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CABIN MRO

AMAC Aerospace believes in keeping its various teams under one roof. Image: AMAC Aerospace

From connectivity to carpets: cabin refurb trends revealed

Amid potential tariff threats or the continuing impact of supply chain shortages, one thing remains certain: the demand for quality cabin refurbishment is ever present. From helping negate the ongoing impact of new commercial aircraft delivery delays to refreshing individual business aircraft, interior makeovers are a key consideration of aircraft ownership. AMAC Aerospace, Duncan Aviation and Starling Aerospace share their perspectives with Charlotte Bailey.

It goes without saying that within the high-end world of private aviation, an interior refurbishment is a highly personal process: reflective of an individual's taste, aesthetic and identity. However, whether delivering connectivity-driven cabin enhancements or recognising an evolving preference for alternative floorings, companies are calling upon a range of skillsets to meet their discerning customers' demands. Whether handling certification in-house, predominantly sourcing from domestic suppliers or checking in daily on a project's progress, different providers are finding unique ways to keep their transformations on track.

US-based business jet service provider Duncan Aviation is no stranger to ambitious projects, as Senior Completions and Modifications Sales Representative, Jeff Beaudette, makes clear.

"At Duncan Aviation, a refurbishment is more than just fixing things," he says. "We have the people, the tools, and the space to do it all in one place – design, engineering, and daily updates."

In particular, Beaudette identifies how many customers are currently opting to replace traditionally carpeted flooring in entry, galley and lavatory areas with alternative materials.

He tells *Inflight*: "This refurbishment applies LVT luxury vinyl tile flooring with a honeycomb substrate/underlayment with a hinge system that allows for quick and easy removal once flooring thresholds are removed."

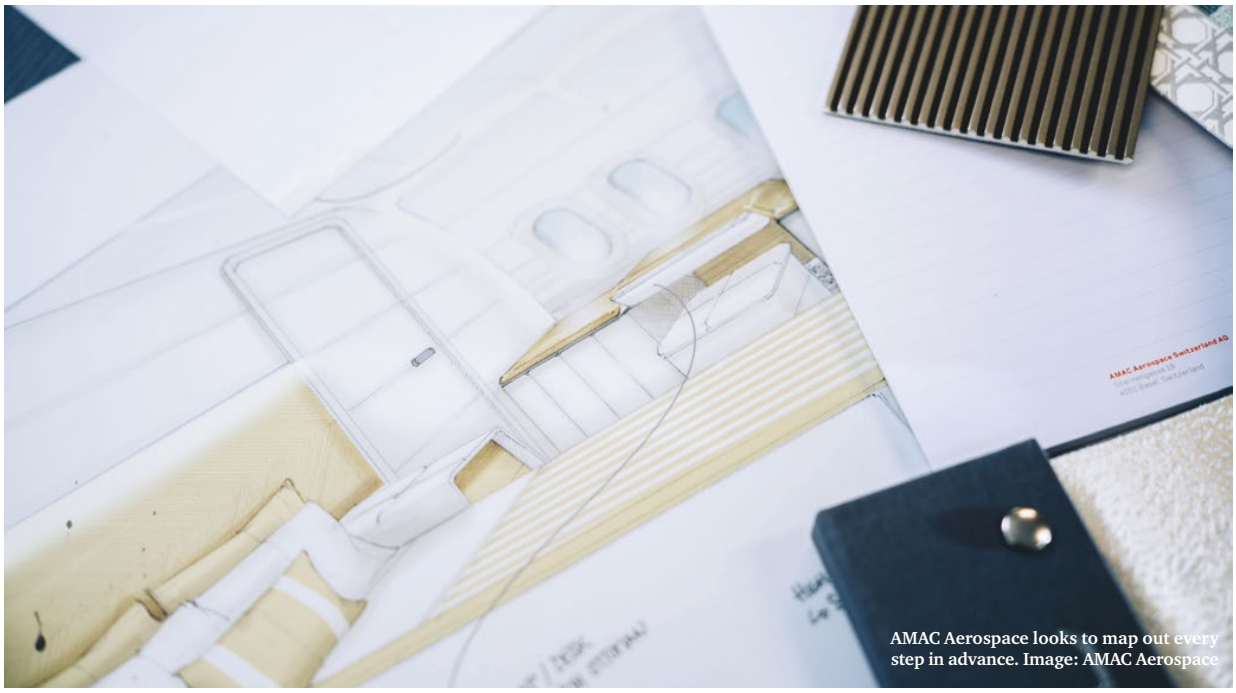
Part of the popularity is its practicality, with operators easily able to mop, dry or clean these types of surfaces. Longevity also plays a part, with Beaudette saying that these tiled areas are also "better performing over carpet to UV and sun damage in the entry area".

