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VIASAT: CHANGING THE CONNECTIVITY GAME

SERIOUSLY SUPERSONIC WITH AERION LEGEND BRIAN BARENTS



Great Scheme Believers



Dumont Group applied Craig Barnett's colour scheme to its own Learjet 45, using Sherwin-Williams coatings. The result is spectacular.

Via Scheme Designers

Founder and CEO of New Jersey-based Scheme Designers, Craig Barnett is a happy man. A self-confessed aviation junkie, he combines his passion for flying with an unusual background in art and engineering to create individual and fleet colour schemes for aircraft ranging from the smallest homebuilt, through helicopters and business jets, to entire airline fleets.

A great deal of Scheme Designers' work comes from individual VIP clients, keeping the demands on Barnett and his small team varied, since no two clients are alike, and each completed aircraft is the product of a careful, detailed process of evolution. "There's no consistent ask," Barnett says. "Every VIP client has a different angle, but many want to remain 'below the radar'. They tend to go for something very conservative, understated and unbranded, they don't

want to be noticed. But then at the other extreme we have people looking for something unique.

"It could be they just want a unique stripe pattern or artwork, from airbrushed artwork all over, to nose or tail art, or they want an overall darker colour instead of the more typical white, or, less commonly, a dark colour on top of the fuselage as an alternative to the more usual darker colour below. We've done a lot of beautiful stripe patterns recently, with a dark colour on top of the aircraft – in fact, we did an entire fleet of different types."

Owners opting for extremely unusual schemes, particularly those incorporating personalised artwork, must recognise that the decision comes with a number of consequences. "Once an owner is identified with that aircraft, they'll be known everywhere they go. And then, when it comes to sell it, the unique paint reduces the market of interest. Owners of business aircraft generally make financially sensible decisions about their ownership and

therefore seldom want to go in the direction where paint will affect their ability to sell the asset.”

Scheme scheming

Some customers begin the design process with a firm idea of the finished scheme in mind, others less so. “The client that doesn’t know what they want is actually more difficult to accommodate. I have three other full-time designers. Whichever one of us handles a project has their own unique style and it takes a while to adapt that to the client’s satisfaction. We might go through ten or 20 unique design concepts and perhaps more than one designer before we arrive at a concept that interests the client, although we try to understand the owner’s taste at the very beginning. We also have returning clients who always use their preferred designer, but then we’ll also change designers if a project seems not to be making progress. We check our egos at the door to ensure we do the best thing for the client.”

But how does Scheme Designers learn a customer’s preferences at the outset? “In 21 years, we’ve done 13,000 or so successful designs for clients in around 150 countries,” Barnett says, “so we have a database of just about every aircraft type, with many paint schemes that we’ve already done. We’ll share part of that database to see what they find interesting and what they don’t like. Positives and negatives are equally useful to us.

“I’ll show them other aircraft types as examples. Perhaps they find a Cessna 150 scheme interesting, for example? And do they love the shape of their Porsche? Or the pattern on the curtains in their living room? Anything an owner wants to share with us is of interest and helps guide us. The precise colour is often secondary at the outset, although it’s good to know, ‘Hey, I love blue, black and gold, but I hate green’. We work out the exact colour as we go through the design process and towards the end we’ll send the client a set of colour charts and work down to the individual shade part number.”



It’s common practice to present a scheme in a variety of colours early on, gradually focussing in on the preferred options. Barnett is pragmatic about defining schemes on screen, recognising that colour representation can vary widely between monitors. Thus, he considers colour charts essential, the majority of Scheme Designers’ work relying on the accuracy of Sherwin-Williams charts and finishing products for their ultimate expression.

“But we don’t send out the entire Sherwin-Williams chart, which can be overwhelming for a client. We’ll do a lot of direction based on knowing them and the design direction we’re going in, narrowing down the shades from which they should choose. Normally we can predict early on what shade they’ll pick. We may go through a process of looking at 20 colours before they decide, but we can usually predict which one they’ll go for.

Julie Voisin, Global Marketing Manager at Sherwin-Williams Aerospace Products, concurs. “We custom match colours to clients’ favourite shades every day, but it’s also important not to overwhelm them with



We like Sherwin-Williams for a variety of reasons... We believe in it enough to stand tall with a long warranty on the finished work

Dan Piraino, Director, Dumont Group



Dan Piraino extended the Dumont Group fleet scheme to the company’s Cessna 172.

Via Dan Piraino

A Dumont-operated Falcon 2000 in an alternative scheme, but again recently completed in Sherwin-Williams colours.

Via Sherwin-Williams



too much choice. It makes it difficult for them to decide, so we try to focus on colours that we know look great – there are some we’ve been supplying for 40 years, but we know they look good and people are drawn to them.

“We’ve developed a colour tool, or colour card, broken up by colour type and containing 333 colours. We have solid, metallic, mica and other cards that we’re putting into a new selector booklet. It’ll include the most popular options and we’ll expand the palette, but it’ll be more focussed.”

