

# Boutsen Aviation

A little flair, a lot of substance



Thierry Boutsen has gone from a mechanical-engineering degree to Formula 1 racing to aircraft brokerage. Earning the university degree was not really his idea, but rather part of a deal with his father for permission to race. In the end, it has served him well, first with race cars and now in the world of aviation. From the dazzling Principality of Monaco, Boutsen and his team guide international customers through the complexities of aircraft sales.

The Boutsen Aviation team (left to right): Laura Kuti, assistant; Karim Hijazi, Middle-East sales; Dominique Trinquet, president; Daniela Boutsen, president of Boutsen Design; Thierry Boutsen, chairman and founder; Katia Selier, assistant to the management; Victor Roinson, sales; Timothée Marcie, sales; and Mathieu Pezin, executive vice-president



## Things in Monaco tend to have a bit of flair.

Monaco is a city that is both seamless and wildly juxtapositional. Architecture of one century gives way to that of another century in a moment. The beauty of the Belle Époque architecture is almost overwhelming. Interesting small buildings can be found around every corner. Large buildings constructed during decades not known for their aesthetic are also scattered about, bringing some cacophony to the urban landscape.

Monaco is the most densely populated country in the world. The community was begun on “The Rock,” which juts out into the Mediterranean and features the Prince’s Palace, Saint Nicholas Cathedral and the Oceanographic Museum. The principality grew and then shrunk and now makes up a whopping 2.02 square kilometers – 4.4 kilometers in length and less than 2 kilometers at its widest point. It is the second smallest city-state, larger than only than the Vatican.

About 30 percent of Monaco’s residents are millionaires. In the spring, the big yachts arrive, back from the Caribbean. Parking in front of the casino resembles a Maserati convention. Housing is the most expensive in the world.

Things in Monaco tend to have a bit of flair, and Thierry Boutsen has his. He used to be a Formula 1 driver. The car he drove in 1989 hangs on the wall of the entryway to Boutsen Aviation. The trophies from his three Grand Prix wins stand in his office.

Before going to university to get a degree in mechanical engineering, Boutsen had done some work on business jets as a mechanic. When he had enough money, in 1988, he bought his first aircraft, a Piper Cheyenne II. He then moved on to a Learjet 35A, and then a Cessna Citation ISP. He always flew and managed his own aircraft.

He took his friend, fellow Formula 1 driver Heinz Harald Frenzen, along on ski trips and such in his Citation. In

1997, Frenzen decided he wanted a plane of his own. He did not know where to find an aircraft, or how to register and operate it. Boutsen had about ten years of experience doing these things for himself, so Frenzen asked him to broker the deal.

Boutsen helped Frenzen buy a Cessna Citation. A couple of months later, a Formula 1 team owner asked Boutsen for help selling his aircraft.

In order to make these deals, Boutsen founded Boutsen Aviation together with his wife Daniela. She was more the business person, he the sportsman. He was still racing at the time. She was glad to end her days as a “decorative plant” next to her racer husband and get back to work.

Boutsen had met Daniela in Berlin, at a gala event for the Golden Steering Wheel Award. Daniela had grown up in West Berlin, and she had wanted to study art. She was not able to go to art school, so instead she apprenticed at the Royal Porcelain Factory in Berlin. She worked in various departments of the elite company, founded in 1763, and fell in love with material.

In order to afford her own apartment during the apprenticeship, she had also worked for event companies. When she finished the apprenticeship, she started her own business, helping companies organize events for trade shows. She soon had the second-largest such business in West Berlin, with clients such as Audi, Porsche and Grundig.

When she was introduced to Boutsen, she had no idea he was a racer. He gave her his card. She had it on the desk at her office, and her male secretary said, “You met Thierry Boutsen?!” She put the card away. Formula 1 racers were skirt chasers.

Boutsen called her – day after day, week after week. He even began learning German. He sent flowers. He offered to come and pick her up in his Citation. She held out.



The Principality of Monaco (top).  
Thierry Boutsen after winning the 1989 Canadian Grand Prix (bottom left).  
A young Boutsen in his Formula 1 days (bottom right)





Thierry and Daniela Boutsen (left). Boutsen during his ten years in Formula 1 (middle). Monaco's Casino de Monte-Carlo during the Grand Prix (right)

## Thierry seems to have quite some tenacity.

Then they both ended up at a series of Audi events. She finally agreed to go out for a meal with him, and they have been inseparable ever since.

Thierry seems to have quite some tenacity, and this has served him well over the years. It was no doubt important to his racing success. It also helped him to start in a new business.

He faced some adversity when he began the aviation business. He had flown and operated his own aircraft. He had also done the stint as a business-jet mechanic. But he had not been "in aviation." He had not studied business. He was a racer.