Additionally, the vinyl tiles "lend themselves to naturally creating different zones of the cabin and can be accompanied by powder coated thresholds that integrate colours from both the carpet and the tile".

BEING PREPARED

All aspects of Duncan's interior projects are completed in-house, overseen by a daily project manager and designer.

Although timescales vary from cabin to cabin – dependent on the size of the aircraft,



AMAC Aerospace looks to map out every step in advance. Image: AMAC Aerospace

the scope of work, how quickly parts and materials can be sourced, and the client's urgency – the team try to make sure "schedules are as accurate as possible" with a "clear, realistic plan for each project".

Downtime for a Bombardier Global Express, for example, stands at about 10 weeks, but this figure will always vary depending on the scope of work.

Matt Spain, Duncan Aviation's Senior Completions and Modifications Sales Representative, believes that supply chain constraints "seem to be improving for interior materials", while a predominantly stateside supplier base helps minimise long lead times and exposure to tariffs.

Nevertheless, for a large completion – including new veneers, soft goods and plating elements – he says that Duncan Aviation likes to have "all materials selected three months ahead, and conceptual seat designs a month before input".

A recent example of Duncan Aviation's inter-departmental co-operation came in the form of a Bombardier Global 5000 refurbishment project, completed at the company's full-service facility in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Spain personally travelled to meet with the customer and present Duncan's curated palette, juxtaposing monochromatic schemes with complementary textures, veneers and satin platinum plating.

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>
> **Christelle Dietsch, Interior Design Manager, AMAC Aerospace**

Duncan Aviation designer Jamie Blanken describes the chosen custom-fabricated seat coverings (blending plush, wool-blend fabric and leather) as imparting a feel more akin to "an upscale living space", with "angled armrests [adding] a modern edge while enhancing functionality and style".

"All of the workmanship was amazing," says Spain. "Our challenge seemed to be the RTS [Return to Service] process".

Another recent Duncan project also saw the team navigate additional challenges when conducting a comprehensive remodelling of a Gulfstream G550 from Asia.

Alongside an extensive scope of in-house work comprising major maintenance, new connectivity systems, a cabin management upgrade, full interior refurbishment, and exterior paint, Beaudette says: "The tricky parts were the time zone differences for quick decisions."

Cultural differences in requests, and not having any face-to-face time with the principal "to really understand their design wishes" were also obstacles to be overcome.

"However, with a good plan and a great production team, this project will go well and the customer will be happy when it's done," he says.

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Starling Aerospace recently collaborated with NALjets on this cabin interior. Image: Starling Aerospace

> In an industry where safety, speed and precision are paramount, the ability to self-manage regulatory approvals is a game-changer.
>
> **Coralie Wigg, co-founder and Director, Starling Aerospace**

UNDER ONE ROOF

Meanwhile, AMAC Aerospace's Interior Design Manager, Christelle Dietsch, points to "clear overarching trends" that have emerged to "align with wider market trends and current technological advancements".

Crucially, these often centre around augmenting connectivity requirements.

"As a designer, we're seeing private aerospace refurbishment move towards fast connectivity-driven upgrades where downtime is kept to a minimum," she says. "Owners expect seamless in-flight tech, so modular systems and plug-and-play solutions are becoming standard."

However, while in-flight connectivity continues to evolve, customers are keen that the associated aircraft downtime remains at a minimum.

"To achieve quick turnarounds, we rely on readily certified materials and modular layouts that still feel highly customised," says Dietsch. "In the end, it's about delivering a cabin that mirrors the comfort and efficiency of life on the ground – without the long wait."

Inevitably, ongoing supply chain headaches – perhaps further complicated by evolving tariff tensions – still have the potential to impact projects.

"Lead times have definitely increased and supply challenges remain tricky, but at AMAC we manage them through careful planning and preparation," says Dietsch. "By anticipating needs early and mapping out every step of the project, we're able to minimise surprises."

She also cites "strong relationships with suppliers" as being equally important, allowing the Switzerland-headquartered company to "stay ahead of potential delays and secure materials as efficiently as possible".

