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Special Issue (English)

Cabin Crew Uniforms

The Uniforms of the Flying Crew at Air France, between Rules and Reality, as Told by Those who Wear them

Loïc Perramond

Traduction de Alice Vigouroux et Hugues Azaïs

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translated from French by Alice Vigouroux and Hugues Azaïs

Cabin Crew Uniforms

The Uniforms of the Flying Crew at Air France, between Rules and Reality, as Told by Those who Wear them

Between two flights, these stewardesses, stewards and chief flight attendants have gracefully answered a few questions about their uniforms and how they feel about them.

Recruitment

Caroline For the recruitment and the photo of my application file, I was wearing a navy blue suit, as a way to fit to the clothing style expected at Air France.
Fanny I was 21, I had gone to the Dames de France and my mother had come with me. She had offered me a white coat which was a bit short, a navy blue skirt, a satin-soft blouse and a hound's tooth jacket. I had also bought faux leather shoes in which I was unable to walk. As a result I failed my Air France selection. I remember it was not so much because of the shoes than the fact I was absolutely terrified by the stakes and also because I must have looked awfully gauche.
Armelle For the casting? I was wearing a white blouse, navy blue jacket and skirt. I had tried to find an outfit as close to the uniform as possible and I had bought a kind of floppy necktie. I wore my hair in a bob and I had navy blue tights and pumps. In a nutshell I was Miss Blue!
Sylvain If I recall that day correctly, I was wearing a grey tweed jacket by de Fursac, anthracite flannel trousers and a light shirt with a black and blue tie still around somewhere.
Sébastien A navy suit and tie and a white shirt that looked like the uniform to try to fit in what my future employer expected. Only one of the girls in my group had breached that rule and wore a flowered dress with flat shoes, she didn't make it to the end of the day.
Déborah The day I was recruited, I was wearing an as grey suit with a white blouse. A simple bun, black shoes and nude tights. Apart from the bun, nothing was an obvious reference to a uniform but on second thoughts…

The uniform as a symbol

C. I started working at Air France on a whim, I had never thought I would one day become a stewardess and wearing a uniform was not a career motivation. It was in no way a fantasy!

F. The uniform, the bearing, the make- up, the look.. I had grown up in the country among a traditional, middle-class family so far from the world of stewardesses that it became a dream for me to be one of them. I remember a film with Michèle Morgan and Jean Marais which had impressed me a lot. I don't recall the title... *Les Ailes du désir*? No... *Aux yeux du souvenir*! That film has been sought to inspire proper young girls to become stewardesses. Jean Marais played the pilot, Michèle Morgan the stewardess and they were two former lovers who met on a flight after a few years separation. The proper young girl I was couldn't help being impressed by such a story!

A. I have always been attracted to the world of stewardesses and their uniforms. I find it very chic, very pretty and it always allows one to quickly get dressed in the morning. One does not lose time trying to figure out what to wear.

Sy. I never had any fantasy whatsoever on uniforms even if I take pride on wearing mine as correctly as possible. I don't see the slightest hint of attraction in it but I would be displeased if I had to wear a tiny red-striped waistcoat as at Austrian, a pea-green V-neck polka dots jumper like at Transavia or even that kind of orange sweatshirt they sport at Jet Facile! It is always pleasant to feel both at ease and elegant.

Sé. Wearing a uniform didn't make me choose a career path, however it is a symbol of the profession that can be recognised in a blink in any airport around the world. It's a guarantee of trust for customers.

Size matters

C. Our uniforms are not tailored-made. When you gain or lose weight, after childbirth for example, you can play with the sizes and the pieces: a short, long, medium or large 6 item with an 8 or a 10. For some items such as the navy blue dress, I go to a tailor to have the size fit to perfection. It is a personal decision.

F. I finally integrated Air France in 1991 after 3 years with another company. I was 29 and overwhelmed with happiness. We had been asked to try our uniforms and I had received my first allocation, I still remember it! Everything fit perfectly. I never had to have my uniform altered.

A. In 1996 it was still the 'Frégate' dress by Carven with the white collar. I chose a regular 8. I have never needed any alterations. I am 1m75 tall and proudly show off my stewardess size!

