

FORUM



Ambassador

Fine Custom Homes Inc.
The artion inside the builder...

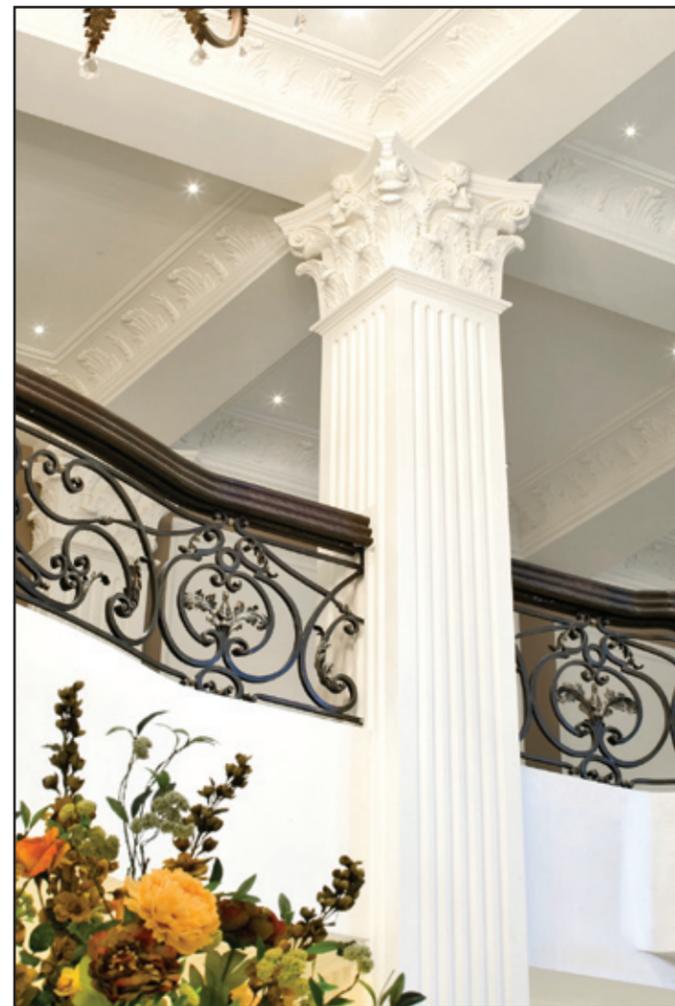
Hotel Napoleon, Paris
Cavo Tagoo, Mykonos Greece
Lamborghini Gallardo Superleggera



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The artisan inside the builder...

by *Smith Corindia*



Prague is a city steeped in a rich cultural history and architectural wonderment with hundreds of year old palaces, castles, churches, galleries and opera houses. Today it is the number one tourist destination city in Europe.

Flash-forward to present day; Michal J Cerny, the President and CEO of Ambassador Fine Custom Homes Inc., says he has little recollection of that historical day, but owes a great gratitude to his parents for making that courageous leap to Canada, via a two year stop in Great Britain.

Having travelled extensively throughout Europe, absorbing the rich architecture that is abundantly available throughout, when asked how difficult it was to design Saxony Manor (as it has become affectionately named by many), his humble response is that it comes naturally. I sense the modesty in the man giving us a tour of this truly authentic and enchanting French Chateau-esque home that one would expect to see lavender fields sprouting all around. And although this is



As the ground thundered with vibrations, in the distance the Russian Tanks were fast approaching; the Cerny Family, with four suitcases in hand, fled towards the airport leaving all the rest of their worldly possessions behind. As chief air traffic controller, Michal Cerny's father, had great personal relationships with foreign pilots, and had access to the airport tarmac through a side chain linked gate. A simple key that would unlock the chain to provide their escape would ultimately be the key to their freedom when they quickly took refuge by boarding their getaway plane which took flight just as the Russian Army shut down the airport.

It sounds like the opening scene right out of a Humphrey Bogart movie, however, this is no Hollywood Movie. These were the events that unfolded in Prague, Czechoslovakia in 1968 when the Russians came in to unhinge any attempts at democratization by enforcing their Communist regime and put a stranglehold on the movement till 1990, when "the wall" would eventually come tumbling down.

not Provence, France you can certainly get lost in its allure that backs onto a picturesque forested ravine lot, nestled in with the pristine surroundings of the Mississauga Golf and Country Club.