Crucially, Dietsch believes that "what truly sets AMAC apart in the private aviation refurbishment space is that everything is under one roof".

This integrated set-up includes cabinetry, upholstery, composites, paint and avionics shops entirely in-house, supported by engineering and design teams.

"That means we're not waiting on third parties or juggling external schedules," she says.

"The expertise and craftsmanship needed to deliver a complete project are right here. Because the knowledge base is internal, we're able to problem-solve in real time and adapt to client requests without delays.

"For the client, that translates into shorter downtimes and a smoother overall experience. It also gives us the flexibility to handle anything from minor touch-ups to

complete cabin refurbishments with the same level of efficiency."

This integrated efficiency was integral to one of AMAC's most recent refurbishments – again focusing on implementing "a high level of innovation and new technology within the cabin".

With this particular aircraft now in its final phase of work, Dietsch says this type of retrofit "really showcases the strength of AMAC's approach, where engineering, design, and craftmanship work hand in hand".

In order to minimise downtime, an early appreciation that the integration of "these advanced systems would demand significant development work to meet aircraft certification standards" was crucial, with co-ordination between all parties adding "another layer of complexity".

Ultimately, however, Dietsch believes that while challenging, "it's precisely these projects that push [AMAC] forward as a company. They force us to refine processes, embrace new technologies, and strengthen relationships across the industry."

BEATING THE BACKLOG

However, increased demand for timely and efficient cabin upgrades is by no means limited to the business aviation sector.

UK company Starling Aerospace, which delivers aircraft for international commercial, corporate and private clients, recognises that airlines are also "investing in cabin upgrades to enhance the passenger experience, and this is being driven by the incorporation of advanced technology such as lighting, Wi-Fi and seating enhancements".

Crucially, however, ongoing new-build commercial aircraft delivery delays continue to bite, with the International Air Transport Association (IATA) noting in July 2025 that these could continue until the end of the decade.

With pre-Covid backlogs extended from some 10,000 units to in excess of 17,000 aircraft, in part due to engine issues and supply chain shortages, an implied wait time of 14 years is forcing carriers to get creative.

A Starling spokesperson says: "Due to ongoing delays in new aircraft delivery, we have also seen a significant uplift in commercial airline seating and lavatory refurbishment projects, as well as cargo aircraft crew seat upgrades."

Coralie Wigg, the company's co-founder and Director, tells *Inflight*: "Perhaps the biggest challenge with complex refurbishments is navigating the demanding certification process whilst managing the customer's schedule window and their expectations. While some providers of aircraft interior services might rely on external agencies to navigate regulatory requirements, Starling's in-house certification status provides significant advantages for the business and its customers."

Wigg adds that whether the project involves a private jet, helicopter or corporate airliner, "in an industry where safety, speed and precision are paramount, the ability to self-manage regulatory approvals is a game-changer."

Starling Aerospace holds CAA/EASA Part 145, Part 21G and Part 21J approvals for the design, development, manufacture, testing and certification of interior modifications for all 9G and 16G rated aircraft. This eliminates delays associated with outsourcing approvals to third-party agencies.

The spokesperson added with "one of the most significant advantages of holding in-house regulatory approvals" being "the reduction in project lead times", Starling's streamlined approach "ensures that regulatory compliance keeps pace with project timelines, allowing for smoother workflow and faster aircraft turnaround".

This was key in a recent collaboration with business jet charter company NALjets, with the end-to-end design and installation of a full Cessna Citation CJ interior being completed in approximately three months.

All in all, a full cabin refurbishment might take anything from a few months to several years, depending on the design brief, technical complexity and availability of specific materials.

The NALjets project also proved an opportunity to utilise a key skillset of Starling's – namely, its in-house soft furnishing capabilities.

Since becoming the first UK aerospace company to operate a three-in-one CNC perforating, stitching and embroidery machine in 2023 – complemented by what Wigg describes as "a major upgrade" to the sewing workshop – Starling continues to invest in the latest equipment and skilled personnel.

Notably, as well as having all the necessary capabilities in-house to deliver "any seating, embroidery or soft furnishing project for an aircraft cabin", Wigg says Starling is able to "deliver any design for leather and fabric, no matter how complex".

She adds: "Providing high quality originality is a signature service of Starling and something that we are very proud of, as this speciality has positioned our business at the forefront of cabin refurbishment in the UK and internationally, and our overseas client base is expanding." ■

Starling Aerospace's ability to certify in-house helps cut project lead times. Image: Starling Aerospace