



Baker's Bay, a Discovery Land community in the Bahamas. Discovery Land Company

REAL ESTATE

The Luxury Real Estate Empire Where Tom Brady and Reese Witherspoon Can Hide Out

Mike Meldman, also a cofounder of Casamigos tequila, founded Discovery Land Company, a collection of private and high-end golf communities

By Shivani Vora - March 5, 2022

In the inner circles of luxury real estate, hard-core golfers and connoisseurs of upscale homes aren't considered part of the cognoscenti if they don't own a property in a Discovery Land Company community. At the very least, they need to know the brand, and, ideally, aspire to eventually become an owner.

Founded in 1994 by Mike Meldman, who is also a cofounder of Casamigos Tequila, the real estate business has a portfolio of 27 private high-end golf communities in North America, the Caribbean, and now Europe with the recent debut of CostaTerra Golf & Ocean Club in Portugal's Comporta region.



Mike Meldman © John Russo 2018

How ironic is it then that Meldman wasn't a golfer when he started his company, and was motivated by the popularity of master-planned golf communities instead? "I sensed the opportunity to create a brand that filled a missing gap in the market," he says. "I wanted properties that were upscale but not formal like all the golf clubs out there. And they had to have lots of fun amenities."

These principles have led to wild success: Today, Discovery Land Company counts a long list of boldface names as members. The mix of celebrities and CEOs includes Gisele Bündchen and Tom Brady, Reese Witherspoon, Michael Jordan, Weight Watchers CEO Mindy Grossman, iHeartMedia COO and CFO Richard Bressler, and Rande Gerber and Cindy Crawford.



Silo Ridge Field Club in New York's Hudson Valley

High-profile homeowners aside, Meldman's business has exploded in the wake of COVID. "There was a strong demand for homes at Discovery communities even before the pandemic, but COVID has dramatically magnified demand," he says. "An overwhelming number of Discovery members quarantined at our clubs when the pandemic hit the U.S. in March 2020." Nearly 100 families stayed at the Yellowstone Club in Big Sky, Montana, Meldman says, with many more quarantining at the Madison Club in La Quinta, California, and Silo Ridge Field Club in New York's Hudson Valley.

“Toward the end of April, as it became clear the pandemic would be present for some time, we started receiving substantial interest from buyers looking to acquire new properties over FaceTime, or close on properties they looked at before COVID hit,” he says. “It was evident that families were looking to our communities to protect themselves from the threat of the virus.”

The Yellowstone Club has especially experienced extraordinary growth since early 2020, according to Meldman, and many families looking to relocate also set their sights on Driftwood Golf & Ranch Club outside of Austin, and Troubadour Golf & Field Club in Nashville. Other clubs have seen a substantial increase in sales to younger families, a demographic that isn’t typically attracted to golf communities. After all, the perception is that they’re meant for retirees.



Gisele Bündchen and Tom Brady are Discovery owners.



Baker's Bay Golf & Ocean Club in the Bahamas

Meldman himself claims to have a home in all his 27 communities. If he had to pick a favorite, he says, his spread at Baker’s Bay Golf & Ocean Club would top the list.

Located on the Bahamian island of Great Guana Cay, Baker’s may just be the crown jewel of Discovery’s portfolio and a place that’s been close to Meldman’s heart ever since he started developing it more than two decades ago. “The minute I stepped foot on the island, I knew I could create something phenomenal,” he says. “It had great beaches and, unlike the other islands in the area which are flat as a pancake, the topography of contours and sand dunes was incredible.”

In the 20 years that followed, the three-mile stretch of waterfront that Meldman had earmarked for Baker's transformed into a flourishing community with 220 homes, a golf course, tennis courts, water sports center, and village with a grocery store and restaurant.

But in 2019, Hurricane Dorian hit and ravaged the island, along with Baker's, beyond belief.

"Most of the community was wiped out," Meldman recalls. Baker's saw around \$250 million of damage from the storm, he says, but the only way to move forward was to rebuild anew.

Currently, the development is fully back to life and epitomizes a classic Discovery experience. Amenities include an 18-hole Tom Fazio golf course, pickleball and tennis courts, farm-to-table restaurants, a spa, a market, and an on-site medical staff. The Outdoor Pursuits program is also a highlight and offers members the chance to enjoy activities specific to the destination. In Baker's Bay, that means snorkeling, bonefishing, boating, and kitesurfing, while at Silo Ridge, options include clay shooting, horseback riding, archery, and hiking.



Reese Witherspoon



The Tom Fazio-designed golf course at Driftwood, outside of Austin

The aforementioned Bressler of iHeartRadio owns a home at Baker's Bay as well as at Silo Ridge and CostaTerra and says that the brand's amenities and relaxed environments are exceptional. "Mike understands that these are communities, not just high-end residential properties," he says. "I own several other homes outside of Discovery and can confidentially say that what he has created is in a league by itself."

Brent Saunders, the CEO of Vesper Healthcare Acquisition Corp. and also a Baker's Bay homeowner, echoes Bressler's sentiments. "Discovery gives you the benefits of a home and luxury vacation in one," he says. "The service, amenities, facilities, and staff are all the best in class."

But, beyond the eye candy perks, there are the ones with an emotional impact. Meldman's intention to infuse typically staid golf communities with a dose of fun, and encourage connection among family and friends is integral to its winning formula.

"Discovery is a big part of our family memories," Bressler says. "We have had many happy times at our homes in the communities."

Meldman too has seen the payoff with the innumerable enjoyable times that he has spent with his sons in his various homes. "We laugh a lot and bond," he says. "I want that for all of my homeowners. That, to me, is what Discovery is about."