

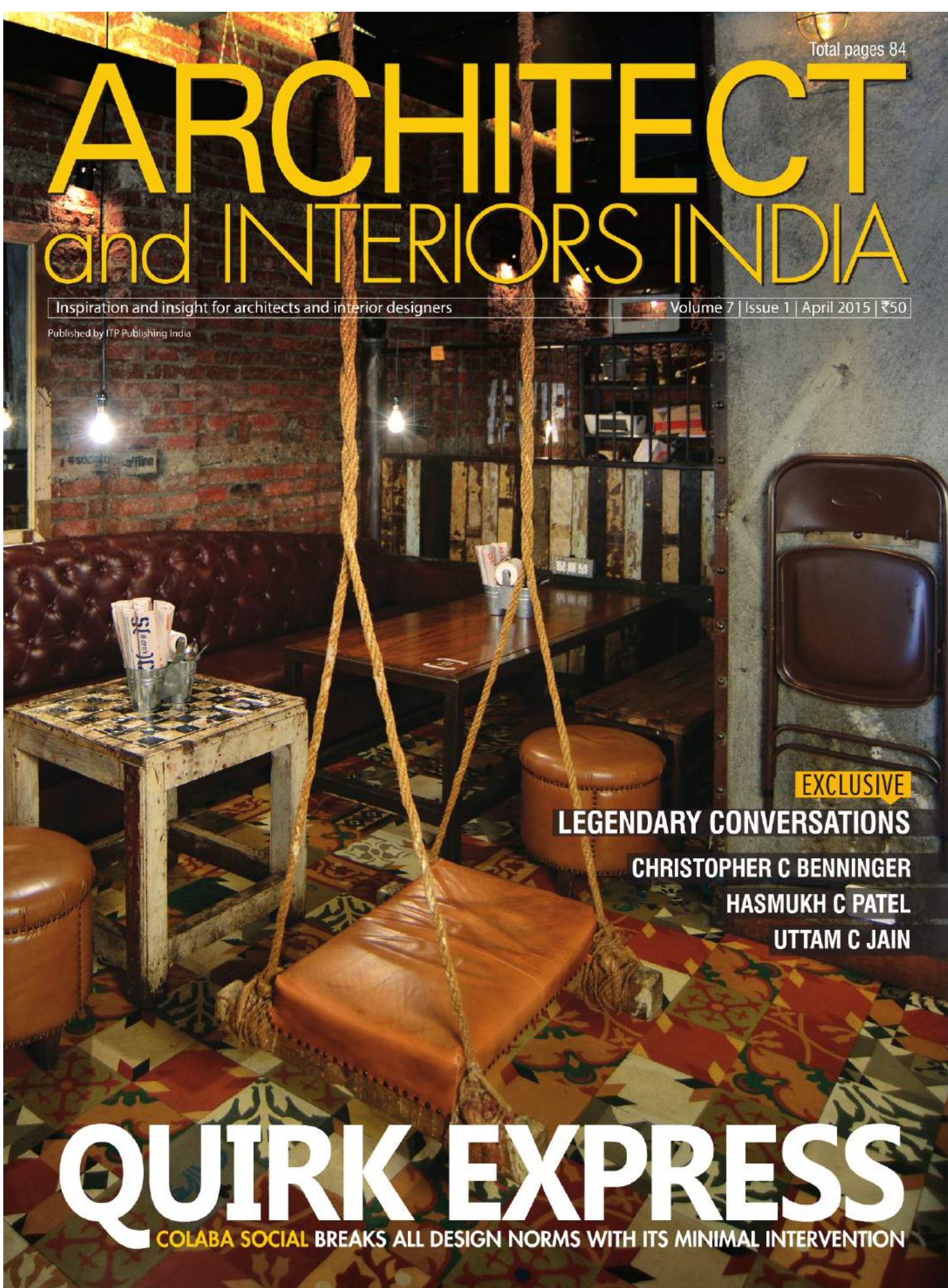
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# ARCHITECT and INTERIORS INDIA

Inspiration and insight for architects and interior designers

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**EXCLUSIVE**

**LEGENDARY CONVERSATIONS**

**CHRISTOPHER C BENNINGER**

**HASMUKH C PATEL**

**UTTAM C JAIN**

# QUIRK EXPRESS

COLABA SOCIAL BREAKS ALL DESIGN NORMS WITH ITS MINIMAL INTERVENTION

## 60-SECOND INTERVIEW

DIEGO GRONDA, MANAGING & CREATIVE DIRECTOR,  
ROCKWELL GROUP EUROPE

Virgin Hotels, the lifestyle hotel brand by Virgin Group founder Sir Richard Branson, has collaborated with award-winning design firm, Rockwell Group Europe, on its first property – Virgin Hotels Chicago. Creative director of Rockwell Group, Diego Gronda talks about how the hotel breaks away from traditional hospitality design to create a space that reflects the famous brand.

**What are the distinctive features of Virgin Hotel Chicago?**

Some of the key features include guest room corridors, which provide a sense of entering a private residence from the street, with wall lamps reminiscent of street lighting and British townhouse-inspired front doors in Virgin's signature red. The quirky porcelain statue of a dog signifies pet-friendly rooms – canine friends are welcome here. In the hotel, the most striking public space is the 6,120sq-ft Commons Club on the first floor, which integrates several other spaces.

**How were historic elements incorporated into your contemporary design?**

The hotel is located in the Old Dearborn Bank Building, an impressive 1920s art deco landmark designed by the accomplished Chicago architects, the Rapp brothers. Significant architectural features were restored. Adding warmth and character are the beautiful 1920s oak Cigar Bar that serves as the hotel's front desk, ornate brass elevator doors and the intricately-ornamented, double-heighted plaster ceiling in the Commons Club. About 75% of the original, highly-ornamented coffered plaster ceiling in the Commons Club had been destroyed, and great efforts went into restoring this stellar feature.

**What innovative features were included in the guest room design?**

We renounced the standard floor plan by dividing each room into two distinctive spaces, the dressing room and the lounge, separated by customised wood-sliding doors. Given a 300sq-ft standard room, guests enjoy more flexibility, privacy and user-friendly amenities. The dressing-room also serves as a buffer between the sleeping chambers and the hallway, minimising the impact of any noise that could permeate.

A highlight is the patent-pending Lounge Bed that we have designed in collaboration with Virgin Hotels. The idea was to analyse how guests really use their hotel bed, to optimise its design and create a focal point for the room. More people work, read news or check email in bed on their handheld devices – so we decided to engineer a bed that is particularly well-suited to such activities. Additionally, we custom-designed other room features to provide versatility and comfort, such as the pivoting round table with a surface that can be pulled outward in any direction. The sit-down make-up vanity, with its own backlit mirror, and the shower with a built-in bench are geared towards a growing segment of female business travellers.

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