



# ROLLING TRIPLE SEVENS

SITTING AT THE HIGH STAKES WIDE BODY TABLE WITH NIKKI GLEDHILL



# T

here are many nuances that distinguish one designer from another. In this case, we're highlighting a Texas-based designer with an affinity for details and a penchant for purple. This designer has found an audience that appreciates both. There are a handful of rising stars in aviation interior design. Ms. Nikki Gledhill is among them and in terms of US-based designers, she's one to watch closely. Her work has been featured in Business Jet Interiors International and she was shortlisted during the 2014 International Yacht and Aviation Show for her one of her projects. Ms. Gledhill and her company, MBG International Design are rapidly becoming a force in VVIP and Head of State design. Her projects have a certain feel and look that is unique to MBG and one that is finding great interest among clients both in the US and abroad.

Ms. Gledhill's work spans an impressive range of airframes. She has worked on BBJ's (I and II), Airbus A-300, 320 & 340, Boeing 747 and Gulfstream. One of her claims to fame is detail, a rather impassioned area of her practice and one she feels is a differentiator from perhaps some other firms. A graduate of the University of Texas - San Antonio, Ms. Gledhill has long been impassioned by luxury design and as she put it..."I was not going to stop until I achieved my goals". Her passion has apparently paid off because the name Gledhill is quickly becoming a household name in VVIP circles.

We caught up with Ms. Gledhill in late February as she was concluding the concept design for a VVIP Boeing 777. The following is a Q & A we conducted with her wherein she discussed a number of topics including her design philosophy and some of the challenges of working on large VVIP projects.

## JETMODA

*Given the freedom by your customer, is there a particular color you like to infuse into your interior palette?*

## NIKKI GLEDHILL

Yes, Purple. It's both masculine and feminine. It's good for any occasion, casual or elegant and it's versatile. It can support either a warm or cool color palette.

## JETMODA

When approaching a wide body project, what is the major difference you encounter between that and say a narrow body or business jet? How does it differ from a philosophical and practical perspective; beyond simply the extra space of course.

## NIKKI GLEDHILL

One of the biggest issues I have to take into consideration between the two airframes is interior weight. Wide-body clients don't usually have a big weight bogey as it affects the range of the aircraft less. Narrow body projects almost always want a lighter interior to enable a farther flying radius.

## JETMODA

Tell us about the triple seven project. Why did you choose this airframe and what about your concepts here are important departures perhaps from other things you've done?

## NIKKI GLEDHILL

I selected the 777 airframe for our latest conceptual design because of its versatility. It's a long-range aircraft while still having the ability to land at many airports. It's big enough to have the space many clients request, without being too big like the 747 or A-380.

## JETMODA

We heard a designer once say he preferred Retrofits to Green AC's because it was rewarding to see the dramatic contrast in the before and after. Do you have any thoughts on this?

## NIKKI GLEDHILL

I would take a Green AC any day over a retrofit. Green AC's give you almost limitless possibilities on design and layout. Retrofits have constraints because usually the clients want to keep the layout that I don't like and many times clients aren't as willing to think outside the box since they already have an interior they can physically see.

## JETMODA

If given the freedom by your client to come up with a palette on your own, would you opt for the monochromatic (neutrals) side or would you infuse bold color. What are some of the palette related things you would counsel your customers on if asked? In other words, what do you regard as "fresh" and current these days and how do you balance that with not getting too trendy?

## NIKKI GLEDHILL

Color. Hands down. Every time. I love color. Color and light make or break a space. Neutrals are safe and they don't warrant conversation and they don't have personality.

## JETMODA

In decades past, Bulkheads were more often than not, clad with wood veneer - but the trend now is for alternate materials and treatments. What sort of things are you exploring for bulkheads?

## NIKKI GLEDHILL

We are constantly exploring fresh and new materials. Wood veneer is always a safe + proven selection for those clients who aren't quite ready to break out alternative materials. There are new and exciting finishes for veneers we can use just not the standard high-gloss. I'm currently trying to infuse more residential wall materials. Textures, bold colors, + prime placement on bulkheads makes something which is usually "standard" come to life.









