

Cult Carpet

Portland Airport is beginning a massive carpet replacement project, and as the new replaces the old, passengers reflect on one of the most famous wefts in aviation.

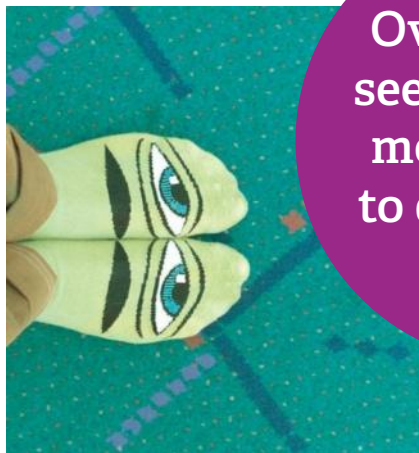
BY HOWARD SLUTSKEN

You just never know how it's going to turn out when you open yourself up to the universe. Especially if the center of your universe happens to be Portland. The one in Oregon, on the US West Coast, famous for food trucks, hipsters, roses, museums, rampant creativity and its "Keep Portland Weird" sign. A city that's lovingly satirized by the absurdly witty TV show *Portlandia*. A very different place.

Right, the universe. Well, just like those of us who have lived in our homes for more than 20 years, the good folks at Portland International Airport (PDX) and the Port of Portland decided it was time to replace the carpet in their terminals. Thanks to a great maintenance program and original design specifications, the carpet had far exceeded its lifetime and was simply wearing out.

Back in the 1980s, when it was designed and installed, the carpet's unique pattern became embedded in Portland's culture. That original design had a teal background and an abstract representation of the




KEEP PDX WEIRD



Overnight, it seemed, social media began to discuss the project.



FOLLOW THE CARPET

-  > [@NEWPDXCARPET](https://twitter.com/NEWPDXCARPET)
-  > [@PDXCARPET](https://twitter.com/PDXCARPET)
-  > ["THE CARPET AT PORTLAND AIRPORT" ON FACEBOOK](https://www.facebook.com/theCarpetAtPortlandAirport)

Thousands of Instagram users have posted their #PDXcarpet photos through the photo sharing application [LEFT], and the design quickly migrated onto numerous retail products [RIGHT].

airport’s runways and aircraft, inspired by what might be seen on an air traffic controller’s radar screen or from the control tower itself. And while the team at PDX knew that the pattern was beloved by the countless travelers passing through the airport, the decision was nevertheless made to update the color and design of the carpet.

NEW BEGINNINGS

PDX wanted to be certain that they had the time to ensure the project’s success, so the process actually started back in 2009. A Portland firm, ZGF Architects, was brought in to update the original design created by SRG Partnership in the late 1980s. In 2012, Hennebery Eddy Architects, also Portland-based, joined the project to help develop the final product, including materials and construction support.

As described by the design team, the new carpet’s look is based on “organic and man-made shapes found within the

surrounding areas of PDX, including airplane wings, runways, leaves, trails and waterways.” The team selected “mood-enhancing colors ... to elicit a calm and inviting environment.” Ommmm. How *very* Portland.

Once the new design was finalized, PDX told *everyone* what was going on. “We didn’t want anyone to be surprised. So we reached out to the community and updated them on the project,” says Annie Linstrom, spokeswoman for the airport.

And that’s when the universe started unfolding. Overnight, it seemed, social media began to discuss the project, and the old and new carpet designs. “The Carpet at Portland Airport” community page sprang up on Facebook and has over 9,000 Likes. It honors “the amazing carpet that tells you that you’re home in Portland.” There’s an Instagram hashtag, pretty well filled with photos of people’s feet on the carpet. Both the old and new designs have Twitter accounts, and there’s an iPhone wallpaper app.

Then it really exploded. First, the pattern showed up on socks. That was followed by T-shirts, coasters, water bottles, mugs, cell-phone cases, men’s neckties, infinity scarves, bike shirts, art prints, pillows, beer-can holders, hats, bike helmets, and... fridge magnets. Most of the items were created by people “out there,” without the official sanction of PDX.

