A Design Laboratory Above the Clouds: Black & White and Color Stories of Portugal’s Airline (1945–1979)
Pedro Gentil-Homem, Leonor Ferrão

Take-Off
Design has always been present in airlines as a way of giving them personality and transforming them. However, scientific studies on the relationship between aviation and design and its different elements—criticism, historiography, and culture—have been scarce around the world, and non-existent in Portugal. The study we have carried out allowed us to clarify the nature of the relationship between the profile of a company that represented the country (and helped to spread an image of modernity) and the different areas of design.

The pronounced ideological conditioning, which is present visually in design projects produced for Transportes Aéreos Portugueses (TAP), from the first years of its existence, emerged as the result of its status as flag carrier. The logos, the crew’s uniforms, the different types of communication media, and the planes’ interior design created a country that only existed “in the air.” In the real country, obliged to remain underdeveloped, poor, and rural, the “one way” ideology did not create job opportunities for designers outside the confines of what the regime understood to be official taste and expression—that is, following the historicist and grandiloquent Portuguese way.

The political closure of the 1950s—a time which, metaphorically speaking, we paint in black & white—made way for a slow and progressive opening. The transition to the next decade saw the image shown in color, foreshadowing the “Marcelist Spring” in 1968 and the “Carnation Revolution” in 1974, which brought freedom to the country. In 1976, TAP kept the floral theme, with an image campaign called Spring Service. The close links between the rhetoric of the regime for external use and the TAP corporate image make for an unrivalled case study in the historiography of design in Portugal.

2 This is a reference to José-Augusto França’s strategy to characterize some of the key figures in modern Portuguese art, whose work, to some extent, establishes a dialogue with tradition or modernity. See Almada, o português sem mestre [Almada, the Masterless Portuguese Man] (Lisbon: Estúdios Cor, 1974); We can also see a seminal study on the promiscuous relationship between art and the political regime by José-Augusto França, A Arte em Portugal no século XX [Art in Portugal in the 20th Century] (Lisbon: Bertrand, 1974).
3 On September 27, 1968, Marcelo Caetano (1906–1980) was appointed by the President of the Republic to replace António de Oliveira Salazar (1889–1970). Recognizing the complex political and military situation in Portugal and the Overseas Provinces, Caetano attempted to reform and “open up” the regime. The period between September 27, 1968 and January 21, 1971 raised hopes of a political renewal and was named the “Marcelist Spring.”
4 The carnation has become a symbol of the military coup on April 25, 1974, which ousted the Estado Novo. The name emerged because of a florist in Lisbon, who shared her joy at the end of the regime by giving her flowers to those around her, and to the soldiers, who placed them in the barrels of their rifles.
Design for a Country in Black & White

At the end of the Second World War, commercial aviation in Portugal was still beginning to emerge. The first aviators were associated with the fifteenth century discoverers because they took risks to establish new connections between the mainland and the colonies in Africa, Macau, India, and Brazil (above all, between 1920 and 1936). These years were essentially ones of propaganda. Promotional flights then came, which launched the first airlines in Portugal (e.g., offering the opportunity to common people to experience aviation for the first time). At the end of the 1920s, commercial aviation, which “was still taking a long time to arrive, could already be seen all over the place, ready to extend its wings to us.”

Before the start of the Second World War, the first airlines were created: Serviços Aéreos Portugueses (SAP) (1927–1945) was the first; Aero Portuguesa (1934–1953) was the most regular and efficient. These first companies ran connections between Lisbon and the neighboring countries of Spain and Morocco. Aero Portuguesa operated during the Second World War and even provided the only regular air connection between Europe and North Africa.

After the Second World War ended, most European companies rebuilt their fleets or began operating air services using War Surplus. TAP acquired its first converted aircraft, the Douglas “Dakota” and “Skymaster,” and began air services in the state business framework. In Portugal, the totalitarian political regime had survived the war unscathed by negotiating with both of the Allies and the Axis forces, as well as the emerging European democracies that prevailed in the conflict. It had preserved territories that were located very far from the mainland, but the country still had a narrow and parochial strategic vision of the importance of civil aviation. TAP was founded and operated under the auspices of the Secretariat of Civil Aeronautics, the successful implementation of both was the result of the persistence and the dynamic nature of its founder and director, Humberto Delgado (1906–1965). This air force officer, who later filled a leading role in the resistance to the dictatorship of António Oliveira Salazar (1889–1970), pointed out the fact that “the Portuguese Empire is in the frustrating position of being the only empire without air connections to the mainland.”

