

# Hospitality Interiors

HOTEL, RESTAURANT, BAR & CLUB INTERIORS

## FEATURES

Flooring | Bathroom design | Outdoor furniture

## PROJECTS

The Bell, Ticehurst | Radisson Blu Aqua, Chicago

Rocco Forte Abu Dhabi | Rizon Jet Lounge

Villa Honegg | River Cottage Canteen & Deli

Hilton Vienna Danube | W Paris Opera

## INTERVIEWS

Diego Gronda | Rebecca James

Issue 39 | Jan-Feb 2012



RAK Ceramics complements chic design at  
Radisson Edwardian Heathrow Hotel's Bijou Bar



## Diego Gronda

Rockwell Europe

*How and when did you make your start in the creative world and what was your first project?*

It was a Frank Lloyd Wright exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum that inspired me to become an architect. I was 17 years old. Before I even finished university at the University of Buenos Aires, I had set up a design firm. I was very fortunate with my first international commission, the International Finance Corporation headquarters (World Bank), which paved the way for many more projects to work on.

I then moved to New York, got a combined Masters in Architecture and Social Studies at the New School, and then joined an architecture and design firm as creative director that took me around the globe designing high end concepts, before landing at Rockwell Group to expand their international scope.

*What philosophies motivate your design work?*

At the core of every project is our desire to connect to people emotionally through design. I also believe very deeply in immersing myself in every culture I travel to and work in, so that the context of every surrounding landscape seeps into my visual language.

One of the great joys of working all over the globe is being able to celebrate and highlight so many diverse vocabularies and cultures. Diversity is my drive and inspiration.

*Describe a typical week as creative director of Rockwell Group Europe.*

I am lucky enough to work with a fantastic team of eclectic locals and expats at Rockwell Group Europe. Every day we brainstorm, sketch and fine tune things together. Many weeks also consist of travel – you name it: Paris, Mumbai, Buenos Aires, New York, Bangkok. But a treasured moment is always taking the time to have a lunch break at a cafe in Madrid around my office, a very necessary and treasured part of my day, if I can fit it in. As a team, we work very hard to service every client around the globe. Our morning starts with a conference call with Asia, Middle East next, Europe in the early afternoon, and by the end of the day, America.

*What are you currently working on?*

We are working on a whole array of projects all over the world, including Gordon Ramsay's restaurants in Doha, Qatar; The Westin Palace in Madrid; the Arts Hotel (Ritz Carlton) in Barcelona; Ritz Carlton South Beach; W Hotel in Oman; Nobu Hotel Riyadh; the Prince Hotel in Tokyo; and the Taj Mahal Palace and Tower, Mumbai to mention a few on the hospitality side.

We are also building high-end residential projects in Bangkok and China and upscale entertainment projects in Bangkok. We have just finished an 850,000ft<sup>2</sup> office building in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Last but not least, of course, W Paris-Opéra has just opened its doors.

*Which three figures from history would you most like to have worked with and why?*

I have always had a fascination for Leonardo Da Vinci. His renaissance approach seduces me the most. He was a man who designed air machines and modern forts while painting masterpieces or researching the human body. His curiosity of the unknown is a quality I try to pursue on a regular basis.

I have always admired Fernando II of Aragón and Isabel I of Castilla. The couple got married after only 18 years in this world, yet in less than 30 years they changed the world. They financed Columbus, discovered and soon after expanded their territories to create one of the largest

empires in the world. Once again, their way of thinking was what helped move from the Middle Ages into modern times.

I admire how they used architecture and urbanism to organise new communities all over the American continent. Their curiosity made them reach great discoveries in many diverse areas. They were the most driven couple I have ever read about. This is another virtue I admire in them.

If I extend this curiosity and proactivity to the 20th century, I would like to highlight people such as Carlo Scarpa, Le Courbousier, Herzog & de Meuron and Marc Newson. Their curiosity outside of their fields is what made/makes them so special to me.

*Looking at current trends in hospitality design, is design becoming too homogenised and how does that affect the user-experience?*

There are so many different kinds of design going on out there, that it's hard for me to make an umbrella statement about it.

There is good design and bad design and everything in between, and people who feel very differently about what falls into each category. I love that design continues to pervade people's day-to-day lives, and plays an ever-growing role in our culture. For us, the user-experience is a foundation for our work, and is something designers should never lose sight of.

*How would you characterise good hospitality interior design?*

Good design for me is about relevance, a point of view, thoughtfulness and awareness. Every design challenge should be a new start. Every problem is different. Every client deserves it.

*Which five fantasy guests would you invite to dinner and why?*

The late Steve Jobs for his vision based on the end-user's experience – he was way more than technology.

The late Jacques Derrida for his vision and deconstruction of the world we live in.

HH Sheikha Moza bint Nasser for her vision to bring Qatar to the centre of the world. I admire her international vision that never loses perspectives of its local reality. Her vision is changing Qatar society by means of culture, medicine, architecture and heritage.

The artist Anish Kapoor. His sculpture and spatial philosophy is of great inspiration to me.

The journalist Thomas Friedman to MC the dinner.