

<http://blog.buzzbuzzhome.com/2012/09/buzz-talk-mitchell-abrahams-interview.html>



Buzz Talk with Mitchell Abrahams [INTERVIEW]

SEPTEMBER 13, 2012 4:40 PM | Posted in [BUZZTALK](#), [DEVELOPMENTS](#), [QUEBEC](#) | Tags: [Benvenuto Group](#), [Le Peterson](#), [Mitchell Abrahams](#)



Mitchell Moss (left) and Mitchell Abrahams (right) at Le Belvedere Hampstead

Today we're buzzing with Mitchell Abrahams, President of [The Benvenuto Group](#). Mitchell has made waves in Toronto with high-end projects like the Benvenuto conversion and [83 Redpath](#) at Yonge and Eglinton. Hailing from Montreal, he's now set to take his native city by storm with a trio of incredible, forward-thinking projects — [Le Peterson](#), [Le Belvedere](#) and [Onyx](#). We chat with Mitchell about the evolution of the Montreal condo market, what sets [Le Peterson](#) apart from other developments in the city and why he'll be a Habs fan until the end. Enjoy!

BuzzBuzzHome: Have you always had a keen interest in real estate?

Mitchell Abrahams: I've been passionate about real estate from way to young an age. I bought my first apartment building in Montreal when I

was 18 years old.

I've always liked taking things apart and putting them back together. I graduated from bicycles to cars to buildings. Real estate was always around the dinner table at my grandparents house. My grandfather was a fruit and vegetable distributor who bought apartment buildings. Other people in my family shied away from the craziness of calls in the middle of the night, I always found it interesting.

I got involved renovating properties and buying apartment buildings from a young age. While my friends running around and getting in trouble, I was driving through streets of Verdun in Montreal looking at small apartment buildings that needed to be renovated.

BBH: When did you get started in the industry?

MA: I graduated from business school in 1989 at McGill and always had an intention of being in my own real estate business. I joined an entrepreneurial real estate company in Montreal, Equidev. Before you knew it, 1989 became 2003, I'd spent 14 years working for five or six different real estate companies across Canada. The last place was Great West Life Realty Advisors where I was executive VP. I was part of the team that grew the company from \$850 million to \$8.5 billion from 1997 to 2003.

At that point I said I have to stop telling people I want to go out on my own or I have to go do it. I left in 2003 with a financial partner and started buying and developing property in Quebec and Ontario.

BBH: What was your first high-rise condo?

MA: My first high-rise was the Benvenuto which was a conversion. It was originally bought as a flagship to an apartment portfolio because it's a well known Toronto landmark. When we bought it we realized there was a gap in the market for people looking for larger luxury condominiums. There was an opportunity with changing rent control legislation which allowed for luxury buildings to be converted from rental to condominium. That was our first condo project and it's been a great success for everyone involved. It gave us an opportunity to understand the luxury condo business. Everyone's a winner because, through rent control legislation, renters get to stay on as long as they want to and benefit from all the upgrades we've done to the building. When we get suites back, we renovate completely and sell them as luxury condos.

The first high-rise condo we did was 83 Redpath at Yonge and Eglinton in 2007. It was a fantastic success. It was an intensification on the site of an apartment building that we had bought prior. It had been a visitor parking lot, extra land next door to an apartment building that we re-zoned to create a luxury building at Yonge and Eglinton. It was a step up in terms of the quality of buildings being built in that neighbourhood.



Le Peterson

BBH: You recently commented that the Montreal market is hot right now. Is it the hottest in the country?

MA: I wouldn't call it the hottest in the country. I love the fundamentals of Montreal right now. I've followed different cities across the country over the last ten years and there are a number of things that are starting to happen in Montreal. One is what I call an emerging condominium culture. If you look at Toronto ten years ago, it's not that there weren't high-rise, it just wasn't the talk of the town. People wanted to live in a house with a picket fence. Then they started seeing urban sprawl and began looking to high-rise as an alternative. Then people started seeing high-rise as the choice in what they wanted and you started seeing better and better quality high-rise to deal with their needs.

