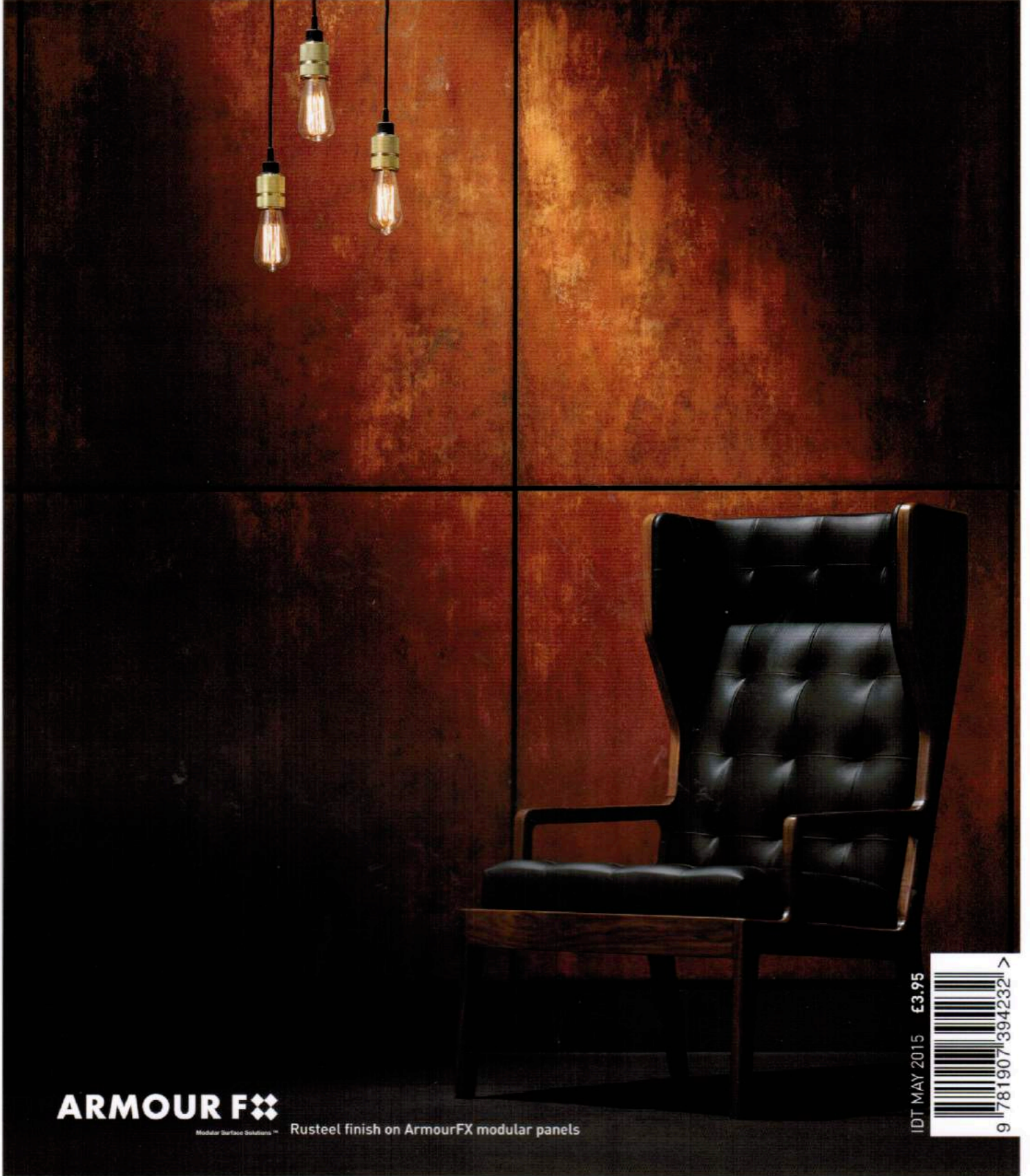


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FROM THE EDITOR

WELCOME TO THE MAY 2015 EDITION OF INTERIOR DESIGN TODAY MAGAZINE,
BRITAIN'S OLDEST MAGAZINE FOR PROFESSIONAL INTERIOR DESIGNERS.



