

## CELEBRITIES KEEP FLOCKING TO DISCOVERY RESORTS DURING THE PANDEMIC. HERE'S WHY.

*At Mike Meldman's Silo Ridge Field Club in upstate New York, sales have been hopping—even before they added more farm-to-table dining and a bowling alley.*



**A**s the cofounder—with George Clooney and Rande Gerber—of the runaway success Casamigos tequila line, Mike Meldman could have rested on his laurels as the man behind a billion-dollar margarita (the company was sold to the massive beverage conglomerate Diageo in 2017, reportedly for as much as \$1 billion). But for Meldman, that was just a side hustle. His main one? Real estate mogul. Meldman's [Discovery Land Company](#) has pioneered a unique hybrid: He creates luxurious turnkey real estate developments in vacation destinations, then combines them with members-only golf clubs and other sports amenities—from the champion ski hill (right outside your door) at Montana's Yellowstone Club to fishing and yachting at Baker's Bay in the Bahamas.

When he opened the [Silo Ridge Field Club](#), with its Tom Fazio–designed golf course, in 2016 in upstate Amenia, New York—his first East Coast venture—Tom Brady and Gisele Bündchen were among the first to sign up. This summer, as buyers were snapping up homes at the property (seven were sold in just the past month alone), Silo Ridge Field Club debuted the Barn, an 11,000-square-foot gathering space complete with a dining room with views of the Berkshire Mountains and farm-to-table food with ingredients culled from the property’s organic gardens. The Barn, designed by [Alder & Tweed](#), is furnished with locally sourced antiques and Shaker-inspired touches and also has a movie theater, a 10-pin bowling alley, and an arts-and-crafts room with its own wood-fired pottery kiln.

We caught up with Meldman to talk about his unconventional approach to real estate—and why his amenity-rich properties are proving so popular during a pandemic.



Real estate entrepreneur Mike Meldman.

John Russo

**ELLE Decor:** You pioneered a new real estate model with Discovery Land Company—one that has lured celebrities like Reese Witherspoon and Michael Jordan, not to mention George Clooney. What was the concept?

**Mike Meldman:** Celebrities and CEOs are drawn to our properties because people want the sense of community that Discovery offers. They want to feel like they are at a seven-star hotel, but one that is their home. In order to be a member, you have to be a property owner, which makes the community tightly knit. Everything at Discovery is very casual, and the members appreciate that. We have also attracted a lot of people because of our golf. Discovery courses are designed by top golf architects like Jack Nicklaus and Tom Fazio, and we don't have the tight rules of country clubs. You can golf barefoot or in your swimsuit. The athletes love to come because the courses are amazing, and celebrities and tycoons like to come for the superior level of service—and simply not having to worry about anything.

**ED:** What are some of the amenities you offer at your 23 properties?

**MM:** We also have incredible food at our clubs—country clubs are usually not known for their food, but here we have terrain-to-table culinary programs led by top chefs. Silo Ridge has a sizable organic garden and greenhouse. Another notable draw is our concierge activities program, Outdoor Pursuits, which teaches and leads activities and sports indigenous to the areas around the property. For example at Silo Ridge, there are activities through all seasons—snowshoeing, fly-fishing, equestrian, hiking, camping, skeet shooting, archery, biking, paddleboarding, and more. It's just fun, and there is a lot to do, all with family time in mind. It is more than just golf—we have snow sports at Yellowstone Club in Montana and water sports and diving in Hawaii.



Condos at Silo Ridge Field Club In Amentia, New York.

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### **ED:** How do you become a member?

**MM:** A member must buy their land, build their home, and join the club. A lot of members end up using Discovery Design, our in-house design team, to design and build their homes, which also makes it a seamless, turnkey experience. Members can visit to experience all finishes and design their dream home themselves. There is also something to say about the standard home builds. Discovery builds large spec homes, though very few of them. At Silo, we have condos—which sold really quickly, because they were essentially finished products. There are also developer-built homes. We have eight different base plans, each version with a modern, traditional, or contemporary style. For custom home builds, the plans have to be cleared by our design review committee. Materials should be natural—at [Silo Ridge](#), for instance, you can use stone, reclaimed barn wood, or repurposed farm materials. The look and feel can be inspired by the Hudson Valley. The architecture fuses a classic Colonial feel with farmhouses and a modern barn aesthetic.

**ED:** Silo Ridge was your first East Coast project. What appealed to you about the location?

**MM:** It's an hour and a half from New York City. The championship 18-hole Tom Fazio–designed golf course at Silo is one of our best courses. There is a lot more to do than just golf; there are plenty of Outdoor Pursuits activities, experiences you don't get in the city. Silo Ridge embodies everything we stand for in one place, all in proximity to New York City. Several exceptional private schools are nearby, too.

**ED:** How has the coronavirus pandemic affected your developments? What impact do you foresee on real estate?

**MM:** A lot of members went to Discovery properties during the quarantine because they have been able to provide all of the usual member services with social distancing. We even had provisions arranged. With the situation around COVID-19 still unfolding, we are staying flexible and adaptable because, as we've seen, anything can change. We were able to adapt quickly to provide food, security, and other essential services for members in quarantine at our clubs. I expect these reasons to influence many more luxury home buyers as we all prepare for the future. Discovery knows that after a crisis, discerning buyers will typically place an even higher premium on the seclusion, security, and community feel at our clubs.



A terrace at the new Barn, an 11,000-square-foot dining and activities hub at Silo Ridge Field Club.

Discovery Land Company

**ED:** You are known for “destination” real estate. Would you ever consider an urban project? Or do you think cities are doomed? If not, what will make them exciting again?

**MM:** We are thinking about urban projects. Last year, we opened Driftwood Downtown in the heart of Austin, Texas, to a great response. Our aim was to re-create a luxury Discovery environment in a convenient and central city location. Driftwood Downtown has all of the signature amenities and service of a Discovery club—it’s a multilevel space with multiple lounges, a comfort station, a golf simulator, meeting space, and even a rooftop bar. It’s looking like COVID-19 will change a lot about cities, but a large proportion of our membership live in or near major U.S. cities, and we are excited to think about offering them a place to gather and experience the Discovery lifestyle in a different setting.

**ED:** I have to ask about [Casamigos](#). How did you start a tequila company with George Clooney and Rande Gerber? Are you still involved in it?



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**MM:** It started at my Mexican property El Dorado, in Cabo. George and Rande built houses there next to each other. We all spent lot of time there and drank a lot of tequila. We decided to make our own, one that we liked and was notably smooth to drink. At first, we didn’t plan on selling it, we just wanted it for ourselves. I had enough projects to make it successful, Rande had enough bars, and George would drink enough. Our distillers said we were consuming too much and that we had to sell it. We then took it to Southern Glazer’s Wine & Spirits, and they agreed to carry it. They said if we did 10,000 cases the first year, it would be a huge success—and we did that in the first week. Nothing has changed in the day-to-day operations since we sold to Diageo; it is business as usual.