

LUXURY HOME

quarterly



CARLOS MARTIN ARCHITECTS
DESIGNS FOR FLORIDIAN ESTATE LIVING

+ A PEEK INSIDE *several dynamic
and innovative American lake homes*

HOUSE OF STEEL

An eco-friendly touch, galvanized steel is incorporated in the interior and exterior of the Billy Smith home. Here, the rust-resistant metal is used for the deck railing and the roof's support beams.



Murphy & Co. Design

A FIRM CHECKS ITS EGO AT THE DOOR TO HELP CLIENTS REALIZE THEIR DREAM HOMES

By David Hudnall

When Jeff Murphy founded Murphy & Co. Design in Buffalo, Minnesota, in 2003, he resolved to create a working atmosphere that was distinctly lacking in ego. “Some architects—many architects, even—tend to have strong opinions about exactly what their designs should look like,” Murphy says. “But clients don’t like dealing with strong, opposing egos when they’re trying to create a home for themselves.”

“A huge part of what I wanted our firm to stand for was to be advocates to our clients, not adversaries,” he adds. “And everyone who works here today embodies and understands that idea. We’re easygoing, friendly, personable, and committed to high-quality, timeless designs that are reflective of the owners’ desires.”

Currently, those designs are custom, high-end residential homes, many of them single-family homes, plus a growing number of second homes, remodels, and additions. “We’re highly versatile in terms of the size and style of homes we work on,” Murphy says. “Major renovations and large houses are typically great for business, but we also enjoy the intimacy of doing small projects, and our office is set up in a way that makes it easy to do any size





LIKE A LOG

The bed in the master bedroom, designed by Jeff Murphy, is constructed from a black walnut that once stood in the vineyard. Also, at the request of the owner, Murphy gave the room the best views of the property.

Billy Smith's House

In Wayzata, a Minneapolis suburb, Murphy & Co. recently completed this very personal Midwestern farmhouse for a winemaker and businessman named Billy Smith. Though the property is within walking distance of a thriving downtown area, it includes a vineyard and a wetland, creating a pleasant duality for Smith. The home features extensive interior design courtesy of Murphy & Co., and its geothermal system and high-grade foam insulation also make it highly efficient, a continuous goal for the firm in its designs. "Billy really allowed us to spread our wings on this one," Costello says.

Still, the firm often does not have to look far for an inspiring design opportunity. Its Tonka Bay home, a second home for a client who also owns a historic home in downtown Minneapolis, gave the firm the opportunity to build a weekend retreat on a Lake Minnetonka peninsula, but the project was not without challenges. Due to the lot's shape and size and thanks to setback and hard-surface restrictions, the firm was required to apply for variances. Also, neighborhood standards called for low roof lines—a challenge, considering the client asked for a recreation room and four bedrooms with private bathrooms, all on the second floor.

Remarkably, Murphy & Co. drew up a design that both outfitted the home with five second-floor rooms inside a 1.5-story structure and reduced the hard surfaces on the lot to improve the drainage system previously in place. From there, it was all about the views. By shaping the house to the point of the peninsula, the firm was able to capitalize on 270-degree views of water. "You can see the lake from almost every room in the home," Murphy says. "It almost feels like you're in a ship when you look out the windows because of the proximity of the shoreline." An outdoor living experience was achieved through features such as an outdoor dining room, an outdoor fireplace, a pergola, and a built-in barbeque area. Three different balconies overlook the lake, and a variety of terraces weave through the property, bringing the home even closer to the water.

The old lakehouse aesthetic of the English Tudor exterior—"We set the design parameters as an English half-timber style," Murphy says—is offset on the interior by a mix of contemporary furnishings. The majority of the stained wood indoors is white oak, the fireplace in the living room was constructed from quarried stone and reclaimed timber, and the fireplace in the library was made of hand-carved limestone done by a local artisan. Murphy also designed all the architectural elements of the interior spaces, including the millwork, cabinetry, and iron detailing.

