

# Wallpaper\*

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\*INTERNATIONAL DESIGN INTERIORS LIFESTYLE

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NEWSPAPER

DEPARTURE INFO





#### CLUB CLASSY

This picture, Eero Aarnio 'Bubble' chairs and Vermer Panton 'Globe' lights in the poolside lounge

Right, the spa features a sauna, six steam-shower rooms and a circular hydropool with loungers



## Heaven's gate

More members' club and spa than airport waiting room, Virgin Atlantic's new Upper Class lounge at London's Heathrow is a real flight of fancy

Long-haul passengers trudging through the dreary corridors of Heathrow Terminal 3 to their departure gates have recently been stopping to gawp at a dramatic new staircase clad in red Levanto marble and wrapped around an LED-lit Swarovski chandelier. No, this isn't some expensive art installation (it's Heathrow, not Schiphol, after all) but Virgin Atlantic's new Upper Class lounge, which has ratcheted the luxury travel experience up a notch.

Once the airline's design team had secured the former Air Canada lounge adjacent to the original Virgin one, London-based architects Softroom were commissioned to transform the space. Out came the oppressively low ceilings and their air-conditioning units - which were instead incorporated into low-slung, horseshoe-shaped seating bays made of American black walnut - and the bland, boxy layout became a flowing landscape, with mood lighting incorporated into elegant, cloud-like ceiling coving.

Nick Jones, the owner of London's Soho House, was consulted to ensure the lounge had the fluid service and smart sophistication of a members' club; Jean-Michel Dixte came from the Savoy Group to be general manager; and ex-Ivy chef Brian Scully created a fresh deli counter for snacks and a daily menu of full meals.

The many different zones are clearly defined by clusters of artfully upholstered midcentury modern classics and contemporary pieces. Passengers can kick back in classic cream leather Charles and Ray Eames

'Lounge' chairs in the sunken lounge, read and watch the sunsets from the gallery in a Harry Bertola 'Bird' chair or enjoy a leisurely smoke in the fumoir. There's a poolside lounge hung with Eero Aarnio 'Bubble' chairs, along with a well-staffed concierge desk, a children's area, complete with real aircraft cockpit, a library and an office for those essential pre-flight e-mails.

A state-of-the-art screening room boasts a bank of screens wired up to individual listening posts, where a multitude of channels is shown simultaneously. A white marble staircase leads to a skylounge, where you can see planes taking off or watch games of pool in the den below through a glass floor. A further flight of stairs leads to the airport's first roof garden.

But the reason CEOs, celebrities and cabinet ministers are likely to check in extra-early is the spa. Soho House's spa brand, Cowshed, offers massages, facials, pedicures and manicures in treatment rooms decorated in Welsh slate and black Bisazza tiles. Chic New York hair stylists Bumble and Bumble give free cuts and blow-dries, you can get a spray-on tan in a St Tropez booth, and there's a sauna, steam rooms and a Jacuzzi, with free swimming trunks and bikinis sponsored by Element, whose organic juices are laid on. First class flying has never been so good. ★ [www.virgin-atlantic.com](http://www.virgin-atlantic.com). Cowshed treatments can be pre-booked by calling 44.20 8897 5055 (UK) or by e-mailing [cowshed.heathrow@fly.virgin.com](mailto:cowshed.heathrow@fly.virgin.com)