Sé. Our uniforms come in standard sizes. I am quite tall so I have the length of my trousers and the sleeves of my jackets lengthened by a few centimeters. Some of my colleagues have them fitted in Thailand or India.

Training

C. On the first day training we have been taught everything about make-up and hair styles. Indeed they are part of the uniform as we have to remain perfect at all times. 'Respect yourself when you are in uniform' was the leitmotiv during training. I remember the location near Étoile and the professional who taught us the rules and basics about make-up and hairdo. It had an old-school Miss

France touch but it was kind of fun. Afterwards we were given a small book containing all the rules we were supposed to follow, which we do, more or less...
A. If I recall correctly, the rules concerning the uniform were described during the 5 week long training. I spent one day at Lancôme on the company expenses. In those days Air France had the means for such treats!
Sy. I don't recall any specific requirements at least personally. A mate I trained with taught me had to do a double tie rack in the bathroom, and nothing else I promise!
D. Our five-week-training consisted in learning the rules on how to wear a uniform and every morning we were reviewed and scrutinized.

Rules...
C. The rules are quite strict, we are the face of the company which is a historic one in the air traffic. No visible tattoo nor piercing of course. Wearing the uniform quickly becomes a part of us, it is the DNA of the flying crews, it is our image.
A. It used to be extremely strict. Not one hair should be out of place, no trinkets and everything that did not fit the image of Air France was strictly forbidden. The rules are more or less identical today and can be found in a small book which describes the way to choose your glasses, jewels, bracelets, earrings, your hairdo, the colour of the nail varnish, which is mandatory, and so on and so forth...
Sy. There is actually a nice booklet that was provided with the latest version of our wardrobe that dates back about fifteen years. But I must admit my ignorance in the subject. The version for male is pretty straightforward. The possibilities for girls are much wider...
Sé. Rules change according to fashion sometimes, which means that we are now allowed to grow a beard. Yet a uniform must look like one to be recognized as such – which means that it must be worn according to established rules. To me uniforms matter as much as the colour of the cabin or the cutlery in terms of marketing and image.

... and daily basis
C. I reckon I do take some tiny liberties with the rules. Are you recording me now? I don't shorten my skirt up to mid-thighs, but when I'm wearing the light blue blouse, I leave the top button open although it is specified that it must be buttoned up, I am quite the rebel! I have to confess it is mostly about comfort, it is very tight. The small friendship bracelets are not allowed and yet I always wear one or two of them... But I swear I never chew gum when I am wearing my uniform. Concerning the make –up and hair-do I always follow the rules. I have worn my hair in a twist ever since I have had long hair.
F. A beautiful image is reflected by the crews at Air France. Indeed, from time to time, some negligence can be noticed and it is my duty as a cabin officer to rectify them. I don't play God Almighty obsessing about the size of a watch dial or complaining about original rims . As long as the overall impression is coherent and they are dedicated to their work it is fine by me.
Sy. There is a small range of possibilities due to the few pieces of the male uniform. I'm not like the ones who get their shirts fitted in Bangkok or like the ones who pack their own coat for the flight. Just like it's not allowed to go shopping

in full attire when coming back from a flight. It's also forbidden to wear parts of the uniform with civilian clothes.

Sé. Sometimes I take the liberty to wear a summer leather bracelet or a red wool hat that matches perfectly with the belts of the female crew. In the winter my short crew cut doesn't keep me from the cold and there is no wool hat in our uniform.

Choosing

F. We can wear the items we want for a flight. With our newest uniform we have stopped wearing a red dress like we used to because it was discovered passengers tend to follow the red-dressed staff in case of emergency and not those dressed in blue.

A. We have several items to choose from and it is up to us to decide what to wear. The choice is large for women: short or long jackets, summer or winter suits, tops with or without collars, tee-shirts with round collars or turtleneck and of course the dress or the trousers. The choice is easier for men: shirts with long or short sleeves, straight or double-breasted jackets and trousers with darts or Italian style, depending on their body shapes. They also have waistcoats with sleeves or without and the rules about it are complicated: stewards are forbidden to take the jacket off if they wear the long sleeve shirt, same with the waistcoat. In Business or 1st class, it is mandatory to wear the jacket, with the addition of a red tie or scarf (same for the stewardess) whereas everywhere else blue dominates. In economy class it is up to the chief to allow the staff to take the jacket off.