Nonetheless, Sherwin-Williams still offers its full back catalogue of shades and has options for custom matching those colours with a particular effect. With the mica effect, for example, the mica is contained within the colour-matched paint, but for the last 12 months or so, the company has been offering SKYscapes Shimmer Basecoat as an option that lays the mica effect on top of the colour coat. “We especially like it for its ease of repair and maintenance, since micas are traditionally difficult to maintain,” Voisin says, “while designers can choose to mask the colour coat and apply the shimmer effect in selected areas if they wish.”

FLEET SCHEME

Dan Piraino, director of the Dumont Group, which specialises in business jet charter, operations and MRO, is both a client of Scheme Designers and Sherwin-Williams. His own paint shop uses only Sherwin-Williams’ products, while he turned to Craig Barnett when he needed a fleet livery for his aircraft.

“We own several planes and find branding very important,” Piraino explains. “We were looking for a common design that would look good across the fleet, including the Cessna 172 our employees use for personal flights. We worked with Scheme Designers to see the scheme on several aircraft models to make sure it would work well for the current and planned fleet.”

Looking back on the design process, he recalls: “I love it. I personally design the exterior and interiors of our fleet. Working with Craig on the exterior is a really fun experience – a change from daily company management. He has the uncanny ability to put on paper what you describe in words. It takes some back and forth, but it’s really easy and very enjoyable.”

“We paint our own planes, and those of external customers, exclusively using Sherwin-Williams – we’re very happy with the quality of the product. Dumont operates its own paint and interior facility, with a focus on large corporate jets, including quite a few Gulfstreams and widebody Falcons.”

“We like Sherwin-Williams for a variety of reasons, including the quality of the product and ease of application. We believe in it enough to stand tall with a long warranty on the finished work. We use a lot of really bold colours and their product is simply better than any other.”

Given that Dumont applied the bold fleet colour scheme to its own aircraft, Piraino has an interest both in the perceived quality of the finish and how it’s received by his charter customers. “We’re looking at branding as key to our continued growth model. We hear customer’s comments and they’re all positive. We also hear from aircraft buyers and charter customers alike when they say: ‘I want to see the red jet’. And we get a lot of comments from FBO personnel, competitors’ pilots and even air traffic controllers!” ●





Relatively simple yet highly effective Scheme Designers' concept for an Airbus Helicopters H125 at right... and as it appears on the finished aircraft.

Via Scheme Designers



Barnett notes that his team does occasionally select coatings from other manufacturers, but Sherwin-Williams is by far its brand of choice; he's very clear on why. "I've experienced the product on my own plane and it was excellent. I painted my first aircraft with their coatings 24 or 25 years ago. It sat outside for eight years and when I sold it, it still looked brand new. In my experience, the majority of paint shops in the general aviation industry use Sherwin-Williams products too, so from a business point of view it's very convenient and we've found their colours and support wonderful.

"It's important for the client to go through the colour choices, even though it can be a long, difficult process. I'm having one of my own planes painted. I chose from Sherwin-Williams and agonised over the colour for two weeks. So, I can understand the difficulty, yet for a client I can instantaneously choose the colour, shade and part number and be right 90% of the time."

Given his designers' shared expertise in matching colours to clients, wouldn't it have made sense

for Barnett to have them suggest a shade for him? Clearly the thought hadn't occurred to him. He pauses before agreeing... "Yes, probably!"

Design process

"I believe design is a process – you don't know what's going to go in or what'll come out at the end and so we structure our service on a flat fee basis. You can't load a person with worries that every time they speak to you they'll be charged, because you can't be sure you'll reach the correct result. Some people think it's an odd approach, but we think it makes every client happy in the end." It's clearly a design process in which Barnett has faith, but it's also true that in the massive, yet apparently tiny global aerospace industry, one happy client is very likely to recommend his services to others.

Evolving a customer's dream finish on screen is one thing, developing it into a set of precise instructions and colour specifications for a paint shop is something else again. "It's incredibly important to have super accurate drawings and well thought

out, careful specifications. Our specification packages are ten to 20 pages long, with dimensions down to the millimetre, set up to provide paint masks for anything complicated.

"A specification begins with a colour definition, down to the part number, then goes through the placement of every element with reference to fixed points on the aircraft. Whether we're working for an airline, manufacturer, homebuilt owner or bizjet operator, they all get the same level of engineered specification; we don't complete projects without specifications and we supply masks too."

Julie Voisin says Sherwin-Williams is equally attentive to its customers, regardless of whether they're painting a piston single or a multimillion dollar jet. "The aircraft may well represent their most expensive purchase and for that reason they're all VIPs from our perspective," she says.

Creating the very best quality business and VIP aircraft colour schemes is demanding, exacting and at times complex work. Does Barnett have fun? "Are you kidding? It's why I do this! I've always lived an aviation life and now my passion is my work. I'd drawn aircraft all my life, but never thought you could do it for a living. When I wake up in the morning, I can't wait to get to work!" ■