

Chuck Mills worked closely with his clients to design the Broadmoor residence, a Craftsman-inspired home, around an existing pool and hot tub.

# Bespoke Abodes

Residential architect **Chuck Mills** lays out his hands-on approach to home design, working with clients, and operating as a one-man show

// BY JONATHAN FULLMER

PHOTOS: GORDON KING





**E**veryone's dream home is different. Some people imagine a sprawling country house or a Craftsman-style bungalow. Others dream of a bigger kitchen or perhaps a movie room or fitness area. Whether you have a detailed list of amenities or merely a rough sketch, though, Chuck Mills can make your dream home a reality.

Based in Ottawa, Mills's architecture design firm, Chuck Mills Residential Design & Development Inc. (CMRD&D), "specializes in high-end custom homes and residential renovation projects," according to its website, which also features a visual portfolio of recent projects and client testimonials. One testimonial applauds Mills's integration of the client's varied tastes into a home that's "part castle, part art gallery, and part high-end Florida resort." In another, a couple who were looking to transform their country house's "cottage characteristics into a sophisticated home" praise Mills for his "innovative and dramatic solution."

Mills's one-of-a-kind projects span the globe, appearing in Japan, Germany, and Russia, among other countries, but since 1996 he's mostly stuck around Ottawa. In that time, he's earned more than 45 awards from organizations such as the Greater Ottawa Home Builders' Association and the Canadian Home Builders' Association, and he's also received laudatory coverage from numerous local and national periodicals.

Born in Cleveland, Ohio, and raised on the Niagara Peninsula, Mills studied architectural design at Mohawk College before landing his first design job with Chapman Murray Architects in Niagara Falls. After working in Calgary and finally settling in Ottawa, Mills launched CMRD&D on Remembrance Day in 1994. "I was tired of watching other companies I'd worked for," he says, "and decided that, with



The kitchen of the Broadmoor residence includes a tray ceiling, a handmade trestle table, and a temperature-controlled wine cellar.



The living room matches the kitchen with a tray ceiling of its own, and large windows connect the indoors with the outdoors.

## 5 QUESTIONS WITH CHUCK MILLS

### WHAT DOES INNOVATION MEAN TO YOUR COMPANY?

Innovation ... refers to creating more-effective work processes, new or better products and/or ideas—all in an effort to help a business be more successful.

### IS THERE A TECHNOLOGY, TREND, OR IDEA THAT'S DRIVING YOUR COMPANY FORWARD?

The Houzz website is being used by an

incredible number of my prospective and current clients. As such, I've switched some of my advertising budget from traditional print to Houzz.

### HOW DO YOU INNOVATE ON A DAY-TO-DAY BASIS?

Honestly, I just try to learn at least one new thing every single day, whether it is how to be more efficient using my primary computer software, how to use a new app for my smartphone, etc.—anything to help my company service my clients and business associates better.

### WHERE DO YOU HOPE THIS INNOVATION WILL LEAD YOU IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?

I hope this approach keeps me ahead of my competitors from now until I'm done working.

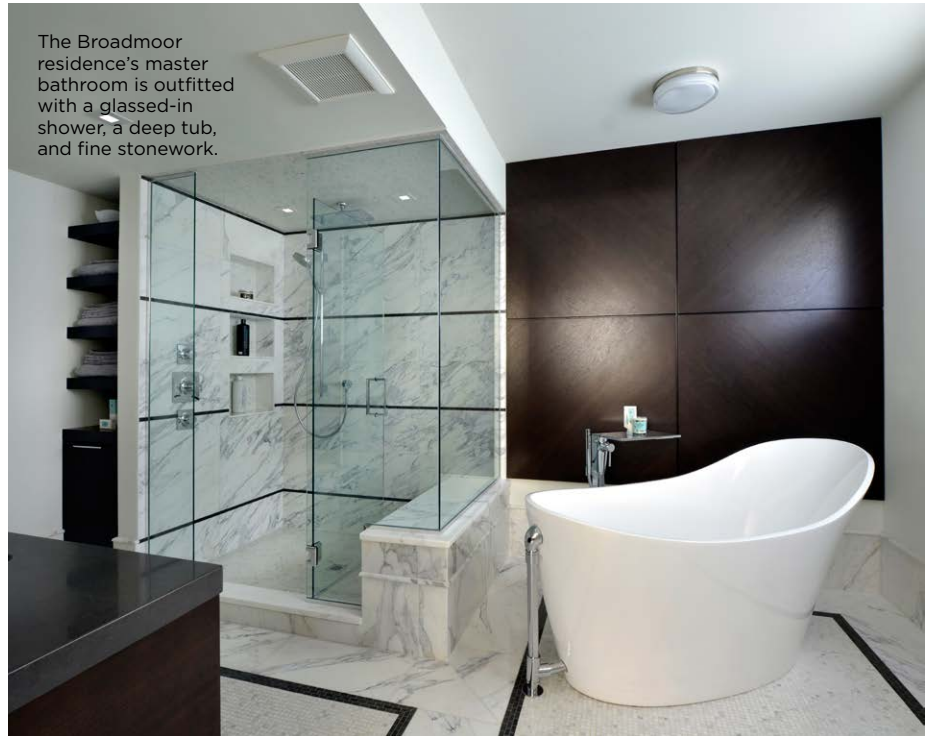
### HOW HAS THE NOTION OF INNOVATION CHANGED IN THE PAST DECADE?

Technology is moving at a blinding rate, with everyone connected to the web through some variety of mobile device and constantly tied into the social media networks. Your corporate presence absolutely has to present a unified look and feel across all of these.

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Chuck Mills, President





The Broadmoor residence's master bathroom is outfitted with a glassed-in shower, a deep tub, and fine stonework.

15 years of industry experience, it was the right time to go it alone.”

Besides some assistance from his wife, Mills now operates nearly every aspect of the business on his own. Cheryl, his spouse of 34 years, keeps the company's quarterly books. After hashing out the day's agenda with Cheryl over coffee each morning, Mills hits his home office before eight. “I am responsible for everything,” he says, his daily tasks including “all design, CAD drawings, advertising and marketing, site meetings, and proposals.” And if that weren't enough, he's also a board member for a couple of homebuilder and architectural associations.

Needless to say, single-handedly running a business isn't easy, particularly when clients pay anywhere between \$200,000 and \$4 million per project. “The most difficult part of being a ‘one-man show’ is time management and staying on top of everything,” Mills says, adding that those challenges are only heightened by his customers' innumerable requests. “Dealing with client expectations, compared to the challenges of the construction industry, can be tough from both the design and building sides.”

One particularly difficult project involved designing a new home around preexisting landscaping and an in-ground swimming pool after the site's original house had burned down. That customer's testimonial, also up on CMRD&D's website, highlights the “daunting”

nature of the task: “From a sketch we had provided him on a paper napkin, [Mills] transformed our idea into a dream home.” Another challenging project entailed designing a house to accommodate its owner's substantial wine collection.

Regardless of the challenge, Mills works closely with all his clients to ensure they get exactly what they want and then some. After helping them create a wish list, he says, he presses for “as much detailed information on a room-by-room basis” as possible before nailing down the project's intended overall look and feel. “I love the interaction [with clients], from their nervous excitement when deciding to start a project to the look of sheer joy and pride with the end result,” Mills says. “You just can't beat it.”

That sentiment characterizes the 57-year-old's expectations for CMRD&D's future: “To continue to do the kind of work that attracts the same types of amazing clients I've been fortunate to work with for the past 20 years.” **A**