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Buzz Talk with Niall Collins [INTERVIEW]

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This week we're buzzing with Niall Collins, the Senior Vice-President, Development at [Cadillac Fairview](#).

Niall has nearly two decades of experience in the real estate industry and has worked in several major markets in Europe and North America. He's been involved in many high profile projects in Canada, including Shops at Don Mills, York Centre, the renovations of the Toronto Eaton Centre and Calgary City Centre.

We chat with Niall about Shops at Don Mills, how he came to be a member of the prestigious [RICS](#) and his dedication to his Blackberry.

BuzzBuzzHome: Where did you go to university?

Niall Collins: I qualified from the University of Dublin, probably better known as Trinity.

BBH: Do you recall any great experiences that really stuck out?

NC: We had a couple of classes that really integrated the different aspects of real estate. They used to run these annual competitions that would bring together architects, engineers and the department that I was in. We'd come up with projects and see how a team dynamic would work.

This was well before we'd left university and it kind of helped collaborate between the different skill sets. When you went out to the marketplace, you had an idea of how engineers think and how architects think. It prepared you very well.

BBH: When did you start working for [Cadillac Fairview](#)?

NC: I only started December of last year, when I moved up from the

US.

BBH: How do you like it so far?

NC: I'm really enjoying it. It's a very exciting and dynamic place to be working right now. There's a huge amount of development activity at various stages — from early conception, going into site planning and approval, the early days of marketing, right through to construction. It's great to have a lot of projects at various stages. Reflections at Don Mills is under construction and LivLofts is going under construction soon.

BBH: How did Cadillac Fairview end up collaborating with [FRAM](#) on [Flaire](#)?

NC: FRAM and Cadillac got together about 8 years ago. I think what was most compelling was FRAM had been very successful out in Port Credit delivering a project that was not too dissimilar to what was envisioned for Don Mills. It's a

community where you could live and have the amenities of a local village. That background was very valuable in steering our own master planning. I think their expertise in constructing it was very valuable.

BBH: What is involved in the process of choosing the shops and restaurants that will be featured at the Shops at Don Mills?

NC: There certainly is a strategy. It's largely based around the spirit of Don Mills as a modern lifestyle location. It's probably not as well known, but there's a substantial amount of office space there as well. People are going to live there, work there, they're going to enjoy the retail experience and restaurant experience.

When we're coming up with a strategy of approaching retailers, we're really trying to make sure it fits into the lifestyle concept. It's been open for a couple of years and has continued to become a real part of the fabric of Don Mills.

BBH: Do you have a personal favourite shop or restaurant?

NC: There's something up there for everybody. My wife and I go there to get away for a restaurant on the weekend and we often go up there for a stroll. It's fantastic to bring the kids up in the winter and take advantage of the ice rink. There's a lot of wide pedestrian boulevards that allow a family to stroll around and take in what's going on.

BBH: What's up next for Cadillac Fairview?

NC: Well, the Shops is an enormous project. It's going to have an excess of 2000 units. Aside from that we have a couple of locations downtown that will be high-rise condo living. I can't disclose them just yet but my portfolio takes in pretty much everything west of Toronto. I've got a mixed use project in Calgary and we're going to have a large office in Vancouver as well. There's plenty going on!

BBH: On the Cadillac Fairview website it says you're a member of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors. What is that and how to you become a member?

NC: It's a chartered association, so it goes back a couple of hundred years as a charter. It's got a similar set of standards, governance and expectations of professional behaviour as a Chartered Accountant association. It's a worldwide organization. Back when I did my exams it took about seven years to qualify. There's quite a high threshold for entry.

I traveled the world but no matter where you go there's going to be a local chapter of the RICS. It's great for networking and just getting your feet on the ground. I lived in Toronto from 1997 to 2003 and the connections I made in the RICS are the same people I know today. You have an expectation of the level of professionalism you're going to get from a person when you meet them and see those initials after their name.

BBH: What's your favourite TV show right now?

NC: I watch a lot of sports. I also really like the program Top Gear; it airs on BBC Canada. I'm a car fanatic so it's definitely one of my favourite programs.

BBH: Are you a Blackberry guy or Apple fanatic?

NC: I'd call myself a Blackberry user because I've had one for nearly 20 years. There's a certain application of a Blackberry as simply a phone and a means of sending emails — it's all I need. A Blackberry is mainly a work tool for me since it's very effective and reliable. It's Canadian too so we might as well support our own.

Thanks for buzzing with us Niall!