

Lila Design

Looks into the sky

When the new-entrant Belgian airline, VG Airlines, VG Airlines, unveiled its corporate brand we (the authors) discovered that it was designed by a Dutch graphic designer. This fascinated us and we decided to find out more about the business of designing airline corporate brands. We contacted the designer of VG Airlines' brand, Mr. Norbert Lambriex for an interview and visited him to discuss aircraft graphic designing and the history of his company. Even as it appears that all-white liveries are the new trend in today's corporate identities for many airlines, Mr. Norbert Lambriex of Lila Design Aviation has other views.

Mr. Lambriex founded his company in 1995, but his love for aviation started in his younger years when he lived near Maastricht Aachen Airport (in those days Beek Airport) but also because his father has served within the Royal Dutch Air Force. During the seventies he enjoyed aircraft spotting very much. This made him think about aviation graphic designs more seriously. Our interview will focus on Mr. Norbert Lambriex's passion for aviation and what plans Lila Design has. The colofon gives the readers information about Mr. Norbert Lambriex.

By Roger Cannegieter and Bram du Saar



When we visited Mr. Norbert Lambriex for an interview, we expected to be received in a designer's office. However, we were very surprised that we were invited into his private home. Mr. Norbert Lambriex offered us a seat at his cosy kitchen table, and the next 2,5 hours we talked about him and Lila Design.

What came first, the devotion for art and design or the love for aviation and aircraft?

"My grandfather was an architect and both my parents are very much involved in paintings, while in my own life art has also played an important role. When, as a child, someone would ask me what I wanted to become, I said that I wanted to be a pilot or a painter! I never fancied playing football with other kids from the neighbourhood, I was much more interested in drawing pictures of my surroundings. At that time our family lived very close to the threshold of the runway at Beek Airport (nowadays known as Maastricht Aachen Airport), and the aircraft landing at Beek passed nearly right over our house at a height of less than a 100 metres. So, my drawings were dominated by passing aircraft like the Caravelles, Vickers Viscounts, B707s, DC8s, Canadair CL-44s. After my father had flown on the Tiger Moth, Harvard and Piper Cub, he was an air traffic controller at the Royal Dutch Airforce for a brief period of time. Therefore, I can't really answer this question. The devotion for art and the love for the aviation came almost simultaneously.

Colofon	
Name:	Norbert, J.M. Lambriex.
Date of birth:	10 July 1965.
Education:	After the MAVO he attended the graphic design school in Boxtel (the Netherlands), followed by a 5-year part-time course in graphic design at the Art Academy in Maastricht (the Netherlands).
Career:	Full-time graphic designer designing labels, displays and packing materials at Pernod Ricard Nederland. However, since the foundation of Lila Design Aviation this is a part-time job.
Start Lila Design:	1995.
Lila Design employs:	Norbert Lambriex and Jeanneke Liebrechts as Creatives / Directors, cooperating with a team of designers, illustrators and companies.
Why the name Lila:	This is a combination of the first two letters of Liebrechts and Lambriex.
Customers:	Amongst others, Lithuanian Airlines, VLM Airlines, Sabena, Swissair, Air Holland, Air Malta, VG Airlines and many magazines for illustrations.
Highlight:	The latest job, at the moment the new Belgian airline VG Airlines (also known as Delsey Airlines) and in March 2003 a logoprop for VLM Airlines.
All time low:	Business relations that turned out to be dishonest.

A combined passion for design and aircraft can develop into many things like being a painter of aircraft or designer of aircraft interiors. So why aircraft liveries?

“Living nearby Beek Airport made me take up plane spotting in the nineteen seventies, and recognizing airline colour schemes is an important part of this hobby. And as I was already interested in aircraft liveries, I became more and more aware of how colours could ‘make or break’ the appearance of an airline’s aircraft. At that same time I had a pen pal on Mauritius, whom I wanted to visit. Because I didn’t have enough money for a ticket, I wrote to Air Mauritius for some livery design work. I was amazed by the response letter I got back: “they said yes!!!” But because I wasn’t an experienced designer it soon became clear to me that I had got more than I bargained for. In the end, I never made a livery for this airline, but I still think of this letter as the driving force behind my ambition to become a designer in the airline branding business and the start of Lila Design Aviation.”

How did Lila Design Aviation come into existence?

“During my studies I met my wife, Jeanneke, who is also a graphic de-

signer. After we both graduated as graphic designers, we seized every opportunity we got to get work in the airline branding business. We were convinced that there was - and still is - a huge number of airlines would deserve much better logos and liveries than they’re flying with. One of our very first clients was Lithuanian Airlines. We offered them a revitalization of their brand, because they were buying new aircraft. But because they were buying new Boeing 737’s, Boeing “donated” a brand new livery for free. After that we were only contracted for illustrations of this new livery. In 1999, tipped by people within the industry, we bumped into upon a small Belgian carrier VLM, which was planning to restyle its corporate identity. After my strong and passionate lobbying at VLM’s headquarters, Lila Design was invited to enter the design competition that was almost closed for entry. Three weeks later we received VLM’s order, as we were the winners of the competition. At the moment Lila Design has designed the (current) livery for Air Holland, VG Airlines and Mama Airlines and we are about to sign a contract with two national carriers abroad.”