The Made in Oregon stores saw that something was happening and added a few of the items to their stock of All Things Oregon. “We were taken by surprise at the response. We had no clue that somebody would buy something that resembles a carpet pattern,” says Candace Vincent, the company’s general manager. “People came in asking for the items, and not just at our [PDX] airport store. It seems to be particularly popular with our younger customers – teens, and high school and college kids,” she added. Popular, indeed. The stores have sold over \$65,000 of carpet-pattern merchandise, according to Vincent. >



Most of the items were created by people “out there,” without the official sanction of PDX.



PHOTOS: PDXCARPET.COM, THE ATHLETIC COMMUNITY

TESTING, 1, 2, 3

In 2013, carpet testing began. Robin McCaffrey, PDX's engineering project manager for the Carpet Replacement Project, explains, "We worked with a number of manufacturers and gave them the performance requirements, including stain, delamination and wear-resistance, and esthetics. They produced carpet samples that met those requirements. It's definitely not something that you'll ever find in a catalog."

A portion of the old carpet was torn up in PDX's Oregon Market area of restaurants and shops, and samples from three carpet manufacturers were installed for over six months. Travelers, visitors, airline personnel and airport tenants were all asked to walk on the test carpeting and comment on the samples.

At the same time, the samples were being tortured at Professional Testing Labs, located in the world's carpet epicenter of Dalton, Georgia. Lab director Lee Phillips explains that "we've studied airport traffic, and it can be very different from other commercial-carpet installations. While the foot traffic isn't very harsh, luggage wheels can put hundreds of pounds of pressure per square inch – PSI – on the carpet." Among the dozens of ISO and ASTM tests, weighted office chairs were used to simulate rolling luggage and, yes, professional contract walkers abused the carpet on a track. >

"We've studied airport traffic, and it can be very different from other commercial-carpet installations."

LEE PHILLIPS

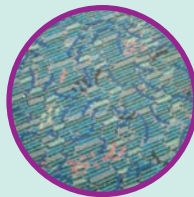
#AirportCarpet

A few months back, the APEX editorial team was compiling their favorite travel-industry hashtags when we stumbled across the #airportcarpet trend on Instagram. The discovery of more than 1,600 photos of airport carpets from around the world led us down the rabbit hole to #PDXcarpet, a keyword which is currently tagged in over 20,000 images on the photo sharing application.



VANCOUVER INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT (YVR)

I know I'm home when my feet sweep across those welcoming blues and greens. Is it raining? Probably. Are we going to go hiking anyway? Very likely. When you descend into International Arrivals, the carpet pattern changes to soft wavy blues just as the sound of water from the fountain wall reaches your ears. Was this aural carpet synergy intentional? My guess is, most definitely. >Terri



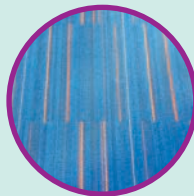
ORLANDO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT (MCO)

When I was working on Delta's Corporate Identity revamp back in 2000, we all struggled with how we would make Delta's bold red, white and blue colors work with Orlando's royal blue, teal, dark aqua, hot pink and lavender colors. Hello Florida! > Al



LF WADE INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT (BDA)

No, this is not in fact the *gouaches découpés* work of the modern master Matisse, but good guess. This undulating, tropical-kaleidoscope-reverie instills an immediate sense of place in its observer: You are here, in Bermuda. Lie down. Roll around a little. Not that much. It's okay. We're cool. > Katie



LA GUARDIA AIRPORT (LGA)

I couldn't seem to find carpet amidst the starkness of LGA but I knew I couldn't leave NY without an #airportcarpet shot. I spotted this royal blue beauty from afar and nudged my way through a boarding line to snap the shot. > Jessica

In case you were wondering, #hotelcarpet, #casinocarpet and even #EXPOcarpet are also popular on Instagram. Since spinning into the wonderful web of carpet obsessiveness, the APEX editorial team has compiled a robust gallery of some of our favorite personal shots. We dare you not to look down and take a snapshot of your own next time you're treading along on an #airportcarpet.



View the carpet gallery online at

> [APEX.AERO/CARPETS](https://www.apex.aero/carpets)



To test stain-resistance and cleaning, a disturbingly wide range of items were dumped on the samples. “Coffee, mustard, Betadine and cherry Kool-Aid were among the things tested,” says McCaffrey. “Mustard was one of the hardest things to get out.” However, *APEX Experience* could not confirm that the samples were tested for resistance to a quintessentially Portland stain combination – spilled chai latte and dark-chocolate mocha drinks, mixed with a ground-in bacon-maple bar from Portland’s Voodoo Doughnuts!

