



DON'T FENCE HIM IN

To real estate developer Mike Meldman, leisure time is too precious to waste on anything other than living well and having fun.

BY { BONNIE DAVIDSON

MIKE MELDMAN



CASAMIGOS
Tequila

Mike Meldman takes having fun seriously. He pals around with celebrities (along with partners George Clooney and Rande Gerber, he launched ultra-premium tequila brand Casamigos in 2013). And he amassed a fortune by developing luxury residential communities designed for those who, like him, have the means—and the time—to savor the good life.

As founder of Discovery Land Company, Meldman believes that buying a second (or third, or 30th) home at any of the 20-plus exclusive private club communities in his ever-growing portfolio is a “reward for a successful career and lifetime of hard work. It’s an investment in real estate. But most importantly, it’s a lifetime investment in family,” where intergenerational memories are made.

Meldman’s latest project, Silo Ridge Field Club, is an 800-acre gated country retreat in the bucolic Hudson Valley of New York State. One of the largest and most ambitious projects in this rural area, it offers unrivaled privacy, pastoral views, world-class amenities, farm-to-table cuisine and outdoor recreation, including golf on a Tom Fazio-designed course. Only an hour and a half from Midtown Manhattan, Discovery’s first private community in the Northeast features 245 residences, ranging from spacious condominiums and townhouses to 5,326-square-foot single-family homes.

Recently, while surveying the renovations to his new office space on Canon Drive in Beverly Hills, Meldman paused to share his thoughts on work, leisure, happiness and what’s really important in life.







MIKE'S FAVORITES

Room in the house:

The media room

Comfy clothes:

Casamigos T-shirt, Tom Ford or Lucky Brand jeans, flip-flops

Sneakers:

Air Jordans

Dress-up clothes:

Tom Ford blazer, Bottega Veneta slip-ons

Watch:

Patek Philippe

Car:

Rolls-Royce Ghost

Workout:

Kettlebells and cardio in Lululemon gear

L.A. restaurant:

Craig's

NYC restaurant:

The Grill and Cipriani

Cocktail:

Casamigos Reposado on the rocks

Hotel:

The Beverly Hills Hotel

Luxury travel experience:

Private ski mountain at the Yellowstone Club in Big Sky, Montana; gorilla trekking in Rwanda; Legendary Resorts in Tanzania for the migration; sleeping in Singita's mobile tents in Botswana

When did you first become interested in real estate development?

During my senior year at Stanford, I was invited by friends to go to the NCAA Senior Bowl in Mobile, Alabama. It turned out that the family of one of my friends had built the stadium and owned just about all of the real estate in Mobile. We had a great time, and I immediately recognized the synergy of the various businesses and thought, "This is great. I want to do this." So instead of going to law school, I became a real estate broker in Northern California, launching my real estate career. I probably should admit that I bombed the LSAT, so not sure I would have gotten into law school, which turned out to be a blessing in disguise.

How did you get the idea for Discovery Land Company?

I had a real passion for land ownership and entitlements for land, but I wanted more control of my own destiny. I also quickly realized that it was easier to get approvals for less dense, more environmentally sensitive projects. Lower density by default means more exclusivity. Since I wasn't a country club kid or a big golfer, I came up with the idea to develop experiential clubs that were less rigid and more fun—a place where I could have experiences and create memories with my kids that would last forever. I've been a shorts and T-shirt guy my whole life, and I wanted families and friends to have all the fun without all the rules in an elegant yet casual environment.

What distinguishes a Discovery Land Company community from all others?

That's easy. We celebrate families and friends in everything we do. Our mission is to help families reconnect. That's why we build private, exclusive Club communities—to give families the best possible experience when they spend precious time together. I realized long ago that for someone who can buy just about everything, nothing is more valuable than the time to make lifelong memories with friends and family. At Discovery, it's not just about the physical structures. It's about what happens in and around them. Anyone can buy a second home. Our communities offer a second chance. Parents reconnect with their children. Children reconnect with their parents. Friends celebrate those special moments together, year after year, even when they live thousands of miles away. These shared experiences create lifetime bonds that you just can't get anywhere else. And now that our owners' children are having children of their own, I'm humbled that we are welcoming a third generation of Discovery members to share these exceptional experiences.

