



The firm split the Churchill-Basswood property in half to construct four architecturally innovative homes.

TOWN SQUARE HOMES

Emerging custom-home-building business in Toronto develops high-quality residential infill projects

BY DAVID HUDNALL

AT A GLANCE

LOCATION:
TORONTO, ON

FOUNDED:
1997

EMPLOYEES:
3

AREA OF SPECIALTY:
CUSTOM-RESIDENTIAL INFILLS

IN 1998, LIVIO DIFONZO RECEIVED A MASTER'S degree in architecture from the State University of New York in Buffalo. His brother, Enzo, was a chartered accountant, and their father, Rocco, had a construction background. "My dad had owned a trim carpentry company, so we were always exposed to the construction business," Livio says. "It made a lot of sense for the three of us to pool together our knowledge and resources."

So the DiFonzos founded Toronto-based Town Square Homes—a true family business specializing in custom

family homes in the Toronto area. "We're set up into three streams," Livio says. "Design, which I handle; design-build, where I'll draw up the plans, and then we'll contract out the work on the site; and construction management, where someone else has drawn up the plans, and we oversee the building process." Enzo's finance background is especially important for the latter two job types, because it gives Town Square Homes the advantage of providing clients with ongoing forecasts of costs throughout the construction process. That kind of communication is further bolstered by Rocco, who operates as a super on jobsites.

From an architectural point of view, Town Square Homes has dabbled in a wide variety of styles—comfortable with both modern and traditional work. “We end up doing more traditional designs in response to the market,” Livio says. “But for all designs, we approach with a very specific attention to details, a layering of materials. We customize each home with stone, brick, wood detailing, brackets—there’s an array of materials that we incorporate into the designs that I think helps us stand out from the competition.”

Residential infills in Toronto—where a piece of property is purchased, torn down, and rebuilt—are currently Town Square Homes’ niche, though its goal in the long term is to transition into townhouse developments. (The company recently project-managed a townhouse complex for another Toronto developer as part of a pilot project.) To work up to that, the DiFonzos have been purchasing adjacent properties and severing them, “turning one lot into two lots, or two lots into four lots,” Livio says. At a 2009 design-build project called the Churchill-Basswood, the firm did just that, dividing two properties into four, building them up, and selling them. “We had to go through the development process of getting the property severed and approved by the city,” Livio says. “It’s located in the north end of Toronto, which is a neighbourhood under redevelopment, and from an architectural point of view, it’s a great enhancement to the area.”

Currently, Town Square Homes is at work on two Toronto residences—one 3,600 square feet, the other 3,200 square feet, and all four homes on the Churchill-Basswood property have been sold. Most years, the workload is roughly four homes, and the DiFonzos say they’re comfortable staying right in that area.

“What sets us apart is our combination of quality and cost,” Enzo says. “We don’t want to be in a position where we grow too fast and quality suffers. So we’re happy with where we’re at right now, and we’re staying busy.” CBQ

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