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Dying for a mansion? Here's what all its bells 'n' whistles would cost you, from the lot to the lighting



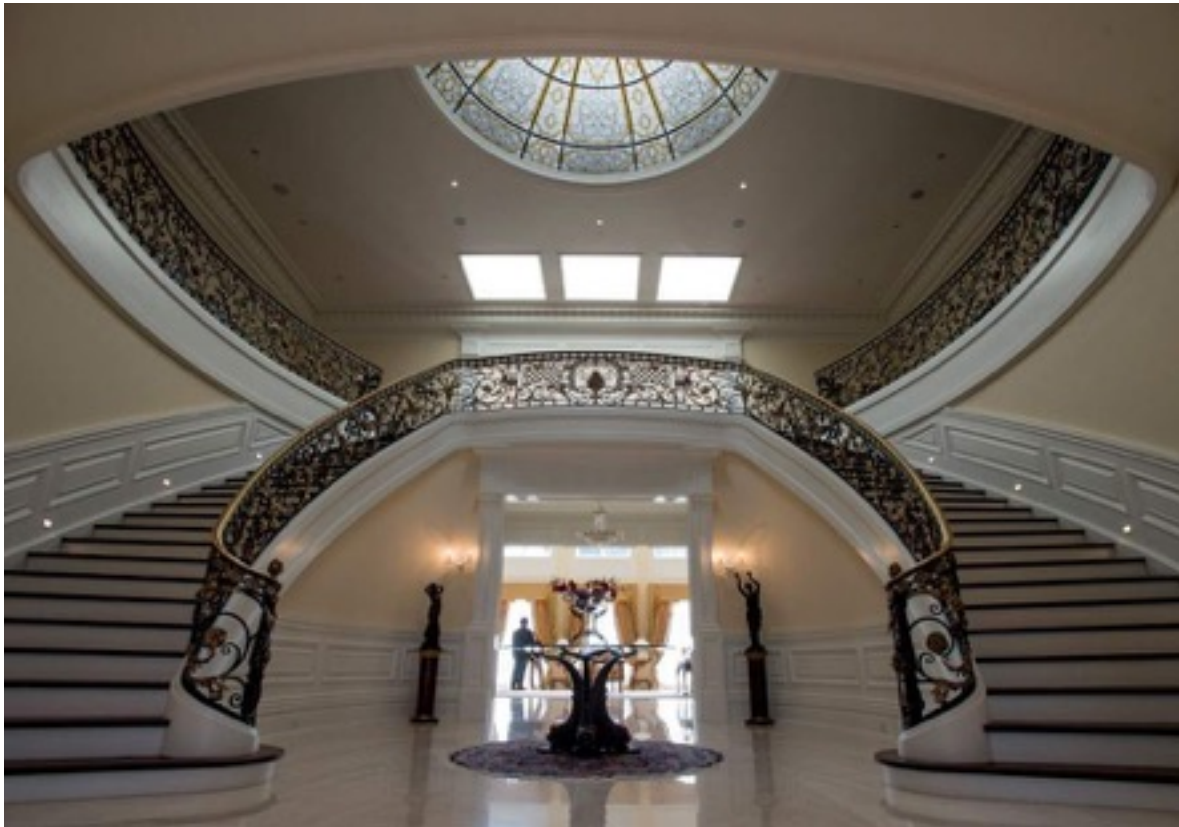
BonaVista Leisurescape

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Special to National Post

When he was 18 years old, Paul Miklas worked as a framer for Green Park Homes, putting up cookie-cutter suburban homes. Almost four decades later, he's one of the premiere builders on Toronto's tony Bridle Path, with three mansions currently under construction (the smallest at 28,000 square feet). Given that, the guy certainly knows the cost of luxury.

“You’re typically buying a lot that’s two acres,” the president of Valleymede Homes says of his affluent clients. “It’s costing them \$7 million to \$9 million just to purchase the land. You’re looking at anywhere from \$500 to \$550 per square foot to build the house. And that doesn’t even include the landscaping – you’ll always put aside between \$1.5 to \$2 million for that.”

