

# CUSTOMER DRIVEN WINDS OF CHANGE

FLEXJET'S LXI CABIN COLLECTION



When was the last time you scanned a brokerage page looking at jet interiors? It's like staring through a kaleidoscope filled with beach sand. Northern Afghanistan has more color! A bowl of mushroom soup is somehow more visually stimulating. Ah but the winds of change are stirring...or so it seems. Some are beginning to tout a fundamental shift away from interiors that are (to put it in a word) boring. But the shift itself is only interesting or worthy of discussion if we understand WHY. And the why in this case, is neither complex nor particularly interesting. It's simply the oversaturation of bland...too much fizzle, not enough sizzle.

It's like the "trend pendulum" somehow got stuck following the seventies and lodged itself into a permanent state of environmental monotony. And at it's center is a single overused, under-nourished cluster of colorways to which it can all be attributed. We affectionately refer to them as "the neutrals". And what do neutrals do? Well it's easier to say what they don't do. They don't get involved. They neither support nor detract. They show up...but they don't sing!

By definition, it goes like this: 1. Neutral - "having no strongly marked positive characteristics or features"

And low and behold, Wikipedia nailed it; "no positive characteristics" other than their ability to hold the middle ground and never (God forbid) offend! So why have neutrals dominated jet interiors to the point of ad nauseam? Because for OEMs, charter operators and fractional groups alike, the popular notion for almost three decades has been...they're SAFE. To apply a predominant palette of neutrals means you aren't going to offend anyone.

But it seems that ship may be sailing. As Isaac Newton observed, "for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. In this case the overwhelming reaction is...we're sick of it! Enough is enough...somebody shoot me if I see another beige interior!

OK, I'll quell my rant here. I mean we all know neutrals have their place but all too often it's become the default and completely unsupported with the infusion of colors. If applied in the right proportions, rich colors delight the senses and offer a fresh and appealing environment in which to travel.

One emboldened, rather well known fractional group is turning the page of greige! Flexjet, arguably the most recognized fractional operator on the planet is making its own fundamental shift and it may well be represent the first of many innovators that make "color" ok again!

Flexjet's own customers have helped them recognized that a tailored approach to interiors will prove a tremendous differentiator between them and other fleet operators in the industry. "Owner response has been overwhelming", claims Ric Michaels - Global Products Director for Flexjet, and their fresh approach to offering artisan interiors is now playing a key role in attracting new customers. All in all, private fliers have themselves seen enough of the "greige" (the standard boring mix of beige and gray seen on most business jets) and are looking for elements of surprise and delight that match the significant amount of capital they're putting forward to fly privately.

Suffice to say, a major component of Flexjet's LXI program is dedicated to "breaking the beige" and infusing colorways that raise the spirit and produce a dramatically enhanced flight experience. The images here speak for themselves but we also wanted to find out more about the LXI program and the Red Label offering. JetModa



## JETMODA

It is our understanding that this fresh new approach is proving to be a significant differentiator between Flexjet and your competitors. Might you please explain how you came to this and how you were able to measure the response by your customers?

## RIC MICHAELS

In 2013 Directional Aviation acquired the Flexjet division of Bombardier and Chairman Kenn Ricci quickly realized the importance of differentiation from other fractional jet providers. Relying on 30+ years in the private aviation business and after consulting with Flexjet Owners, he became determined to develop a personalized experience (like whole aircraft ownership) within the fractional model.

Accordingly, three distinct attributes became the basis of the Flexjet Red Label: The world's youngest fractional jet fleet, professional flight crews dedicated to a single aircraft and the finest custom cabin interiors available.

The first impression is the exterior visual - or "ramp presence" of an aircraft. Thus, we put significant thought into designing the exterior paint scheme (fleet similarity is important) and blended metallic (or mica) finish with unique, variable color striping treatment (we call it chameleon).







