

01 The rooster weathervane tops off a multi-car garage, which offers a direct route into the mudroom and house. **02** The farmhouse-inspired home features hand-cut natural limestone and Cedar board shingle siding.



The Greely Residence

Location: Ottawa, Ontario

Completed: 2011

cmillsdesign.com

Chuck Mills Residential Design and Development Inc.

COMBINING CLIENT'S WISHES AND ARTISTRY PROVE SUCCESSFUL FOR THIS FIRM

by Kevin Kane

In 1994, Chuck Mills decided to take the plunge into starting his own company after the design firm that employed him closed, and Chuck Mills Residential Design and Development Inc. was born. But that was not the one only reason he wanted his own firm. "I was tired of doing things the way that they wanted because I didn't believe it was the right way," he says. "I wanted to do more one-on-one with private clients." For the first year, Mills' major client was an export housing company with a large portion of its business located in Japan. Despite the heavy load, the work did not deter Mills. "For the first eight months, I was basically working 20 hours a day and six to seven days a week because of the Japan work," he says. "I'd be getting stuff that would be coming in at three in the morning."

Another factor that drove him toward his own firm has become one of the hallmarks of his success: working one-on-one with clients toward their vision of a custom home. That attention to detail and

union of the clients' wishes and his own artistic vision propel his designs. "I consider myself very, very fortunate because I do love what I do," he says. "I really do love the interaction with clients. And the fact that everything I'm doing is custom. Nothing is boring. One job is so different than the next that it's still really compelling to me."

Though Mills remains modest, his firm has won numerous awards from different organizations since he started the company, including the Ontario Home Builders Association, the Canadian Home Builders Association and Greater Ottawa Home Builders Association. He credits some of his business with winning them early on, but it is not the only reason he has enjoyed success. "Until I was in my early twenties I was a pretty competitive athlete," he says. "I've always been competitive by nature so entering awards is not only to hopefully receive recognition from your peers but also because I'm just straight-up competitive."



While awards and recognition help to secure meetings with potential clients, Mills' skills as a designer earn him the jobs. "I often get asked as a designer, 'What's your style?'" Mills says. "For me getting asked that by a private client is somewhat irrelevant because I really think my job, on behalf of the client, is to take their wants and needs and not only meet but exceed all of those in developing the project. It's my job, at every single project, to really be very sensitive to the client's wants and needs."

03 The kitchen is perfect for entertaining with a spacious island and bar seating situated around views of the natural surroundings. 04 A modern-designed mud room/storage space houses shoes and jackets.



04



The Greely Residence

This 4,315-square-foot home sits tucked away among 26 acres of thick woods, which helped fuel the design of the home to fit it within—rather than against—the surrounding environment. Mills says that he designed the home, “with a lot of stylistic features of what would be classified as an old Ontario farmhouse,” which even included a rooster-capped copper cupola on the garage. Built by Patterson Homes, the craftsman-style boasts a union between functionality and crisp design details from the claw-footed tub to the sharp lines of the great room’s deep coffered ceiling and limestone-clad fireplace. Using all natural materials, such as the Eastern White Cedar corbel brackets and cut limestone, plays off of the home’s natural surroundings, in order to avoid, “a house that’s all brick in the middle of the forest,” Mills says. A Weatherwall screen system encloses the back porch, offering sights of the dense woods around the property.

05 A deep coffered ceiling caps off a spacious, open great room accented by a gas fireplace sheathed in limestone. The large windows look out on the bounty of the tall woods.



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With a lot of the firm’s business coming from older homes, Mills pays particular attention to the fit of his design. His firm tackles projects on homes over a hundred years old in well-established neighbourhoods. “If you add an addition or do anything to the exterior you have to be sympathetic to the surroundings,” he says. “It has to make sense and at the end of the day—it should look like it’s part of the house.”

Though Mills has won awards for green design and technology and has been well trained in its use for decades, he does not focus solely on that aspect,

preferring, again, to work toward the desires of his client. He clearly excels at the use of environmentally-conscious elements such as incorporating geothermal heating and solar panels, which opens up another avenue for his clients without restricting him. Mills views his philosophy in very simple terms: “I always try to exceed my client’s needs within the scope of their budget and the things that they like—to try and really wow them.” Again, Mills’ modesty shines against his beautiful custom designs and homes and he says, “I think I have been relatively successful at that.” ■

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