What is Discovery Land Company's philosophy—your secret for success?

If you and your family join any of our communities, you are immediately part of the larger Discovery family. And it really is a family. Many of our employees have been here since the day their communities opened. They establish personal connections to our owners, and our owners regularly ask for their favorite server, Outdoor Pursuits counselor or concierge by name. That's why families buy in multiple communities—they want the extraordinary Discovery experience wherever they live.

You talk a lot about families. Why?

The programming and amenities available to our exclusive clientele were designed to keep families together not just at mealtime, but also playtime. Owners/members enjoy all the benefits of a Discovery private club—the casual elegance of the homes, five-star amenities and the pure beauty of the destinations. But the greatest gift is having the time and the desire to experience all of it with your family.

Our owners are at the very top of their professions, and they can create great lifestyles for themselves. But the unique benefit of a Discovery community is our exceptional, personable staff that curate life-affirming experiences for members and their families, so they don't have to figure it out for themselves. These men and women love what they do, and it shows in how passionate they are. Surfing, scuba-diving, hiking, biking, golfing, skiing—we make it fun to learn and great to do together as a family. In Hawaii, we turn members into real "watermen/women" and in Montana, my kids learned to be "mountain men" with a real appreciation for everything the location has to offer.

There's something else that differentiates Discovery. In our communities, the kids want to hang with their parents. We give them space to be themselves, but we also build into our planning family spaces that are warm and inviting, because it really matters. I know this from my own life. As a young father with a busy work life raising two young boys, I found the curated experience model really worked for my kids and me, and I knew it would for others with busy, active careers.

What is your development philosophy?

First, create peerless private luxury that gives owners priceless time with family and friends. Second, provide unmatched experiences and superior customer service for every member of the family. Discovery is the next step in the evolution of resort living. After all, you can go to a five-star resort/hotel year after year, and they may welcome you back, but do they really know you? There is a true social fabric to our communities. It is difficult to create this at even the finest resorts in the world, simply because of their transient nature. So when an employee says "Nice to see you," it's because they really have gotten to know you, year after year, and they watched your children grow up with you. When staff really knows you, the experience is much more intimate—and that is the pinnacle of a luxury.

Do you have a business mantra?

It's not a mantra, it's what we live every day: Sweat the small stuff. Every detail matters. Delivery must be flawless. This is true in the design, the construction, in the golf course and the clubhouse, in the amenities and the experiences. Anything we oversee, from the food in our restaurants to the sheets to the toilet paper, has to be perfect. If our members are spending their valuable time and money to create memories with their families, we need to take the time to deliver and exceed their expectations every time.

What attracted you to the Hudson Valley of New York, and specifically Dutchess County, to build Silo Ridge?

Two simple principles: land and location. At Silo, I love the natural landscape, stunning countryside and peaceful surrounding neighborhoods. It is also just 90 minutes from New York City. So to go a short distance and be in the beautiful "country" so ideal for families is incredible.

Can you describe the prototypical Silo Ridge home buyer?

We have many members who look at Silo as an escape from the city. They have young families, a busy, active lifestyle, love golf and want to have fun outside, not just at their desks. We also have a few owners who will use Silo as their primary family home and commute to the city for work. There is a train stop across the street from Silo that heads into Grand Central. Many buyers are also members at other Discovery properties who have visited the Hudson Valley for the first time, even though they have traveled to New York for years to do business.



Can you describe a day in the life of a Silo Ridge resident?

Wake up and have a farm-to-table breakfast at the Ridge House, cooked by Jonathan Wright, regional VP of culinary operations, while overlooking the Tom Fazio-designed golf course. Then, head outside for a round of golf with a breathtaking view of the Hudson Valley, interrupted several times by stops at a comfort station (the kids call them sugar shacks) for a break to refuel with Recover 180, candy, soft-serve ice cream or any of the available snack options. After golf, visit the garden to pick fresh vegetables to prepare for a late lunch. The afternoon is spent with the family, participating in some activities with the Outdoor Pursuits team—archery, equestrian, fly fishing, hiking, biking, skeet shooting, kayaking, stand-up paddle boarding, tennis, pickleball and more. Wind down the afternoon with a spa treatment, and then join friends at their home for Casamigos cocktails followed by a catered dinner.

