

# Dutch cottage influence reveals charming surprises in custom-built homes



## FROM HOLLAND WITH LOVE: ARCHITECT TREATS EVERY PROJECT AS A CUSTOM BUILD

Architect Bryan Mermans spent his early childhood in rural Netherlands amid thatched-roofed farmhouses and a low rolling countryside, and the beauty of it all never let him.

Though his work spans a modern California-styled home to an uptown condo befitting a top NBA draft pick, Mermans has built a reputation for designing homes that bring in light and leave no detail unfinished.

"I can't define the style, but every time you look at it, you see something new, and you can't take it all in at once," says Billy Royal, a contractor with Royal Building Group, who is currently building six homes designed by Mermans in Charlotte's rapidly evolving Chantilly neighborhood, and who chose Mermans for his personal home. "Bryan is a big lover of windows and natural light, and all of our clients are too."

Mermans moved from Holland to the Charlotte area when he was just seven years old. After graduating from Appalachian State he worked for a time as a commercial real estate appraiser in Charlotte before earning a master's degree in architecture from Arizona

State University. After 15 years in commercial design, working in Atlanta and then for Jenkins Peer Architects, he opened Mermans Architecture & Design PLLC, four years ago focusing on residential architecture.

About half of his work is developer-oriented, and his designs create the identity for such developments as The Fountains, a collection of four-story townhomes in Dilworth, and Cramer Pond, an infill development in Plaza Midwood, developed by Grandfather Homes and Mattie Rose Development.

The other half of Mermans' practice is custom designs for homeowners in neighborhoods such as Foxcroft and Eastover.

Clients Michelle and Greg Neun had just finished a major Eastover renovation a few years earlier when Michelle began to consider building a new home on a lot she was eyeing on Hempstead Place. When the couple offered the winning bid on the lot-and-a-half, Michelle Neun needed an architect to design her vision of a cottage-style home for her family.

Neun was drawn to famed Montgomery, Alabama, architect Bobby McAlpine's style,

and a friend suggested that she'd love Mermans' approach.

"I felt like Bryan had a similar style but even better for me because it's so family friendly," Neun says. "We love it. The floor plan functions so easily."

The Neuns tore down the 1930s house on the lot to make way for their new home, built by Knight Residential Group with landscape architecture by Bruce Clodfelter.

The painted brick house is L-shaped with windows on all sides. Keeping the footprint narrow allows more light to stream inside from multiple viewpoints. Even many of the closets include windows so there's no searching for a lost shoe in darkness.

"I try to get a much glass in every room as possible," Mermans says.

The compact L-shape crafts an interior courtyard, hidden from the street, but open to mid-day sunlight. The courtyard opens to a car park and two garages. Instead of a detached garage that takes up much of the backyard, Mermans says moving the garage to the front of the home and behind a gate creates an enclosed play area for the chil-



dren while downplaying the prominence of the garage from the front. With no garage in the back, the flat yard makes way for a large grassy play area and saline pool.

Through the full glass front door is a light-filled entryway with a parlor and bar and a home study. Custom-finished plaster creates a rounded nook for entryway seating.

A short way into the home is the rotunda, an oval-shaped intersection that divides the home's more formal areas from more private areas in the back. The rotunda walls are clad in fluted vertical trim, accentuating the curve.

The dining room with floor to ceiling windows is tucked into the interior of the house. It overlooks the interior courtyard, creating a light-filled center of the house without opening the home's inhabitants to the street or neighbor's sight-lines. Hand-painted pale green wallpaper with trees and colorful birds on tea paper by artist Paul Montgomery Studio brings the outdoors inside.

Neutral putty-colored cabinets and Calcutta quartzite countertops create the right neutral backdrop for the kitchen's main attraction — a delft blue Lacanche French range, which is the heart and soul of the space.

"I was never going to go for color, but I'm so glad we did," Neun says of the piece.

The home has a neutral pallet but doesn't shy away from color, from tans to Wedgewood blues, greys and greens. All of the doors in the house are the same color, but trim paints vary. In total there are 42 paint

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Bryan Mermans,  
Mermans Architecture  
& Design PLLC







colors throughout.

Light from the kitchen's counter-length window overlooking the backyard pool is met by light from the opposite side courtyard windows. Long ago the room's inglenook would be the place where cooking happened by the fire. In the Neun's kitchen, a recessed inglenook with a cast stone fireplace is accompanied by two upholstered chairs, creating a place for morning coffee to be enjoyed.

The nearby scullery includes a dishwasher, oven and coffee maker, keeping the main

kitchen clean when guests are over.

Mermans says the Neun house brings a cottage feel with a one-and-a-half story scale to the large home. The swooping cedar shake roof brings down the scale on the front, with the massing in the back. The house is five bedrooms, five full and two half baths.

"It's always a fun challenge to blend the personality of the client into an architectural style," Mermans says. "It took a lot of back and forth, and in the end you end up with a better design."

Neun says she peppered Mermans with questions, pictures and ideas throughout the design process and ended up with a home that fits her family's personality.

"I learned so much and Bryan was so patient because I wanted to be more involved," Neun says.

Construction took a year and a half, finishing in the summer of 2018.

As a smaller firm with two full-time employees, Mermans partners with other architects on larger projects. He recently completed the redesign of an NBA stand-out's condominium in The Trust with local architect Jack Ossa of Ossa Design Studio.

"Every project is custom to me," Mermans says. "We match the program of a home to the client's personality and taste. We get to reinvent ourselves every day."

Like Neun, many clients are drawn to Mermans' designs with swooped rooftops, rounded gables, dormers, a mix of stucco and brick exteriors and whitewashed walls.

But much the same way the Dutch played a leading role in the development of modern architecture in the 20th century, Mermans designs go beyond parapets to push Charlotte's red brick comfort zone. A recent home in Myers Park is reminiscent of a California farmhouse for its clean lines, courtyard concept and pool.





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Mermans is bringing the Dutch look that made him popular to his first foray into real estate development with a luxury duplex in Foxcroft at the corner of Providence and Knollwood roads called Ferncliff Court Homes. The two connected homes are around 4,000 square feet and include kitchens with scullery and salt water pools with spa options. The homes feature Dutch Coastal-inspired architecture and will be built by Royal Building Group with interior designs by KBN Interiors.

“We are doing some amazing details there and things that people haven’t seen in Charlotte before,” Royal says from unique details on floors, baseboards and drywall. “Bryan’s designs are not the easiest to build. There are so many details, that you have got to know what you are doing to build one of his plans.” ❁