Miklas’s mansions ooze luxury right from the street with electronic gates that swing open by invitation only to reveal a circular heated driveway, water fountain and eight to 12 garage spots. The home’s 14-foot-high double wooden doors open into a grand foyer with heated marble floors and a \$150,000 dome covering a \$20,000 Schonbek chandelier and elaborate staircase. Intricate ironwork surrounds the second-storey landing, with custom brass and metal on the banister and handrails that can take the price to \$400,000.



The foyer of a mansion Paul Miklas is just in the process of finishing up. Tyler Anderson / National Post

The dining room, with its decorative plaster ceilings and perimeter, wows with another incredible chandelier and a “knockout” \$50,000 hand-cut, crema marfil or light white marble fireplace mantel. The wood-panelled family room, with its alluring ceiling detail,

boasts a \$45,000 speaker system, a 90-inch plasma TV for \$15,000 and theatre chairs at \$10,000 each. In the living room, there's a \$70,000 Marie Antoinette-patterned hardwood floor, \$35,000 worth of cabinetry and two more chandeliers. The study's desk, coffee table and leather couch can easily cost \$200,000. Kitchen cabinetry ranges from \$380,000 to \$500,000 while appliances and installation cost \$120,000.

Then there's the 25×50-foot indoor pool, sauna, massage room, shower and bathrooms – about 4,000 square feet of fun, for \$900,000. And we haven't even gone upstairs (by \$100,000 elevator) where \$5,000 toilets are the norm, or downstairs to visit the 3,000-bottle wine cellar (\$120,000 to build) and home theatre (\$500,000), or even outside where another pool plus sports courts, barbecue setup and breathtaking greenery awaits.

“Fifteen years ago you didn't see this,” says Miklas of the demand for luxury homes. “In the Bridle Path, if you were building two a year you were doing alright. But in the past nine or 10 months we've had seven or eight properties selling here. If it's not the Bridle Path, it may be (suburban) Whitby or Pickering or Markham. There's just so much demand on single-family [luxury] residences right now. It's incredible to see Toronto really taking a place of its own.”

If an estate home is in your future, here's a closer look at some of the costs involved in living luxuriously:

Foot Cushioning

Michael Pourvakil rarely gets flustered by a complicated project. In fact, the president of Weavers Art in Toronto has outfitted so many estate homes with handwoven carpets that he welcomes the challenge. That's because in houses of a certain size, standard sizes don't apply.

“If room is 20×30 feet, we won't have a 9×12-foot carpet in the middle and have it get lost,” says Pourvakil. “A bigger rug always looks more beautiful by its nature. It always looks more grand, more palatial, more regal.”

Mansions call for special treatment. For one spectacular Oakville property, Pourvakil's team created two “massive” 16×26-foot rugs for the living and dining rooms, with identical colours but different designs (\$95,000 each). The main entrance had an inlay wood floor with a border so the custom rug took on an 11×22-foot elliptical shape (\$55,000). The home's “fit for a king” master bedroom, as he calls it, required a 17×17-foot rug (\$65,000) – that's 289 square feet, the size of some downtown Toronto starter condos – plus a 10×14-foot rug (\$30,000) near the fireplace (“and there was still plenty of

hardwood floor showing,” he says with a laugh). Then there was the oddly shaped, labour-intensive 38×28-ft. carpet he made for another client. It came to a triangle at the top and cost \$130,000.



“Thirty, 50, 100 years ago, carpets were the main thing in any room, so when you came in it took over the room and everything else was secondary,” says Pourvakil. “But now the design trend is more about unison, harmony. Everything has its own place, but at the same time it flows. There’s not one dominating feature like a rug used to be. It still has to work with the surroundings.”

Then there are the intriguing staircases he has to cover. A recent project in Whitby had three open staircases – two in the centre hall, where one went upstairs and one to the basement – with wide stairs at the bottom and top but narrower ones in the middle. The hand-knotted silk-and-wool carpet was woven overseas in one piece and shipped to Toronto for cutting, with each staircase individually wrapped. Price tag: \$50,000. For natural flow and consistency, smaller rugs with similar patterns picked up on the design throughout the open-plan second floor.

As for colours, gone are the tone-on-tone taupes, seafoam greens and blue, silvers, greys and platinums of the past two decades. Now it’s all about neutrals accented with what Pourvakil calls “spicy colours” such as navy, tomato red and burnt orange.