Of all the glorious places in the world to buy a second home, why would someone choose Silo Ridge?

Location. Silo Ridge's location is ideal. The laid-back, casual environment is perfect for kids and families. The quiet country and the rich greenery are so beautiful, and the winter wonderland is stunning. There is so much to do, the community is family-focused, and everything is personally tailored to make your experience as enjoyable as possible. Silo is private and gated, which gives every member real peace of mind. It's a great alternative to the Hamptons for those that like a more bucolic, slower pace.

What are some of the standout amenities at Silo Ridge?

There's the Family Barn by Quarry Pond with a game room, arts and crafts center, lakeside pavilion for winter ice-skating and fireside gatherings along with watersports. The Field House will be a state-of-the-art indoor sports and recreation facility for lacrosse, baseball, basketball, soccer, squash, tennis ... with professional coaching and competition. An expansive equestrian center, on-property vineyard and vegetable garden with a greenhouse are other standouts.

Do you have a home there?

I have a condo at Silo overlooking the golf course, but I am in the process of building a larger home. It is important to me that I have enough space for my family and the ability to entertain friends comfortably. I spend as much time as I can there, especially in the summer and early fall when the changing colors of the foliage is beyond compare. I love the area.

What are your favorite parts of Silo Ridge?

I would say the golf, the food and overall environment. It's a very special place—peaceful, tranquil and beautiful, the perfect place to be outdoors. There's a multitude of Outdoor Pursuits, great terrain-to-table food and a really special golf course with unmatched views and a challenging, natural landscape. After staying here a week, I am sure there will be people who decide to make it their primary home.

How does Silo Ridge give back to the community?

Silo gives back as part of the Discovery Land Company Foundation (DLCF), which contributes to organizations that assist local children and families in need, like the local Boys & Girls Clubs. DLCF provides resources to diverse programs for children, including education, mentors, shelter, food, books, tutoring and medical needs. The Foundation held its annual Pro-Am Invitational at Silo last year with

participation from some of the top golfers in the world, including Rickie Fowler, Jordan Spieth, Justin Thomas, Dustin Johnson and other PGA Tour Pros who played and helped raise awareness and support. We were honored to provide a significant contribution to the North East Community Center in Millerton, New York, as well as other local charities.

How much fun have you had partnering with George Clooney and Rande Gerber on Casamigos?

Partnering with George and Rande has been an incredible adventure. It's always great to work with creative friends who are also such visionaries.

Since the whopping \$700 million sale of Casamigos to Diageo last year (in a deal that values the company at up to \$1 billion), what is your current and future involvement with the brand?

We are all still very involved and love it. When you develop a great tequila, you don't give it up. It's a lifelong passion for us and we will continue to grow the Casamigos brand into other spirits. As an example, we recently launched our Casamigos Mezcal. [The partners reportedly stand to earn up to \$300 million more if sales targets are reached over the next decade.]

Any future Discovery Land Company projects in the planning stages?

We are actively looking for locations that are easily accessible but offer the seclusion and relaxation our families deserve. We've recently started development on properties in the Dominican Republic and Barbuda, and are in planning stages for properties near Austin and Nashville. The projects we started a few years ago in Las Vegas, Maui and Los Cabos (which was our second one in Mexico) are going strong. As long as families are our focus and quality our commitment, we have no limits. At the moment, we are continuing to expand the brand internationally and integrating the Discovery lifestyle into high-end boutique hotels and luxury apartments.

Have your views on real estate development changed through the years?

Years? My opinions change every month as we add new projects with new challenges. The team at Discovery is committed to continuous improvement, and we live it every day. In the end, the reason I think I work so hard comes from my passion to build the perfect community for the most amazing families. I still don't think I've gotten it quite right, but we're close.

Biggest obstacle you have faced in your career?

That's easy. The local entitlement process. I'm lucky because I learned early on how important it is to be environmentally friendly and protective. There are locations where it is important to develop lower density projects with sustainability and conservancy in mind. It matters to our owners, and it matters to us.

Greatest lesson learned?

There is nothing more important than family—my family and yours. Everything we do is done to revitalize, rejuvenate and reconnect families. The best communities have the best families.

Of all the projects you have developed, which one makes you most proud?

My three sons—Hunter, Will and Max Meldman.