WELCOME to the May edition of Interior Design Today. This issue contains our hotly anticipated Hotel Design feature. Woven throughout the pages are hot product designs and even hotter projects, serving as lessons in spectacular hospitality design. Take, for instance, our entries in the Project Gallery. Tara Bernerd and her team have worked tirelessly to bring SIXTY SoHo back to life. It conforms to her usual slick brand of 'rough luxury', with all a manner of furnishings layered upon one another in a cool, relaxed and deeply luxurious vibe. Head over to Paris and you will see the artistic flair of Gilles & Boissier running through the very veins of the Chess Hotel, a game of juxtaposition, using Parisian roots with unexpected delights to create a lavish hotel fable style hotel. One of our main features takes time to explore the new Virgin Hotel, Chicago. Diego Gronda is on hand to guide us through the design, with that global Virgin flavour just sprinkled through the space for the final flourish of clever branding mixed with strong design. With several exhibitions on the horizon, including the now global MAISON ET OBJET, we prepare for these shows with a preview of the May Design Series. Pages 54 – 59 offer an insight into what you can expect from your trip.

Thomas Griem is on the Designer Profile pedestal – I had a wonderful discussion with Thomas about his varied design education and the appreciation of great lecturers in the design world. Thomas has worked on some truly magnificent projects (including the St Pancras residence, as pictured in the feature) and we discuss where his inspiration has come from. Product highlights include spotlight features on Kitchen Design and Furnishings, Fabrics + Textiles.

Before I sign off I'd just like to declare my new obsession after finally downloading the app – Houzz. It's addictive, my 'ideasbook' is full to bursting with edited snippets of design ideas, for no other reason than because I like collecting pretty pictures. I suggest you all download it immediately.

Jade

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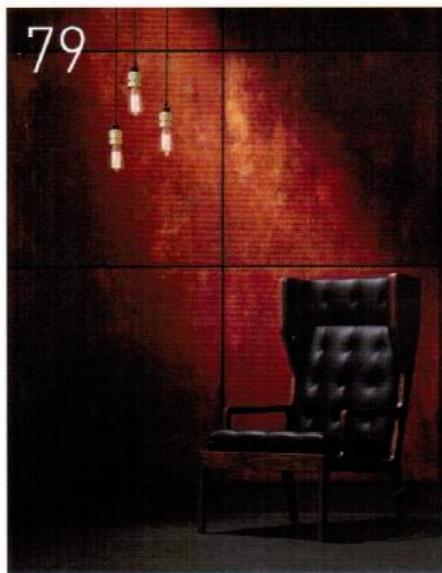
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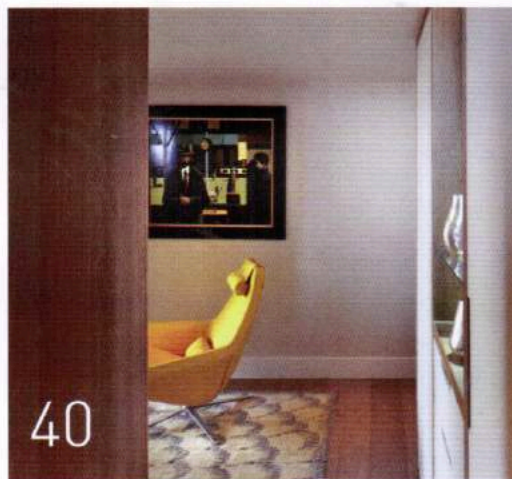
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STYLE LANDING

DIEGO GRONDA, ROCKWELL GROUP EUROPE, SHARES HIS INSIGHT INTO WORKING WITH VIRGIN, THAT VIBRANT SPLASH OF RED AND THE NEW EXPERIENCE CREATED FOR TRAVELLERS TO CHICAGO



ROCKWELL GROUP EUROPE HAS COMPLETED THE INTERIOR DESIGN OF VIRGIN HOTEL CHICAGO FOR SIR RICHARD BRANSON'S VIRGIN HOTEL DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING THE HOTEL'S 250 GUESTROOMS, 40 ONE BEDROOM SUITES, AND TWO ROCK STAR SUITES; THE COMMONS CLUB; TWO VIBRANT RESTAURANTS; AND THE SPA.

Having opened in January 2015, Virgin Hotel Chicago aims to offer travellers a comfortable and efficient home away from home with a simple and modern feel, featuring a contemporary style that is sophisticated and elegant, yet understated. The 26-story hotel is housed in the Old Dearborn Bank building in downtown Chicago, an intricately ornamented 1920s landmark originally designed by Rapp and Rapp.

The interior design was undertaken by Rockwell Group Europe, led by Diego Gronda, Managing & Creative Director, Rockwell Group Europe. Here,

Diego details the design highlights, including working with an enigmatic and exuberant brand such as Virgin.

