



michael meldman

Founder
Discovery Land Company

Michael Meldman has described Scottsdale, Arizona-based Discovery Land Company's residential private communities and clubs as frat houses for families. After founding the company in 1994, he opened his first property, Scottsdale's Estancia Club, a year later, with a focus on activities, golf, and the ultimate luxury—uninterrupted relaxation. Last year it reported sales exceeding \$1 billion and his properties, which now number 19 throughout the U.S., Mexico, and the Bahamas, highlight his own easygoing attitude: unfiltered fun with none of the stuffiness of dated country clubs. Here, he talks about working and playing hard, family-focused programming, and bucking tradition.

Why did you start Discovery Land Company?

It started with the desire to create ways to spend time with my boys when they were younger, specifically doing things that would create great experiences for all of us to share. This was the foundation of my first club, Estancia, established in 1995, and is reflected in Discovery's mission to develop family-focused private communities in the most unique natural settings. We call it the Discovery lifestyle. Our communities are created for those who have spent their lives working hard and now want to enjoy their success with their family and friends. It's a reward for their hard work—a way to create lasting memories—with a variety of activities and options for the entire family. This was the original vision for the company and it holds true today.

How do you set yourself apart from your competitors?

When we develop our communities, we follow a design and style that fits naturally within the surroundings of the specific community and its locale. This sets each club apart from the next; no two are the same and all are designed to reflect the local culture, tradition, and history.

Because the emphasis is on family, our amenities and programming go beyond golf. I didn't grow up a country club kid or a golf course snob. I wanted to create environments in which I felt comfortable, relaxed, and free of old-fashioned rules. The numerous activities are meant to create an environment that all members of the family will enjoy. We wanted it to be all encompassing and inclusive. Our Outdoor Pursuits programs offer everything from organized sports to professional-level athletic training, hiking, biking, fishing, hunting, or educational and gardening classes, depending on the history and culture surrounding each club.

What are some specific property highlights?

At Baker's Bay [Golf & Ocean Club] in the Bahamas, we took an untouched island and created one of the most beautiful and serene private beach club communities and marinas in the world. Members can experience the ultimate Bahamian lifestyle, from fishing, boating, and lobster diving to snorkeling, island hopping, and even feeding wild pigs.

We developed the world's only private ski (and golf) community at the Yellowstone Club in Big Sky, Montana. No ski passes, no lines, just



Big Sky, Montana's Yellowstone Club

Photo by KIM SARGENT



A residence at Baker's Bay Golf & Ocean Club in the Bahamas' Abaco islands

Photo by JOHN LAIR

perfect powder. In the summer, there are numerous outdoor adventure opportunities as well, making it the ideal year-round getaway. When you're at Silo Ridge [Field Club in Amenia, New York], you will have access to hunting and shooting because the club is located in hunt club country. There is a farm-to-table emphasis that is true to Hudson Valley style; we have planted our own garden and plan to raise our own cattle and chickens onsite. We have perfected the beach club communities with unique and pristine coastal properties at El Dorado Golf & Beach Club [in Los Cabos, Mexico], Kuki'o [Golf & Beach club in Kona, Hawaii], and the soon-to-be-unveiled Dune Deck Beach Club in Westhampton Beach, New York.

You also provide comfort stations at various holes at your golf courses.

They are stocked with full bars and every imaginable treat (candy, sushi, dried fruit, homemade potato chips, jerky, cheese, ice cream) and depending on which property, specialty items influenced by where the club is located. There are margarita machines at El Dorado and huckleberry-flavored treats at Gozzer Ranch in Idaho, for example.

At some clubs, they even cook on the course between holes, including offering fresh burgers and steaks right off the grill. The Madison Club in La Quinta, California is known as the five-pound round in reference to the weight you could gain from all the food offered. There are comfort stations on the course at the Yellowstone Club but since golf is not an option in the winter, there are also warming huts on some ski runs—places to stop in and have warm cider or venison chili.

Why do you think guests have responded so positively to these communities?

It is a universal sentiment that people's No. 1 regret in life is not having enough time with their families. At Discovery, we offer a respite from the grind, where [guests] can be present and focused on spending time with those they love.

How do you pick the locations?

We need to be strategic and seek out popular, family-friendly destinations.

We have [also] found that American luxury is desirable across many cultures and our brand translates worldwide. Therefore, we are considering projects in the UAE, Russia, Brazil, and China.

Your properties are known for their custom beer pong tables and the fact that golfers aren't required to wear collared shirts. Why is a casual atmosphere so important?

Whether at their homes, at the clubhouse, or on the golf course, we want people to be pampered but always comfortable. Bathing suits and shorts are the attire of choice. We have successfully created the antithesis of the stuffy country clubs of past generations. This is again the result of my background (I was born in Milwaukee), and the experience of trying to get my kids to golf with me when they were younger. At one of my first projects, Iron Horse in Montana, the golf pro came up to me on the course and said my kids had to wear collared shirts. They were frustrated and I thought that was a dumb rule, and it makes the game seem so formal and intimidating. So we threw it out. The casual and organic environment of our golf courses lends itself to being inclusive of all family members.

What's next for you?

We plan to expand internationally and possibly start some high-end boutique hotels and develop luxury apartments. Our company and work as developers really translates into limitless opportunities. And of course, beyond just real estate, I will continue my other career as a tequila baron, promoting my brand Casamigos [with Rande Gerber and George Clooney] around the world.

Since this is the new icons issue, who are some of the people you see doing great things?

My mentor and the person who has influenced me the most is [movie producer] Jerry Weintraub. I also admire and respect [financier and philanthropist] Michael Milken, Steve Wynn, and [real estate developer] Lyle Anderson for all of their accomplishments.



El Dorado Golf & Beach Club in Los Cabos, Mexico



Silo Ridge Field Club in Amenia, New York

Photos courtesy of DISCOVERY LAND COMPANY