During the company’s first few years, TAP’s image was managed using a military rationale. Delgado, who was a “staunch Anglophile,” had a modern idea of the importance of aviation, which contrasted markedly with Salazar’s particular “aversion to planes.” Nevertheless, TAP ultimately was very useful for the country’s image over the years. Because he depended directly
on the Prime Minister, Delgado was repeatedly and consistently forced to convince him of the importance of his decisions, as reflected in the intense exchange of correspondence during the campaign’s initial period.  

Ironically, Delgado called Salazar his “Minister for Air.”

TAP’s first logo may have been Humberto Delgado’s responsibility. This supposition is based on correspondence between Delgado and Aviquipo—the company that mediated the conversion of the first “Dakota” aircraft; specifically, the exchange describes the visual characteristics of TAP’s image. Delgado left the company and the Secretariat of Civil Aeronautics two years after they were founded. The first logo (see Figure 1), which is visually bold and conforms to contemporary aesthetic parameters, was replaced by an aerodynamic but regressive logo that stuck to the iconographic aesthetics and values of the regime. Thus, the wing flying around the world was replaced by a heraldic version, dominated by the armillary sphere (a reference to Don Manuel I’s kingdom, from 1495 to 1521), with the Portuguese shield over a redrawn winged element (see Figure 2). It was common among flag carrier companies for their emblems to highlight national symbols. However in Portugal, it was even more explicit, since the visual elements were part of a discourse common to all the state institutions and companies. The inside of the aircrafts, although converted in different locations, had a range of colors in shades of blue, in accordance with the first logo, which represents an early example of an (integrated) design concept in Portugal.

The air route to the African colonies, known as the Linha Aérea Imperial (Imperial Air Line), was one of the imperatives that influenced the start of TAP’s operations. Praising African provinces was an integral part of the regime’s official discourse, and TAP was one of the privileged channels for that rhetoric. The first basic communication elements, therefore, make an interesting case of conditioning an image to serve a nationalist ideal. A military rationale for uniforms certainly ruled in most airlines, but TAP

15 We are grateful to Mrs. Adelina Maria Melo Arezes, Director of TAP Museum.

16 Rosa, Humberto Delgado e a aviação civil, 7.

17 Humberto Delgado, “Resposta de Humberto Delgado à Aviquipo acerca da pintura exterior dos aviões Dakota” (“Humberto Delgado’s letter to Aviquipo about how to paint the Dakota airplanes.”) Typed copy, August 17, 1945, Caixa 81, Processo 1321, Documentation and Archive Section (SDA) of the TAP Museum in Lisbon (MTAP).

had a particularity. On African routes, the crew began the journey in the regular dark blue uniform, but depending on the flight pilot’s judgment and the weather conditions at the destination, they changed into the tropical version during one stopover (see Figure 3). The regular uniform had characteristics of military dress and a palette of colors that tuned with the corporate image, while the tropical version reflected an ideal associated with the explorers who first went deep into Africa in the nineteenth century.19 The tropical uniform, according to the Uniform Plan, consisted of a pair of shorts in “Palm Beach” material, a linen shirt jacket, and cream-colored, smooth, high socks.20 The colonial hat, although optional, established the (symbolic) link to the Empire (spread over several continents) and the romantic idea of an Africa ‘domesticated’ by white colonizers.