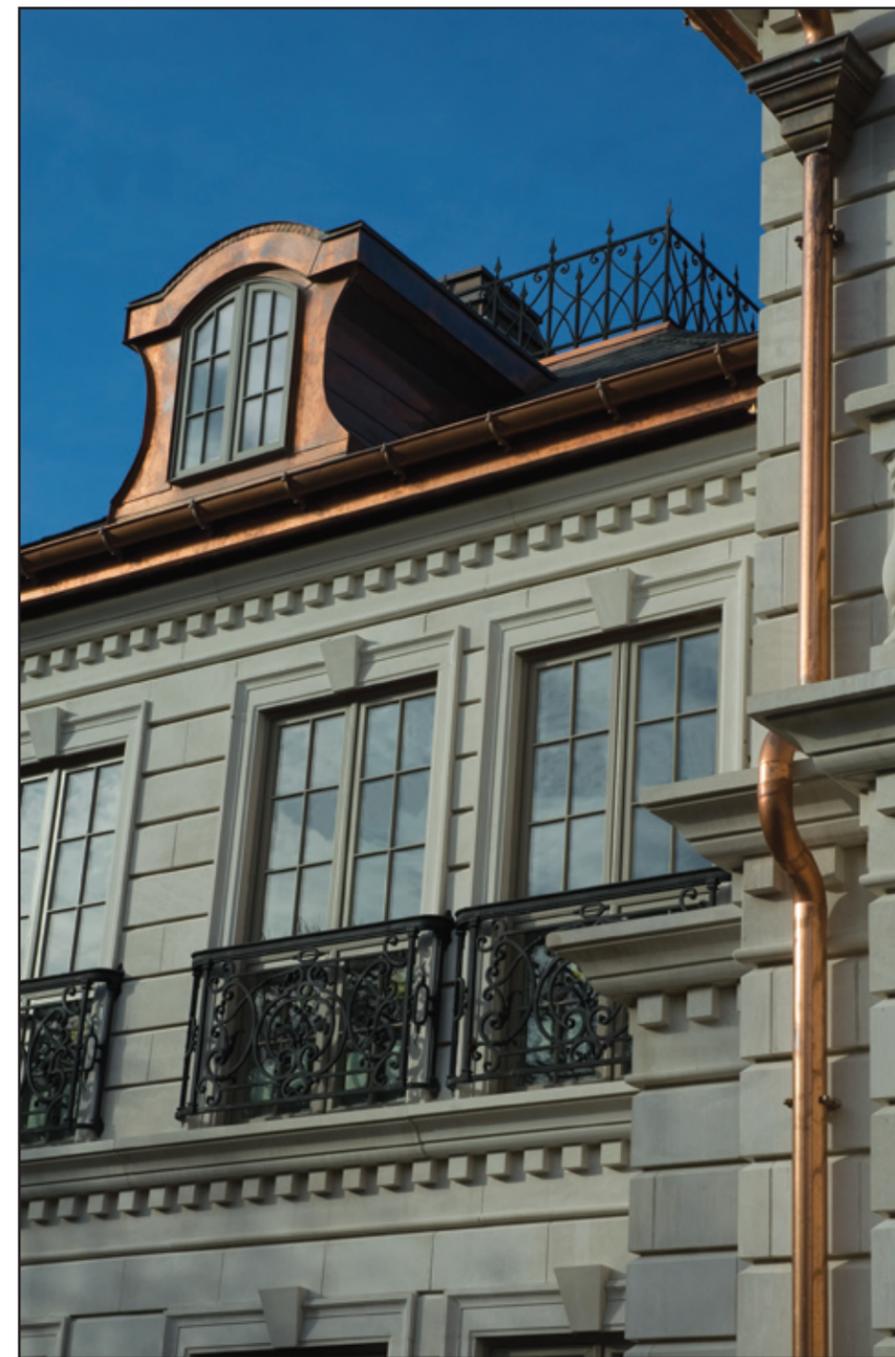
Michal looks anything as what you might perceive as a home builder. Dressed in a sport jacket, Armani t-shirt and designer jeans with shoulder length hair that is pushed behind his ears, he comes across more like the down to earth congenial artiste, a guy whose comprehensive knowledge behind every intrinsic detail

(both technical and design) of this 18,000 square foot palatial built home is inspiring to say the least. Michal has designed every aspect of Saxony Manor; from floor plans, elevations and finishes, to the detailed wrought iron work, plaster work, staircase and all fine custom cabinetry.

