

KENTUCKY

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Judy Miller:
Flying Colors

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Judy Miller: <<< With Flying Colors

*1993 UK grad designs comfortable
surroundings for busy executives.*

By Beverly Bell





Imagine you've just signed the paperwork on a new home and you're itching to decorate. Untouched walls, unfurnished rooms, it's all waiting for you, like a beautiful, blank canvas.

Now imagine that your new home isn't made of brick or wood, stucco or concrete. It doesn't cost \$150,000 or \$300,000 or even \$1 million. It's not a compact condo with 700 square feet or a McMansion with 12 times that much space.

In fact, the "canvas" on which you will paint isn't a house at all. Instead, it's a \$40 million corporate jet. Welcome to life in the fast lane, literally, whisking through the air at 550 miles an hour. As a company CEO or CFO, this is your flying office, kitchen, family room. No patio or built-in pool, but a killer view. While it's not a three-story Tudor firmly planted on the earth, you don't have to be tethered to the ground to appreciate a sense of style.

And that's where Judy Coburn Miller comes in.

"I'm a Virgo," Miller states simply. As if that's explanation enough. Practical, methodical, highly discriminating, analytical, these are the qualities of those who fall under the sixth sign of the Zodiac. Qualities that serve the 1993 University of Kentucky graduate well in her role as manager of aircraft interior design for Dassault Falcon, the corporate jet manufacturer headquartered in France with offices in Little Ferry, N.J., where Miller works.

Every day, Miller and her team of seven staff members take a very small space of 200-300 square feet and transform it. How they transform it is determined by the needs and wishes of the client, but it might include a full entertainment center, complete galley for hot meals, spacious leather, reclining and swiveling seats, and even sleeping quarters for overseas or cross-country flights.

Business is conducted inside this shell. Ideas are hatched at 47,000 feet. And the plane's interior is the incubator, providing a conducive environment and comfortable surroundings, as clouds tick by and the horizon stretches as far as the eye can see outside the window.

It all begins with one simple decision — a company choosing to own a plane rather than using commercial airlines. After the specific model is selected, Miller enters the picture.

Her process begins by meeting with the company CEO, typically, but not always. In her 13 years at Dassault, Miller has consulted with the CEO's spouse, children and parents. She has sat down with the company lawyer or a designer friend of the top executive. It all depends on who will be flying in the aircraft and for what purpose.

2007 was a record year for shipment of business jets. According to the General Aviation Manufacturers Association, more than 1,100 units were delivered into the hands of corporations, representing a 28 percent increase over 2006. The market research firm Forecast International estimates that 15,000 business jets worth \$192 billion will be sold within the next ten years.

"Foreign Sales Lift Private Jet Business," March 10, 2008, Forbes.com

"Quite often, its main use is more private for the top executives and/or their families," Miller explains. "Although it's used for business, it's also used for personal reasons." This also impacts the interior design. "If it's a private individual, buying it for the exclusive use of themselves and their family, then it's extremely personal in terms of



their taste. If they're buying it for more corporate use...then it needs to appeal to a broader range of people."

Décor choices for an aircraft cabin are nearly as diverse as those for a home interior. Clients choose everything from Wenge West African hardwood to classic cherry, from Corian to granite, embossed leather to chenille. They order specially woven fabrics with logo inlays and monogrammed sliding glass panels.

They also bring samples of wood from custom bookcases in their home library or marble from their bathroom counter so that Miller can match it. One executive handed her a piece of the dashboard from his Mercedes so she would know exactly what he wanted.

Beyond material and surface preferences, they have very specific amenity requests for their aircraft, such as storage units for children's toys, video game and iPod systems, and litter boxes for their pets. "That's a big thing. A lot of people fly with their pets," she says.

Whatever the requirements, Miller is ready. Her highly organized approach and thoughtful nature keep her one step ahead. When her team moved into a new work space, Miller designed it herself, incorporating the best layout and organizational structure. What could take hours in tracking down a particular design among thousands of samples, Miller does in minutes. To mimic the natural lighting on airplanes, a skylight was installed in the fabric conference room. Because artificial lighting also is on the plane, she has fluorescent lights with the same color temperature as those on the aircraft. In a hangar across the street

from her office, Miller and her staff use an actual aircraft to place mock-ups of furnishings, seats and photos so that they convey as accurately as possible what the finished product will look like.

Of course, corporations pay a hefty price for the privilege of their own plane, ranging from approximately \$27 million to \$42 million depending on the type of aircraft selected. Despite the expensive price tag and climbing fuel prices, demand remains strong.