HOW DID ROCKWELL GROUP EUROPE COME TO WORK WITH VIRGIN HOTELS INITIALLY?

Getting this commission was an exercise of perseverance. In 2004, when I was a Principal and Creative Director at Rockwell Group in New York, I met Richard Branson to discuss a high-end hospitality project that was going to be located in upstate New York. I was fascinated by how different he saw luxury hospitality. It was my first encounter with Virgin's vision of a new kind of hospitality experience – one that is defined in non-glitzy terms and breaks the classic, traditional codes. But this particular project remained on the drawing board, and I moved to Madrid in 2005 to start Rockwell Group Europe. Several years later, Virgin set out to create an entirely new brand with Virgin Hotels. I was interested in this project right away and,

without really being asked, put together a team in Madrid to develop some ideas around design and technology, and to start defining the brand's audience. Somewhat impulsively, we flew to New York to present these ideas to the new Virgin team. About one year later, they contacted us in Madrid to see if we were interested in taking on the design of the first Virgin Hotel property in Chicago, and that's when we really got involved.

WHAT WAS YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE BRAND, PRIOR TO WORKING WITH THEM?

Virgin likes to push the boundaries and is not afraid to try things differently to satisfy their customers. They also recognise the potential of smart, functional design, so I was keen to work with them. It had been one of my dreams to design a hotel for Richard Branson that would redefine the guest experience. The challenge with this project was to create a new member of the Virgin brand family and to build on past successes while carving out an



identity for this new Virgin brand. We had to develop a design concept that was aligned with specific values that are key to Virgin, and the level of expectation was high. The hotel had to express Virgin's innovative and playful spirit, yet this was neither Virgin's exclusive Limited Edition nor Virgin Atlantic.

ONCE THE BRIEF WAS SET, WHAT WERE YOUR INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE PROJECT?

From the start, Virgin had a very clear, strong vision for the hotel brand. It was impressive, but they never approached us with a precise aesthetic vision nor asked for a certain interior style. Instead, they were really focused on the guest experience and how the staff would engage with customers. Once that direction was defined, we began to imagine the physical environment that would provide the setting for that experience. It was really a journey of discovery together with the client to determine what their guests at this hotel might really want and need and to produce a destination that would express the values that are key to Virgin. For us it was very much about creating comfortable and intuitive spaces with a casual, relaxed vibe and a sense of playfulness. There was an emphasis on integrating smart design features that would enhance the guest experience and make people's stay more pleasurable and fun.

HOW DOES THE VIRGIN HOTEL DIFFER TO ANY OTHER HOTEL OFFERING IN TERMS OF ITS DESIGN?

Many other hotel brands use design as a statement. Virgin's team, however, looked at design first and foremost from a functional point of view. The hotel should be a perfect machine where every special feature, piece of furniture, and electronic outlet is perfectly placed and has a distinct purpose. While the principles of functionality and comfort guided all of our design decisions, the notion of fun was never far behind. Our design had to be clever and witty yet any problem had to be solved in as simple a way as possible. Design was always discussed with operational aspects, functionality and a sense of humour in mind. The design of the first-ever Virgin Hotel was an exhilarating challenge that made us question pretty much everything we've created over the past twenty years. Take the most basic element of a hotel room: the bed. With Virgin, we brainstormed about the evolution of the bed and its function in the 21st century. Surely our habits of sleep, party and work have changed over time and we've become attached to a host of handheld devices. How might the design of a bed account for such changes? Virgin asked us to completely rethink the conventional hotel bed and its uses, which is how we came up with the iconic, patent-pending Lounge Bed.

Another interesting aspect of the hotel is that Virgin asked us to create a better experience for both male and female guests, accounting for couples and a growing number of female business travellers. This was such a refreshing point of view. Our challenge was to design spaces that would please both genders, which raised a lot of





Image left: A working area in the Sleeping Lounge features a custom rotating table, a leather Poltrona Frau Chair, and an Artemide LED task light. The wallpaper in dark grey felt with custom red stitching was exclusively designed for Virgin Hotels by Maya Romanoff. Image courtesy of Eric Laignel.

Image right: The Dressing Room features two large wardrobes by Poliform that provide ample shelving, hanging space, shoe storage, drawers, and a full-length mirror. Above the oversized vanity sink, a custom round, wood frame mirror with wall sconces adds a residential feel. Image courtesy of Virgin Hotels.

interesting questions, especially for the guest rooms. We added amenities such as two large wardrobes with ample shelving, hanging space, shoe storage, and drawers for his and her belongings, a separate make-up desk with its own backlit mirror and space for cosmetics, and a large shower with a built-in bench. The two-space room layout provides additional flexibility and privacy. These are subtle features that can greatly enhance someone's room experience, male or female.