But don't be fooled by this look. I have been visiting Saxony Manor since the framing stage, and during construction you'll find Michal up on the scaffolding, directing and choreographing the various trades and



Michal J Cerny, the President and CEO of Ambassador Fine Custom Homes Inc.



artisans ensuring that things are built to the Ambassador level of perfection. After 20 years of framing, the rough carpenters acknowledged that they learned a half dozen "Best Practices" and most up to date techniques from Michal. Go figure. On another site visit, the stone mason, welder and crane operator were all listening attentively as Michal solved an on-site condition which required on the spot resolution to a new challenge that presented itself, when the 1600lb limestone slabs were meant to be installed onto the sloped roof portion of the front portico. A dance of steel I beams, angle irons, custom designed brackets and stone; ensuring that it can withstand the "one hundred year storm."

Built with chamfered and buffed 100 % Imported Indiana limestone, the thirty foot tall front Portico with its four solid stone columns, was a marvel of craftsmanship, brute Herculean stamina and crane acrobatics to fit and manoeuvre all into its rightful place. This is the sixth house in the GTA with the entire home exterior being built with chamfered and buffed Indiana Limestone (over \$1 Million worth). There is no pre-cast, no stucco, no imitation man-made stone - just real, quarried, all limestone all the way around. The Master Ensuite and



back bedrooms have walkouts with the classic all stone balustrade Juliet balconies. The entire solid granite cobblestone driveway (built on top of a

2ft thick ensemble of gravel, concrete and rebar) and all walk outs, patios are heated with a glycol snow melt system making shovelling of snow obsolete.

The 11 dormers, chimney caps, collection boxes, 6" eaves troughs, soffits and downspouts are all made from 20 oz. copper and non fading

black Slate tile roofing, that can sustain any unforgiving weather conditions. Staying true to form, Michal conceived the classic hand

forged wrought iron balcony rails skirt ing each window and carried the motif inside the house onto the staircases. This is the first time in 27 years that

the Iron Smith used one inch thick material, which Michal explains was necessary to balance the size of the stone when looking at the house from the street.

As we are ushered in through the home's 10 foot double Mahogany front doors we take a moment to breathe in the space where streams of bright light came in from every direction. The formal front foyer boasts 23ft tall ceilings with a 9ft tall solid plaster dome crowning the plaster jewelled ceiling, pilasters and Corinthians. A stone sculptor was commissioned to make the clay model (from which the mold was cast) to Michal's specifications. Ambassador owns the plaster mold and as such you will not find this custom made Corinthian anywhere else.

In staying true to the integrity of the home's traditional elements is the 18ft tall Drawing Room. The historical significance of the drawing room in the 1800's was when guests would arrive, this is where the butler asked them to wait for their hosts. Wealthy families would have the current family portrait in various stages of completion, proudly displayed on a painter's easel in the drawing room, and hence where the name "drawing room" was derived from. In present day, it is the quintessential "withdrawing" room to have some tea with a good book.

Needless to say Michal's colour commentary was a great asset in putting into perspective the appreciative value to this home. The huge slabs of True Select Crema Marfil (only 15% of the Crema Marfil quarried, is of True Select quality), laid in a diagonal direction and framed off in an Imperial Coffee granite border is to die for. Michal sent back the entire first container of marble, as the veining was not of "true select" quality, and the shading of the colour was inconsistent. Each piece of the 60" x 112" slabs of marble were handpicked by Michal and imported from Spain.

At the push of a button, the oversized chandelier in the foyer entrance drops down to eye level for easy cleaning purposes.