PATTERN RELIEF

Ultimately, carpet was selected from J+J Invision – not surprisingly, also in Dalton, Georgia and Mohawk Industries in Calhoun, Georgia. “What we ended up with is similar to, but not exactly the same as, what we tested, because the testing helped tell us what we needed to tweak,” says McCaffrey. “It’s a broadloom tufted cut-pile carpet with a relief pattern; some of it is cut and some is looped, because that mixture has a good esthetic and it doesn’t show wear as

much.” Sixty-three-thousand square yards of carpet will be laid in the project, budgeted at \$12.24 million, and much of the work will be done at night to minimize the impact on the airport’s 24-hour-a-day operations. It is expected to be completed before the Thanksgiving 2015 travel crush.

The airport is proud of its award-winning record of environmental stewardship, which will extend to this project and the disposal of the old carpet. “Our goal is to recycle all of it, and to keep it out of the landfill at any cost,” says PDX’s Linstrom.

Linstrom says the airport will pay tribute to the old carpet with an abstract exhibit by Nancy Wilkins, a Portland printmaker, which is on display in the terminal through to the end of the project. PDX is also thinking about other unique ways to feature the old carpet.

But will the new carpet pattern ever reach the cult status of the old one? Made in Oregon’s Vincent thinks so. “We have to be ready for it!”

And so she should be, or the universe might be upset. After all, it *is* Portland. ■

But will the new carpet pattern ever reach the cult status of the old one?



Portland Airport pays tribute to the old carpet with an abstract exhibit by Nancy Wilkins, a Portland printmaker, which is on display in the terminal through to the end of the project.

PHOTOS: PORT OF PORTLAND

Thread Count



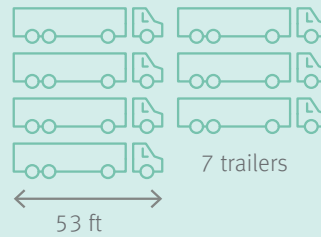
See the PDX Carpet Factsheet at
 > APEX.AERO/PDX

The **63,000 square yards** of carpet to be installed in the terminals would cover 34% of PDX's main Runway 10R/28L, which is 11,000 feet long and 150 feet wide.

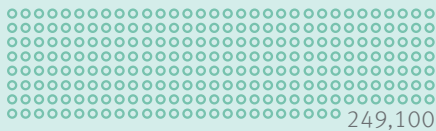
11,000 ft x 150 ft

The new carpet will fill seven, **53-foot tractor trailers**.

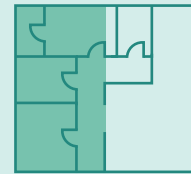
The new design will show up about **249,100 times** in the new carpet, not counting the background "relief" pattern.



○ = 1,000



These days, in the average 3-bedroom, 2,400 square foot home, about half the flooring is carpet. The PDX installation could cover about **467 homes**.



■ = Carpet
 □ = 5 homes



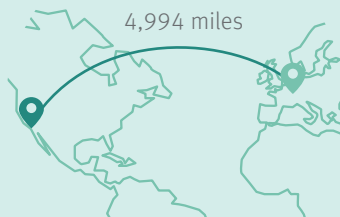
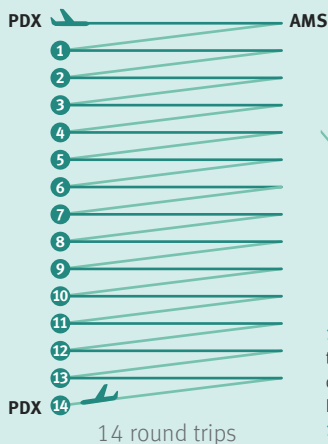
The total weight of the new carpet will be **331,000 pounds**, about the same as the takeoff weight of two Airbus A320s (the maximum takeoff weight of an A320 is approximately 162,000 pounds).



331,000 pounds



The most popular "carpet pattern" item sold in the PDX terminal Made in Oregon store is socks. At **\$20 a pair!**



142,000 miles of yarn will be used to make the new carpet. If you tied one end to the tail of the Delta Air Lines A330 that flies from Portland to Amsterdam, the plane could make **14 round trips** before running out of yarn!