Despite a full catalogue of designs to choose from, Pourvakil says many clients at this level have ideas of their own, mainly due to the enormous or unusual sizes involved. That’s why the bulk of the cost comes from labour, he says.

“[They like] having something that’s one of a kind in the world,” he explains. “... People feel good about having unique stuff in their possession.”

On the Surface

There was a time when granite was the stone of choice for upscale floors and surfaces. In today’s crop of luxury homes, though, it’s marble that packs a statement punch. In fact, luxury builder Paul Miklas is accustomed to spending at least \$600,000 on marble for his mansions.

But what's really exciting, according to Thomas Hargittay of Toronto's Stone Tile International, are the colourful geometric patterns that are showing up in impressive Italian tiles and wood flooring.

"Pattern on a floor makes a huge statement," he says. "It can be ultra-contemporary or ultra-classic."

Just as these homes are getting bigger, so are the materials' surface dimensions. Wood planks of seven, eight or nine inches wide are now standard in estate homes, he says, with last year's muted grey tones giving way to dark and natural hues. Also popular are hand-scraped woods that have been naturally protected, offering a more rustic look and greater durability. Prices vary from \$7 to \$50 per square foot. In tiles, 2x4-foot or 1x1-metre are common now as is large-format slab porcelain. Italian Laminam, for instance, comes in 1x3-metre slabs that are ideal for countertops, vanities, fireplaces or around tubs. Unlike natural stone, says Hargittay, it's "virtually indestructible" and is a fraction of the cost of marble, at \$11 to \$30 per square foot.

In the kitchen, "transitioning tiles" are making an impact. Hargittay equates it to the lanais of Florida, with one-centimetre-thick exquisite porcelain-looking tiles running throughout the kitchen, and matching two-centimetre-thick tiles continuing outside. Cost

is \$12 to \$20 per square foot.



Gleaming marble floors in one of Paul Miklas's recently completed mansions. Tyler Anderson / National Post

"The popularity is driven from European inspiration," he says. "It can be put on 'pedestals' so wiring can be put under it. It can be laid on grass, sand, concrete. It's very versatile and cost-

effective and you get a beautiful look. You can mimic wood, natural stone, marble, you name it. It's an amazing alternative to tumbled stone because it's a lighter product to lay down and less labour intensive."

Backyard Fun

As if there isn't enough space to roam indoors, backyards of the wealthy are party-ready with different zones designated for various types of entertaining. Think pool with whirlpool and hot tub, dining area, outdoor kitchen with top-notch barbecue, sports courts, fire features, waterfalls, sound systems and plasma TVs.

You name it, the backyard's got it. According to Jennifer Gannon, proprietor of BonaVista LeisureScape in Toronto, homeowners can justify spending on their backyard up to 10% of the value of their home. For a \$20-million dwelling, that's big bucks.



"Clients are looking for a resort experience that they've seen at four- or five-star hotels, one that they want to bring into their backyard to create that Zen escape," she says.

While indoor pools are generally standard styles, the outdoors spawns creativity (see top photo). Lately, Gannon's clients are outfitting their pools with a

8x5-foot recessed tanning shelf that accommodates a chaise lounge to help them soak up the rays ("It's like a wading pool for adults," she quips). At about \$5,000, the beautifully tiled shelf also creates an art focal point. Others may choose a refreshing plunge pool with a \$20,000 swim current that Gannon equates to a treadmill in the water.

When the lights dim and guests arrive, there's something magical and luxurious about fire. It creates a feeling of harmony, says Gannon, and adds drama when combined with the sound of water.

"We can actually build them so you have water spilling out underneath it but fire up above," she says. "That combination is very elemental ... It has a very Hollywood Hills feel when you've got that ripple effect casting light back onto the cabana or the main



residence. It's a very soothing and therapeutic vision."

Fire also extends the Canadian summer by providing a striking source of heat (since most municipalities don't allow wood burning outdoors). Dekko Concrete's Canadian-made lightweight fire pits and fire bowls, for example, use natural gas or propane to shoot flames through decorative stones. Costs range from a 13-inch fire bowl at \$1,700 to a 60-inch rectangular

fire pit table for \$3,600. Custom sizes boost the price.

