

Sebastian Martin

Meet Colliers Germany's CFO/COO and newly appointed Partner, who shaping a future-ready business by championing digitalisation, operational excellence and innovation.

“ Congratulations on your new appointment as Partner, and COO at Colliers Germany. What does this new chapter mean for you personally?

This new role is both a professional milestone and a personal commitment. It reflects my belief in the company's vision and my desire to actively shape its future. It's a chance to lead with purpose and contribute to a culture of excellence and innovation.

How do you see your role shaping the next phase of Colliers Germany?

My role is to drive operational excellence, foster innovation, and ensure that our strategy is executed with discipline and agility. It's about building

a resilient, future-ready organisation.

Tell us about your career journey. How did get into real estate?

My path began in finance and transport. Real estate strategy, working across industries like logistics and transport. Real estate became a natural progression—complex, dynamic, and deeply tied to economic and societal trends. I was drawn to its tangible impact and the opportunity to drive transformation in a sector ripe for innovation.

What do you value most about your work?

The ability to create lasting value—whether through strategic decisions,

empowering teams, or driving operational excellence. I also value the diversity of challenges and the collaborative spirit that defines our industry.

How does real estate compare to your previous industries?

Real estate offers a unique blend of strategic complexity and human impact. Unlike logistics or transport, where efficiency is paramount, real estate demands a balance between financial acumen, stakeholder engagement, and long-term vision.

How do you see the CFO role evolving in real estate, particularly, with increasing automation and data-driven decision-making?

It's becoming more strategic and tech-driven. CFOs are now expected to be transformation leaders—bridging finance, operations, and innovation.

What achievement are you most proud of in your career to date?

The achievement I'm most proud of was leading a cross-border transformation at Deutsche Bahn's Cargo business, where we harmonised financial governance and performance management across Europe. At the time, I was responsible for France, and the initiative—focused on aligning operations around shared value-driver models—took about two years. It was a pivotal moment in bridging strategy and execution, and in building a more unified, transparent culture across multiple countries.



You've held roles across multiple countries—including USA, Germany, and France. How have these international experiences shaped your leadership style?

Living and working across diverse cultural and business environments has taught me the value of adaptability, cultural sensitivity and the importance of listening. These experiences have shaped a leadership style that is inclusive, pragmatic and focused on empowering teams to thrive in complex, cross-border contexts.

As a member of the EMEA SteerCo and Finance Transformation programme, what are the biggest challenges in creating a unified financial strategy across multiple countries?

Striking the right balance between local adaptation and regional harmonisation is the biggest challenge. Each country has unique needs and operates under different business models, so creating a unified financial strategy requires flexibility without compromising consistency and alignment across the region.

Who have been your greatest mentors or sources of inspiration throughout your career?

When I started my assignment in Paris, I had a very experienced CFO, Pedro Ubeda, who was a strategic thinker and very business oriented, compared to an accountant type of CFO. This has influenced me a lot on how I see my role as CFO & COO today.

If you were not working in finance or real estate, what would you be doing?

Probably working in winery or

WORDS OF WISDOM

What advice would you give to your younger self?

Trust your instincts, but don't be afraid to ask for help. Growth often comes from discomfort. You have to be active in putting yourself regularly in discomfort to advance.

If there was one business decision you could change, what would it be and why?

Early in my career, I underestimated the importance of patience, persistence and agility in the way to success.

agriculture having my own premises I operate and develop.

Tell us something few people know about you.

I have completed several (semi-)marathons and am passionate about running. Sometimes it offers me time to reflect, sometimes it is a joint activity with my family to spend quality time.

How do you maintain a good work/life balance?

By setting clear boundaries, prioritising time with family, and staying physically active. Balance is not static—it requires constant recalibration.

Where do you see yourself 10 years from now?

Still learning, still building. Ideally, I'll be mentoring the next generation of leaders and contributing to shaping a more sustainable and digitally enabled real estate industry.

What is something you would like to learn or get good at in the future?

I'd like to deepen my understanding of AI and its applications in real estate finance and operations.

Is there a book, film, or piece of music that has had a lasting impact on you?

Leadership and the One Minute Manager Updated Ed: *Increasing Effectiveness Through Situational Leadership II* by Ken Blanchard had a major influence on me. The Situational Leadership model highlights the importance of adapting leadership styles to the development level of your team. This model identifies four leadership styles and four levels of

INDUSTRY FOCUS

follower development, emphasising that the most effective approach depends on the situation and the readiness of the individuals being led. It's especially relevant in times of transformation, helping leaders guide teams through change while maintaining performance. I've also really enjoyed the novels of Carlos Ruiz Zafón—The Shadow of the Wind stands out as a particular favourite.

What are some key leadership challenges you've encountered, and how have they shaped your decision-making style?

One of the biggest challenges is staying true to my values while navigating complex decisions. I've learned that being loyal to your principles doesn't mean being rigid—sometimes it requires creativity and flexibility to uphold them in a practical way.

Tell us about a hobby or passion outside of work that reveal another side of you.

I collect Märklin model trains, with a particular interest in the special editions from Deutsche Bahn. Whenever I get the chance, I enjoy browsing old-school collectors' shops in search of rare pieces to add to my collection. ”

One of your key mandates is to professionalise operational management at Colliers Germany. What specific areas are you focusing on first?

We're prioritising process standardisation, performance transparency, and cross-functional collaboration to lay the foundation for scalable growth. A key part of this is setting up the right organisational structure and teams to successfully deliver new technologies that will support and enhance business operations.

How are you approaching digitalisation?

Together with the global Colliers Technology teams we're embracing automation, data analytics, and AI to enhance decision-making and client service. I'm particularly excited about predictive analytics and smart workflow tools.

How do you balance financial control with the need to foster innovation and growth?

By building a culture where governance supports innovation. Clear frameworks and KPIs allow us to test new ideas safely while keeping core operations stable. When a concept proves itself, we scale it—ensuring both control and continuous evolution. In an entrepreneurial organisation like Colliers, it's essential to make room for experimentation, learn quickly, and continuously evolve.

How is Colliers integrating ESG into financial decision-making?

We're embedding ESG metrics into investment decisions, budgeting, and reporting. It's not just compliance—it's a value driver.

What advice would you give to companies optimising financial structures for resilience?

Focus on agility, scenario planning,

and digital tools. Build structures that can flex with market shifts while maintaining control.

If you could implement one major innovation in real estate finance, what would it be?

A real-time, AI-powered financial cockpit that integrates ESG, risk, and performance data—enabling faster, smarter decisions.

What is your current outlook for the German real estate market, and how do you see it evolving in the next 2–3 years?

The market is slowly recovering, with rising competition among RE consultancy firms. Digitisation will accelerate, shaping client expectations, pricing, and speed of service.

How are investor expectations and occupier needs evolving in Germany amid ongoing economic and geopolitical uncertainty?

Investor sentiment has been cautious, with significant price corrections over the past two years—even as rents continued to rise. However, with interest rates now declining, we're entering a phase where market conditions are becoming more favourable and new investments are starting to look attractive again.

Which sectors or regions in Germany do you see showing the strongest resilience or potential in the current market?

Office leasing, industrial and logistics, as well as residential sectors have demonstrated strong resilience throughout the recent market challenges and continue to offer solid fundamentals and long-term potential.