In Toronto we're at a point where we have people who are choosing to live in high-rise because they feel like it gives them more lifestyle than they could get in a single family home. You come home and you go work out in the gym, swim in the pool and when someone sends you flowers, the concierge keeps them in a fridge so they're fresh when you come home.

Montreal has evolved. For the last number of years, there have been close to 10,000 condos per year built in the market. There's a good balance between supply and demand and there's a fair bit of demand now. That demand comes from a bunch of reasons. Suburban housing has become expensive for the first time, access to downtown has been impacted by infrastructure work and it's just a really dynamic downtown that people want to live in. If you put all that together, you end up with a really interesting market.

The city is ready for some great buildings.

BBH: The average condo price is much higher in Toronto right now. Do you see a significant price increase in Montreal now?

MA: I think so. When I look at pricing in Montreal projects, I think they're very reasonable. There's still a fair number of available sites in downtown Montreal so I don't think we're at the point where prices are going to go through the roof. With that said, as people build better buildings, I think better buildings compete better and prices will start going up. The quality of product coming to the market right now is so much better than what came to the market one or two years ago.

BBH: Let's talk about [Le Peterson](#), your downtown Montreal development. What are some key attractions that will entice buyers to the project?

MA: The first thing that I think drives all real estate developments and decisions is location. Where there are projects in all kinds of downtown locations, we really picked out Quartier des spectacles as where we wanted to be. It really is the centre of downtown where business life meets your social life. We're two steps away from the downtown office core. At the same time we're between McGill and the University of Quebec. We're a short walk to St. Catherines Street and Sherbrooke Street for shopping. We're close to Old Montreal and steps away from a new super hospital being built just south of us. The metro is 50 feet from the door. So many festivals in Montreal take place at the Quartier des spectacles.

This is a rare site and when we saw it it was a really exciting site for us. We really felt the city was ready for something exciting in terms of architecture and you couldn't do it anywhere. There are far more conservative neighbourhoods where you couldn't build something like this. When the mayor introduced ten new projects coming to Montreal, he called the architecture audacious. I think he meant it in the most positive way. It's audacious because this is a part of town where you can flaunt it a bit more because it's an entertainment centre.

We really have brought world class amenities to the building. It takes a larger building to be able to do some of these exciting things. We've got a double height lobby with a guest suite and a 24 hour concierge. We have real lounge that has a theatre area that you get together with friends a watch the hockey game. There's an area with pool tables and foosball table where you can really meet your neighbours. On the 25th floor, we've created an outdoor deck with views over Quartiers des spectacles and a water feature and barbecues. There's also a fitness area with views over the city.

BBH: How often are you back and forth between Toronto and Montreal?

MA: *laughs* I'm friendly with many Porter employees these days. I'm in Montreal at least a day a week, sometimes two or three days a week depending on where we are in the sales process and construction process. We're very hands on in terms of managing the build-up to a sales launch. It's really quite an easy city to commute to. Last Friday I was in the office until 11, had a flight at noon to Montreal, on the ground at 1 and in meetings from 1 until 11 at night. I'm back and forth and having fun!

BBH: Do you have a favourite restaurant in Montreal?

MA: I have a lot of favourite restaurants in Montreal but I always enjoy [Milos](#).

BBH: Canadiens or Maple Leafs?

MA: It goes back to a story of a good friend of mine who was at the Bank of Nova Scotia and is also an ex-Montrealer. His son came to him when he was six years old and said "Dad is it okay if I'm a Leafs fan?" He said "I'm your father and I'll love you no matter what. You just have to find somewhere else to live."

I have three kids, 2 boys. My six year old's room is painted Habs red. My older son's favourite story is when he was in the driveway last year playing hockey in a Cammalleri t-shirt. A car drove by, stopped and turned around, rolled down the window and said "Want me to sign that shirt?" It was Mike Cammalleri and he spent half an hour with us in the driveway.

We are fervent Habs fans. I moved from Montreal to Toronto in 1997 and I've yet to give up my season tickets.

Thanks for buzzing with us Mitchell!