The company’s visual identity, with its nationalist ideology, was supported by an iconography that was politically committed to the Estado Novo (i.e., that was defined by the dictates of the Secretariat for National Propaganda).21 That same identity continued throughout the 1950s, which were known as the “years of lead” (due to Portuguese isolation from the European democracies). During these years, some unusual events began to take place. In 1953, the company went through a transformation, becoming a Sociedade Anónima de Responsabilidade Limitada (SARL)—a private limited company. A year later, it redesigned its image for the third time. The logo left behind historicist elements and isolated two aspects: the logo, with the acronym TAP, and the

21 The Secretariat for National Propaganda, or SPN, was a central body for official regime aesthetics since 1933, and changed its name to National Secretariat for Information, or SNI, in 1945.
symbol consisting of a winged element (see Figure 4). With the change to the logo, the company also changed the interior of its aircraft to shades of red. The symbol stopped being used to evoke the country and instead was used to evoke the company; it was designed similarly to other internationally recognized examples.

Thus, 1953 was marked both by decisions to maintain the official iconography and by the desire for change, which is at the very least paradoxical but not impossible. The cardboard cover for timetables and tariffs, designed internally by Gonçalo Pais de Freitas, follow a naturalist aesthetic, faithful to the values of the Estado Novo (see Figure 5). The design appeared at the same time as an advertisement by Eduardo Anahory (1917–1985), published in Panorama magazine (see Figure 6). This advertisement introduced a controversial and pioneering side to design efforts by TAP—first, because it was an external project, commissioned from somebody renowned in the field; and second, because the result had been adapted to the content and the medium, which in this case was an art and tourism magazine. These two factors helped produce the final result—a piece with notable graphic quality in the TAP context, using abstract, symbolic forms of expression.

In Portugal, the transition from the 1950s to the 1960s was politically eventful. The regime was undermined by a series of events that shook its support base and threatened its survival. At the heart of these events, in 1958, was the same man who had been at the heart of the flag carrier company’s beginnings, Humberto Delgado: “[M]arked by his contact with American society, (...) he had become progressively more distant from the regime.” That year, the “Fearless General” sparked a fire in the country, in a wave of enthusiasm that had never been seen before, challenging and losing the presidential elections (through a fraudulent result). Acknowledging that Delgado’s prestige and courage could not be stopped, the political police carried out an operation that led to his assassination in 1965, in what was surely one of the darkest moments in the history of the Estado Novo.
Among the many actions that shook the country during the “Delgado Earthquake” was one that involved TAP (1961): A Lisbon-bound “Super Constellation” plane, which had taken off from Casablanca, was hijacked by a group led by Hermínio da Palma Inácio (1922–2009) to drop anti-fascist pamphlets over Lisbon.

The general feeling of a regime in decline began to gain momentum in Portuguese society, and the idea of change and the new “spirit of the time” began to take hold. The hijack of the Santa Maria liner (1961) by Captain Henrique Galvão (1895–1970), the invasion of Goa, Daman and Diu by the Indian Union (1961), the start of the Colonial War (1961–1974) and the student revolts at the universities of Lisbon and Coimbra (1962) reflected growing social discontent. For TAP, the transition period between the 1950s and 1960s concluded with a move toward more efficient communication. The company assigned new resources to graphic design, applying standards such as the progressive introduction of grids or outlines to regulate the composition of printed materials. From 1956, route map covers made use of these outlines (see Figure 6).

---

25 See Rosas, História de Portugal, 7: 523.

Figure 7, which allowed the use of illustrations by different artists, based on the destination, while pursuing a consistent corporate image. Emphasizing elements of the TAP brand experience was part of the strategy for easing political control and reflected an awareness of the importance of integrated design. Despite the suffocating climate imposed by the fascist regime, apertures appeared through which the “winds of change” could enter. This expression arose in a speech by Harold Macmillan (1894–1986) in the South African parliament in 1960, and changed Britain’s strategy for its colonies. However, Salazar was not persuaded by Macmillan’s plea, and denied the aspirations of Portuguese African nationalism(s).

Design for a Country in Color
Throughout the 1960s, the design for TAP moved away from the grayness of the preceding decade, specifically during the short “Marcelist Spring.” This change coincided with the expansion of advertising in Portugal, as well as an increase in advertisements for airlines. The period’s eclectic aesthetics, emerging in work commissioned from graphic artists outside the company, resulted from the deep transformation in the guidelines for visual communication and the role of design within these guidelines. Consequently, the public perception of TAP’s image also underwent significant changes: As it emphasized its visual and cultural matrix, new themes emerged, and content was directed toward the specific characteristics of the different target audiences.

