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AIRCRAFT INTERIORS INTERNATIONAL
EXPLORES FINNAIR'S BUSINESS CLASS
INNOVATIONS ACROSS THE FLEET AND
DISCOVERS THE DEVELOPMENTS THAT
CABIN DESIGN LEAD DAVID KONDO
HAS IN THE PIPELINE

Words by John Walton



LEFT: THE AIRY A350 BUSINESS CLASS CABIN, DESIGNED WITH HELSINKI-BASED STUDIO DSGN VERTTI KIVI & CO.

BELOW: THE GREEN-THEMED SOFT PRODUCT LIFTS THE APPEARANCE OF THE CABIN, BUT IS SOON TO BE UPDATED IN BLUE

BUSINESS CLASS ENHANCEMENTS IN THE PIPELINE

Finnair's business class is marked by the quiet exceptionality that also typifies the Nordic carrier more widely. Finland's national airline is small enough to be nimble and carries a sophisticated enough business class segment to drive innovation beyond its size. It's one of the bellwether airlines for pushing the boundaries of the passenger experience, but with a practical, realistic eye on actually delivering on its promises that feels very Finnish indeed.

Finnair's bread and butter is connecting passengers between Asia and Europe via its Helsinki-Vantaa Airport hub. Taking advantage of Helsinki's geographical position, very close to the ideal great circle route between Asia and Europe, the airline's selling point is its ability to transfer passengers with a single stop between secondary European cities and primary Asian cities, secondary Asian cities and primary European cities, or two secondary cities.

"Our focus as an airline is very much on connecting Europe and Asia," explains David Kondo, the airline's head of cabin interior development. "The advantage of our Helsinki hub's location is that we are on the great

Finnair moves slowly with its soft product. The littala glasses have been around for more than 50 years, and the apple green of most items in the Marimekko partnership is no longer as in vogue today as it was at the beginning of this decade. However, change is on the way.

Recent pieces of inflight soft product, such as the coffee service, plus the forthcoming new linens and fabrics, are a fantastic midnight blue, as eye-catching as they are timeless, with new patterns.

On the ground, the airline is in the middle of a heavy revamp of its non-Schengen (essentially UK, Ireland and long-haul) lounges, which feature one business class lounge and one for top-tier frequent flyers. This revamp has led to some substantial disruption while the renovations take place, but the future looks bright.



circle route between a great number of city pairs between Europe and Asia, which allows us to offer some of the fastest journey times in the market. The connecting traffic between long-haul Asian routes and short-haul European routes is absolutely integral to Finnair and accounts for the majority of our growth in recent years."

Finnair is part of the oneworld joint-venture partnership with AA, British Airways and Iberia, and it could well be argued that it provides the best passenger experience of the group.

LONG-HAUL BUSINESS CLASS DESIGN

Finnair's current long-haul business class seat on its flagship Airbus A350 aircraft is the Safran Seats (previously Zodiac Aerospace, and before that Sima Aero Seat) Cirrus, an outward-facing herringbone seat.

The airline's implementation of Cirrus on the A350 is notable for its simplicity: there is no moving footrest, with passengers using the footwell as an ottoman, for example. Similarly, the headphone storage space has no door, unlike other iterations of the seat.

The end result for Finnair is a seat that feels a little less elegant and feature-filled than some of its competitors', but one that

GEOGRAPHICAL ADVANTAGE

The connecting traffic between long-haul Asian routes and short-haul European routes is absolutely integral to Finnair and accounts for the majority of its growth in recent years.

For China, for example, Finnair serves Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong, from its Helsinki Airport (HEL) base, as well as Guangzhou, Chongqing and Xi'an. In Japan, Osaka Kansai and Nagoya are served in addition to Tokyo Narita. Thai-bound travelers have the option of flights to Phuket and Krabi and Bangkok. Delhi, Seoul, Ho Chi Minh City and Singapore are also on the network.

Time savings are assisted by the location of most major Asian airports to the east of the continent, and most major European network carriers to the west of the continent, requiring back-tracking for connections – to say nothing of transiting mega-airports not always renowned for their passenger experience.

