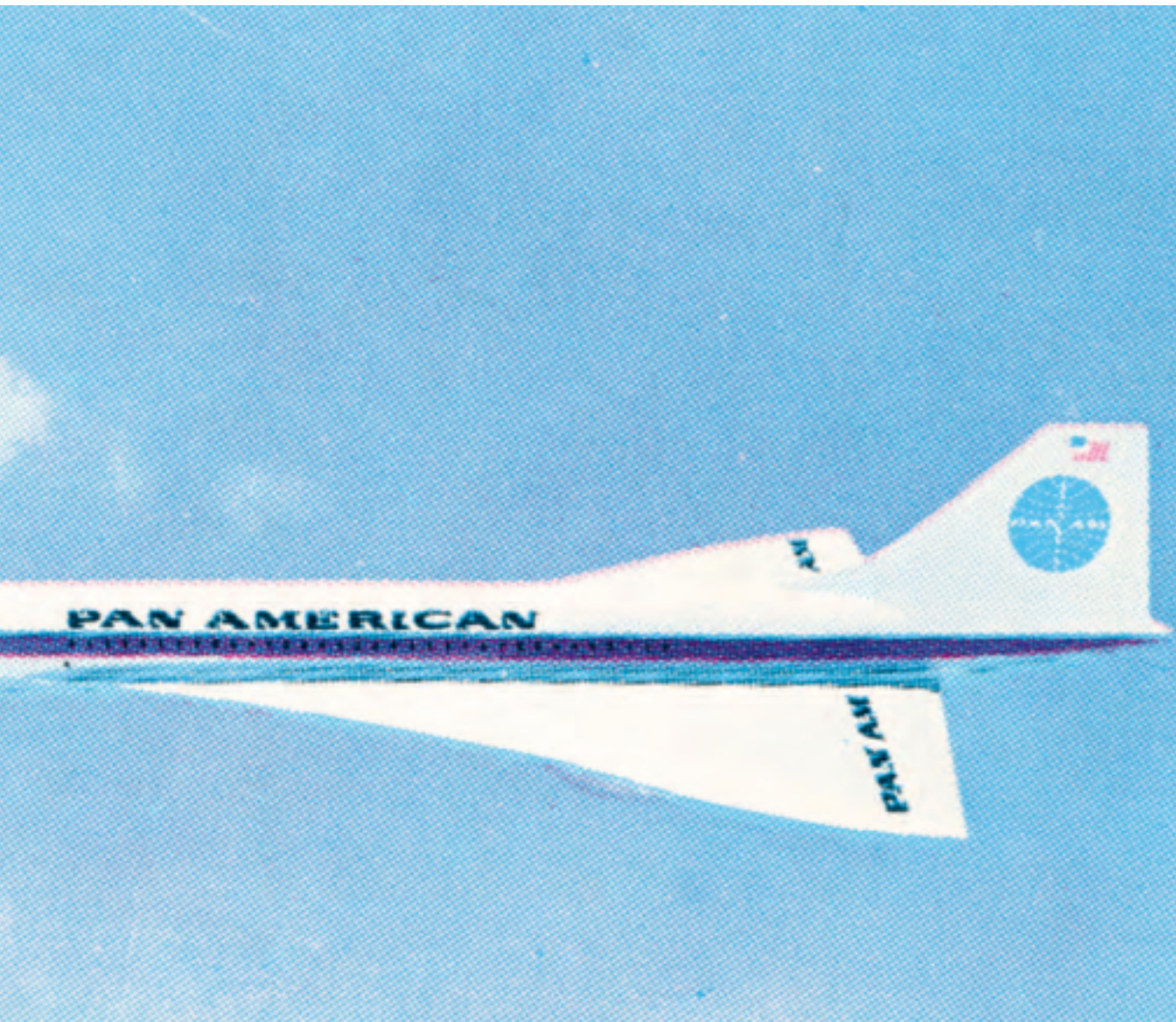


SUPERSONIC





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The Design and Lifestyle of Concorde

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PRESTEL

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Original interior design of Concorde 02, 1973



French postcard showing preproduction Concorde, 1976

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FOREWORDS

Clare Vivier

Whether in fashion, architecture, or music, France has an unparalleled ability to blend beauty with meaning. This spirit is epitomized in the Concorde, an Anglo-French masterpiece that stands as an enduring symbol of innovation and elegance. As a French-American handbag designer, I find myself deeply inspired by the lessons embedded in the legacy of this iconic aircraft.

