



ROOM WITH A VIEW

Views of the Lake Erie are enjoyed through the abundance of floor-to-ceiling windows in every room of this Ohio home. Schill designed the home so that the homeowners would have a three-story design facing the lake to capture views from as many rooms as possible. A vast amount of earth had to be excavated to facilitate the design.

Schill's demanding career and strong work ethic, forged over several decades in the business, doesn't mean that his life is dominated entirely by his job. While he devotes at least a part of every day to work, he doesn't punch a clock, he says, and he's learned over the years to make family an equal priority. Making his own schedule allows him plenty of time with his wife, Nancy, and their college-age daughter and teenage son, whose high-school track and cross-country competitions Schill follows closely. Staying close to his family is also easier because the business is a family affair, with Nancy handling the property-management firm. Daughter Stephanie is studying architecture, and has shown an interest in running the firm someday, while son Robert plans to study engineering.

It's no wonder that architecture is a family-driven pursuit for Schill; his lifelong interest in the profession has family roots. His ambition was born during long drives with his grandparents, when he, as an eight-year-old, would gaze at the mansions that lined Cleveland's upscale Lake Road. He started working in the industry when he was 15, and a degree in architecture from Kent State in 1985 moved him closer to his goal. Then, in 1988, he became registered as an architect in Ohio.

A lifetime of experience has allowed Schill to create homes that are often the fulfillment of a customer's cherished dream. Schill's homes are something special, with features tailored to his clients' every wish. Because owners anticipate living out the rest of their lives in these houses, Schill builds most with elevators, so that trips up and down stairs won't be a problem in coming decades. "People don't want to give up their dream homes because of age," he says. He's also a fan of flexible space. People seldom use formal dining rooms, he says, so he creates smaller rooms for that purpose, adjacent to foyers so large "you can drive a car down them." These huge spaces can be used for entertaining whenever the need arises.

Outdoor living space is another feature often requested by Schill's clients. Kitchens and living

Schill Architecture

HARD WORK AND FAMILY PROPEL THIS CLEVELAND-BASED DREAM-HOME DESIGNER

by Susan Flowers

For most people, working seven days a week would be akin to a prison sentence. However, that's not the case with Steve Schill, owner of Schill Architecture. "I work seven days a week, not because I have to, but because I enjoy the process," he says. Operating in the Cleveland area, where he has lived his entire life, Schill produces dream houses for high-end clients, with services ranging from "concept through construction," as he puts it. Drawing an average of

10 homes a year, he's also usually building approximately 4 homes through a separately held construction firm, and he even offers property-management services once a project is complete. And Schill's plate is even fuller than it seems: because his homes are so large and packed with special features, construction can take as long as 24 months. Taking pride in providing personal attention to his clients, he's available to them seven days a week.

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ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS

A number of Schill homes feature elegant woodwork and oversized windows, allowing the homeowners to enjoy their views.

“I work seven days a week, not because I have to, but because I enjoy the process.”

STEVE SCHILL, OWNER

rooms are set up to take advantage of the Lake Erie setting of many Schill houses. Pools and hot tubs are also popular, allowing owners to enjoy their homes' spectacular views.

With Schill's homes averaging 10,000–12,000 square feet, he also incorporates as many energy-efficient features as possible into his designs. Even the most upscale clients want to minimize their utility bills, he notes. “People want that space, but they don't want to spend all their resources on energy,” he says. Indoor fitness centers with multiple pieces of equipment are also a must for most owners, as are garages that can hold four to six cars.

These large dream homes are possible because of Schill's focus on quality of projects rather than

quantity. With his firm going full-speed ahead in the early years of the past decade, Schill decided to slow down and specialize in 2003, paring his architecture firm down to just himself. But working solo in Schill Architecture doesn't mean that Schill lacks a strong team. He has long relied on a trusted group of subcontractors, most of whom have been with him for ten years or more. His reputation firmly established, Schill is able to rely on referrals for most new business (though he's also exploring the use of new media, having recently begun using Facebook).

All of this effort produces more than just success in his chosen field, says Schill, who adds that seeing his initial concepts come to fruition for his clients is the most satisfying aspect of his work. “People are coming to me to make a dream come true,” he says. ■