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Buzz Talk with Rudi Spallacci [INTERVIEW]

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Today we're buzzing with Rudi Spallacci, part of the visionary development team that's set on revitalizing downtown Hamilton with their 700 unit project, [The Residences of Royal Connaught](#).

Rudi is President of the [Spallacci Group](#), who, along with [Valery Homes](#), will be transforming an iconic Hamilton landmark into a major residential development. The developers plan on keeping the facade of the former hotel, in an effort to retain the historic character of the building and the surrounding neighbourhood.

We chat with Rudi about his time growing up in Hamilton, how the city has changed since then and why his contribution to its revitalization is so significant.

Enjoy!

BuzzBuzzHome: Why are you so passionate about home building?

Rudi Spallacci: It's in our family. My father started building in the late 50s. From an early age, we had to work on Saturdays in the business. As we got older my father would send us off with some of the trades for the breaks or summer and so we would learn masonry, carpentry, plumbing, dry wall and stuff like that.

Growing up there was always discussion around the table so we used to wake up in the morning and talk about

building. It's in our blood, I guess.

BBH: When you first started out in the industry, was there anything that you learned early on that you still carry with you today?

RS: Basically, everyday is a learning experience. The industry changes all the time. You have to be active in that business and you have to understand what's going on. It's ever-evolving and being active in that business keeps you going.

BBH: Talking a bit more about Hamilton, could you sum up what's going on in the city right now development-wise?

RS: Hamilton's picking up steam. There seems to be a lot of activity from the younger people — creative, talented people bringing new ideas to the city and downtown. The art crawl, new restaurants, galleries, retail, cafes encourage people to be part of this energy. Some of the recent stats have shown that Hamilton's been ranked the best place to invest in Ontario for the past few years. There's promise here in Hamilton.

BBH: We'd love to talk about your really big project that was just announced recently. When did planning start for The Residences of Royal Connaught?

RS: We've been talking about various scenarios for the project for the past couple of years. November was when we started going full steam ahead.

BBH: A lot has been made of your incorporation of historic facade of the old hotel. Why is it so important to incorporate some of the building's history into the project?

RS: I think it's important to work with the existing beauty that we have in front of us. We're lucky that we have that type of architecture. It's a hundred years old and it's

gorgeous. It's hard to replicate in this day and age so we're lucky to work with that. We will also be restoring the lobby to pay homage to the past and the value of what we're starting with.

It will be modern, yes, but we're retaining quite a bit of the original architectural features. We'll be restoring the original plaster mouldings, the sweeping staircase, and columns. There will be glass chandeliers suspended from 23 ft. high ceilings. People will be brought back to the hotel's golden era but they will be able to enjoy it again with modern amenities. When you walk through the revolving door you will smell the aroma of fresh espresso and croissants from the coffee bar, and hear sounds of a piano and people chatting. People will be able to enjoy the lobby and appreciate it. It will be a grand space they will want to stay and linger in.

BBH: Have you lived in Hamilton for your entire life?

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RS: Yes.

BBH: What do you love about the city? What keeps you in Hamilton?

RS: I think Hamilton gives you that big-city feel, but on a smaller scale. We kind of mirror Toronto — the histories of the cities are probably comparable. There's not as many people living in Hamilton and that makes life a little easier here.

Growing up in Hamilton as a young kid, I used to live up on the Mountain. We used to go downtown to the core to do all our shopping and that's where the mall was and so on and so forth. So as a kid growing up that was a big attraction. Now you don't really get that anymore in Hamilton and I grew up in that — it was an exciting time. And going downtown, the streets were full of people and traffic, stores all over, cafes, restaurants — lots of activity going on downtown. It hasn't been like that for some time. But now things are pointing in the right direction. Things have been happening downtown for the last four or five years and that's what draws me to the core. We want to contribute to that. And the Royal Connaught redevelopment, I think, is going to be a big, big plus.



The Residences of Royal Connaught

BBH: Do you feel like a slow down in the Toronto market will ultimately do the Hamilton market a favour or is it better that both markets prosper together?

RS: Well, I think in general there's a correction all over in Ontario: Toronto's affected, Hamilton's affected and so on. What's favourable in Hamilton is the house prices and our opportunity to compete against that. I think there's an opportunity in Hamilton. I think there's just a correction that's going on. Actually, I've seen it starting to improve in the last few weeks already. I think that was just like a two month correction and I think we're going to be back to where we were shortly.

BBH: There have been a few Toronto-based publications over the last six months or so that have run stories about the Hamilton housing market. Some people who are finding the Toronto market unaffordable are moving out to Hamilton as a more affordable alternative. Are you actually seeing any of that on the ground? Have you met people from Toronto who have moved to Hamilton in search of more affordable housing options?

RS: There is a market because of the value that's here. We have the GO station just around the corner from the Connaught. There will be a second new GO station. We have the escarpment, the bay and a strong arts scene. We are a lot more competitive price-wise compared to Toronto. We have another large site here in Hamilton that's been active for about two years and there's been a lot of activity here from out of town. So I can safely say that yes, we are seeing it here.

BBH: Since you've been in the building industry for so long, how has the internet reshaped the industry? And do you think online tools and services improve the way the industry operates?

RS: The internet's reshaped business, period. In regards to real estate, the internet's the first point of contact for potential purchases therefore we have identified social media as an important part of our marketing strategy. I'm not a media or an online-type of fellow but I know that there's no doubt it's had an impact and there'll be lots of movement in the future. On our project, we've been using Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest.

I think there's a fantastic visual story to tell about the development and Hamilton in general.

BBH: What advice would you have for aspiring home builders out there? How do you think the best way to get a sort of foot in the door in the industry?

RS: To be successful in the homebuilding industry, in my opinion anyways, you need a strong foundation before you begin. You need to build on relationships, you need knowledge about the business because without either one of those two facets, your relationships with trades and financial institution et cetera will be difficult and it will be tough going getting started in the building business.

BBH: And the final question is, which do you prefer — Tim Hortons, McDonald's or Starbucks coffee?

RS: *Laughs* I prefer my own espresso!

Thanks for buzzing with us Rudi! Photo of Rudi Spallacci courtesy of Jeff Tessier Photography.