Sy. The smartest girls sometimes take another outfit so they can blend their navy trousers suits for the outward journey and the sky blue dress on the flight back – how very chic!

D. Each member of the staff is free to choose his favorite uniform for the flight. According to the traditions of the country we are going to, I can either wear a dress or trousers with a long jacket to hide my body a little. We have to adapt and the uniform is a great help.

My first uniform

C. When I started working for the company in 2001, I had an old-fashioned uniform which had not been modified for quite a long time. There was only one item worth wearing, the famous summer dress which came in 3 colours; navy blue, light blue or red. The other pieces such as the 'Frégate' dress was not comfortable with its white collar and it modifiable wristbands. I remember having trouble moving in it whereas our current uniform is much more comfortable and adapted to our work on board.

F. In 1991 the style was classical. I have not forgotten that split skirt, the famous Pompadour-like floppy necktie and that blouse I loved wearing, made of a very thin cotton and given the seal of approval by my grandmother: 'magnificent!' There was also a short winter jacket with visible pockets and of course the famous Louis Féraud summer dresses in faux linen which creased when we seated. We did not dare move in it which is awkward for a stewardess. The colours reminded me of sugared almonds: light blue, pale pink and ivory beige. They could be worn with the collar open, sometimes with a pearl necklace, or buttoned up with the famous floppy necktie that added a touch of chic to the

outfit. We looked like candies. I remember the stewardess in chief in charge of clothing telling us it showed 'elegant creases'. She had some nerve!
A. My first uniform was the one from Air Liberté in 1994. It was quite a beautiful one; I and the new uniform arrived at the same time, it had changed from a kind of Ninja Turtle greenish one to a beautiful blue. The jacket was velvet and the buttons golden. Balmain had created it and I loved it. There was also a tiny hat which completed the look. The lovely tops with polka dots were great to wear. When I integrated Air France my main outfit was a 'Nattier blue' suit by Nina Ricci, it was another world altogether.
Sé. My first flight attendant uniform was the one from the army and I wore it with pride.
D. A huge pride to wear the colors of the national company!

Accessories
C. Concerning the jewels, a watch is mandatory but in no way can it be a fashion jewelry. No more than 2 rings per hand and in theory not on the same finger. No visible religious symbol. Earrings must be studs and one per ear only. We have to carry the handbag which is part of the uniform during the rotations besides our luggage and they must be coordinated to Air France colours: blue, black, grey or sometimes red suitcases.
F. the precise rules concerning jewels? No bling, never 6 rings per hand even if one is lucky enough to have a rich spouse. The handbag is mandatory as requested in the uniform book but not everyone carries one. Some manage to hide it in a Longchamp bag while others do not take it at all under the pretence it is worn out and that they are waiting for their allocation. I must admit it is neither very practical nor very beautiful…
Sy. Recently I asked a flight hostess to take off a very flashy and particularly ugly bracelet. "I've worn it at work for years and my flight instructor never said anything about it. You're the first one to pointed out."
Sé. For male jewellery we are allowed one ring per hand, a watch and on the other hand a silver or gold vintage curb chain, and no leather or wood or fabric (even the ones designed by famous creators). So the Californian surfer look is forbidden!

Hairdo
C. The hair-do is strict: the bun must be perfect at all times but not as strict as at Singapore Airlines where you are required to wear a 6cm-diameter bun. A flawless braid with no rubber band at the top of the braid, it is in the book. No bobby pins unless invisible. And bunheads if you wear one must be navy blue and no scrunchie. No pony tail unlike what can be seen at other companies. No loose hair, that's a given, we are after all in contact with people and we must obey strict sanitary rules.
A. The hair-do has evolved a little: it used to be a strict bun or a bob which had to be above the shoulders and the collar of the jacket. The famous Air France bob! Nowadays we are allowed a braid and the bob can be a bit longer. Mine is currently a bit too long, don't you think?
Sé. If you dream of growing your hair move on! At Air France boys must have a short and clean hair cut and the length of sideburns mustn't be longer than half the length of your ears. I told you!

