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Mesmerizing Photos From Inside The European Space Agency

Astronauts are just as awesome across the pond. Documenting the space-going culture of the lesser-known space agency.

Rocket launches and epic views of Earth might get more attention from other photographers, but [Edgar Martins](http://www.edgarmartins.com/) (<http://www.edgarmartins.com/>) is just as interested in the more mundane details of spaceflight, like how old training facilities look, or where spacesuits are stored when they're not in use.

For two years, following a lifelong obsession with space that led to his giant collection of sci-fi movies and astronaut memorabilia, Martins has been painstakingly documenting every aspect of the European Space Agency, the sprawling equivalent of NASA for 20 European countries.



Astronaut dressing room, Yuri Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre (Star City, Russia). Photos by © Edgar Martins ([//www.fastcompany.com/person/edgar-martins](http://www.fastcompany.com/person/edgar-martins)), Courtesy of the artist, The European Space Agency

Martins went from launch sites to jet propulsion labs to robotics departments, seeing places that few non-rocket scientists have ever visited. In Star City, Russia, he spent the night at a center where astronauts are sometimes quarantined before and after flights. In the Netherlands, he went in the Large Space Simulator, which he says "was like walking into a porthole to a different dimension."

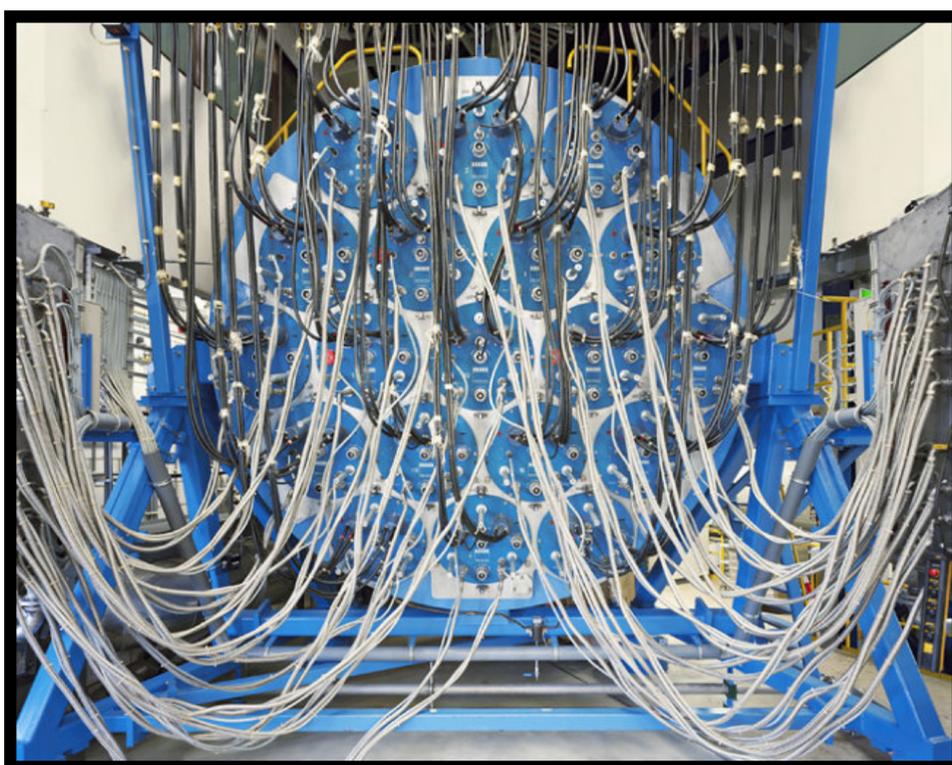
The photos focus as much on the personal side of space exploration as the technology. Martins read astronauts' mission journals, and looked through storage rooms. "I photographed all sorts of weird and wonderful things," he says. "I was curious to understand the symbolism of these items, as well as to find out what they actually comprised, so ESA put me in touch with several of their astronauts."

One of the things he discovered was a cassette tape labeled "[Cosmonaut Song](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EYK-sNNgce8)" (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EYK-sNNgce8>), from a bag of mementos astronaut Jean François Clervoy took into space. Clervoy explained why he had the tape:

I had taught this song in Russian to my American crew mates with the intent to sing it in front of our Russian friends on board Mir. We were so busy that we thought about it only just after undocking, and finally sang it over the VHF radio so that the Mir crew could hear it, a few hundred feet away.

"These photographs provide the project a human dimension," Martins says.

Martins is equally interested in bigger issues about the future of space exploration at a time when it's becoming increasingly privatized and commercialized.



Large Space Simulator Sun Basement, ESTEC/ESA (Noordwijk, Holland). Photos by © Edgar Martins, Courtesy of the artist, The European Space Agency

"Working on the theme at hand for a period of almost two years reasserted my belief that space exploration programs are of the utmost importance to the development of science, technology, engineering, education, medicine as well as variety of other programs at all levels of life," he says.

"These have vital economic benefits, often inspiring novel, spin-off technologies. I was able to photograph a myriad of technology which will have similar applications in the future."

Over the next four years, the photos will travel in a series of events, as audiences learn about everything from microgravity to the magnetic field.

[Photos by © Edgar Martins, Courtesy of the artist, The European Space Agency]



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