Certain factors have driven the increase in business jet popularity. Initially, it was the events of September 11, 2001, and corporate concerns about the safety of senior-level executives. This was followed by long and protracted travel, exacerbated by the growing number of delayed and cancelled flights. With the average CEO earning \$11.2 million in 2007 or \$5,600 *an hour*, time lost checking in, waiting in lines at airport security, the gate and on the tarmac, starts to add up.

Miller has witnessed the increased sales phenomenon firsthand. When she joined Dassault Falcon in 1995, the company was delivering about 30 aircraft a year. Now, it's nearly 100. Even as the U.S. economy has sputtered, foreign markets such as China, Russia, Malaysia and South America have more than made up the difference.

For Miller, watching this growth and being an integral part of such a unique business has been a journey that started in high school. All the aptitude tests she took back then directed her toward creative careers — interior design, fashion design, photography and drama. But even as she decided on the right course, the Virgo in

her, with those deliberate tendencies, won out. She carefully considered the proximity of potential colleges close to her home in New Jersey, the likelihood of landing a job after graduation, and building a sustainable career. This thought process led her to nearby Berkley College in Waldwick, N.J., and its 12-month program in interior design.

There was only one problem. Berkley didn't offer a degree. New York City had several big design schools, but that would mean a grueling commute every day. Then, Miller's aunt mentioned the University of Kentucky as a possible option. The family had relatives from Kentucky, including Miller's great-grandmother. If she had to go out of state to pursue her degree, it made sense to go to a place where there was a familial connection.

"It was one of the greatest decisions I ever made," Miller says.

The first person she met at UK was Terry Rothgeb, currently an associate professor in the School of Interior Design. During

her campus visit, he reviewed her portfolio. She toured the campus and met some of the other professors. "I really liked the school, I liked the program and so, I applied and got accepted," Miller says.

In the beginning, Miller was attracted to UK's program because it was accredited by the Foundation for Interior Design Education Research, a special designation that means the program had undergone a rigorous evaluation and met a set of high standards identified by the accreditation body. Later, Miller appreciated something else. In their sophomore year, all students are required to have a portfolio review. This thorough and blind assessment process evaluates the students' work to determine if they have the knowledge, skill and talent to continue in the program. Miller says it's a way of weeding out those not fully suited for the profession and who might have more success in other careers.

"To me, that meant they really cared about the students that were coming out of the program, as opposed to other schools

which are just more or less concerned with the number of students enrolled and how much they're going to make off of them," Miller says. When she graduated in spring 1993 with a bachelor's degree in interior design, Miller felt ready to tackle the demands of the profession. "In terms of skills, I think UK really prepared me. I was proud of the portfolio that I assembled while I was there. I definitely used the skills and techniques that I learned. They did a very good job as educators."

Now, Miller focuses all that learning and natural skill on good design, which she believes adds to the quality of life. "You really want to like the environment you're in," she says. "For me, design and style are not about money. It's about picking quality pieces and designs that you like, and putting them together to create an environment that a person is comfortable in and is happy to be in. People really want a personal environment...and make it their own. Design helps you do that."

Judy Miller On Design

Miller, an Allied Member of the American Society of Interior Designers, shared some thoughts about color and design.

- Her favorite color? Pink. "Unfortunately, I've never had to do a pink interior for a plane."
- Prior to joining Dassault, Miller had only flown twice in her life. What has she learned about flying since then? "Biz jet flying is a wonderful privilege that I'm reminded of every time I step onto a commercial flight."
- If you want to make a space appear larger, Miller suggests using monochromatic colors. Beige, taupe and grey are good choices and use accent colors in pillows and other decorative pieces.
- Though she can't reveal names, Miller is currently working with a top female CEO from a Fortune 500 company. She estimates that roughly 90 percent of the corporate executives she consults with for new planes are men.
- Miller doesn't have a favorite style — "what I like is good design" — but she does have a favorite architect, Frank Lloyd Wright.
- Miller has done set design for several off-off Broadway productions and two short films. She also was hired as a product representative on QVC, the home shopping television network.
- While she doesn't judge every interior she sees, fabrics always catch her eye. "It's almost like a sensory reaction. You notice the quality of a fabric when you sit or touch it."



Décor choices for an aircraft cabin are nearly as diverse as those for home interiors, says Judy Miller, who regularly meets with her team of seven staff members.