

FAST TALK

Interviews by Dave Demerjian



Flight of Fancy

Fiona Morrison, 46, leads a team that has helped develop the passenger-experience elements of T5, JetBlue's new \$743 million terminal at JFK, which opened October 1.

"The airport should deliver as much of an experience as the flight itself. There are a million little touches that we've sprinkled throughout T5. We chose Italian furniture that's both sturdy and beautiful; we used indirect lighting and installed colorful, custom-design carpeting. If a space looks like a food court, people will treat it like one.

I love talking about the baggage-claim area, because it encapsulates what we've tried to do throughout the building. Our architect, Gensler, came up with the idea of installing backlit blue panels on the walls, and we've covered the luggage carousels with bright orange rugs. People go to baggage claim expecting a dark, dingy basement, and instead find themselves in a gorgeous space. It's so unexpected to be standing in this warm glow of color—it makes people happy."

> Airports' First-Class Upgrade

Travel has never been worse—US Airways now charges two bucks for a can of soda?! Meet the highfliers working to make the terminal experience bliss.

Fiona Morrison

> Director of Brand Management
and Advertising

JETBLUE AIRWAYS

> FOREST HILLS, NEW YORK

Pankaj Shukla

> Director of RFID Business Development

MOTOROLA

> ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

Radio Flier

PANKAJ SHUKLA, 48, sells Motorola's luggage-sorting solutions—which are built on radio-frequency-identification technology—to airlines and airports, most of which still use bar-code optical-scanner systems to handle baggage.

“A lost bag tends to stick in a person's memory more than a delayed or canceled flight. It's such a major inconvenience. In 2006, more than 34 million bags were lost or mishandled worldwide, at a cost of \$3.8 billion in lost productivity. To remedy the problem, the technology we use to track luggage is called 'passive RFID.' A small chip is embedded in each bag tag. As baggage rolls down the belt, the chip picks up radio waves emitted by readers positioned at different points, and sends back a message saying, 'Here I am.' The RFID read rate is 99.5%, versus 80% to 90% for optical scanners. Bags that aren't read get handled manually, and that's when most of the problems occur.

We've deployed our solution in Hong Kong and Las Vegas, with great results. The Las Vegas airport processes around 70,000 pieces of baggage on a busy day. Since implementing RFID, only 350 bags a day need to be handled manually.”

Bag of Tricks

EMILY MCHUGH, 32, is a bag designer whose nine-year-old company is one of only a handful selling TSA-compliant laptop bags that let passengers pass through airport security without removing computers from their cases. They're available at boutiques such as Fred Segal and Flight 001.

"It's not easy to bridge the divide between function and style, but that's the reason we're in business. You can have a bag with all the functionality in the world, but if people don't want to carry it because it looks bad, what's the point? TSA guidelines say that nothing should be on top of a laptop when it goes through the scanner, so a checkpoint-friendly bag can't have a pocket or a flap on the front. We've created one case that unzips and flips open like a lid, with the computer secured by a Velcro strap. We've also designed a sleeve without pockets that can go through without being opened at all.

My sister Helena and I design collaboratively. We bounce around ideas that are based on our own tastes, then make a sample and test it ourselves. Does this compartment need to be bigger? Should we take off that pocket? It's this back and forth that allows us to make bags that work on every level."

Emily McHugh

> Founder and Designer

CASAURI

> FORT PIERCE, FLORIDA



Wit's Vend

CHRIS STIDMAN, 39, developed Best Buy Express, a self-service kiosk that sells tech gadgets, accessories, and gift cards. So far this year, he has rolled out 12 of the kiosks at eight U.S. airports, including Atlanta, Dallas, Los Angeles, and San Francisco.

"We thought about airport stores, but ruled it out as not viable. Then an employee came to us with the idea of kiosks. He was extremely passionate and convinced us that Best Buy Express was an ideal way to reach the customer who shows up for a flight without his BlackBerry. There was already a company, ZoomSystems, that operated nonbranded kiosks at airports around the country. We partnered with them, adjusted the mix of products for sale, and were able to bring the concept to market in 150 days.

We see our kiosk customers falling into three categories: those buying headphones or a game to escape travel headaches, those looking for something that would make their flight more productive, and those who need a last-minute gift. We've seen double-digit sales increases since rebranding the kiosks."

Chris Stidman

> Vice President of Strategic Planning

BEST BUY

> MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

Oasis in the Desert

ATOUSA GHOREICHI, 37, develops new restaurants for HMSHost, the \$2 billion U.S. division of Autogrill, which runs concessions in more than 100 airports. These include her own concepts as well as chefs' visions that she translates into airport dining, like Nancy Silverton's La Brea Bakery at LAX.

"By the time passengers get to the gate area from ticketing and security, they're stressed out and looking for an oasis. So we're creating environments that don't feel like they're in an airport. At O'Hare last year, we opened La Tapenade, a Mediterranean café. We've hung photos of olive groves and seascides that you might see in the Mediterranean, chosen tile work inspired by France or Italy, and used a subdued green-and-salmon color palette. They work together to create a soothing atmosphere.

I also helped create a grab-and-go kiosk called Ciao. To evoke an Italian market, we went with bright red and mango to make the space pop and added beautiful photos of dried fruits and nuts. Stainless-steel lighting fixtures complement the colors and give the space a bright, energized feel. Customer response has been so positive, we're going to debut six more Ciao kiosks around the country within the next year."



Atousa Ghoreichi

*> Senior Director of Marketing,
North America*

HMSHOST

> BETHESDA, MARYLAND



Mike Caro
> Vice President

BAA BOSTON
> BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Local Flavor

MIKE CARO, 40, supervises the construction, leasing, marketing, and management of 90,000 square feet of retail space at Boston Logan's Terminals B and E. Terminal B's \$25 million redevelopment for American Airlines debuted this fall.

"We're the last thing people see of Boston before they take off, and we want to leave them with a good impression. We can make local travelers feel comfortable and also give people coming in from other places some Boston flavor. You need to build customer trust first, though, and that means balancing local retailers with well-known regional and national brands. Dunkin' Donuts and Au Bon Pain are New England institutions, but they're also well-established brands that are the anchors that allow us to add smaller local companies into the mix.

For example, Local Charm is a jewelry store whose original location is in Faneuil Hall, a huge tourist attraction. It sells unique, fashionable jewelry that appeals to female passengers coming through Logan, who are typically stylish and have money to spend. The more varied the mix of retailers we have here, the more money passengers are willing to spend, and the happier they are to be spending it."