So he learned the aircraft one by one, applying his engineering background. The first deals he did involved aircraft similar to those he had owned. Then he began to branch out.

He read about business. He watched others in the industry, picking up their methods and learning from their mistakes.

He is very much a "do it right or not at all" kind of guy. This may come from

his engineering background. Or it may be why he chose engineering.

He is precision oriented. He wants to have as much information as possible as he goes into a deal, and he puts a lot of emphasis on the pre-purchase inspection. "Whether we are representing the buyer or the seller, we want the plane to be as scrutinized as possible," he says. "We want both the buyer and the seller to truly understand the object of the transaction."

Boutsen brings aircraft to Jet Aviation for this pre-purchase inspection. In 2010, he also brought two new Airbus 319s to Jet Aviation Basel for completions, on behalf of a client.

As he first built up his business, Boutsen's clients all came from the Formula 1 world. Then, in 1999, after he had brokered ten deals, he made the transition to working with clients outside this world. The next year, he brokered the sale of the Falcon 20 of Monaco's Prince Ranier III. He was approached with the commission. "Monaco is small," he says, "everyone knows everyone."

It cannot have hurt that Prince Ranier III was a huge car-racing fan. A Monaco museum displays part of his 100-car collection. The Monaco Grand Prix is one of the most-watched sporting events in the world.

### THE RACING LIFE

A large painting of a comic-strip panel hangs in Thierry's office, showing a Formula 1 racer looking back over his shoulder and thinking, "I was wrong to worry about it." This is Michel Vaillant, created by the French cartoonist Jean Graton. Thierry read these comics growing up.

Valliant is a true hero – courageous, kind, helpful, generous and a very good racer. He fights a bad guy, the Leader, who attempts to dominate the motor industry using special powers he learned from the Buddhist monks that raised him.

The Vaillant adventures that Boutsen read as a child represent an earlier era in comics, and a different era in rac-

ing. There are many good things about past days in racing that Boutsen feels have been lost.

"There was a human side to Formula 1 that does not exist anymore," he says. "We drivers would sometimes go out together, we would eat together. We were doing sports together. But today drivers are like machines, because of the amount of new technology."

Drivers used to give a lot of feedback about how a car was performing. Engineers would then make changes, the drivers would take the car out and test it, and then the drivers would give input again. As an engineer, Boutsen had some advantages in this process.

Today engineers get so much data from sensors that this is not necessary. Cars need to be adapted to a given track, and with all the data now available, engineers can largely do this without the drivers.

"There used to be different winners at every race," says Boutsen. "Today with the second-best car, you can never win. The driver cannot compensate anymore."

There is one clear advantage that has come from new technologies and regulations. There has only been one Formula 1 fatality since Ayrton Senna's fatal crash in 1994. Senna was Thierry's best friend in the racing world, and he would have been the godfather of Thierry's second child.

The one race that Boutsen still attends, as a spectator, is the Monaco Grand Prix. He says it is the toughest and most exciting of the Formula 1 races. The course is all on city streets, with climbs and tight turns. There are guard rails running along the whole course.

He drove it ten times, but it was not a lucky course for him. Several times, when he was doing well, a piece came flying off his car, or something else broke.

Thierry left his native Belgium and moved to Monaco in 1984, after his second year of Formula 1 racing. He stopped racing Formula 1 in 1993, at the age of 36, and gave up racing altogether in 1999, shortly after a bad crash at Le Mans.

### A WIDE SEARCH

**There are a relatively small number of aircraft in the world, and brokers have access to data bases that provide information on all of them. When Boutsen Aviation receives an exclusive mandate from a client to purchase an aircraft, the brokers do not just look at aircraft for sale. They look at all aircraft of the desired model that are registered anywhere in the world and they approach owners of those that they think would be a good fit for their client. Executive Vice-President Mathieu Pezin repeats the old adage, "Virtually everything is for sale, it depends on the price."**



An Airbus A319, brokered by Boutsen, completed by Jet Aviation Basel (above). Facing page: The Boutsen Design showroom in Monaco (top left). The bedroom of the A319 brought to Jet Aviation by Boutson Aviation (bottom left). The Monaco Yacht Club dining room decorated by Boutsen Design (right)



## HELICOPTERS

**Mathieu Pezin handles helicopter transactions at Boutsen Aviation. He does about two per year.**

**He says that only a very small percentage of the world's helicopter sales are VIP. Most helicopters have commercial uses such as fire fighting, medical evacuation, military, police, taxi services and transportation for the oil-and-gas industry.**

**He says that when VIPs do own helicopters, they often fly the aircraft themselves. According to Pezin, helicopters are rarely a business tool for individuals. Instead, they are often part of a progression – business jet, yacht, helicopter.**

He serves as a consultant to the Group GT3 Boutsen Team, which he built up with his sister and her husband, to encourage a new generation of racers in Belgium. He is also on the board of the Jean Graton Foundation, determined to keep alive the stories that first drew him into racing.