Emigration had seen a drastic increase in the 1950s and reached historic highs in the following decade, with the start of the

Colonial War. This situation was hardly uplifting for the image of the regime and, consequently, the country being transmitted to the outside world. For TAP, however, which included this audience of emigrants in its business strategy, it became an opportunity to play with ideas of nostalgia and promising the new Portuguese diaspora a unique experience: “Whether you’re in Paris, London, Johannesburg, or New York, as soon as you get on a TAP plane, you’ll feel right at home.”

After the arrival of the first Caravelle jets (1962), TAP expanded its commissioned work outside the firm, inviting submissions from several graphic artists who had their own studios and from those who worked at advertising agencies. Given the small size of the country and the policy of remaining closed to foreign countries, the chance to create projects for a client like TAP opened up a new world of opportunities for design in Portugal. Although saying that the company had defined a coherent and distinctive communication strategy at the time would be an exaggeration, the “designers” who were invited to create projects for TAP had the chance to try solutions and to give their own style free rein, while establishing themselves as professionals in a new field.

Most of the aesthetic shifts that we find in communication materials made by the airline can be attributed to creators who were very strong poetically, whether they were trying to establish or to gain further recognition. For instance, the unmistakable style of Gustavo Fontoura reflects the change in paradigm in graphic design at TAP—a shift that began with the advertisement by Eduardo Anahory in 1953. Fontoura uses an unpretentious and relatively non-institutional style (see Figures 8 and 9).


It is only known that Gustavo Fontoura worked between the 1950s and 1970s.
TAP’s advertising and that had numerous followers. The visual branding—a legacy from caricature drawing, from North American cartoons, and from French and Belgian bande déssiné—contrasted with previous advertising material, which was more institutional.

The enormous increase in commissions led to an inevitable divergence in concepts and in the graphic design solutions used, which threatened to fragment TAP’s advertising strategy. A growing number of design agencies and freelance designers produced content in Portugal and in the different foreign delegations. In Portugal, agencies like Ciesa, Forma, Marca, and Cinevoz, as well as freelancers—from the best respected to those with little experience—represented different generations of graphic art and design. The people who worked with TAP included Sebastião Rodrigues (1929–1997) (see Figure 10), Arcindo Madeira (1915–2003), Manuel Rodrigues (1924–1965), Oskar Pinto Lobo (1913–1995), Carlos Rocha (b.1943), Leonildo Dias (1928–1986), Carlos Rafael (b.1924), and João Velez (b.1937). None of them called themselves a graphic designer; instead, they used the term graphic artist. (The shift from graphic art to graphic design in Portugal is a topic that will have to be addressed by other papers.)

In 1953 the company had changed its acquisition strategy and bought new aircrafts for its fleet: the modern “Super Constellations.” TAP’s orders, placed directly with the plane manufacturers, required the introduction of different passenger classes and
the choice of a portfolio of configurations for the interiors of the aircraft, based on the range of options included in the manufacturer’s original projects by Henry Dreyfuss (1904–1972), with different levels of personalization.

The interior of the “Caravela” (1962) kept the historicist appeal of the Portuguese Discoveries, with drawings of caravels and galleons on the partitions, as well as the regionalist appeal, using motifs of Portuguese fishing vessels in the side friezes (see Figure 11). Sud-Aviation allowed TAP to call the Caravel plane “Caravela” (The Portuguese word for Caravel), thereby allowing the company to maintain the link to the era of the discoveries.

The introduction into the TAP fleet of the Boeing 707, 727, and 747 (in 1965, 1967, and 1972, respectively) included interiors by Walter Dorwin Teague Associates; the nationalist trend was temporarily abolished in these aircrafts.