Preferences

C. About the stewardess image: obviously the former Air France uniforms were more representative. Maybe times were different. Air traffic was still new in the 70ies and a stewardess was unique in that ideal vision. She was most certainly looked out from head to toe, after all, she was dressed by Dior! I reckon that our current uniform corresponds to our times. Indeed it is modern and practical, it fits everyone, every body type. It is surely less discriminatory than the famous 70ies dresses created by Courrèges . Less 'mummish' than the Louis Féraud suit or the 'Dauphin' suit by Carven, created at the end of the 80ies famous for its huge floppy necktie. Today my favorite piece is the Lacroix summer dress with the red belt tied at the waist even if I wear it less often than the trousers, for practical reasons. Indeed we flight quite a lot on medium haul.

A. Personally, I really liked the 'Frégate' dress by Calven, with its silky white collar and the twin sleeve hems, not to forget the floppy necktie. This item really embodied the image of the stewardess, it was very chic. All that white and blue, that satin,that pearly shine... it is my favorite outfit.

Sy. I rather like what Christian Lacroix designed for us even no it is unforgiving if you care a little about how you look. The trousers fitted cut can be rude on a fifty-years-old who likes wine, beer and burgers...

In an ideal world

C. As you have probably understood by now, my ideal uniform is the suit or the dress. When recruited, and it is quite discriminatory, it was specified that we had to have nice figures. Besides it must be said that Air France is a company where the staff is getting older as there has not been any external recruitment for the last 10 years. The average age is 43 and figures alter with time. The current uniform allows us to adapt to physical changes thanks to the numerous pieces and the large possibility of variations.

F. the ideal uniform...Does it really exist? In fairy tales everything is perfect. In the real world it is not always easy to work at 10,000 meters high in a pressured cabin with jagged schedules and with customers who sometimes forget their manners. I don't know whether I'll be here to witness the new uniform because of my incoming retirement but I am curious to see what will be created.

A. The current uniform by Lacroix is nice. The blue dress with the red belt tied at the waist is very beautiful, very elegant. Too many people wear the long jacket with the trousers now which is a pity... A small hat could be added as an accessory even if it is not very practical depending on the hair style. After wearing one at Air Liberté I find it the perfect final touch to a uniform.

Sy. Can a uniform be perfect? It should be something that has to remain comfortable and pleasant to wear because our job on board is also quite physical, and that's under estimated. Banding to load 150 casserole dishes at 2am in the back galley of an Airbus or wriggling to reach the passenger sat next to the window who doesn't hear you because of his headset on with loudly music at full blast. I don't really know what I would like to wear but I often running to crews wearing vile uniforms: duck blue (KLM), flashy green (Transavia), cherry red (Austrian), curry (Jet Airways)...

D. I would love Karl Lagerfeld for the next collection...

In our eyes

C. Our uniform is quite classical, it doesn't stick out contrary to the one favored at Austrian Airlines which is red from head to toe. Nevertheless it is elegant and well-cut even if according to the location where the items are cut and assembled differences can occur. We can order new items once a year thanks to an allocation. I couldn't say where the uniforms are made, it is not written on the labels but they are not made in France, even if Christian Lacroix, the creator, is French. They are not signed either and a lot of things have been said on that subject so I don't know what to make of it…

F. Even a tad old-fashioned, our uniform is still among the top 5 of the most beautiful ones. I must admit it is not very distinctive, navy blue being the dominant colour. In the beginning, we were nicknamed the Ravens. Anyway, nowadays, some customers are not even aware of the company they are travelling with so the idea of them identifying a uniform… Once a passenger asked me if I was working at the airport after the flight and if I was flying for American companies. You get the picture!

A. Above all, it is a real pleasure to wear it. A uniform represents 50% of the image of a company, wouldn't you agree? I remember when the uniform changed in 2005. Passengers would congratulate us on board. It looked a bit like a fashion show, there was even a commercial about it during flights. Of course it is also a working tool, easily identifiable .A marketing element of its own.