HOW DID YOU CAPTURE THE SPIRIT OF VIRGIN?

I believe the spirit of Virgin is a spirit of innovation that's in constant flux and evolution. Those who expect a red hotel filled with Virgin logos will be disappointed. We didn't want to emphasise the brand in such a literal way, and while powerful when dealing with branding, the colour red can also be a source of stress. As a result, the use of Virgin's signature red throughout the hotel is subtle, almost minimalist, although we decided to

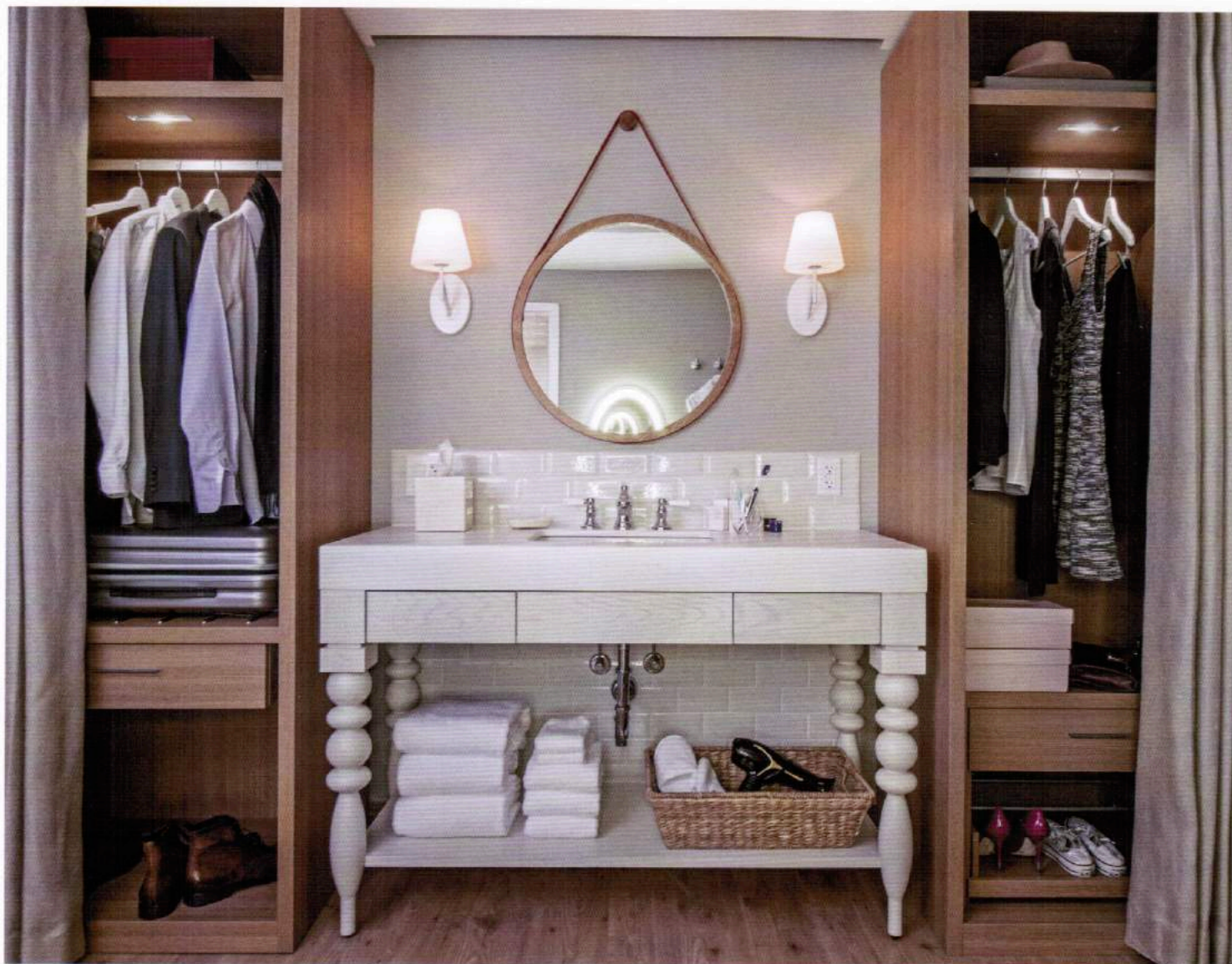
be bold in certain areas, like the staircase with the "red paint blob" area rug and the guestroom doors. More importantly, I think we captured the Virgin spirit by creating a comfortable and tech-forward environment with a casual, relaxed and playful vibe. This is an understated pied-à-terre distinguished by a contemporary, cosy and whimsical style. There are the guestroom corridors with wall lamps reminiscent of street lighting and British townhouse-inspired red front doors that set a residential mood and create an unexpected sense of arrival. The quirky porcelain statue of a dog marks pet-friendly rooms. The guest rooms, on the other hand, are held in a neutral palette of natural woods, grey, white and beige for the furniture and finishes, exuding an air of serenity. The iconic, patent-pending Lounge Bed again has the Virgin spirit deep inside its sheets. Another area that breathes the Virgin spirit is the 570 m² Commons Club on the first floor, which really blurs the lines between work and play. We

