

Q&A for WIP Aircraft Interior Design Presentation

by Natalie Rodriguez, Principal, VVIP Aircraft Interior Design

What type of dance did you do and did you always enjoy it?

At my dance studio, we trained in many different styles. I did ballet / pointe, jazz, tap, contemporary, acrobatics, contortion, lyrical, hip hop, and even clogging.

I loved dance so much that before my first design internship at an aircraft completion center, I wasn't sure I wanted to pursue interior design at all. I actually thought about changing paths and becoming a professional dancer or working in the performing arts. However, after that internship, I completely fell in love with aircraft interior design and I never looked back.

Do you make your design from exotic materials?

Occasionally, yes. Some designs call for more unique or exotic materials. For example, I've worked with Clients who were very proud of the craftsmanship in their home countries, especially when it came to carpet making. In those cases, wool and silk carpets were handmade in their countries, then specially treated for fire safety and static control so they could be safely installed on their aircraft.

What materials do you usually use for your interior designs?

The most common materials are leather, wood veneer, and wool or silk carpet. For fabrics, natural fibers usually work best. Some man-made fabrics can be used, but anything involving seats or divans (the areas people sit on most) has very strict safety rules, especially for fire resistance. This is because these areas are most important for passenger safety. More unique materials may be used depending on the Client's request and where the material will be installed.

What type of lessons did you learn from dancing when you were younger AND how you have grown into this area of work?

One of the most important lessons dance taught me is that hard work and practice lead to progress. In dance, that meant learning new skills, becoming more versatile, and earning opportunities like being featured in routines.

Dance also taught me teamwork. You learn how to work with different personalities, listen to others, and cooperate to reach a shared goal. That skill is incredibly important in design. Being a good team player means listening, compromising when someone has a better idea, and understanding that it's okay for someone else to shine - your moment will come too.

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What inspired you to become an aircraft interior designer?

The idea came from a conversation with my best friend in high school. I told her I wanted to study interior design, and she said her aunt did that - but for airplanes. The moment she said this, I just knew that was what I wanted to do. I had flown on airplanes at least once a year to visit family and always loved the excitement of travelling, even though I didn't know much about aviation at the time. Somehow, it felt like the perfect fit.

If you could tell students one thing: a quote or word of advice what would it be?

"Be you". My parents always encouraged me to stay true to myself and not let others change who I am. It's important to grow and improve, but to always do it authentically. In today's world - especially with AI and technology - being real and genuine actually helps you stand out.

How many airplanes do you design the interior for per year?

For full, real aircraft interiors, we usually work on about 1–2 aircraft per year. This can change depending on the size of the aircraft and whether it's a new design or a refurbishment. If we include design bids and concept projects, the number is closer to 10–12 aircraft per year.

I feel like this is such a rare job so how did you hear of this and what made you want to do this over anything else?

I first heard about aircraft interior design from my best friend in high school, and it immediately felt right.

I did explore other types of interior design, like residential and commercial, and I have a lot of respect for these fields. But aviation kept pulling me back. Designing aircraft interiors feels like solving a complex puzzle - with strict rules, safety requirements, and the challenge of creating something beautiful and luxurious at the same time. What makes it even better is that the people I work with are just as passionate about aviation as I am, which makes the work exciting and fun every day.