

deSter puts glassware at center of premium cabin strategy

This is a special feature from the [September 2026 IFSA Global EXPO issue](#) of *PAX International*, on [page 50](#).



Caroline Blomme, Director, Product & Client Strategy, Premium Cabin, deSter

Designing onboard drinkware requires more than aesthetics. [deSter](#)'s in-house design and innovation team deStudio combines design, engineering and product development to create cabin-ready solutions that are tested against galley constraints, wash cycles and weight requirements before entering service.

As part of gategroup, deSter draws on operational insight from catering and cabin service, ensuring products are designed for efficiency, durability and large-scale performance.

Caroline Blomme, Director, Product & Client Strategy, Premium Cabin at deSter, tells *PAX International* that this approach is most evident in premium tableware and glassware.

Rethinking small touchpoints

On a typical galley loading plan, glassware may appear to be a small detail. But in the premium cabin,

it is one of the objects passengers touch and photograph most often. This creates a clear imbalance, with drinkware often representing a minimal share of the budget, while carrying a significant share of perceived quality, Blomme explains.

Airlines continue to invest in premium dining, curated wine programs, chef partnerships and onboard hospitality concepts. Yet the vessel that delivers those experiences to the passenger can be specified late in the process, adapted from hospitality ranges and evaluated primarily on unit price.

For deSter, that is where the opportunity begins. Cabin conditions change how passengers experience food and beverages. At altitude, low humidity, cabin pressure and even background noise can suppress sweetness, reduce aroma perception and alter flavor. The product has not changed, but the environment has. Bowl diameter, headspace, rim diameter and taper all influence how aroma concentrates, how liquid reaches the palate and how long volatile compounds are retained.



At altitude, cabin conditions change how beverages are perceived, making the shape and design of glassware an important part of preserving aroma, flavor and the overall sensory experience

Beyond champagne

Wine and champagne remain important parts of the premium cabin experience, but Blomme notes the underleveraged opportunities are in the moments that repeat.

“Coffee and tea are served three to five times on a long-haul sector; champagne perhaps twice. That frequency makes them the highest-value touchpoints per item loaded,” she says.

Pre-departure drinks, specialty coffee and night-flight tea service each create moments where

drinkware can support a more deliberate experience.

“The test we apply is simple: an occasion justifies dedicated drinkware when the design changes the ritual. How the drink is poured, presented and held, not only how it looks in a photograph,” Blomme explains.

Brand through form

For airlines, drinkware can also help connect the service to a wider brand identity. But Blomme says that connection should come through shape, material reference and coherence, rather than obvious decoration.

“Printed logos and applied motifs are the weakest branding tools available: they wear under industrial dishwashing, add cost and tend to read as corporate rather than crafted,” she says. “Form language, proportion, weight balance, base geometry, the rim details a passenger feels on every sip survives thousands of wash cycles and communicates far more precisely.”

Destination storytelling can also be expressed in subtle ways, such as a cut pattern inspired by regional craftsmanship or a silhouette that echoes a cultural reference. Blomme says literal imagery dates quickly, while form and proportion remain relevant for years.

Coherence across the full drinkware family matters as well. When one design language carries through sparkling wine, cocktails, coffee and tea, the service feels intentional. When pieces have accumulated over successive tenders, passengers may not be able to explain the difference, but they can sense it, Blomme shares.



Though a small line item in airline service budgets, premium-cabin glassware is a highly visible touchpoint that can leave a lasting impression on passengers

Designing without complexity

Premium cabins are becoming more individualized, but airlines still need to manage loading,

forecasting, replacement stock and galley space. For Blomme, less is more.

A well-proportioned stemless glass, she says, can serve sparkling wine, still wine and cocktails. A single bowl shape in two sizes can support both coffee and tea service. The passenger perceives differentiation through timing, presentation and accompaniment, rather than through a higher item count.

The galley remains central to this thinking. Nesting behavior, compatibility with standard drawer inserts and secure stacking help determine whether a collection works in practice. A collection that fits existing stowage without custom inserts removes a significant operational barrier before it arises.

Lifecycle decisions

Sustainability is now part of nearly every premium cabin conversation, but for drinkware, Blomme says there are two main considerations.

“Lifecycle impact is dominated by two variables: how many service cycles a product survives, and how much it weighs,” she says. “A glass that survives twice as many cycles roughly halves the manufacturing and logistics impact per use. And every gram loaded flies on every sector.”

End-of-life handling is also becoming a standard tender consideration, favoring mono-material constructions that can enter recycling streams cleanly. The same logic applies commercially. A lighter, more durable product can reduce cost across the cabin cycle while also supporting sustainability goals.

Design meets reality

For deSter, designing premium cabin drinkware extends well beyond creating a strong first impression. With cabin concepts typically remaining in service for seven to 10 years, each collection must be designed to feel as relevant at the end of its lifecycle as it does at launch. Achieving that longevity means grounding each design in timeless proportions while introducing contemporary character through subtle details, such as rim finishes, base geometry and weight distribution, that stand the test of time.

“Premium drinkware decisions are lifecycle decisions,” Blomme says. “The glass a passenger lifts is the visible end of a chain that runs through crew handling, galley space, wash cycles, replacement rates and fleet weight. Collections designed with that whole chain in mind deliver the strongest brand experience and hold it from launch to the next cabin refresh.”