

IN-FLIGHT ENTERTAINMENT

BY TIANA MOLONY



A PAMPERING AT 30,000 FEET

A 1950s airline ad will show a family dressed to the nines: kids polished and proper, Dad in a taut suit, and Mom with her hair styled under a green cloche. The kids beam as Dad points out the window, instructing them to admire the scenery while the flight attendants push a cart laden with delectable desserts and accoutrements. It's a stark juxtaposition to the modern flying experience, which today has been reduced to a means of getting from point A to point B.

For Aero—a semi-private jet company—bringing back that

mid-century charm means taking a page out of the book of the early days of commercial flight, where the travel part of a trip was just as noteworthy as the trip itself.

Arriving at Aero's private terminal in Van Nuys, I expect at least some of the usual airport hassles, particularly security's precarious demands—"take off your shoes" and "remove all devices from your bag." However, in lieu of this, I'm handed a glass of champagne and invited to relax in the lounge and have complimentary snacks—I am playing a member of the Royal Family, being tended to like a baby bird.

Our destination this time is Napa Valley, but it could have just as well been Sun Valley, Las Vegas, or Cabo. For anyone in Montecito heading for Aspen in the winter, Aero's direct flights help get rid of those pesky layovers through Denver.

I chat with another passenger who feels just as much of an imposter as I. Then, an Aero employee greets us. "So, what do you do at Aero?" I inquire. "I'm the CEO," replies Ben Klein, a former pilot with a wide smile reminiscent of Bob Saget. I apologize for my ignorance, but he only laughs—he is more

interested in talking about Aero than he is in himself, sipping his non-alcoholic wine and gesturing around the waiting room.

I've been in fancy airport lounges before—the kind where you enter through glass bi-parting doors to a room where only elite flyers are allowed. While inviting, these lounges can often be as crowded as the gates, and the security process remains unchanged.

With only five planes and 16 seats each, few travelers grace the Aero lounge. There are no monotone intercom announcements, layovers, or gate changes; just you and your 30-second walk to the plane. It's less akin to air travel and more some

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form of magical transportation. Within a mere 30 minutes of my arrival at the Aero lounge, I am airborne.

The plane itself is downright serene. I comment on the warm lighting overhead and ask Klein, who sits in front of me, if this is intentional. "Everything is intentional," he relays. He then encourages me and other passengers to touch the plane's interior walls lined with cream suede material that is supposed to help with noise reduction. It is incredibly soft to the touch. Klein admits while it's not the most practical option, it is certainly the most luxurious so that's what they went with—I, too, prefer ballet flats to tennis shoes.

Instead of gluing ourselves to an airplane screen (which Aero has none of), conversation fills the void; people like to talk when they're content. We are like a group of excited schoolchildren on a wine-country field trip. There I am, sipping wine from an in-flight tasting, eating my Erewhon cheese, and stroking the suede walls, wondering how the hell I got here.

Free from the stress of the airport, I can fully savor the flight experience, just like those carefree families in the old airline ads. As we pass San Francisco, Klein grabs everyone's attention, exclaiming, "Look at the Golden Gate Bridge on your right." 