The racing is still part of his identity, but he is glad to be out of the racing world, alive and healthy. He says he enjoys aircraft brokerage just as much as he enjoyed racing.

## GROWING

Up until 2000, Boutsen had mostly been helping clients buy and sell small jets. They were the kind of aircraft he knew from his personal experience. Once solidly in aircraft brokerage full-time, he began studying the larger jets – Challengers, Falcons, Gulfstreams – one by one. He was moving things up a notch in his business, and he was doing it with an engineer's penchant for analysis and detail.

In late 2000, he hired Dominique Trinquet, who had been an airline pilot, then a business jet pilot, before moving into aircraft brokerage in France. In 2002, Mathieu Pezin joined the team. He had studied aviation management and flight technology in the US, planning to become a pilot for a US airline, but when the rules for foreign pilots in the US changed after the September 11 attacks, the Frenchman readjusted his career path. Pezin is now executive vice-president of Boutsen Aviation, and Trinquet is president.

The sales force is growing. There are two additional salesmen in the Monaco office, and one based in the United

Arab Emirates. All Boutsen salesmen are pilots. And they all go through a long learning process. Aircraft deals are complex, often much more so than people realize before they begin.

Once an aircraft purchase is complete, Boutsen and his team will get the aircraft registered and organize any changes that need to be made for the new jurisdiction. "There will be something you need to do on the aircraft to make it legal," he says. Even within France, for example, there are four different regulatory authorities, with four sets of rules.

Boutsen Aviation will also oversee refurbishment and help the client find an aircraft operator. In 2008, the company brokered the purchase of two new Airbus A319 aircraft. These are the two aircraft that were brought to Jet Aviation in 2010 for refurbishment.

The customer later asked Daniela Boutsen if she could take care of the loose items for the aircraft. She coordinated tableware, cushions, vases and other elements. She enjoyed the experience and found it tied together many elements of her past. It seemed that she had arrived at something promising.

She founded Boutsen Design and spent the next year assessing suppliers. She visited them to see how they made their products. She also spoke to flight operators and flight crews to understand what they needed on an aircraft. She wanted to be helpful not only with design, but also with the question of what should be on an aircraft in the first place.

"We recommend the exact items that you need onboard," she says. "People often buy far too much."

Boutsen Design has its storefront and offices right across the street from Boutsen Aviation. It is its own company, and Daniela is president. Boutsen Design now has 14 employees. The pace has picked up in recent years, and there is a lot of traveling involved.

This means the Boutsen household requires quite some coordination, because Thierry travels often as well. He says trust is an essential part of the aircraft brokerage business, and he believes that face-to-face contact is vital for this. He meets every customer personally.

He estimates that only about half of the people who come to him wanting to buy an airplane have accurate knowl-

edge of which aircraft would be best for them. Taking the time to get to know customers, and understand their culture, makes it possible for him to make valuable suggestions.

Boutsen Aviation has sold 335 aircraft, in 51 countries. Thierry speaks five languages, and among the whole team, there are ten languages spoken. Everyone seems to speak amazing English, maybe partially because of their pilot backgrounds.

Boutsen says that when he was racing for Formula 1, he traveled often, but when he got to a place, he would go from the airport to the race course, and then back. He figures he only got to see five or ten square kilometers of most places. And he was always with the same people.

He was surprised, when he stopped racing and went into the aviation business full time how the world opened up. "There are many special people of different cultures, and different ways of doing business," he says. "What I discovered when I went into aircraft sales is how large the world is."

**BOUTSEN  
DESIGN**

THE FINE ART OF DECORATION

The Monaco-based company currently works with 140 brands. Sometimes president Daniela Boutsen orders existing products, and other times, she has custom pieces created to fit colors and patterns found in an aircraft interior.

Over the years, she has learned how to make maximum use of minimum space, as well as how to organize a variety of small details to improve a passenger's experience. She has clients think about how they want to do food service onboard – which part of the aircraft, how often, which style. And this, of course, has to do with who will be on the aircraft and how far it will fly. Ultimately, it has a lot to do with truly understanding the lifestyle of those who will be onboard.

Boutsen Design also works on yachts and residences. Daniela Boutsen says that yachts are somewhat similar to aircraft in that you have limited space and certain regulatory requirements. When it comes to homes, she enjoys the freedom from these restrictions. At a kind of meeting point of these two activities, Boutsen decorated the dining room at the Yacht Club de Monaco in which Prince Albert usually dines.