

Exclusive: Cathay Pacific Lounge

Ise Crawford injects warmth and even cosiness into first-class air travel, with a lounge full of sumptuous details at Hong Kong International

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Ise Crawford has always sought to redefine the concept of “luxury” – an ambition that seemed particularly pertinent when airline Cathay Pacific asked her to design a first-class lounge at their hub airport, Hong Kong International. “Luxury has come to mean excess, labels, shininess,” says the London-based designer. “I wanted to create somewhere warm, considered, comfortable, informal and generous.”

Rejecting opulence and ostentation, Crawford’s Studioilse has built a reputation for creating interiors that act as a calm backdrop to the lives of their users; the airline turned to her after receiving poor feedback on its existing, more conventional lounges (designed by such architectural bigwigs as Norman Foster and John Pawson). For Crawford, it is attention to people’s well-being, and small, thoughtful gestures – rather than conspicuous displays of wealth – that feel special. “The things we respond to in space are unquantifiable things, like comfort, trust, beauty – emotional qualities you can’t write down or measure,” she says. “This lounge is for people who travel ridiculous amounts, who see their own homes once in a blue moon and are nearly always in formal, institutional spaces. This should be somewhere they can slow down and feel good, free and human for a moment.”

To provide such frequent flyers – 800 each day – with a rare dose of domesticity, the 2,031sq m space is divided into rooms as if in an apartment, with names like “the living room” and “the library”. But it’s no ordinary home, to be sure. Once you’ve made it past the bronze reception desk, you encounter a large reclaimed-wood table that sits in a long limestone-and-onyx corridor, where a specially curated selection of Asian art is on display. >

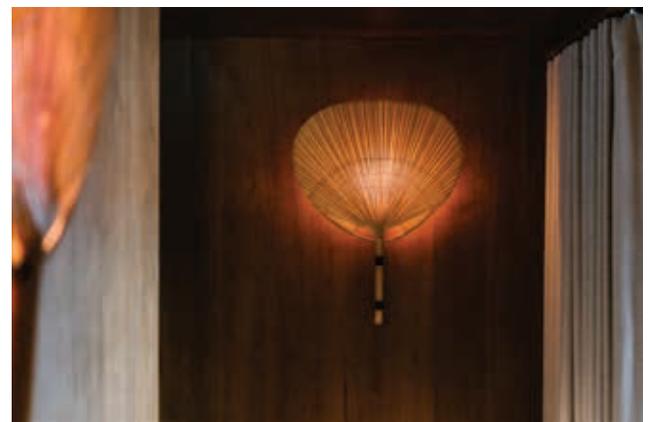
Left Studioilse’s design prioritises comfort and well-being over opulence



To the left is a walnut-clad pantry where you can grab a beer or a bite from a cold buffet; the space encourages you to linger as if nibbling on a snack in your own kitchen. Back in the corridor, a set of multi-paned sliding doors gives way to a moody lounge with modernist wood furniture and a large horseshoe-shaped onyx bar, over which hangs a series of cylindrical brass pendant lamps.

The mood is less playful in the “library”, where wood-heavy decor and clusters of low-set sofas bring to mind a gentlemen’s club – the colours and textures were chosen to counteract the gleam of the electronic devices that will certainly be used here. But there are enough clean lines and smooth surfaces to avoid the stuffiness usually associated with such spaces. As with the bar area, there’s a liveliness that comes from a selection of punchy statement pieces, including a wagon-shaped drinks trolley with oversized brass wheels.

“Constant stimulation is a part of everyday urban life, so a quiet space where you can think for a moment, you could call that a luxury,” Crawford says. For those looking for solitude, eight private suites are arranged in a row >