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Another distinctive Flexjet aircraft treatment is wingtip striping, including chameleon paint, which is visible from inside the cabin. Accordingly, the appearance of our jets is a major differentiator, as are the custom cabin interiors, flight crew uniforms, private passenger terminals and company headquarters.

Interior customization is unprecedented in an industry typically clothed in institutional colors and further underscores the personalized Flexjet experience. There are more than twenty unique designs in the Red Label LXi Collection. Passengers will experience hand-stitched leather seating, a distinctively warm, welcoming color palette and customized seating configurations.

A unique inspiration came from the luxury, style and masculinity of the 1999 movie: Thomas Crown Affair and it inspired one of our Bombardier Global Express interiors that we call Boardroom. In this theme, we combined distressed brown leather with smooth silver (called ice) on the cabin seats to deliver a designer "blue jean with tuxedo" look common in the film. The contrasting stitching was inspired by leather upholstery details used in classic motorcars and the custom wool and silk carpet mimics cracked sea ice – a result of 15 prototypes.

Since Flexjet rolled out the Red Label LXi Cabin Collection in late 2015, the feedback from owners has been exceptionally positive. One third of Flexjet Owners are opting for the premium Red Label aircraft, reinforcing that it is a true differentiator.

Flexjet saw a 20 percent surge in new business in 2016 versus 2015, with 50 percent of new business coming from customers who previously flew on another fractional private jet provider, the highest level ever for such "conquest sales." Moreover, business generated through referrals from existing Flexjet Owners grew 23 percent in 2016 versus 2015 –and that is the ultimate validation.

#### JETMODA

We at JM are acutely aware of the "Greige" syndrome. In fact we are developing a separate article for this issue entitled: 50 Shades of Boredom wherein designers and others speak out about this shift as well. Can you please tell us what design talent you have employed to help you with this and how far along you are in the process; how many planes in your fleet have been refitted thus far etc.

#### RIC MICHAELS

We were an abettor of the greige syndrome. Rewind to the early years of fractional and it's apparent that a fleet of aircraft that looked alike was itself a differentiator. It followed suit that interiors should be identical as well.

Perhaps we can thank the airline industry for this...refurbishment practicality notwithstanding.

As our products and programs evolved, we believed that clients would appreciate upscale and varied interiors – as one would experience in a deluxe hotel. Accordingly, our new aircraft feature very unique palettes and veneers that only occasionally repeat.

In-service aircraft are also refreshed much more frequently than is customary in the industry. Two thirds of the Flexjet fleet is either new or recently refurbished.

#### JETMODA

Does the LXi Cabin Collection predominately focus on soft good change outs (new colorways) or are you actually changing some of the interior details and architecture as well?

#### RIC MICHAELS

Actually they complement. The primary architecture of an aircraft is a component of its design, yet Flexjet has the capability to make configuration modifications within the certification parameters.

We have our industry's largest HDTV in its own private viewing cabin, custom S-shaped galleys, hardwood and natural stone entranceways and very exotic veneers & plating.

One of our entry-level jets has been reconfigured for optimal seating comfort – which is so well received that the OEM now offers it.

We have installed lighted cabin dividers not offered by the manufacturer, and likely are the first to incorporate dimensional window treatments.

#### JETMODA

Please tell us about the Red Label Flexjet offering; how it was developed; its futuristic underpinnings etc.

#### RIC MICHAELS

Red Label is an offering that was conceived by our chairman. Among its key principles are artisan interiors, dedicated flight crews and the most advanced aircraft and service, both inflight and on the ground.

#### JETMODA

You mention that you started by choosing some of the most sought after airplanes in your fleet. I think our readers would be curious to know which is the absolute most popular - and then descends from there. It would also be interesting to learn which "creature comforts" and on board amenities seem to hold the biggest concern by your customers.