"The transfer times on our flights between Europe and Asia are designed to suit business travelers," the airline says in its advertising, and indeed the times are usually short, with HEL's minimum connection times as short as 35 minutes.



has not suffered quite as many quality and wear issues as some other airlines' seating products, which are suffering from ongoing production issues.

Presently the look and feel is a series of grays and off-whites that could charitably be said to resemble a Nordic winter, responding well to the aurora borealis-themed mood lighting. Uncharitably it could be called a bit boring. Cushions and duvets featuring designs from renowned Finnish design house Marimekko enliven the space, but the airline has used the apple green color for so long that it is now feeling a bit staid.

"The green textiles were very fresh and modern... but it's now time for a change," Kondo explains, noting that a refresh of the soft product is well underway.

"The inspiration for the original Marimekko collaboration came from the green of the Finnish forest and the blue of

the lakes. Finland is known for its lakes, of which there are more than 187,000. Given that the previous scheme was dominated by green, we quickly landed on blue, especially as it is also one of our main brand colors."

A350 AND A330 CONFIGURATIONS

All of Finnair's 11 Airbus A350s have 32 business class seats between doors 1 and 2, and most – with the exception of OH-LWI, -LWK and -LWL – have a further 14 seats in the three-and-a-half rows behind door 2.

Finnair's eight Airbus A330-300 aircraft, meanwhile, are outfitted with Thompson Aero Seating Vantage fully flat beds in a staggered configuration. These are not the Vantage XL seats, which offer direct aisle access to every passenger, although with the alternating 2-2-1, 1-2-1 configuration most passengers will not need to step over a neighbor or be stepped over.

Like the A350s, the A330 fleet consists of two layout subsets: five with 32 seats ahead of door 2, and 13 behind, with

LEFT: THE VANTAGE SEAT ON THE A330 FLEET OFFERS A 'THRONE' SEAT TO SOLO TRAVELERS

BELOW AND BELOW LEFT: FINNAIR'S SERVICEWARE AND AMENITIES ARE AMONG THE MOST COVETED IN THE AIR

INSET BELOW: KIDS TRAVELING WITH FINNAIR USE A SPECIAL MOOMIN CHECK-IN COUNTER AND CHILDREN'S SECURITY CONTROL, AND ALSO RECEIVE MOOMIN-THEMED AMENITIES



FINNISHNESS IS MORE THAN MOOMINS

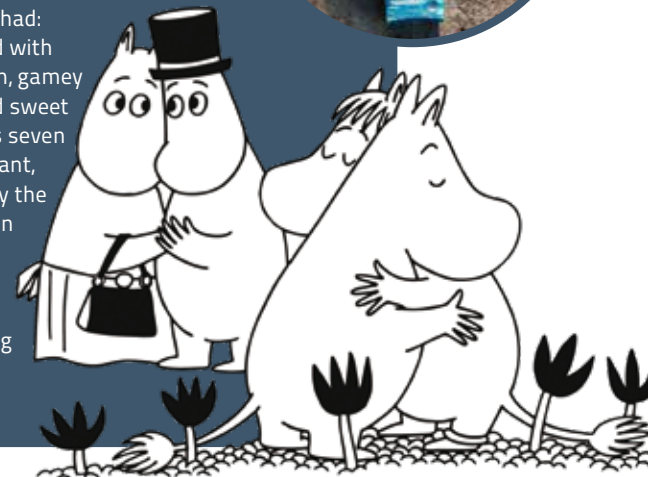
More than the seats, more than the fast connections, more than the once and future advantages of Helsinki Airport, what makes Finnair Finnair is Finnishness. The national airline of this 101-year-old country makes the most of its culture throughout the passenger experience, often flying in the face of the stereotype of gruff and stoic Finns.

Rather, it's the wry smile that characterizes Finnish humor, and a sense of self-aware elegance that characterizes Finnair's business class service. It's flight attendants who don't fawn, but don't forget what you were drinking, or spot that you're still working and never pass by without checking whether your coffee needs a refill.

It's a sense of national pride that a country only winning its independence a century ago can bring, and that pride spurs partnerships galore: from household

international names like Marimekko, Moomins and Iittala, to lesser-known Finnish favorites like chocolatier Fazer, from salty licorice to Karelian pies and cinnamon rolls in flight.