Another distinctively personalized property by Murphy & Co. is in Wayzata, Minnesota, a Minneapolis suburb. The client, Billy Smith, is a winemaker who sought a home for himself and his sons that reflected his artistic and philosophical identity. "Billy is a big believer in the concept of yin and yang," project architect Bill Costello says. "He's a winemaker and an artist—but also a businessman. The right side of his brain is engaged in business development, and the left side is where his creative pursuits come from. He wanted a reinterpreted contemporary Midwest farmhouse that would reproduce those different aspects of his personality."

"Major renovations and large houses are great for business, but we also enjoy the intimacy of doing small projects, and our office is set up in a way that makes it easy to do any size project efficiently."

JEFF MURPHY, PRINCIPAL

project efficiently." This diversity has led the firm to another kind of flexibility, too: the company now accommodates different fee structures and budgets depending on the project. "We enjoy flat fees," Murphy says. "You agree to a budget that meets the client's needs, and then you just have fun from there."

The bulk of Murphy & Co.'s clients reside in the Minneapolis area and its surrounding suburbs, but the firm has recently been doing work in western Wisconsin, the Brainerd Lakes area of Minnesota, and even outside the upper Midwest in places such as Aspen, California, and even India. "We'll go wherever the clients will take us," Murphy says.



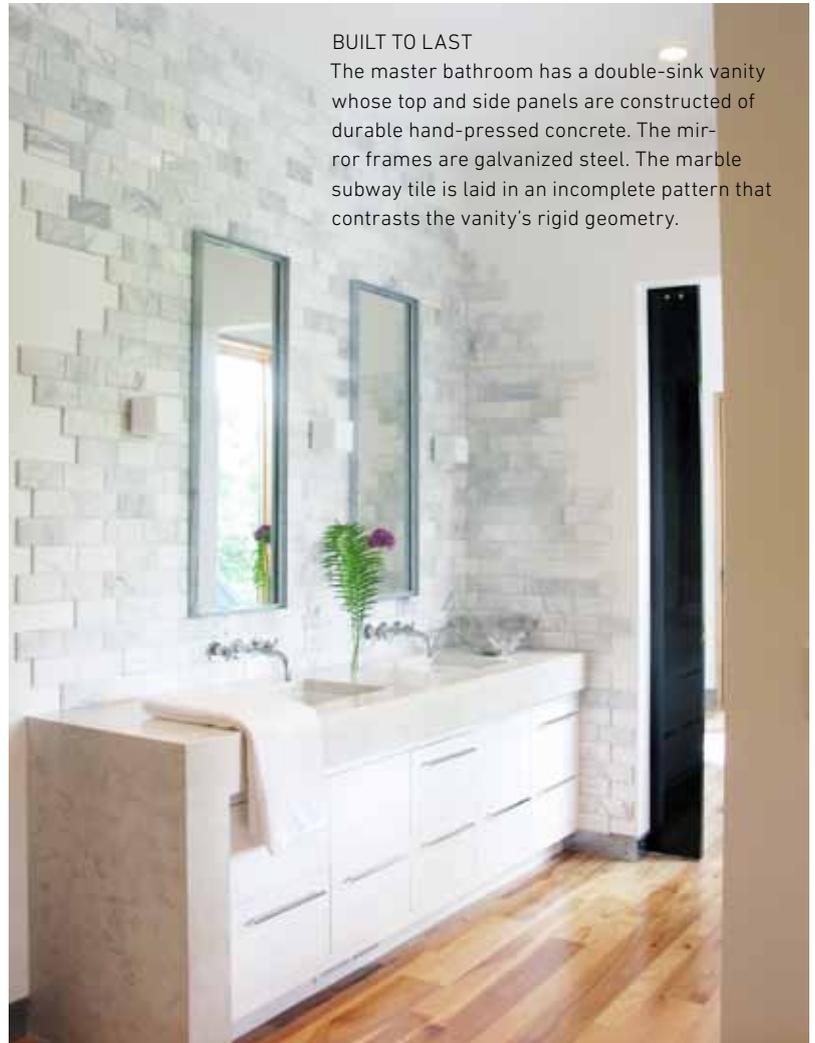
COMING TOGETHER

The living room and the owner's office share the same vaulted space. This room was oriented to have views of both the wetland and the vineyard, and the desk and the side and coffee tables were all designed by the Jeff Murphy.