Significant changes also were made to the uniforms. The sixth alteration to the flight attendants’ uniforms was made in 1964. The project was given to Sérgio Sampaio. This Portuguese tailor—and later, dressmaker—had become well known among the urban social elite, specifically for coats, tuxedoes, and suits that were extremely well stitched and impeccably cut. Thanks to Sampaio’s design, the TAP uniforms lost their allusion to military uniform. The female silhouette was rejuvenated: It was made up of a short skirt and jacket in petrol blue and included a small hat with two pompoms, a reworking of the traditional women’s costume

31 It is only known that Sér jio Sampaio worked between the 1940s and 1970s.
32 Tereza Coelho and Maria Assunção Avilés, A moda em Portugal nos últimos trinta anos [Fashion in Portugal in the Last Thirty Years] (Lisbon: Edições Rolim, 1987), 18.
In the following decade, when its international counterparts received uniforms designed by *haute couture* creators, TAP got its seventh uniform (see Figure 13). The project by Louis Féraud (1921–1999) won the international contest: The winning model brought together a spatial, geometric cut, introduced by André Courrèges (b. 1921), and the miniskirt by Mary Quant (b. 1934). Following the uniform by Sampaio, Féraud shortened the length of the skirt but kept the pompom on the hat, acknowledging Sampaio’s boldness in Portuguese fashion, and designed three different color options. The French couturier went to Lisbon to launch the new uniforms, which were presented at a fashion show using the same soundtrack of a ballet music formerly choreographed by Maurice Béjart (1920–2007). The Portuguese hôtesse de l’air became as glamorous as those at TWA, United Airlines, Air France, and SAS, who were dressed in Pierre Balmain (1915–1982), Jean Louis (1907–1997), Cristóbal Balenciaga (1895–1972), and the Maison Carven, respectively.
Despite the political restrictions, TAP served as a means to import culture: being, or knowing, a member of the TAP crew gave free access to newly released records, to accessories from Carnaby Street—really to everything that was available outside Portugal but was prohibited by the regime (e.g., books, films, newspapers, magazines, etc.). The fascination with music and pop culture emerged as a way of resisting the grayness of the regime and adopting apparently harmless behavior, from an apolitical point of view—above all, among the students at the universities of Lisbon, Coimbra, and Oporto. Thus contact channels opened up with the outside world, making it harder and harder to keep people from knowing what was going on in European democracies, whose economies flourished as a result of the Marshall Plan (the European Recovery Program).

The profound changes in mentalities in the West (and in the design field in Portugal), mainly due to the postwar optimism, took on the qualities of a true revolution in the 1960s. In the United States, the growing recognition of the seduction of advertising and its influence on consumer behavior and habits made way for a boom in creativity: the years of the “Mad Men.”

In reference to the television series produced by Matthew Weiner (b. 1965), which began in 2007.
Figure 14
Palette of colors for the graphic motif on a page of the Fundamental Graphic Rules Spring Service (top), and two applications (above, left and right). ©TAP Museum.
began operating, a campaign was created by Delehanty, Kurnit & Geller. The slogan, “The Only Foreign Country Left in Europe,” (1967) highlighted the fact that the country was closed to the outside world and was therefore completely unknown, compared with other European destinations, which were already saturated with tourists.

In 1972 the airline decided to rethink its visual strategy,37 and ordering Boeing 747 “Jumbos” served as the pretext for implementing a set of visual and thematic directives, produced by Alvin Chereskin & Rose (AC&R). The relationship between AC&R and TAP included several advertising and company image management initiatives during the 1970s, spreading the familiarity with the TAP brand around the world. The most emblematic example of this strategy was, without a doubt, the big enough... small enough campaign (1972). The slogan, linking the two opposing scales, transmitted the idea of TAP’s benefits on both ends of the scale: big enough was completed with sentences referring to the large size of the aircraft or service, and small enough gave the idea that TAP was the airline with the right scale for a personalized service. Thus, the campaign stressed the dichotomy between a very large airplane (the largest passenger aircraft at the time, and until very recently), and an airline from a small European country. What began as a one-off commission to an advertising agency to create a campaign turned into the development of a fundamental document for the airline, the “Style Manual for Advertising and Collateral Material.” This first manual with guidelines for developing the company’s image today is preserved at the Documentation and Archive Section (SDA) of the TAP Museum in Lisbon (MTAP).38

