

NATIONAL POST

April 30, 2016

In-demand custom builder of mega-mansions in Toronto's tony Bridle Path: "This is the gig!"



Paul Miklas stands in the double-staircase foyer of one of his newer Bridle Path homes. The railing system took nine months to build at a cost of \$325,000.

Tyler Anderson/National Post

Suzanne Wintrob
Special to National Post

There's no doubt that Paul Miklas loves what he does. In fact, the dapper builder practically dances along the grand marble hallway of the 34,000-square-foot mansion he's finishing off in Toronto's exclusive Bridle Path neighbourhood. He's clearly smitten

by his own creativity and attention to detail but doesn't come off as boastful. Rather, his ear-to-ear smile is genuine and his enthusiasm is infectious.

“It's all about grandeur,” gushes Miklas, president of Valleymede Homes, as he takes in the house's breathtaking foyer with its sweeping double staircase, intricate iron banisters and brilliant glass dome.

Miklas, 55, is the area's Go-To Guy for new mansions, with his jet-setting clients finding him through word of mouth and then swooping into town for quick meetings on everything from construction strategy to finishing touches. He gives them soup-to-nuts service right down to the furniture and fixtures, which comes in handy for people who spend so much time travelling the globe for business and pleasure. He's supported by his equally stylish wife, Holly, who handles the interior design.

This particular house, on a 2.2-acre lot, belongs to a couple in their 50s with two school-age children and a little white Bichon dog. It's one of four homes they own around the world but it's one of their favourites. They're businesspeople and philanthropists who love to entertain so they wanted a house that could keep up. Clearly, this one won't let them down.

At this luxurious level, grandeur starts from street — or as Miklas puts it, “It has to pop right from the top” — with high wrought iron gates that swing open to reveal a long driveway and 17-foot-deep portico, lush landscaping and an eight-car garage (the owner nixed the water feature common in neighbouring homes). It's two steps up to the tall glass double front doors adorned with sculpted ironwork and matching carriage lanterns, setting the tone for the banister to come.

The house is split into public and private areas: work and entertaining at the front, family time tucked into the back. So once inside, the staircase, dome and heated crema marfil slab marble floor pack a punch. In fact, the magnificent French-inspired double staircase's Canadian-made iron and brass banister and scrollwork cost \$325,000 and took nine months to build, while the \$135,000 custom dome overhead ushers in sunlight during the day and lights up at night for maximum impact.

Immediately to the left of the entranceway is where deals get made. The 15×20-foot sitting area with fireplace leads into the striking 20×20-foot study, its walls panelled in dark walnut with a seven-layer, French-polished finish and hand-carved designs that are echoed on the front of the desk. When tough discussions warrant a stiff drink, the owner simply pushes on one of the bookshelves to reveal a hidden 7×9-foot wet bar. Says Miklas: “I was looking at this room and didn't want to turn it into another closet but

something more exciting, so I took the space back and created this quiet little man cave.” A spacious dining room sits to the right of the front door, with high ceilings, floor-to-ceiling windows and a scullery so servants can move around discreetly.

The only full room visible from the foyer is what Miklas dubs “the grand salon,” which is tailor-made for entertaining. At 40×25 feet, the owners have set up three distinct sitting areas though there’s still sufficient standing room. The focal point is a white limestone fireplace boasting a six-foot mantel with 4.5-foot corbels. Exquisite pilasters rise another 18 feet and blend with the intricate crown moulding to create a dazzling effect. The Juliet balcony over the entrance has the same custom ironwork pattern as the double staircase.



The indoor pool benefits from plenty of natural light; the space also includes a spa and bar. Tyler Anderson/National Post

Beyond that is where the family hangs out, hidden from view. The 180-foot hallway, which runs the width of the house, gives way to the large family room and the grand cream-coloured kitchen with marble island. The kitchen’s octagonal sitting area, with an 18-foot ceiling, overlooks the backyard’s water feature, tennis court and dining and entertaining pavilions. There’s also a gym and an indoor pool with jacuzzi and bar.

Upstairs (accessible via one of two elevators, the main staircase or a service staircase) are eight impressive bedrooms, all with vaulted ceilings, walk-in closets and luxurious bathrooms. The 25×35-ft. master bedroom boasts his-and-hers bathrooms, huge walk-in closets, a 90-inch television and gorgeous Italian fireplace. Five mechanical rooms are hidden in the attic for more efficient heating and air conditioning, with catwalks built for service technicians to get from one room to the other.

Still, Miklas really beams like a kid in a candy store when he heads down to the basement, but not because of the spectacular brick-and-wood wine cellar that holds 1,500 bottles of wine. Rather, he's more excited by the enormous and meticulous mechanical room that conjures up the engine room of a cruise ship. Think rows of colourful pipes and pumps, six super-high-efficiency boilers, four hot-water tanks, an 800-amp transformer to bring power into the house and an 800-amp backup generator, several air handlers and the security system's hub.

“These aren't even houses – they're more like commercial buildings,” says Miklas, who worked as a framer at Green Park Homes as a teenager and began renovating basements under the Valleymede Homes moniker in the 1980s. “... The important thing is to keep up the streetscape so that it not only looks pretty but maintains the value of the area.”

Given the size and scale of this project, construction has been going on for a couple of years and there's a bit more to go. So Miklas spends his days jumping from his own 32,000-sq.-ft. home around the corner to this project as well as a 40,000-sq.-ft. one nearby where 45 tradespeople are in the rough-in, electrical, plumbing and mechanical stages. He's constantly on the lookout for new lots to snap up but they're getting scarce, he says, and that's worrisome, since overseas buyers keep calling. With lots alone going for around \$7 million and construction costing \$550 per square foot (plus another \$1.5 million for landscaping), Miklas is keen to find more land.

“When I came into this area in 2000 and built my first home at just under 20,000 square feet, I wasn't sure how many more I'd be able to do here,” he says. “But I've been able to, in the last 15 years, successfully continue to build and build. The most we've had going at the same time is three ... Each home we try to advance even more than the first, so technology is a must with me. You've got people coming to this home and they want to know they've got nothing but the best. Especially with ... a lot of foreign purchasers, this is what they're looking for.

“We've been very fortunate – 12 or 13 mansions later, we're still doing our thing. ... I'm telling you, this is the gig!”