The Concorde was not just an aircraft; it was a bold vision realized. Its striking design transformed it from mere transportation into an emblem of possibility, defying the limits of what we thought achievable. To travel at more than twice the speed of sound while enveloped in unmatched style was a revolutionary concept. It was a moment when human ambition soared, quite literally, to new heights.

The connection between Concorde and French design runs deep, most notably through the influential figure of Andrée Putman. A pioneer in modern design, Putman was tasked with refining the Concorde's interior—a role she embraced with both passion and precision. She understood that true luxury lies in the details, and her influence transformed the supersonic experience. Putman once said, "To not dare is to have already lost," a philosophy that permeated her work.

When she was chosen by Air France to revamp the cabin interiors, her vision was clear. As a frequent traveler on the Paris–New York route, she felt compelled to create an environment that reflected both comfort and sophistication. She wanted to change everything, and she did so with a deft hand that shocked the public with its powerfully understated elegance. The dove gray seats, paired with

white china adorned with a delicate blue New York skyline, illustrated that simplicity can deliver the most potent statement. Each element was thoughtfully curated, proving that even the smallest details can resonate profoundly.

Putman's approach teaches us that design transcends aesthetics; it's about crafting experiences that leave a lasting impact. Like her, I believe in the transformative power of dreaming big and manifesting those dreams into reality. It's about taking risks and pushing boundaries, whether I'm designing a handbag or refining an interior space. The essence of my work lies in creating pieces that evoke emotion, much like the experience of flying Concorde.

The elegant ambiance onboard was not limited to the cabin design; it extended to every facet of the journey. Passengers were treated to menus featuring Christian Lacroix's whimsical drawings and luxurious Pierre Balmain journal wallets. These weren't merely functional objects; they were tokens of a lifestyle steeped in elegance. Each detail was infused with creativity, reflecting the belief that artistry belongs in every aspect of life.

The graceful silhouette of the Concorde remains timeless—its allure as captivating today as it was on its inaugural flight. French design has always been rooted in the idea that it's not merely about how something looks, but how it makes you feel. Concorde represents the transformative power of design, reminding us that it shapes our experiences, our interactions, and ultimately our perspectives. It redefined what it meant to travel, elevating it from a necessity to a celebration.

Unfortunately, I never had the chance to fly on the Concorde, but my friend Christy Turlington Burns had the opportunity to fly on the storied jet many times. She told me that, for her, being the daughter of an aviator, “just getting the opportunity to experience Concorde enhanced every detail, every time. Everything about it felt niche and exclusive, from the check in area to the lounge to the boarding and flight itself. At the same time, it was a lean luxury. More efficient and practical than plush.”

When I first mentioned to friends I was writing a foreword for *Supersonic*, I encountered puzzled looks. “Why you?” they would ask, and I would smile, knowing that the connection was deeper than it might seem. Upon reading the first edition of this book, I understood why this project resonated with me. As an American designer, a frequent traveler, and a proud holder of a French passport, I see the profound connections between design and experience.

Growing up, I was captivated by stories of the Concorde soaring through the skies, a flying embodiment of sophistication. It wasn’t just an aircraft; it was a statement of possibility, a testament to what happens when vision meets artistry. In my own work, I strive to capture that same spirit—combining the timeless allure of French design with the boldness of American creativity.