If the 1973 oil crisis proclaimed for the first time a dark future for air transport, the following year’s Carnation Revolution added another destabilizing factor, deeply altering life in Portugal and at the airline. TAP, like the majority of public and private companies with great strategic interest for the country, did not escape untouched from the socio-political changes following the April Revolution. In 1975, the company was nationalized. During that “hot summer,”39 the company felt the effects of the revolutionary atmosphere, both in the turbulent situation of the internal workforce, and in providing the airlift to evacuate those who wished to leave the former Portuguese colonies in Africa. Between August and September, c. 700 passengers arrived in Lisbon every day, and on September 11th, it reached a record of 1500 passengers per day.40 Against the backdrop of great instability came successive attempts to implement a new image for TAP. For example, in the “Spring Service” campaign (1976), commissioned from Daciano da Costa’s (1930–2005) Risco studio, the harmony in the boldness of form and color and the name of the company linked this new commercial stance with the country’s rebirth as a recently formed democracy (see Figure 14). Risco’s campaign was an attempt to

39 Range of revolutionary events that marked the summer of 1975.
partially restructure the company’s image (without altering the logo), preparing the way for the first totally integrated corporate identity program in 1979 (see Figure 15).

The new image, built from scratch, kept the short form of the name TAP, focusing on the shift in branding from Transportes Aéreos Portugueses or The Airline of Portugal, used until that time, to Air Portugal. TAP’s initials and brand remained as references and were intended to appeal to the domestic market. The change meant managing a name strongly linked to creating national identity—a connection that would be very difficult to ignore. The graphic dichotomy between the first letter (in outline) and the other two (in block lettering) produced a compromise between two possible interpretations: the traditional TAP and the new Air Portugal (AP).

**Landing**

Studying the design for flag carrier airlines in context is fundamental for preserving a very rich piece of material and non-material heritage, which must be rescued from the forthcoming transformation on the horizon. The current context is very complex, on a global level: strategic alliances and/or mergers have resulted in a progressive disintegration or decline in the cultures and thus in the identity of various flag carrier airlines; contributing to the problems is the insolvency of reference airlines, some much older than TAP, such as Sabena. Cultural and national identification should be the main visual strategy flag carrier companies used to sustain their identities, particularly in light of the threats of low-cost companies. The current corporate identity process at TAP Portugal (2005) has accepted this approach: “the new TAP, with more open and vibrant national colors, a picture of a hot, sexy country, and master of an enormous Atlantic area, is the framework for all aspects, the unshakeable feeling that the re-contextualization of our country’s symbols is a fundamental task for revitalizing our economy.”

---

The Portuguese flag carrier is an extraordinary case study in the historiography of design in Portugal: “TAP [was] a client sought after by all the [Portuguese] agencies, not just because of the size of the company in Portugal but also because of the challenge that working on its image represented. Being chosen by [this] client was almost a certificate of quality [because] it had a tradition of choosing only the best professionals from these areas.” Design, the results of which were formed through such an enormously diverse range of objects, marked the Portuguese people’s collective imagination.

Even during the “years of lead” of the Estado Novo regime, TAP was a design laboratory in the Portuguese context: The size of the company in the Portuguese economic framework, as well as the nature of its operations as focused on internationalization, meant that the most important designers over three generations could be hired, as well as a host of other lesser known or unknown creators. Everyone helped to form the company’s visual culture, which is important to acknowledge—not only because the new historiography of design has lessened the focus on isolated creators and emblematic objects, but also because the figures in the foreground, such as Daciano da Costa, did what he called design alimentar. Finally, design for the Portuguese airline was made into a specific, independent area of operation. Here, it brought together the means to make a place for itself as an operational tool, appropriate for analyzing the concepts and historiography of design practiced in Portugal.

At a time when privatization is highly probable for TAP, acknowledging and understanding these many dimensions might help to reconfigure the cultural identity of the national air carrier, thus avoiding the danger of the (cyclical) reappearance of a nostalgic stance—a stance based on the memories of its exciting past and a certain, deceptively happy idea of a country that was “the garden of Europe by the sea.”