



Castles in the Sky

How the other 0.1 percent flies.

Photographs by Neal Slavin

About the Photographs

Castles in the Sky

As first-class seats on commercial aircraft have become easier to come by, thanks to the ubiquity of frequent-flier miles, the rich and famous increasingly travel apart from the hoi polloi in the confines of private jets. In 2002, there were an estimated 8,000 noncommercial jets registered in the United States. The cost of these planes starts at roughly \$3 million and goes up fast; the price of a Gulfstream jet ranges from about \$11 million to about \$45 million. Some enthusiasts, like the actor Harrison Ford, fly their own small-cabin planes, while others, like the billionaire Donald J. Trump, buy commercial jets and convert them to meet their specifications.

The photographer Neal Slavin, best known for his clever, elaborately orchestrated ensemble pictures, traveled from New York to Los Angeles to Washington to document the behind-the-scenes world of elite travel. "On the one hand," he explains, "these are almost architectural pictures. On the other hand, these are pictures about people. I had to bring these two elements together." Technically speaking, the biggest challenge was achieving the proper lighting. As those who travel coach class may be consoled to learn, even spacious private planes can feel cramped: "Every picture," Slavin says, "was like trying to light the inside of a cigar tube."



Harrison Ford has been flying planes for about nine years. "This is a 1958 eight-seater De Havilland Beaver DH-2 restored to my specifications," he says. "The plane was a hulk that had come back from Vietnam. It had been cobbled together for the movie 'Six Days, Seven Nights,' and I fell in love with it. I fly it cross-country, which takes about 15 hours because you have to stop and refuel every four hours or so and get coffee and take a break."

This Gulfstream IV-SP jet belongs to NetJets, a fleet of 512 aircraft that are jointly owned and shared by more than 3,000 clients, including Tiger Woods, Arnold Schwarzenegger and General Electric. Eschewing catered cuisine for takeout Caribbean fare, Busta Rhymes and his fellow performers "always have a lot of food on their plane whenever they finish a gig," Slavin says.



Donald J. Trump's jet, a converted commercial aircraft with master bedroom, comfortably accommodates about 22 passengers. It has 24-karat-gold fixtures in all three bathrooms and 24-karat-gold seat-belt buckles. The crystal glassware is designed to withstand the pressures and rigors of flight. He uses the jet about once a week.

Phil Condit, C.E.O. of Boeing, says he travels "75 to 80 percent of the year." To accommodate his schedule, his Boeing Business Jet features a lounge, dining area, office, stateroom, galley and two showers. The office is equipped with a satellite phone, printer, fax, photocopier, shredder, TV and computer access via a high-speed air-ground data link. A bare-bones Boeing Business Jet costs \$40 million, and an interior starts at about \$10 million.