What are the do’s and don’ts in designing aircraft liveries?

“Literally everything is possible in this part of industry. At the moment

the use of national symbols and flags in liveries of carriers is a recurring trend, after it was broadly abandoned in the early nineteen eighties. The fact that airlines are more and more operating on a international level, might create the need to identify themselves with their home market. Perhaps KLM will reintroduce the “red, white and blue” in its livery, just as they did ten years ago, when they intensified their business relations with other international carriers. As BA is doing now! For KLM it turned out that they went for a minor livery design change as the airline unveiled its re-vitalized scheme a short while ago.

Regarding the don’ts, I can think of two or three things! One, the use of religious symbols, like Christian crosses or Buddha. This can offend people from other religions - wars started for less - and thereby scaring off potential new customers. Two, the use of florescent colours can count on positive no no! First of all because they’re used for safety reason only, and second because of their horrifying colours. White fuselages with a window cheatline are often boring and outdated but this trend is making a come back. As an aircraft has much more horizontal lines than vertical ones, one should not try to break these lines with vertical orientated marking. It takes away the aerodynamic features of an aircraft.



VLM Fokker 50 at Rotterdam Airport showing the new corporate identity designed by Lila Design

What services does Lila Design Aviation offer to customers?

“We design corporate identities for aircraft of airlines and that’s what we do in the first place. Depending on what the airline wants and what is specified in the contract, we develop more than just the corporate identity on the airline’s aircraft. For example, we have had customers asking us to redesign the entire corporate image that included the airline’s lounges and ticket counters. VLM Airlines was our first customer of which we redesigned the airline’s entire company brand. During the design process, VLM Airlines indicated that they wanted to have a better European identity while keeping the Flemish Lion. This led to the current livery which features a small national Belgian Lion on the tail and a dark blue belly to give VLM Airlines a more luxurious appeal”

To which aspects does Lila Design Aviation pay attention when designing corporate images for airlines?

“We focus on the country’s culture, market trends, the airline’s image, the airline’s history and the market position the airline would like to have in about five years from now. When we redesigned Air Holland’s brand, we were asked to design a brand that keeps the Air Holland logo while

How does Lila Design Aviation identify customers?

“We identify customers by following the airline market and trends in the aviation industry regarding corporate images. When airlines have had their corporate image unchanged for several years we look at possibilities for these airlines to ‘update’ their corporate image. We believe that on average an airline livery can be used for approximately ten to twenty years. That’s why we base our graphic for that period of time.”

What is the exact target of Lila Design Aviation?

“Our main goal is to attract smaller airlines as many larger national airlines already have their own design departments and have long term contracts with other design bureaus. But as Lila Design is growing and getting more popularity in the aviation industry, we are open to negotiate with any airline.”

What is known of the competition regarding aircraft design bureaus?

“We know we are not the only ones out there. Landor Associates is one company I do admire greatly as they have done excellent work on a number of airline livery upgrades. We

“Russian”-looking flag.

We differentiate ourselves from other design bureaus by designing ‘timeless’ or ‘evergreen’ liveries that can last for at least ten years. We believe the tail and fuselage of an aircraft should be one, such as Alitalia for example. That’s what we try to achieve in our designs and that’s how we differentiate ourselves from the competition.”

Where does Lila Design Aviation want to be in the coming five years?

“We have no intention to expand. For now we will keep operating the way we are doing. We are very satisfied with the way we work and don’t have a need to add more to improve our services. We would love to redesign an airline livery for some American airlines, which will be seen across the entire world. To redesign or upgrade the livery of Northwest Airlines, Aerolineas Argentinas, Aero California or ATA, will let the world see our work in more than one way. Furthermore, we want our business to be a family business with an income security. Because of the terror attacks of the 11th of September, uncertainty surrounding the aviation business has led to a decline in assignments for redesigning airline brands as well. To keep our business running to our satisfaction we will keep searching for



The design schematics of the new Air Holland livery. Drawing: Lila Design Aviation.

accentuating the Dutch culture. As national flags are the new fashion within airlines, we put the stylised Dutch flag on the tail with the famous Orange colour which is the identity of the Dutch culture.”

think they did an excellent job on Delta Airlines’ previous corporate brand. This restyled Delta logo on the aircraft’s tail combined with the fresh white fuselage makes this livery stunning and gives it a true new millennium look. Delta is now again in the middle of changing its livery, which has already been nicknamed by spot- ters as Deltaflot, because of the huge

assignments and doing our work on a part-time basis, but we will spend more time on this in the near future.”

Comment: Between the moment this interview was held and publishing Airlines issue 23, VG-Airlines, also known as Delsey Airlines, went into bankruptcy and is currently not flying.