

BLENDING IN

Banks of windows allow award-winning home to become a part of the natural world of Caledon Hills

BY SIGNE LANGFORD
PHOTOGRAPHY BRANDON BARRÉ
STYLING LYNDIA FELTON

Architect Christopher Simmonds won the Ontario Home Builders Association Award of Distinction for the Most Outstanding Custom Home (2,500 to 5,000 square feet) in 2010 and the Greater Ottawa Home Builders Association's 2010 Most Outstanding Custom Home Award (Open Category, Greater Ottawa) for his design of the house.



Look to the ceiling and you realize there is not a straight line in the place. Walls flare, ceilings arch and curve offering interest and fantastic acoustics in a space that might otherwise have sounded echo-y and felt cavernous. Instead everything in this space is light, airy, clean and organic and every inch of it speaks of a fresh start, which seems to have been just what the Moyer clan needed.

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A TWISTING GRAVEL DRIVEWAY SNAKES to the top of a hill where the Moraine House pops into view, hidden from the main road by trees, tall grasses and wild flowers. It's a residence that is easily at home with nature.

Designed by Ottawa architect Christopher Simmonds for Brenda and Michael Moyer, the house, made of oiled cedar and hand-chiselled Owen Sound limestone, blends with the landscape thanks to banks of windows reflecting the trees and flora of the surrounding Caledon Hills.

A southern wall of floor-to-ceiling glass rising 25 feet and a 36-foot stretch of clerestory windows - a total of 120 windows - give every spot in the house a vantage point on the great outdoors. Brenda Moyer loves these views. "I'm a homebody, birdwatcher, nature-lover and gardener," she says. "I can see wild turkeys and deer from my living room or bedroom. And at night, it's just so quiet, peaceful and starry. If the conditions are right, I can see the Toronto skyline, which is kind of neat."



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Inside it's sleek and sparse with a soft palette of brown, taupe and bluish-green. Brenda chose Restoration Hardware silver sage for the master bedroom. Throughout the house, adornments and art pieces are few. Long and comfortable sofas in the great room encourage lounging, reading, chatting and gazing out on nature and Brenda spends much time there when she's not outside. "I don't really watch TV with all these windows and so much to see outside. I don't need to," she says. Husband Michael, on the other hand, enjoys his down time, relaxing in the media room in his well-lived-in brown leather recliner. "Oh, it's been the subject of many a heated discussion." Brenda laughs. "Every time I bring it up, he says, 'I ask for so little. Can't I just keep my chair?' I can't argue with that."

Owners of a thriving electrical contracting business, the Moyers decided to reward themselves for more than three decades of hard work by building a custom home on 50 wild acres on the Oak Ridges Moraine. "Mike's work ethic has always been incredible and it was time" for the new house, Brenda says. At 3,500 square feet of upper level and 2,400 square feet of ground level, the house feels almost too big for the empty nesters, but, as Brenda explains, "Mike really wanted something lavish and special after all those years of hard work."

Throughout the home, light, warmth and natural elements abound and transition seamlessly, one into the other: maple, bamboo, marble and limestone. Intricately swirled, curved slabs of olive ash burl wood adorn the kitchen island base and greet visitors between the spacious foyer and piano stage.





The many gorgeous yet understated features – a Neptune infinity tub, Logico Triple Linear Suspension lamp of hand-blown glass designed by Michele De Lucchi and Gerhard Reichert and indoor rock garden with fountain – were chosen by the Moyer family and Christopher Simmonds. Computerized lighting and security is by Lutron Smart Systems. A \$90,000 geothermal system – 9,000 feet of pipe and in-floor radiant heat coils – provides all heating and cooling and a filtration system purifies water, drawn from a well 140 feet deep.

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It's also simple. Architect Simmonds kept his eyes on the big picture and the details while bearing in mind the landscape and clients' lifestyle. "I am inspired by Japanese and Asian architecture, how a house is always understood in relation to the landscape, natural and man-made," he says. An architect and meditation teacher, Simmonds considers the flow of energy or chi when designing a home. "A house should gradually unfold with a sense of a gentle flow. This house is an expression of the landscape."

Originally, Michael wanted to do the design himself, but his son, James, talked him out of it and the Moyers are grateful. "We would have just done something very traditional. We never would have done anything so modern," Brenda says. In fact it was James who introduced Simmonds to his parents. "We researched several architects and talked to one other," recalls Brenda, "but once we saw Chris' work, we had to go with him. He knew what we wanted before we did!"

"When I first visited the property with Mike and Brenda, there was a sense of energy that I got from looking out at the landscape, a feeling of excitement in my gut," says Simmonds. "Looking across the rolling meadows and woodlands, I felt that this was where the house should go."