**JETMODA**

In terms of the AC's architecture, do you prefer to establish that in Grayscale first (devoid of color) or do you sort of develop the architecture in tandem with palette?

**NIKKI GLEDHILL**

Grey Models on every project is a must! We work on size, scale and architecture long before we commit to color. I generally discuss color palettes in initial meetings so I have an understanding of general preferences. Color palette preferences also aids in understanding client's taste. Usually clients with definite color preferences are usually more susceptible to pushing the limits on design. Our "grey models" allow us to view the interior in a raw state. Understanding how the space is being used and occupied. Usually we don't show the clients the grey models, they are used for interior design purposes. You don't throw your chips on the table until you've decided what chips to use.

**JETMODA**

Do you produce your own 3-D renderings internally or via third-party resource? How involved are you in this process?

**NIKKI GLEDHILL**

I utilize third-party rendering services. I have two main companies in which I rotate work through. Each company has it's own strengths and I utilize those strengths on a per project basis. 3D renderings are the most expensive part of the conceptual design. Finding qualified people who understand space and aircraft is tough. Since our firm does both conceptual and project management, we aren't constantly modeling interiors, and it is much more cost-effective for the firm, and the clients to outsource this part of the project. We are however in control throughout the project from sketches to drawings and reviewing the models in mesh form and also in 3D solid form.

**JETMODA**

Some say, "the devil is in the details" but we have had at least one designer assert that she loved the details - that it was her most enjoyable involvement. Can you tell us how you approach details and what you think they mean to the overall project?

**NIKKI GLEDHILL**

Details are usually what drives my projects from the beginning. Since I travel frequently I have had the opportunity to see different areas of the world and see how they utilize different materials and architecture. I come across unusual items all the time and they definitely spur my creative side. Then when the next client who comes along, I try to incorporate a detail and build up from there.

**JETMODA**

Obviously CMS and IFE are huge components to large VVIP aircraft and the screens just seem to keep getting bigger. Do you try and make these elements a part of the design (e.g. using decorative frame surrounds etc) or do you regard them as necessary evils?

**NIKKI GLEDHILL**

CMS + IFE systems are a necessary evils. We always try and incorporate them in the design so they blend in as well as look like a design feature.

**JETMODA**

Do you enjoy the exterior livery part? Many clients are very fussy about this piece. Is this something you enjoy or do you find it a chore?

**NIKKI GLEDHILL**

I don't mind doing livery. I do find it easier to meet the client's aesthetic goals if we do their interior first and then try and create an exterior scheme which complements the interior.









**JETMODA**

How is the "design integration" process for you? In other words, do you enjoy working with the completion center (engineers, DER's etc) in getting your designs thru PDR & CDR?

**NIKKI GLEDHILL**

I would say that 90% of my projects go from conceptual through completion. We are almost always involved in PDR and CDR with the modification center and see the project through completions. Overseeing the design aspects ensure no deviations from the approved design package.

**JETMODA**

There is talk that soon Boeing will be offering a "long window" available for use in the constant section. Are you familiar with this and do you think this will hold appeal for VVIP and Head of State customers?

**NIKKI GLEDHILL**

I think this is an awesome advancement. Windows seem to be a tricky design point. Do you highlight the windows with big design features or do you try to let them blend in? A larger window in the constant part of the aircraft I believe would appeal to all clients. The more natural light you can let in the ac, the better.

**JETMODA**

We always try to weave one frivolous sort of question in so here goes..."If you had your client's resources, what AC would you own for yourself - and when you arrived to your destination, what kind of car would you drive away in?

**NIKKI GLEDHILL**

I would fly the Boeing 777 and my car would be a Mercedes. I'm not super flashy so I would continue to drive the Mercedes as I do in my daily life now. I love their cars. Ok, maybe I would be a bit flashy landing my 777 in Bodrum, Turkey!

Our thanks to Nikki and her team for affording us a view into their world of high-end VVIP and Head of State design. It's pretty clear Ms. Gledhill and her firm will continue to make their mark within this top end sector of aircraft interior design. We look forward to seeing more from MBG Design International and look forward to spotting her the next time she drops in to Bodrum, Turkey in her purple triple-seven!

For more, visit: [mbginternationaldesign.com](http://mbginternationaldesign.com)