## RIC MICHAELS

Flexjet operates only premium aircraft, i.e. Gulfstream, Global Express, Challenger, Legacy, Phenom and Learjet. Understandably the most popular are the world-capable jets but desirability and budget may be mutually exclusive. Of course, Wi-Fi is a very important amenity. All Flexjet long-range aircraft feature two (2) lavatories, one exclusively for passengers. We actually design our large-cabin aircraft with a three-room sensibility in mind. One section is configured for working, one for resting and another for dining – the colors and materials we choose help to distinguish each area. Flexjet's largest and most capable aircraft – The Gulfstream G650 will join the fleet this year. These ultra-long range, .92 Mach aircraft will boast an exclusive 15 passenger "four-cabin" layout with the ultimate in luxury and uniqueness available only at Flexjet.

## JETMODA

You mention TWENTY different new interiors. Were these each be developed by different designers or one particular studio? How was your design resource chosen?

## RIC MICHAELS

I have 35 years of experience in jet aircraft interior and exterior design and oversee a state-of-the-art in-house design studio. Additionally, I personally interview and select designers from each aircraft manufacturer. They propose designs exclusively for Flexjet that we vet and adjust. The interior themes that we finally select and put into production are reviewed by an executive committee that includes select customers.

## JETMODA

You use the term "Artisan" Interiors. That's a pretty broadly used term these days. Please tell us what it means to Flexjet - how the term translates in visual terms for you and your customers.

## RIC MICHAELS

"Artisan" is commonly thought of as a high-quality or distinctive product made in small quantities by a skilled craftsman. Jets are built in small quantities and perhaps are one of the few remaining hand-crafted products, particularly their interiors. Our light-cabin interiors feature hand-sewn baseball-style stitching that accents ergonomic leather seats. Additionally, some cabin furniture is designed exclusively for our aircraft, such as foldout seats hidden within the main cabin credenza. The custom, wool and silk carpeting is designed with such care that we even test how it feels in stocking feet.

Flexjet marked its 20th anniversary by launching Red Label. Flexjet's chairman, Kenn Ricci boldly predicts, "This will become the future of fractional flying and a genuine innovation in our industry. We are pushing the bounds of the typical fractional offering to provide enhancements exclusive to Flexjet. Red Label intends to deliver a level of premium comfort and customization that fosters a private flying experience as personally rewarding and empowering as owning your own aircraft."

Red Label takes Flexjet's existing offering and customizes it to the expectations of the fractional ownership industry's most sophisticated and discerning group of owners. To take Red Label from conception to reality, Ricci and his team put to use 35 years' worth of knowledge and experience building some of the nation's most successful private aviation companies. In 2013, Flexjet's executive team began a two-year effort to develop their vision for the future of fractional by seeking to anticipate and fulfill owners' desires in every conceivable aspect of the flight experience.



The result is Red Label. Among the most pioneering features available only through Red Label are flight crews dedicated to a single aircraft. Red Label's "One Flight Crew, One Aircraft" model, under which one crew is assigned to fly a single Flexjet aircraft, is a completely new take on aircraft crewing under the fractional model. "When one crew is assigned to fly a single Flexjet aircraft, a higher level of confidence and consistency is delivered," added Ricci. "This is a model that has been used by the military for years. It instills a sense of pride and ownership in the aircraft and allows the pilot to become more intimately familiar with their aircraft. Red Label pilots will be exclusive to their very own Flexjet aircraft, akin to what both pilots and owners experience when they own a whole aircraft."

In addition, exclusive artisan aircraft interiors with smart cabin design elements will be offered and are unique to Red Label by Flexjet. These interiors feature hand-stitched leather and suede seating, a distinctively warm, welcoming color palette and customized seating configurations. For example, in the Learjet 75LXi, Flexjet has introduced unique interior enhancements such as a fold-down ottoman in the forward club and a smart six-passenger seating arrangement for added comfort – an example of the kinds of innovative interior touches available under Red Label through the LXi cabin collection.