Traveling has become an intrinsic part of my life and work. My journeys often take me along the well-worn air paths between Los Angeles and New York City, or from LAX to CDG, to work in Paris or my home in the Loire Valley. Each trip is marked by the distinct stressors of commercial air travel—the lines, the delays, the uncertainty of whether my meticulously

planned itinerary will hold. The prospect of boarding the Concorde would have been a sublime escape from that reality.

For those who travel as often as I do, the Concorde offered not just speed, but a true relief from the chaos of modern air travel. The quiet elegance of the cabin, the attentive service, and the sheer thrill of supersonic flight made every moment special. It was an experience designed to soothe, to inspire, and to evoke a sense of wonder. It was an example of how design can elevate our lives.

As I consider the significance of the Concorde in the context of French design, it’s clear that its legacy extends beyond mere aesthetics. It embodies the idea that design is about more than objects—it’s about how those objects transform the way we live, the way we think, and how we see the world. The Concorde was a cultural phenomenon, a beacon of creativity that invited us to dream bigger.

In celebrating the Concorde, we celebrate the artistry of design and the spirit of innovation that fuels it. This book, *Supersonic: The Design and Lifestyle of Concorde*, invites readers to immerse themselves in the rich narrative of this extraordinary aircraft. It reminds us that with the right vision and determination, we can make the impossible possible.

As you journey through these pages, I hope you feel inspired to embrace the power of design in your own life. Like the Concorde, may your dreams take flight, defying expectations and reshaping the world around you. Together, let’s celebrate the spirit of creativity that connects us all—a spirit that echoes in the curves of a handbag, the elegance of an aircraft, and the very essence of who we are.



Sir Terence Conran with actor
Nigel Havers and his wife
Polly Havers on Concorde,
October 24, 2003

Sir Terence Conran

Concorde is the most iconic aircraft of all time and I can honestly say that it is the most beautiful and exhilarating man-made object I have ever seen. It is one of the few designs to take my breath away. It had that magic ingredient of the truly special and it inspired the imagination of millions of people all over the world.

It was instantly recognizable, immediately eye-catching, unspeakably elegant and so it became one of the great design icons of the modern age.

Watching Concorde fly was to witness that rare, dynamic combination of graceful elegance with the raw energy and power of supersonic flight. Flying on Concorde was something different altogether though—that terrific, exhilarating surge, the blast of power, and then the momentary feeling that you had left your stomach behind in the terminal.

Concorde arrived in a relatively gloomy period in the twentieth century and immediately became a global symbol of luxury, glamour, ambition, and human achievement. In a heartbeat it raised the spirit and opened our eyes to something that had never been experienced before—supersonic travel. Just the very idea was utterly seductive.

Concorde was a head turner, so far ahead of its time that when it made its first speed-defying passenger flight across the Atlantic in 1976 it gave us all an irresistible glimpse into the future, captivating us instantly and daring us to dream. It remains as thrilling today as it was when it first pushed out of the aerodrome in Filton, England.

I have always felt that by very definition, planes are beautiful objects because their functionality requires a graceful solution and Concorde was the most stunning of all. It became *the* aircraft of the twentieth century. It combined exquisite beauty and form with enormous engineering invention and excellence. It was an unparalleled recipe of art, design, science, engineering, and bold imaginative thinking.

From the first moment I heard about the project, it captured my imagination. It wasn't just me; the jet inspired millions of people around the world. It became the embodiment of thoughtful, forward-thinking design.

The key to Concorde's success was developing the technology to make the ideas a reality and bringing this most fantastic of dreams to life. Working side by side, the British and French engineers overcame every obstacle and the project became a great melting pot of ideas and technical advances—it was *the* great moment for European aviation. To work on the project must have been a dream come true.

Do not think I exaggerate when I say that Concorde is the single most important piece of design in my long lifetime. Will we see anything quite so elegant, beautiful, and optimistic again? I'm sad to say perhaps not, but that may be the challenge for our great designers, engineers, innovators, and even artists. Can you work together to create something so beautiful, powerful, and iconic it pushes the boundaries of our imagination? Can you make us dream like that again? Can you show us the future?