the benefits that executive jets present.” This is certainly a sentiment that Kate Dell’Aquila, senior account manager and luxury expert at Point One Percent in New York, agrees with. “Ultra-high-net-worth individuals are willing to pay above and beyond for the ease, for instance, of being able to change plans in-flight and thus the utter convenience, and let’s not forget the pampering,” Dell’Aquila says.

But the real benefit of private travel, beyond the convenience and efficiency, is the complete privacy

and with that comes confidentiality. Whether you’re leaning back in first class (after having turned left) or your own plane (even though it’s pricier), the way the industry has changed over the past 20 years in particular is what has made the experience fabulous again. There is a reason why Nina Simone sang: “Birds flying high, you know how I feel. Sun in the sky, you know how I feel. It’s a new day, it’s a new dawn – and I’m feelin’ good.” ✈

FOR SAVVY BUSINESS TRAVELLERS

La Compagnie, the French all-business-class airline, has launched its New York, London and Paris routes. Started by Frantz Yvelin and Peter Luethi, who “believe that business class travel and personalised service can be offered at much more respectable fares than currently available”. lacompanie.com

British Airways and its Club World have taken wellness to another level. With “Height Cuisine” for healthier meals, improved lighting to mimic natural light (seamless day to night), the added memory foam in the seats and a reduction in cabin noise, fatigue and jetlag are easily avoided. britishairways.com

SHA Wellness Clinic, know for its property in the south of Spain, has added an Esenza Mini-Clinic (pictured) at the Adolfo Suárez Madrid-Barajas Airport. Travellers can experience the finest therapies, beauty and styling as well as healthy, organic food while waiting for their flights. shawellnessclinic.com

ABOVE LEFT *The Al Mourjan Business Class Lounge is all about a fully immersive luxury experience.*

BELOW *Qatar Airlines offers all kinds of cuisines at Hamad International Airport, while travellers are waiting to board their plane.*