Simmonds, who integrated the ancient Chinese principles of feng shui in the design, says there is a sense of peace in the house. "[The owners] feel wonderful when they're there," he says. "And anyone who visits doesn't want to leave. They want to hang around. People sense that there's a flowing energy that is a calming energy."

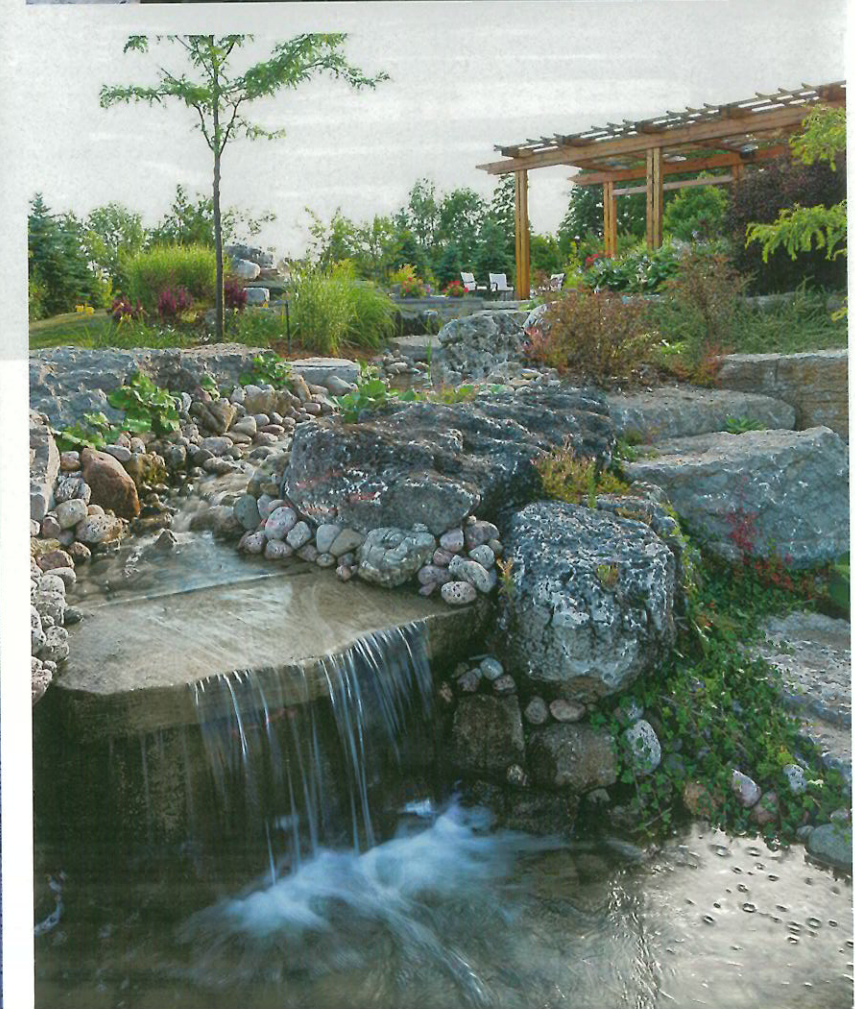
For the Moyers, home is where friends and family come together and relax in nature. There's warmth in this home that makes it perfect for celebrations and Brenda is especially fond of Thanksgiving.

"I love the fall. The colour up here is really spectacular then and we turn Thanksgiving Day into garlic planting and veggie harvesting day, too. At dinner, we feast on pumpkin, squash—all the veggies that are ready to harvest." But don't even think about bagging one of Brenda's beloved wild turkeys for the table; she's far too sentimental. 🦃





Photo by Peter Fritz





James and his husband, Dwayne (the couple were married on the grounds in 2011), need only a little prompting to break into song and play the rare 1936 Steinway B concert grand piano. Simmonds' design included a raised stage overlooking the sunken living room specifically for the piano. It's one of two pianos in the house. The other, a baby grand on the ground level, was rescued when the Moyers' home of 27 years was badly damaged by fire in 2006, on the same day contractors broke ground on Moraine House.

The spacious and open galley kitchen boasts a pantry of 60 square feet, but its shelves are practically empty. Brenda says she prefers to do her shopping daily at one of Caledon's farmers' markets—one of the benefits of country living. The kitchen features a leather textured granite island, and a stainless steel Dacor propane range. Minimalist cabinetry is dark walnut and the floor is travertine, a type of textured limestone.

"Natural and eco-friendly, non-toxic materials are very important to us," says Brenda, referring to wood floors and wool rugs, coloured with vegetable dyes.

Brenda recalls how she felt about leaving her old home six years ago, "I was finding it emotionally very hard to let go of that house; we'd lived in it so long—the kids helped me plant the trees. I was really attached to it." But it seems fate was conspiring to give Brenda a shove. "After the fire, it was much easier to walk away. I wanted a clean start and no more antiques." ☛

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