SOUTHWEST AIRLINES

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Arconas was already working closely with Southwest at several airports, and had built a relationship of mutual trust and respect. The airline trialed their products to see how their seats would fare in the busy Southwest environment with excellent results.

“We can store five for every one of the old seat cushion style. We’re always running out of room, and that makes a big difference for us. Replacing the cushions is very easy too. Arconas has it down to a science and they know what they’re doing,” says MacDonald.

In the end, it will save us a ton of money, especially on labour. The labour costs to replace the old seats really added up,” MacDonald continues. “Service issues have been minimal since the new installation.”

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“SWA operates differently than other airlines do,” says Don Ostler, Senior Project Manager, Corporate Facilities, Southwest. “Our traffic does not ebb and flow; it goes all day long, which taxes the facility, including lots of wear and tear.”

The airline was also interested in drink holders, but in the test models they tried, they found that their passengers were particularly hard on the detachable drink holders.

Southwest Airlines was ready to make a change. It was time for their hold room (gate area) seating to be replaced in various locations, and they reviewed their options.

“We had an old-school seat style, like most airports did,” says Kelly MacDonald, Senior Administrator, Corporate Facilities, Southwest. “The back was heat-stamped with the Southwest logo, which looked great, but dated, and were expensive to maintain because they tended to separate at the seam and cracked.”

“The original drink holder, designed to be an optional add-on, was attached to the arm with screws,” says Arconas Vice President of Airport Solutions Lynn Gordon. “Southwest challenged Arconas to come up with a seat design that incorporated the drink holders into the armrests of the seats themselves.”

Drink holders, resilient design, and low-maintenance seat replacement. Arconas was ready for the challenge.

Bernù installed with the original drink holder design. Southwest Airlines, Dallas-Love Field Airport

During the Dallas-Love Field modernization process, the airport allowed Southwest to run the project in tandem with the City of Dallas after they proved they could meet Southwest’s needs. Southwest upgraded to Arconas’ Bernù line with inPower flex, which features a smaller metal-edged seatback that took up less space. Made of anodized and die-cast aluminum with injected molded CFC-free, HR fire retardant soy-based BiOH® polyol foam, the Bernù seating had everything Southwest was looking for in a contemporary solution.

“We see much less destruction to the seats because the padding is protected by the metal edge, which takes the brunt of the damage from bags rolling by,” says Kelly MacDonald, Senior Administrator, Corporate Facilities, Southwest. “We are responsible for all janitorial services in our proprietary areas, so we consider how our seating will be affected, what chemicals are used, and what equipment will be used to clean it. Our seating has to be tough, and the Bernù/Bernù Aero line is an excellent fit.”

Because of the modularity of the seat design, Southwest can replace a damaged seatback more easily and quickly, and requires less storage space than the old style. Now, they can store what they need in the attic space at the airport, which saves them money overall.

“If we have a damaged seat out in the field, we have to consider that not every airport has storage space,” says Ostler. “There are a lot of airports that are a lot smaller, have no space to store anything, and there might not be a facilities person on site. We have our own warehouse where we keep seating parts, and Arconas suggested that we order 50 instead of just two or three at a time to save cost and time.”

Arconas products carry an extended warranty; if a service issue occurs, anyone at Southwest can order a replacement and it will arrive within 24-48 hours.

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“It’s very functional and the wire basket is fully integrated,” says Ostler. “That’s the beauty of it. It needs to be somewhat indestructible in the airport environment, and Arconas products hold up very well with heavy traffic.”

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Bernù installed with the original drink holder design. Southwest Airlines, Dallas-Love Field Airport
Southwest Airlines has named Arconas its seating manufacturer of choice, company-wide. Most recently, Southwest has installed Arconas seating at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, Dallas Love Field, LaGuardia, and Los Angeles International Airport. At Love Field, Southwest has specified Arconas as their standard. Southwest is moving forward with Arconas in airports across the country.

“Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport was a challenge because of the AirTran integration; they had to become a Southwest airport pretty quickly,” says Ostler. “In Baltimore, we chose Arconas to replace the seating at 33 gates. Then Phoenix, where we will replace the seating at 25-28 gates. We are also completing 25-30 gates at Houston-Hobby as well. We want to cover all of the big stations and then start working on the smaller ones.”

Southwest believes that the seating is a critical part of the passenger experience, and they want their customers to be comfortable.

“We did a study a number of years back to discover our customers’ greatest concerns at the airport,” says Ostler. “The number one thing that outpaced all of the other comments was the fear of losing time. The way that correlated to seating was that customers wanted to get through security and get there on time, and so there are a lot of people waiting in the hold room.

As it relates to the overall experience, Southwest also specifies some of Arconas’ other products, like inPower flex and Bernu wood bench seating at the security area that is a durable, yet elegant step up from the government-standard option.

“The customer service sets Arconas apart – Lynn Gordon and the Arconas airport team are very customer-focused, much like Southwest Airlines,” says Ostler. “When you reach out to Arconas, you’re guaranteed an answer and soon. They are also very collaborative on design.”

Airport furniture is a unique business, but there are only a couple of companies in North America that provide this service, and having Arconas in the same time zone is beneficial. Arconas has a fantastic-looking product that holds up very well, and they are better than their competition, overall.”

FACTS & FIGURES

We want to be sure they’re comfortable while they’re there; giving the customer a better experience is important to us. We’re going to provide 100% power where possible; Arconas seat power products allow us to more evenly distribute power in the hold room provided there is enough power supply from the terminal infrastructure.”

“Arconas products carry an extended warranty; if a service issue occurs, anyone at Southwest can order a replacement and it will arrive within 24-48 hours.”

CLIENT: Southwest Airlines, Dallas, Texas
MODEL: Bernu, Bernu Aero, Bernu Wood Bench, inPower Flex
AMENITIES: Power, Drink Holders
LENGTH OF PROJECT: Ongoing since 2012

Southwest Airlines – La Guardia International Airport, New York, NY

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