Sé. Our uniform is sober and smart looking. It is the visual identity of the airline and we represent the image and brand around the world. Therefore is a pleasure to wear it. Besides uniforms can come in handy as the shield in some circonstances.

Wearing the uniform

C. I don't have any particular feeling or pride when wearing my uniform, it is an appropriate working clothing. I do my best to fulfill some criteria and follow the rules. Wearing a uniform shows that we are part of a great company and if some people dream about that, well… Good for them!

F. I am very proud to be part of Air France. I have noticed that I was standing straighter when in uniform.

A. I feel extremely proud. When in uniform I am someone else. I act my part.

Sy. If there is an issue with an unsatisfied customer we have to tell yourself that it is your uniform (which represents what he paid for) that he is mad about and that it is nothing personal. Quite a relief!

D. I wear my uniform with great pleasure because I like my job and I am glad to represent Air France. And I hope not to stop any time soon.

What about the others

C. I am not very good at recognizing other uniforms. There was a time when British Airways had the most famous ones but not for the best reasons. Those girls had to be depressed to have such a ridiculous look. They looked like old retired stewardesses who played at wearing 1940ies costumes. Nowadays, apart from Alitalia with their awfully old-fashioned green and Austrian who favored an all red uniform (even the tights which was pretty horrible) I don't know who is who. I get confused with all the Gulf companies and I am as clueless with the Asian ones. But I always check them out. It is quite a game to scrutinize the hairdo and style of a stewardess and a steward from a rival company.

F. It is true that we flight attendants scrutinize each other a lot. So what can I tell you… The Americans are 70 years old and wear slippers. The Spanish and the Italians have casual Friday hairstyles. The Asians hide themselves behind a haughty attitude. The Gulf stewardesses wear as much make up as Sheherazade and the Dutch act like Smurfettes. Our uniform by Chris Cross (aka Christian Lacroix) is by far better cut and far superior concerning elegance and bearing. It is a thing of beauty.
A. Sometimes it is easy as a lot of companies haven't modified their uniforms for years such as KLM with their appalling Smurf blue one. Alitalia also favor a terrible green. China Eastern nearly have the same uniform as us which was also created by Christian Lacroix. His backlash against Air France was due to the making of our uniforms in Eastern Europe with different fabrics being used from the ones chosen by Monsieur Lacroix. That's the reason why he did not signed our uniforms. It had been a tradition at Air France to have the creators signing theirs: Balmain for Air France, Carven for Air France, and before them: Dior, Balenciaga, Courrèges… As I often came across China Eastern in New York, the resemblance is uncanny, mostly from the back.

Keeping the uniform
C. I think we are not allowed to keep them but I am not quite sure… I am not familiar with these rules. I have kept the famous summer uniform I wore on my first days in the company even if I don't have a clue as to its whereabouts to this day. When some items are a bit worn out or when I receive my allocation I throw some of them but I always take the company identifications off, per requested. It is a safety measure: wings, badges, trimmings, buttons when showing the logo of Air France… about everything that makes a suit a uniform. I cut the pieces with my scissors so the rest is useless. If I were to leave the company, I think I would keep a symbolic item, such as the dress because it represents 15 years of my life.
F. As a safety measure, you are not allowed to keep any uniform to avoid them being used by terrorists who could then masquerade as crew members. But anyway…The day I leave, I will keep my uniform out of nostalgia.
A. I would like to keep some of them and I believe we can keep one or two items, can't we? It is not possible? Really? Too bad, it could quickly become vintage or collector…
D. I have kept each and every one of my former uniforms and I would like to keep some more when leaving the company. I am allowed to do so as long as I do not wear them in public…I will have to check with someone…

A few last words
C. I hope to welcome you aboard Air France very soon.
F. I love Air France, I love my job, I love my uniform!
A. I would like to know what you will do with all this information and I am quite curious of the outcome. Anyway it has been nice speaking with you in these wonderful surroundings.
Sé. See you soon on board Air France!
Sy. I've got to dash I have a flight.
D. In a nutshell, to do that job, you'd better not be allergic to navy blue! ■







Chemise, chemisette, cravate et pince



RÈGLES DE PORT :

Chemise

- Col boutonné.
- Poignets boutonnés.
- Toujours portée avec la veste.

