

Chuck Mills Residential Design & Development

Award Winning Design Excellence in Service

Named a national awards finalist for his renovation work on 41 McLeod Street in Ottawa, Chuck Mills says that his business is based on attention to detail and making sure the client is involved in the construction/renovation process.

Chuck Mills' business is based on relationships.

Sure it is. Everyone's business is. But when that relationship with his clients extends to knowing them on a personal level and being able to stop by for coffee on a casual basis, you begin to get a bit more insight into the way Mills works with his clients. "I like to build long-term relationships with my clients," says Mills. "The work I do for them is a process involving various stages, and it's a process that can take a fair amount of time, from start to finish."

Mills' design work in custom homes and in upscale renovations, through his home-based business, is about understanding a client's wants in a home and working to turn a list of ideal features into a final product which is of an award-winning quality. "It is important to make sure to iron out all the wrinkles during the conceptual design phase before I begin working on final drawings for the client. A custom home can take from two to five months, just to complete the design and drawings."

If it seems as though Mills is a stickler for detail, it's because he wants his clients to be happy and comfortable in their new home or newly renovated home and he wants to make the best use of the space he has available.



"My favourite projects are still the custom homes which are not restricted in terms of size by the land on which they're built," he says. "That allows me to optimize the use of space and to get the best angles for light and sight lines."

Mills started his company, based out of his Barrhaven home, in 1994, after having spent a good deal of time working in the industry with other builders and architects. In its infancy, Chuck Mills Residential Design & Development started by working on homes in, of all places, Japan and Russia. An odd beginning for an Ottawa-based designer. More bizarre is the fact that Mills has still never set foot in either of those countries! He worked with an architect friend who started up an export panellizing plant, which delivered Canadian wood framing technology overseas. This contract accounted for almost 70 per cent of Mills' business for his first one and a half years in business.

Chuck Mills

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He soon moved out of the export housing design business and began concentrating again on high-end custom homes and renovations in the west end of the region and, from that point forward has made it his personal commitment to be involved in all levels of the construction/renovation, despite the fact that he is a designer, first and foremost.

"I don't really consider myself a project manager, but I do make sure I spend time on each one of my sites on a weekly basis. That way, I can give feedback to the contractors as they go along, and I can act as a liaison between my client and the builder," he says adding that he prefers recommending OCHBA builders to any client who might not have a contractor in mind. The end result of this personal touch is a list of delighted customers, and numerous awards Mills has received at the local association level for his hard work.

This year marks a first for Mills. While his name and work have become well known in the OCHBA's housing design awards, it was the first year he had entered a project in the provincial awards. Lo and behold, his renovation work at 41

McLeod Street in Ottawa won at the OHBA level for "Most outstanding renovation over \$100,000." And his luck hasn't stopped there. On the strength of that award, he entered the same project at the national level, only to be named a finalist in the same category. The winners will be announced Feb. 19 during the CHBA conference in Edmonton, Alberta.

"To be in the running as a finalist for a national award was like a early Christmas present for me. I found out about a week before Christmas and I don't think I came down off the ceiling until a week later," he says. "I'm up against some tough competition, some highly decorated builders who have won at this level before. It feels a bit like David versus Goliath."

The renovation in question turned a dilapidated 1910's home at 41 McLeod Street in Ottawa from a building that by all accounts might reasonably have been condemned into a beautifully restored, yet modern, three-storey home whose style is unique in many ways.

He began by gutting the entire building (he says the main staircase was the only part of the interior which was even salvageable) and completely re-shaping the home. "The main floor of the home is loaded with details" he says "including a replica of a

famous 'Manhattan Players Club' fireplace. The basement features a wine cellar and tasting area. The second floor is a full-floor master suite, with an oriental theme and a Japanese Zen rock garden and the third floor is a full media entertainment centre and guest quarters."

The entire project was fast tracked, taking six months to complete and Mills says he's

extremely proud of the finished product, adding that his trip to Edmonton for the awards will offer him a chance to travel to Calgary to catch up with old friends.

Looking ahead to the future, Mills says that his love is with custom work, in much the same capacity as he's doing today. Though one day so, he wonders about hiring a full time designer

on staff to help with the day-to-day aspects of the business, while he attends to more of the project management.

What matters most to Mills is that the quality, which has come to characterize his hard work in the Ottawa area, be maintained above all. "I approach every project with the notion that I want to turn it into an award-winning project," he says.

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