Hand carved solid white oak, church sized wood handrails blue printed by Michal (and three life sized samples later), resulted in this being another first; in 30 years of being in business

the staircase company manufacturer had never made such a large wood handrail, complete with descending curved volutes. Aside from the temptation of wanting a thrill ride

down the banister, what was unique here was its innovative design allowed it to be freestanding and not inhibited by wall anchoring supports that one might normally see in traditional built

staircases. Michal describes how he created the self supporting curved staircase early in the design stage, "A series of I beams welded to posts in key placement positions, allow the

welded structural steel frame at both ends to have the solid wood staircase built onto them, preventing the need of attaching the staircase to a wall, or having a post at the fulcrum (load

point where staircases get the most torque when, say you have the famous 14 person wedding photo)."

Michal explains that the home was designed on an X-axis, or perhaps what 17th Century Mathematician Rene Descartes assessed as part of the Cartesian design: the centre of the space and its equal distances in either direction which may constitute, x, y, and z. Or something like that. Whatever it was, no matter whether you looked up, down or all around, there was something you were drawn to – and then just like that I'm drawn into the magnificent Great Room. With its three sets of 10 foot French doors with expanded windows over top, the world outside the window suddenly felt like an extension of the room. The opulent custom plaster mouldings with coffered ceiling squares that looked like they were woven right into the ceiling and the floors with 8" wide North American White Oak rift and quarter sawn hardwood; installed, sanded, stained and finished on-site, played in perfect harmony together. Once again, Michal's nuanced detailing to his estate built homes comes through: He insisted on 7-12ft premium lengths of clear quality (no sap, no pin holes, no knotting) 8" wide planks. To those in the know, this is a daunting task. The hardwood fabricator went through 38,000 linear feet of material to deliver 1650 sq ft to Saxony Manor. Talk about detailed perfection. But perhaps the room's piece de resistance was the captivating marble fireplace. A 20 foot tall solid marble caramel beige marvel that evokes a time of when great artisans put their sweat equity into master works – with its journey from Indonesia, was no exception. "...16,000 pounds of hand carved solid marble that took over half a year to make..." prides Michal, and if you've ever been sceptical that Santa Clause couldn't fit down a chimney, then this might rekindle your belief. We easily fit three people inside the solid masonry fireplace that can function as an optional wood burning or gas. "To install the over mantel, we chain hoisted four solid horizontal pieces each weighing 1,800 pounds into place first." Michal says, then takes a





daunting breath to deliver the punch line, "Then we had to install the top decorative piece weighing in at 5,300 pounds." And just to give us a visual comparison, he points out that the new Bentley automobile weighs in at about 5,200 pounds. "The ceiling was opened up, and our 3 ton chain hoist was attached to the twin steel I beams and the various pieces that were then lowered into place. It took seven men and four hours to set the top piece into place." In the early design stage, Michal ensured that the two structural steel beams used for the steel roof

frame work were situated over the centre of the fireplace. This was one of five solid marble fireplaces in this exquisite home, and although they were not all of this size and stature they were all hand carved with the same ornate details and characteristic of the minor imperfections that remind us that these were not cast molded in some assembly line factory.