There are many delights to be had: tiny smoked vendace fish packed with umami; salmon myriad ways; rich, gamey roasted reindeer; tart berries and sweet liqueurs; strong coffee and cakes seven ways. It's simple food made elegant, and elegant food made simple, by the Finnair Kitchen catering operation brought back in house in 2017, and now working with chefs from Finland and key markets to create some truly groundbreaking food in the air.



TURBOCHARGING TURBOPROPS

For much of Finnair's extended home market, the airline's 12 ATR 72-200s operated by regional subsidiary Norra, half of which are over 10 years old, are the first and last face of the Finnair experience they see as these aircraft enable connectivity with the long-haul fleet.

"The ATR operation is important for Finnair – in terms of movements it represents a large proportion of our flights in and out of our Helsinki hub that feeds into our mainline operation," explains David Kondo.

As a result, between now and summer 2019 Finnair will kick off a cabin refurbishment exercise to align the ATRs more closely with the rest of the Finnair fleet for greater consistency for those connecting between aircraft types. Work includes more ergonomic seats and a fresh cabin interior design. Refurbishments will roll out by the end of Q1 2020.



RIGHT: THE AIRBUS NARROW-BODY FLEET HAS A TYPICAL 'EUROBIZ' CONFIGURATION



three aircraft being equipped with only the 32 seats ahead of the door.

SHORT-HAUL EUROBUSINESS

Given Helsinki's position in the far northeast of Europe, Finnair could be expected to have an above average short-haul business class, as passengers connecting on its primary Europe-Asia network will spend a greater proportion of their journey time on short-haul aircraft.

Finnair, like almost every European airline, operates a business class consisting of economy seats; the number sold as business class can be varied according to demand. Unlike some airlines, however, the forward rows that can be converted into business class feature extra seat pitch.

"On the Airbus narrow-body fleet the business class zone is 31in," confirms Kondo. "On the E190 we have a mix of 31in and 32in, and on the ATR we will have a mix of 30in and 31in. In economy, the majority of seats are pitched at 30in or 31in, with a limited number at 29in."

On the airline's Airbus narrow-body fleet – the A319, A320 and A321 – the middle seats of the 3-3 configuration are kept free.

On the 12-strong, 100 seat Embraer E190 fleet, as well as the 12 ATR 72-200 turboprops, unlike many airlines Finnair does not keep the adjacent seat free.

"On the Airbus narrow-body fleet the seat next to business customers is blocked for extra space," Kondo says. "The E190 and ATR typically operate much shorter sector lengths and have adequate personal space that does not necessitate blocking adjacent seats. Business class customers on these flights are offered priority ground services and lounge access, which weigh importantly on shorter flights."

However, the extent to which Finnair uses these small jets on relatively long flights, such as its Lyon route, which debuted in late 2018 with a 3hr 10m block time, or Geneva at five minutes less, this is a product weakness, especially given the distance between its Helsinki hub and many destinations in Western Europe. ☒

A LEADER IN IFEC?



On Finnair's short-haul fleet, the only in-flight entertainment is a copy of *Blue Wings Magazine* and the duty-free catalog. Increasingly, however, the Airbus fleet that operates the majority of its domestic and European flights is being equipped with ViaSat-provided Ka-band connectivity, using the Eutelsat constellation in advance of the expected arrival of ViaSat's own connectivity.

The downside of Eutelsat: coverage gaps. The upside: internet that is blisteringly fast for in flight, and not bad for anyone without fiber to their door. This journalist had the opportunity to try it out on three separate flights, and with streaming an option it's a real game-changer – especially since business

class and high-tier frequent flyers receive 30 minutes of complimentary access.

Long-haul, the wide-body fleet offers Panasonic touchscreens, with the older A330s equipped with eX2 and the newer A350s with eX3. Finnair has done a huge amount of work on the user interface of both these products.

Panasonic also provides Ku-band connectivity on the long-haul fleet, which is unfortunately largely saturated by demand at this point, and anything beyond email or text-based messaging is a struggle. On two long-haul flights in 2018 this journalist experienced first hand what it looks like when you try to get two-thirds of the passengers on an A350 on a single connection – and it's not pretty.