"No one else is doing this" according to Ricci – "and we are years ahead of the rest of our industry with this innovation. Red Label puts an element of elegance and delight into fractional flying that has never existed before. It's an entirely different experience, and it's possible only because we are purchasing so many new aircraft that we have the scale and ability to customize them right as they come off the production line."

The Red Label fleet includes the Learjet 75LXi, Challenger 350, Legacy 450 and Gulfstream G450, G500 and G650, each of which is less than five years old.

"Current and prospective Owners who have had a sneak peek at the first Red Label aircraft are impressed by their luxury and superior quality, many expressing that it will be hard to ever go back to a traditional business jet interior," said Michael Silvestro, Flexjet's Chief Executive Officer. "The comfort and aesthetic touches of Red Label are truly one of a kind, and we are excited about bringing crews dedicated to a single aircraft to the fractional model, offering individuals who fly with us a deep sense of familiarity and confidence."

"Dedicated crewing provides Flexjet pilots with a sense of ownership and familiarity with their assigned aircraft and teams, and that enhances the entire travel experience for Red Label Owners, taking them to a place the fractional model has never been before," said Flexjet Chairman Kenn Ricci, himself a veteran pilot with more than 6,000 hours flying type-rated aircraft. "Our competition couldn't implement this feature even if they wanted to because of their contractual agreements with their employees."

The response to dedicated crewing from both Flexjet Owners and pilots has been remarkable, and it underscores what a distinctive innovation it truly is for civil aviation. Flexjet Owners have cited dedicated crewing as one of the primary reasons they chose to purchase a fractional share in a Red Label aircraft, and more than 30 percent of Flexjet Owners already have opted to join Red Label, just a year after the program's introduction.

Launched in 2015, Red Label features not only flight crews dedicated to a single aircraft but also access to the world's newest shared jet fleet and exclusive, artisan LXi interiors that are the most distinctive ever offered to fractional travelers. Red Label bridges the gap between traditional fractional programs and whole-aircraft ownership, providing a premium level of comfort and customization and giving fractional owners the feeling that they are experiencing whole aircraft ownership.

Under Red Label, each aircraft's dedicated crew sets its own schedule and is assigned to just one tail number, which becomes their dedicated aircraft. They fly only their designated plane, and work as a team to ensure it is perfect for each trip. This commitment improves the Owner experience, enhances dispatch reliability and is a tailored approach that no other provider can offer in the fractional market. Under Red Label, Flexjet pilots are achieving the highest pay in the industry, with some pilots earning as much as 30 percent more than the industry standard.

"With only three captains dedicated to our airplane, we have much greater control over the care and condition of what we consider our airplane," said Captain Wayne Jorgensen, who pilots a Challenger 350. "It comes down to a matter of personal pride in ourselves and the service we provide. All the benefits of the Red Label offering for our Owners are made possible and enhanced by this sense of pride and professionalism."

John Braen, Pilot of a Flexjet Gulfstream G450 said, "We are able to create a unique, personalized experience on each airplane and deliver a consistently superior standard of service throughout the fleet. There is a certain buzz and excitement amongst the Red Label pilots that you won't find anywhere else in fractional travel."

"Red Label enhances Flexjet's position as a provider of the world's finest and most owner-centric experience in private jet travel," said Ricci. "Our industry has been in a mature state for some time, and it was time to rethink the norm. We are delighted that Flexjet pilots have so warmly gravitated towards this innovation and the enhanced pride, flexibility and control it provides them in fulfilling each and every mission with absolute excellence."

It's JetModa's fervent belief that we're going to see more companies following suit in this customer driven trend toward a fresh and enhanced cabin experience; one that leaves the beige behind! Flexjet is indeed a pioneer in redefining the current models and with a new younger generation of owners, we fully expect to see the trend flourish.

To learn more about Flexjet's LXi program, visit: [flexjet.com/lxi](http://flexjet.com/lxi)