Top Furniture was chosen for its durability and timelessness

Above Luxury is derived from attention to details such as lighting

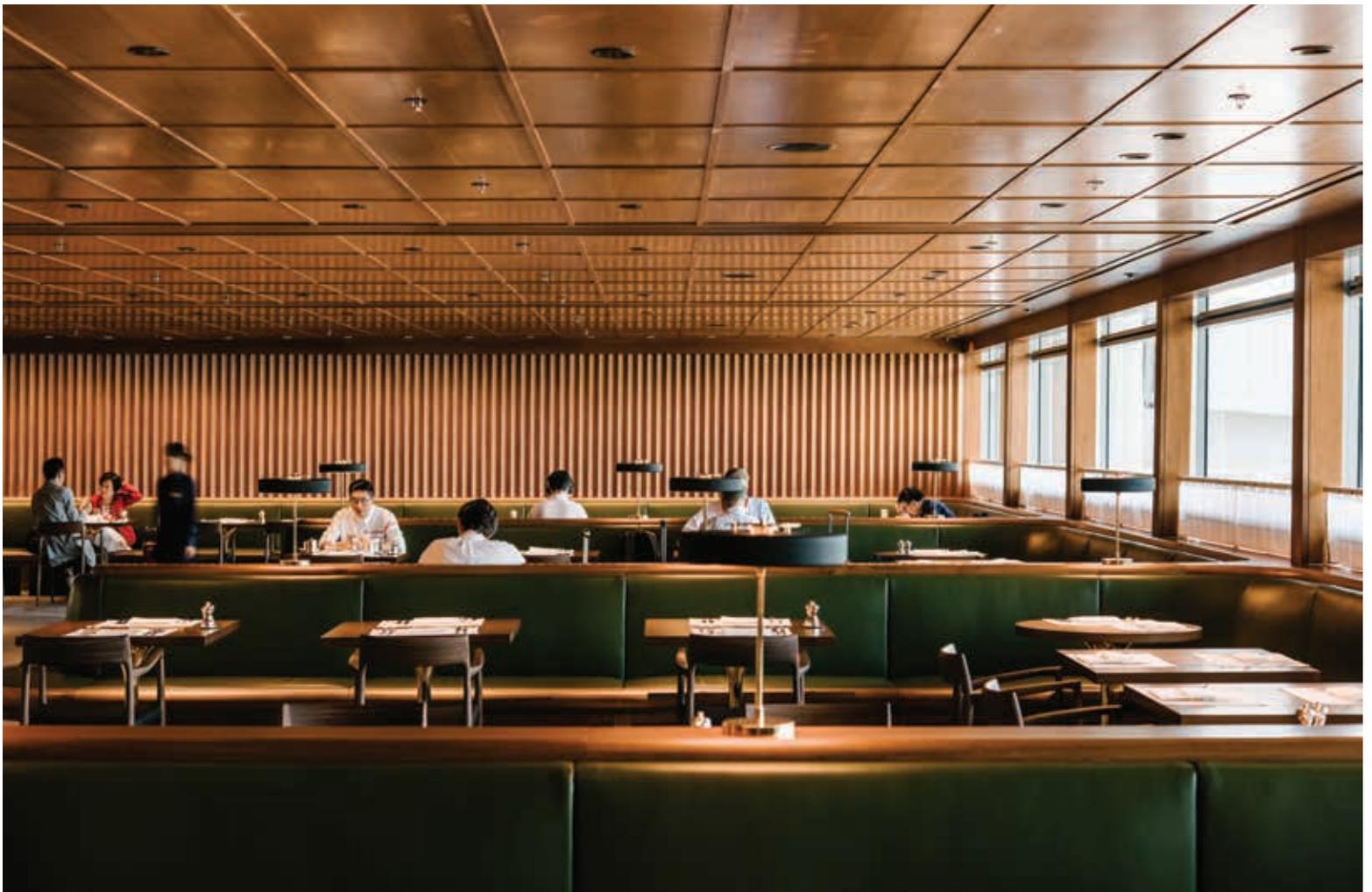
Below A selection of Asian art is on display in the limestone-and-onyx corridor

Bottom The full-service restaurant is dominated by racing-green leather banquettes



alongside a window overlooking the bustle of the airport's apron, beyond which is the glistening sea, punctuated by hilly green islands. This view gives context and human qualities to the "non-space" of the lounge, an institutional environment with no history or sense of it (and boy, do many lounges excel at remaining as such). As Crawford says: "The contrast between a warm, cosy place and looking out at the aircraft is quite exciting." With brown leather daybeds and walnut sliding doors, the suites bring to mind those in a rail carriage. There's a similar atmosphere in the full-service, à la carte restaurant, which is dominated by racing-green leather banquettes.