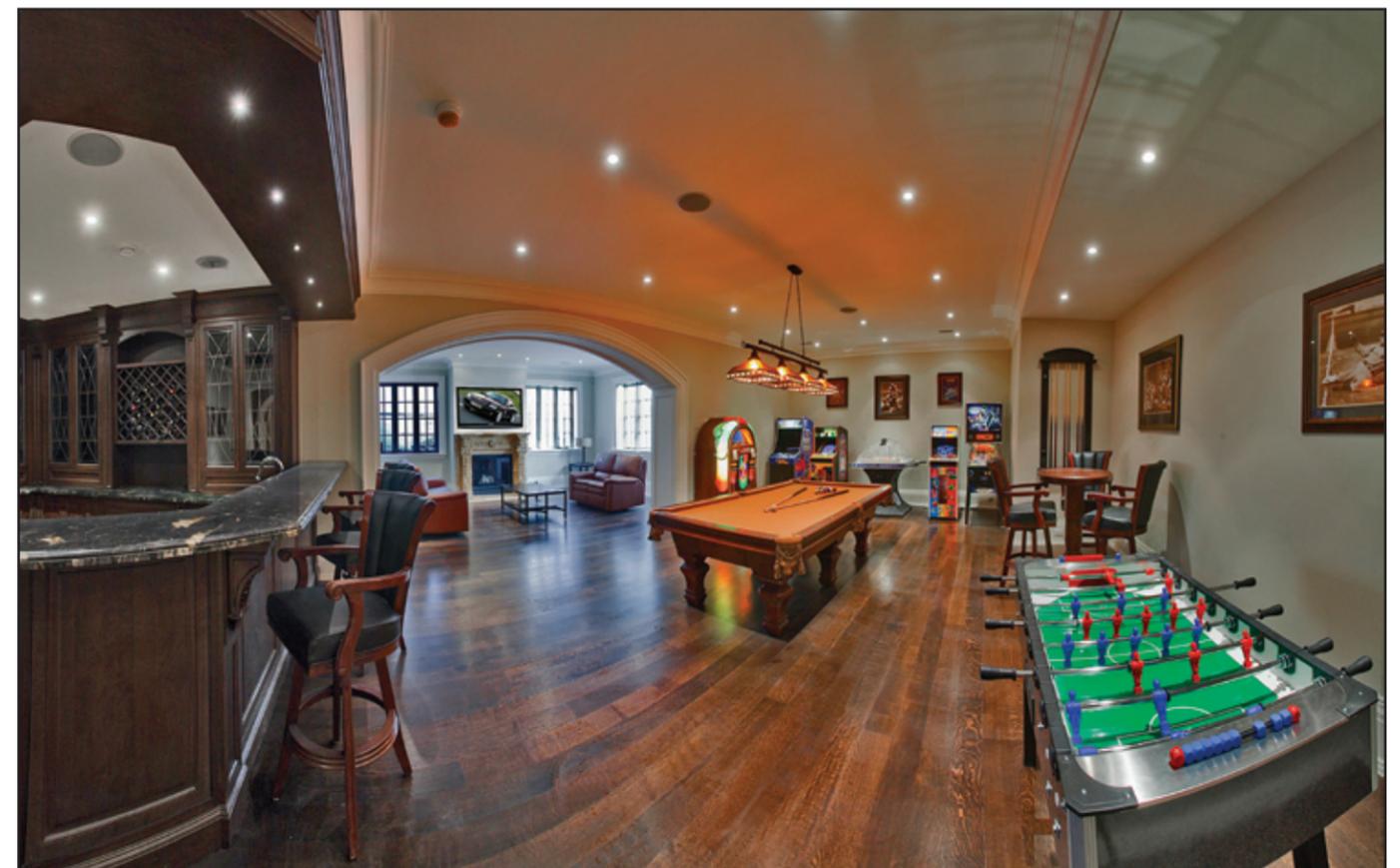
In this home, it didn't matter which way you ventured you were in for an eye-pleasing reward. In the 1600sq feet of Master Bedroom, Ensuite and Dressing

Room with their 18ft vaulted ceilings and 4 dormers, you experience exactly what we would expect to see in a Prague Palace. The dressing room has 10ft tall wrap around 5th Avenue style, solid walnut speciality cabinetry, complete with a centre island and flat screen TV. Michal outlined every detail of this dressing room and all other cabinetry in Saxony Manor (\$700,000 worth) on 31 pages given to the cabinet maker, describing each piece right down to corbel size and trim detail.

In the lower level, which is what I would call the "escape level," you are first met by a vintage wine cellar that was crafted in a solid Spanish Cedar wood with custom wine shelving for up to 750 bottles of your favourite vino and beyond that was an Exercise Room with cork flooring and four flat screen TV's to compliment each work out station. Then there was the ultimate Games room with a wrap around floor to ceiling built-in bar made of Cherry wood that included glass doors with a lead inlay detailing. The lower floor (because I can't bring myself to calling it a basement) had 10 foot high ceilings and large windows and window wells with the home's exterior Indiana Limestone stone as a backdrop where in time one could visualize the beautiful Baltic Ivy vine taking fold on the wall.