As for cooking, these are outdoor kitchens in the truest sense. Philip Allen of Lynx Grills Eastern Canada says a typical luxury set-up includes a 54-inch grill, 30-inch griddle, side burners, warming drawers, storage cabinets, countertop with trash chute and refrigerator. Starting price is \$25,000, he says, though it can skyrocket to \$70,000 when clients add pizza ovens, sinks, wine fridges, ice makers, infrared heating for winter use, beer tap and anything else their hungry heart desires.

Sports, Anyone?

There's indeed something for everyone when it comes to play. Tennis court? Naturally. Basketball court? Of course. Dek hockey? Absolutely. No matter what their sport, homeowners at this level can have it all thanks to multi-functional courts with moveable posts and multi-coloured lines designating each game.

"[Ten years ago] when we were putting our courts in they were very small at 20x25 feet with a basketball hoop, and satisfaction was rendered,"



says Andre Laberge, vice-president of Flex Court Canada in Oakville, Ont. "Today, things have changed. Families are finding that their kids are not very active. They're

hooked on video games so there's a big tendency to get the kids outdoors. To do so, these courts have gotten bigger. They're multi-functional, multi-game courts where you can have basketball, pickleball, badminton, paddle tennis all on the same court to keep these kids going. And the consumer has figured out that it's a great central point – all the neighbours come to their house.”

Prices vary, says Laberge, from a “tiny little court” with one basketball hoop costing \$5,000 to a 60×120-foot court with multiple hoops and nets and full fencing for \$100,000. And there's no shortage of takers, with Flex Court's business up 50% over last year.

With backyards so large, there's still room for a swing. But this ain't your grandma's swingset. David Sadja, president of Rainbow of Ontario, works closely with landscapers to find the perfect spot for the company's redwood King Kong Double Whammy Green Machine complete with swings, crawl tunnel and Billy Goat bridge, tire swing, adult lawn swing, picnic table, chop wall, spiral slide, monkey bars, rock wall and so much more. It starts at \$21,000, though those who “really want to go crazy” opt for the King Kong Castle Supersized Tarantula at \$35,000. It takes three workers one full day for assembly. While these playgrounds suit about six children at a time, says Sadja, some of his clients don't even have kids yet.

Indoor Action

Don't fret if it's snowy or raining. Just head to the basement for a lucky strike. Greg Cruise of Striker Installation Inc. in Oakville (Canadian distributor for Brunswick Bowling) says his company installs one or two residential bowling alleys in Canada each year. They're typically two five- or 10-pin synthetic lanes measuring 60 feet long by 3.5 feet wide plus another 16 feet in front for the approach and 10 feet at the end for the pinsetter machine. Pricing starts at \$120,000 for labour and all bowling-related

equipment including automatic scoring, but Cruise says the price can soar to \$200,000 if players “really jazz it up” with display images on the lanes, cosmic lighting and specially-designed ball returns. One client who loved fishing ordered a ball return shaped like the head



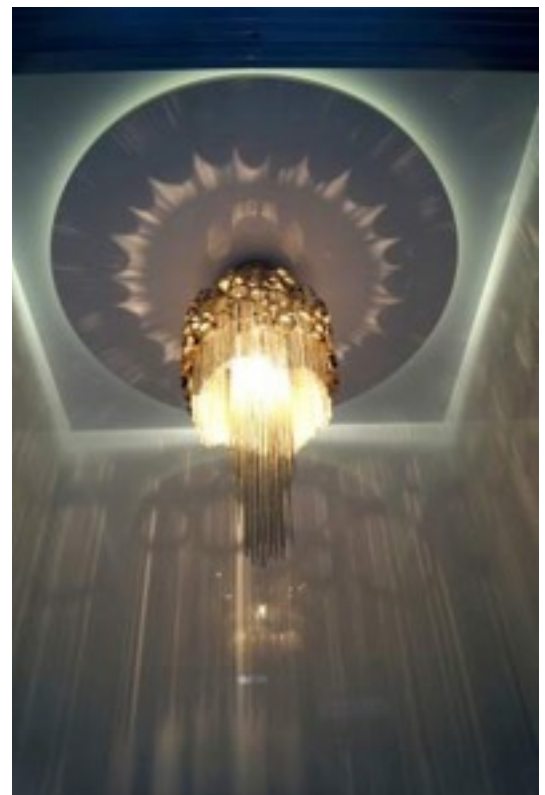
of a fish and projected an ocean floor on the lanes.

