

# Member Shop Profile



# The Mills Group

## Residential Cabinetry and Furniture



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— Jeff Mills, owner of The Mills Group

Jeff Mills comes by his passion for wood naturally, even inherently. While growing up, Mills remembers his father making furniture. That's when his interest in woodworking began. He started his own collection of woodworking tools and machinery in his early teens, and today is the proud owner of The Mills Group in Minesing, Ontario.

After high school, he worked for two years at an industrial supply company. He then attended Georgian College in Barrie and received a mechanical engineering degree. He began working at an auto parts manufacturer in Bracebridge, Ontario. He worked there for six years as a product engineer responsible for the design of seat adjusters for vehicles including the Corvette, Cadillac XLR, and full-size Chevy vans and trucks.

### An Interest in Woodworking

During his six years there, he attended McMaster University at night and received a bachelor's degree in manufacturing engineering technology.

"My father built furniture while I was a child growing up and that led me to an interest in woodworking," said Mills. "In my late teens and early 20s I began my own collection of woodworking tools and machinery, and started building furniture as a hobby."

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It was about six years ago, while he was still working as an engineer, that he began to see the automobile market shrink, along with layoffs at the company he was working for. "I began making plans to start my own business doing renovations, cabinetry and furniture. I began taking on small projects that I would do on evenings and weekends."

Four years ago he was laid off. Six months later the factory he worked at completely shut down. "I took a severance package and decided to start doing cabinetry, renovations and furniture full time from my home-based shop."

### **Then and Now**

Mills explained that four years ago when he first started cabinet-making full time, he basically took on any wood project including hardwood flooring, tile, furniture, kitchens, vanities, etc. Since then, his business has grown into a business that does about 95 percent cabinetry including kitchens, baths, built-ins, wet/dry bars, mantels, etc. "Any renovation work gets subbed out to another small local company, and they source their cabinetry from me," said Mills. "I still operate as a one-man operation and bring on part-time help as required. I build almost exclusively semi-custom frameless cabinetry." His work is exclusively residential, direct to the homeowner.

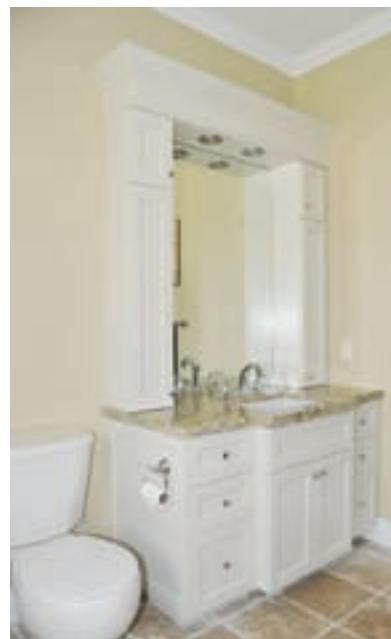
### **Machinery and Software**

His shop consists of a 900-square-foot garage used for breaking down sheet goods and finishing. Mills has just purchased a 23 spindle line drill from another CMA member (John McCutcheon of Mountain Millwork) that will be going into the garage. He has a little spray booth in the corner opposite of where his saw is located.

Mills also uses a 500-square-foot basement shop for processing the panels and assembly, and has another 400-square-foot of space just outside the basement shop for storage of completed cabinets prior to delivery. Cabinets are staged there while they wait for doors to be finished.

The garage shop and basement shop are connected with a dedicated staircase. Mills uses a Minimax 9" panel saw, Devilbiss Spray Equipment and all the basics such as a table saw, jointer, planer, drill press and miscellaneous small power tools, such as drills and routers, etc. He does line boring with a router and a custom-made jig, which is surprisingly fast and accurate.

His edgebanding is done with a tabletop hot air machine, or the trusty old iron. He uses a program called Cabinetplanner to design and generate cutlists, as well as a program called Cutlist Plus that allows him to print part labels along with the cutlist.





## Building His Business

Mills' business comes almost exclusively through word of mouth. He also has a Web site, [www.themillsgroup.ca](http://www.themillsgroup.ca). Two years ago he ran an ad for a year in a local magazine and didn't receive a single call from the advertising. This year things have slowed a little, and he is currently putting together some postcard mailers to target some of the older, yet affluent neighborhoods in his area.

"Business is definitely slower than usual. I am still maintaining a steady work load, but I am not where I want to be to allow growth," he said. "Because I work from home and maintain low overhead, I see no issues with riding out the current economy. In the future, as things pick up, I have aspirations of purchasing some property and putting up a dedicated shop away from home, and hopefully growing the business into a three or four person operation."

## Joining the CMA

As a member of the Cabinet Makers Association (CMA), Mills said he has a place to gather information that would not otherwise be available to a one-man operation. "The ability to tap into others for knowledge and problem solving is priceless," said Mills. He is also a member of the Columbia Purebond Fabricator Network, which allows him to market a green product to his customers.

Mills was born and raised in Barrie, Ontario. He currently resides in a suburb of Barrie called Minesing. He is married with two children. For more information on Mills and The Mills Group, contact Mills at (705) 796-8636 or visit his Web site at [www.themillsgroup.ca](http://www.themillsgroup.ca). ❖