A handful of sumptuous materials – jade-green, gold-veined onyx, grey limestone, walnut, bronze and brass – is used across the space in an understated way, with warm, tactile fabrics such as mohair and velvet added to meet Crawford's desire for her designs to be "smelled, heard and felt". The lounge needs to last for ten years, so furniture – by brands >>





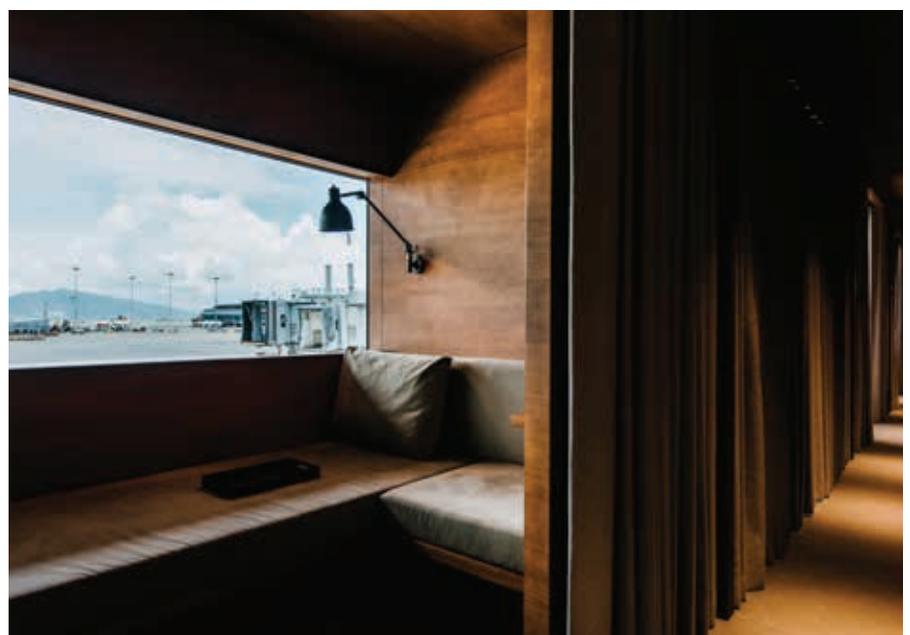
Above and left Low lighting and a few sumptuous materials such as walnut, bronze, brass, limestone and onyx are used across the space in an understated way

Below Eight private suites, with leather daybeds and sliding doors, overlook the airport's apron

such as Cappellini, Kalmar, Benchmark and Michael Anastassiades – was selected for its timelessness and durability and arranged to allow sufficient room for luggage.

For Crawford, luxury is also derived from attention to the basics. “We analysed practical details like dimensions and heights, placement of lighting and how people use furniture nowadays – for example, we designed a table with easily accessible plug sockets and adapted a chair from Knoll to be wider, because people sit diagonally when using tablets.”

First-class travel is synonymous with exclusivity, but Crawford is a firm believer that the principles of good design become mainstream through projects that demonstrate their potential. “The notion of making spaces like this that are informal, rather than corporate and institutional, is blindingly obvious, but it’s not happening because people are very bad at visualising new realities,” she says. “The only way you can reach wider is by proving that something is doable and that there’s no reason why it shouldn’t be that way.” ✕



ILSE FOR IKEA Sinnerlig collection

A project for Ikea may seem to have nothing in common with a first-class airport lounge, but Crawford insists she approaches all her work with the same attention to materials and to the centrality of the user. Launched this August, Studioilse’s Sinnerlig range of homeware (above) for the Swedish flatpack furniture giant is designed around natural materials – predominantly cork, which is being developed for new contexts as its use to seal wine decreases. “We wanted the imperfections, tactility and connection to nature of real materials,” explains Crawford, pointing out that such considerations often get lost in the process of mass production. The collection comprises about 30 products – from tables and a daybed to smaller items such as bamboo-lattice pendant lights, hand-blown glass bottles and baskets made of dried seagrass. It was designed with versatility in mind. “Ikea has to sell to people from all walks of life and from all parts of the world and we thought that furniture really had to be background furniture – invisible, universal pieces that everybody always needs and that different people of different ages might want.”