Chemisette

- Avec fourreaux d'épaules selon le grade et insigne agraphé côté droit.
- Col boutonné.
- A bord, peut être portée sans veste si ajustée et d'une netteté rigoureuse : durant les embarquements et débarquements en cas de forte chaleur.

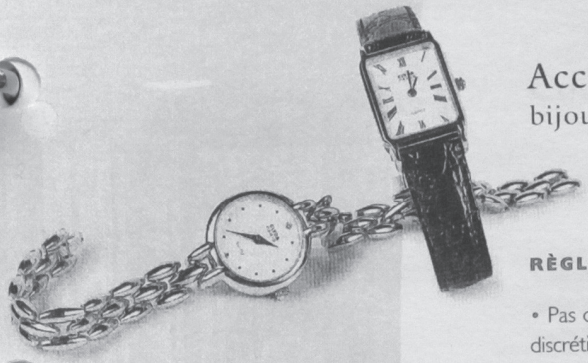
Cravate (modèle Compagnie)

- Port obligatoire.
- Nœud ajusté.

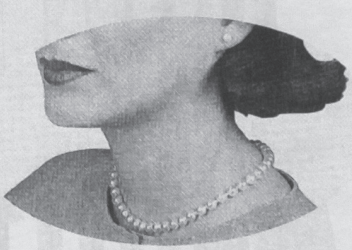
Pince de cravate

- Port facultatif (modèle Compagnie).

50.25



Accessoires
bijoux*





RÈGLES DE PORT :

• Pas d'ostentation, la plus grande discrétion s'impose ; seuls sont autorisés :

• une montre de femme, classique, discrète.

• un bracelet-montre de couleur or, argent, bleu marine, noir ou marron.

• des bagues discrètes limitées à deux sur chaque main, alliance comprise.

• un ou deux rangs de perles de couleur naturelle, ou un tour de cou or ou argent, ou une chaîne fine or ou argent, avec éventuellement un pendentif discret.

• un bracelet autour du poignet couleur or ou argent, sans breloque d'aucune sorte.

• une seule paire de boucles d'oreilles, très discrètes : les seuls modèles autorisés sont un petit clou ou un petit anneau enserrant le lobe de chaque oreille.

• Le sautoir, la chaînette autour de la cheville, le piercing et les pin's sont interdits.

* (non fournis dans la dotation)

Excerpts from the Guide to the Wear of Uniform

Beyond concerns for aesthetics and elegance, every effort must be made to comply with the common rules for maintaining and wearing the uniform.

In uniform, undue familiarity and behavior incompatible with the elementary rules of decency and elegance are to be banned.

To wear the uniform is always to be discreet and courteous.

When leaving the Company, all pieces of the uniform must be returned to the relevant department.

The length of the dresses is strictly limited to the knees.

We recommend attendants carry a extra pair of tights.

Makeup must be visible without being ostentatious.

Lipstick must not be black or white and should agree with the mandatory nail polish.

Long necklaces, ankle chains, tattoos, piercings and pins are forbidden.

One or two rows of natural-color pearls, small gold or silver necklaces, or thin gold or silver chains with possibly a discreet pendant are allowed.

Hair falling below the neck should be put in a bun.

The only authorized shoes are those issued with the uniform, except in special cases and upon presentation of a medical certificate.

For men, sideburns should not go below the upper half of the ear.

Only natural baldness is permitted.

Discolored or colored hair is not allowed.

For boys, varnish, even colorless, is not allowed.

The scarf can not be worn inside the plane and is not compatible with summer dress.

Any excessive customization of luggage and bags is prohibited.

Mixing civilian clothes with elements of the uniform is forbidden.

Flying staff may not transfer or lend items of their uniform to any person who is not authorized to wear them.

The wearing of the Air France uniform is an essential vector of the Company's identity in cultivating customers' trust.



50.07

Robe demi-saison

la robe frégate

Bleu marine

RÈGLES DE PORT :

• La robe frégate se porte col fermé.



• Les parements blancs sont obligatoires.

• Le port de la ceinture
cuir bleu marine est obligatoire.



• Sa longueur est limitée aux genoux
(limite supérieure et inférieure).