integrated different zones of activity into one seamless, dynamic spatial experience. Guests can use the library as their temporary office, meet in the lounge areas, party in the semi-private Shag Room, or enjoy a casual meal from the open kitchen.

HOW DID YOU PAY HOMAGE TO THE ORIGINS OF THE BUILDING AND THE ART DECO PERIOD IN YOUR DESIGN?

Our design continuously juxtaposes the historic and the contemporary, underscoring the vibrant DNA of the Virgin brand. Significant architectural features were restored to add warmth and character, such as the ornate brass elevator doors and the vintage oak cigar sales counter from the 1920s that serves as the hotel's reception desk. It's a fun historical reference in the context of today's smoke-free Chicago.

The highly ornamented, coffered plaster ceiling in the Commons Bar is a standout. 75 per cent of the



original ceiling had been destroyed and great effort went into restoring this stunning feature. We stripped away a mezzanine added by a previous tenant to recapture the dramatic, double-height space. It was quite an endeavour to build new moulds in order to bring the ceiling back to its original splendour.

We wanted to create a modern, forward-thinking hotel that's also respectful of the historic architectural fabric, so our interventions are mostly freestanding pieces. The oval-shaped bar at the Commons Club draws attention with its zinc and red leather cladding and exposed filament pendant lights. It's a focal point that brings new energy to this former banking hall and creates a dynamic dialogue between the old and the new.

DID THE CHICAGO LANDSCAPE PLAY A PART IN YOUR DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS?

Yes, the hotel's location and aspects of the local culture played a role, and the local community was central to considerations about the hotel's F&B concept. It was important to Virgin to create a destination that would appeal to both out-of-town visitors and local residents, so on the ground floor, we created distinct design languages for the hotel's

entrance and lobby, the corner café, and the diner. More than eighty percent of the building's historic street-level space is dedicated to neighbourhood-friendly food and beverage. These spaces don't even feel like they are part of a hotel.

Other aspects of the hotel play off the local landscape and culture. There is a space in the Commons Club called the Funny Library, which features a curated collection of comedic books, vintage toys and art sourced from local antique stores and bookshops. Local authors were a priority and preserving many of the building's original features was a way to celebrate Chicago's extraordinary architectural history.

WHAT ARE YOUR DESIGN HIGHLIGHTS OF THE PROJECT SO FAR?

One of the highlights in this project is innovative space planning and I think we shifted a number of hotel paradigms in a new direction. We broke with the typical layout by dividing each Chamber into two distinctive spaces, the dressing room and the lounge, separated by custom wood sliding doors. This "suite-like" floor plan is refreshing. Given a 300 square-foot standard room, guests enjoy more flexibility, privacy, and user-friendly amenities.

Couples can take advantage of two distinctive and independent spaces. For example, while one person is asleep, the other can shower and get dressed in a separate, closed-off area without disturbing the other.

Another extraordinary space is the Commons Club, not only because of the stunning historic ceiling in the two-story bar area, which we restored. There's an interesting flow of spaces and activity. People can find a quieter spot at the library and pick up a book, socialize at the bar, or enjoy a meal from the open kitchen. It's the kind of place you want to spend time in.

This is also a hotel that uses technology in sophisticated ways to make things more comfortable for guests and give them more control. There's a mobile phone app that allows you to manage details about your stay, from making the initial reservation, to setting your room temperature, to selecting music you'd like to listen to. You can check into your room by using a check-in station with a touch screen at the front desk. Technology smartly touches on many aspects of the guest experience and helps streamline rituals of arrival and departure.

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