Of course, there's always the home gym to help get muscles pumped. Michael Wiseman, president of Foremost Fitness in Toronto, says many of his clients are used to using top-notch equipment at expensive hotels around the world and crave the same at home. Most set up their 300-sq.-ft. gym with a treadmill, elliptical machine, functional trainer, dumbbells, bench, exercise ball, stretching mat, pilates equipment and ankle weights. Average price tag: \$20,000.

Still, Wiseman once outfitted an "over-the-top" gym with a rowing machine, various bikes, separate machines for every body part, a big TV with sound system. It took up half the basement and cost \$70,000. Some clients want two gyms: a cardio room upstairs with a treadmill and stationary bike and one in the basement for weights or group exercises with friends. Even so, homeowners might also belong to a club for racquet sports or spinning classes, and, no doubt, their personal trainer makes house calls.

Going up?

That splendid staircase may draw eyeballs, but why climb it when there's an elevator in the house? Residential lifts are fairly standard in luxury homes, though designs vary depending on an owner's taste. Florence Facchini of Federal Elevator Systems in Mississauga says there are two extremes: from a simple elevator that sits behind a closed door (\$25,000) to a "showpiece" glass elevator with glass hoistway (\$70,000). They can have traditional unfinished wood for walls and doors or high-gloss or exotic wood panelling. There are simple stainless steel bi-fold gates, accordion gates, scissor gates or beautiful wrought-iron doors. Those who like to ride in style can go all out with a chandelier, crystal-filled handrails and mirrored walls. The elevator can have one, two or three doors depending on where it has to open on each floor. Some even have windows and skylights for what Facchini calls "an elevator with a view." They can also be programmed through a smartphone – ideal, say, for those who want have the elevator be at the top floor by a certain time each morning for that mad dash to work or hot yoga.



With a standard 1,000-pound capacity, Facchini says residential elevators are perfect for moving people or furniture – though the company once installed an elevator for a homeowner with an elderly dog. The elevator can run by hydraulics or electricity, with the latter costing “the equivalent of three large appliances per month.”

Art by the Glass

Glass abounds in estate homes. But not just run-of-the-mill glass. We’re talking exquisite etched, carved and coloured glass: in other words, gorgeous works of art that are also functional. They’re found in windows, kitchen cabinets, door panels and room dividers and make quite an impact when light shines through.



Yet one of the most popular choices – albeit the priciest – involves dolling up the central staircase with a dazzling flat ornamental skylight or a dramatic stained- and leaded-glass dome.

“Creative art-glass skylights are in huge demand,” says glass artist Victoria Balva, owner of Artistic Line Studio in Mississauga. “That was not the case a while ago because ... the technology was not that perfect and they were leaking and making a lot of trouble for homeowners. There was also enormous heat loss. Now technology is in place and we have perfect roof skylights that don’t leak, that come with decades of warranty and people are no longer afraid to install them.”

Balva and husband Eugene Bakumenko, a civil engineer, receive commissions for about a dozen skylights per year, the majority in private homes. They range from 4×4 to 12×12 feet and take about one month to produce following extensive consultation with the homeowner. Price is based on the scope of work but averages around \$140,000 for an 11×11-foot skylight including installation. Most clients summon her when the house is in project development or the early stage of construction.

There are no such things as catalogues at this level of the glass business. Rather, it's all about custom work. Balva collaborates with clients to fine-tune their initial concept and then comes up with several sketches before the final design. Being local makes things go smoothly.

“It's a unique, custom-made, site-specific skylight that cannot be fabricated in China or somewhere else,” she says. “It has to be a local specialist to design and fabricate and install the product.”

Some glass artists prefer to keep their feet on the ground. After 30 years in the business, Tom Smylie, owner of The Glass Studio in Toronto, now says no to massive skylight projects. Instead, he's big on stained glass, hand-bevelled or etched artistic windows for rooms and hallways as well as door panels, transoms and decorative glass panels. His projects are also one-of-a-kind and are priced by time (approximately \$80 per hour). One client, for example, had a large stylish window along a staircase but didn't want to put up curtains. They opted for a leaded, textural and bevelled glass window that became what Smylie calls a “contextual piece.” The project took 137 hours including art development, fabrication, materials and installation. Price tag: \$12,000.