COMMUNITY KITCHEN

The kitchen is at the center of the home, and its large concrete island serves as a gathering place that can fit eight people. All of the cabinetry in the house is finished with a high-gloss automotive paint to guarantee a gleam.



BUILT TO LAST

The master bathroom has a double-sink vanity whose top and side panels are constructed of durable hand-pressed concrete. The mirror frames are galvanized steel. The marble subway tile is laid in an incomplete pattern that contrasts the vanity's rigid geometry.

LUTRON.



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Tonka Bay Project

Achieving a sense of timelessness is one of Murphy & Co.'s primary objectives, and this retreat home, located on a peninsula between Echo Bay and Lafayette Bay on Lake Minnetonka, is an example of that ambition in action. The English Tudor's half-timber exterior gives the home a classic aesthetic, and the 270-degree's worth of lake views—available in nearly every space of the home via windows, doors, and balconies—give a sense of being on a ship at sea. Inside, details and finishes by Murphy & Co. lend a contemporary balance. "We were able to overcome a number of obstacles to give the clients everything they wanted," Murphy says. "I think it reflects the fact that we're very good listeners and collaborators."

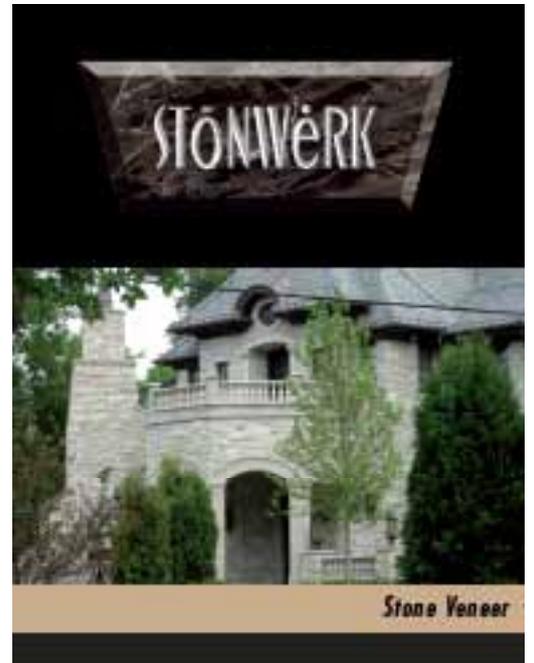
"The same goes for insulating above building code standards—we almost exclusively specify closed-cell polyurethane foam insulation."

A half-acre vineyard sits at the front of the property, the home in the distance beyond it. Views to an adjacent wetland were incorporated into the home's design. "When you look at pictures of the home, it looks very much like an agrarian setting," Costello says. "But in reality it's just a few blocks from a pretty energetic downtown area. Billy can pick grapes and then walk over to the coffee shop."

Murphy & Co.'s involvement on the home's interior was extensive. "We went beyond the exterior shell and really got into the nitty-gritty details on the inside," Costello says. His team designed the window trim, the cabinet detailing, the hardwood detailing, the dining-room table, and a desk in the office, and they crafted the master and guest beds from a black walnut tree that had fallen in the vineyard.

Smith also was intent on the home being energy-efficient, and to that end the firm incorporated prefinished steel products, high-grade foam insulation, and "lots of ceiling fans—he likes to be able to open his windows during the part of the year where you can do that up here," Costello says. A geothermal system for heating and cooling also made its way in, which is an approach Murphy & Co. particularly favors. "We're big advocates of geothermal systems because of how cold it gets in the areas our projects tend to be," Costello says.

"We're students of architectural style, so we're doing constant research and exploration in that area to broaden our knowledge," Murphy says. Looking ahead, the firm is eager to identify additional accomplished builders to collaborate with in its market and to continue spreading the word about its "advocate-not-adversary" architectural approach. "Smart business and great design go hand-in-hand," Murphy says. "The better your business plan, the easier the projects are for your team—and the more pleasing they are to your clients." ■



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