*Furnishings by Direct Interiors, www.directinteriors.com
Photographs by Michel Boucher
Games Room furnished by www.thePlaydiumstore.com,
please contact Guylaine Tassoni*





But if you really wanted to steal away some time and lose yourself, the theatre room had all the accoutrements of the silver screen experience. The three rows of seating for twelve had the roped lighting, Ornate Cornice Mouldings throughout the coffered ceiling along with four Corinthian topped pilasters and commercial grade

theatre carpeting, a complete surround sound system with professional sound proofing throughout, and what's a theatre without a built in popcorn machine? The only thing missing here was the usher and his flashlight. It might be of interest to note that if you ever wanted that Drive-In movie experience, the Garage, and its



European lift system for up to eight cars even had its own HD screen on the wall.

As we take a collective breath, we settle down in the casual dining area (appropriately called the Gathering room) adjacent to the opulent kitchen and are curious as to what looks like a tree trunk carved into a very large table. Well our suspicions are bang on when Michal says that it was taken from a dying 118 year old Maple tree on the home's property. "Rather than cutting the tree down into firewood, we wanted to make something special for the home owner. It took over a year to dry the wood naturally, and then have it kiln dried in Sudbury via the use of railway cars. Then we took it to an acquaintance of mine in Midland, ON who carved it into this rustic, yet formal looking harvest table." Michal tells us that it would be a great conversation piece for the new home owner – as if this home didn't have enough great conversation pieces as it was.

As we finish up our tour here, we are once again in another X-axis of space. On one side of us was the French Country Gourmet kitchen; with Italian Granite countertops (4 of only 16 slabs imported into Canada) and two Copper leaf art niches on each side of the stove, accenting the splashes of the copper that can be seen veined through the granite island countertop; and a large airy family room with 18ft vaulted ceilings finished with the same high quality hardwood we spoke about earlier, where our host rightly justifies that the kitchen party can now spill over into without ever being too far away from the kitchen.

This 23 room and 9 bathroom over 4 floors, and 8 car garage Manor, has state-of-the-art Smart Home System Technology whose 18 kilometres of wire and sophisticated pinpoint memory cells can light up your specific path all the way to the fridge for those late night munchies, or for vacation mode, the brain of this system will memorize the entire home's on/off switch routines for the past two weeks and then apply the same "somebody must be at home routine" when the family is on vacation, resulting in the technological assets of the home rivalling its decor.

The home is complete with four mechanical rooms which house five furnaces, HRV's, steam humidifiers, HEPA and media filters. When we toured Saxony Manor to write this article, it was -14 degrees Celsius outside and toasty inside. Small catch though; none of the furnaces were commissioned yet. It was only the radiant floor warming and the two pound BASF foam insulation throughout the house (R30 in the walls, code is R19; R50 in the roof, code is R28) that kept the house so warm at +22 degrees Celsius. Truly unbelievable. Powered by a 600 AMP system that Michal prides is the first home in Mississauga with such power (most homes have 200 to 400amp), with a back up 200amp natural gas generator, Michal's team had to pretty much write the book for this as there was no past precedent set for it.

And for all its formality, grandness and technological pizzazz, Saxony Manor feels like a warm, down to earth home.



The consistency in texture, colour, tone and layout gave it a gentle ease and flow and never made you feel lost in the 18,000 sq ft or a stranger in someone else's very grand space.

With twenty-five years experience of project management throughout North America, and an honours degree in Construction Project Management, Michal holds a professional title of PMP. But there is much more behind his title that has contributed to perfect homes that are both exemplary in their authentic tone, look and craftsmanship as they are in their impeccably sound engineering. He leads a crack crew that he classifies as artisans as opposed to what most "builders" refer to as "trades or labourers", but then again, Michal is not your run of the mill builder. As he puts it, "We decide on our vendor partners equally for their attitude as for their aptitude. We educate them to work within our sensitive quality assurance program, ensuring that all of our scope of work is met on time and on budget. They are seasoned team players that understand the common goal, at the macro level, whilst being able to focus on their specialized individual part, at the micro level of the project."

A man who is passionate about his homes, knows that his time away from work is just as important. He has a passion for flying and is a licensed pilot that has flown himself as far



as Phoenix, AZ; has Heli-skied in Whistler; has a love for the Ocean and is a certified Scuba Diver which allows him the privilege of being up close and personal with many a Coral Reef, that in many ways can have its own captivating pieces of nature's architecture.

Ambassador Fine Custom Homes Inc.....a world to discover inside your own home.

