

KINGDOM OF DODD

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN AN A-LIST DESIGNER GETS SO OVER L.A.? HE TAKES ON BAJA WITH FIRE AND BRIMSTONE! WE'VE GOT THE EXCLUSIVE ON DODD MITCHELL AND HIS CABO MISSION, WHICH INCLUDES HIS VERY OWN HOTEL CHAIN

BY GILLIAN FLYNN | PHOTOGRAPHY BY SKOTT SNIDER

OH MY DODD! Designer Dodd Mitchell at the new Cabo Azul resort, which features a three-tier black pebble infinity pool. Materials like the black pottery shown are sourced locally from Mexico.



BRACE YOURSELF, CABO. DODD MITCHELL HAS ARRIVED—WITH SERIOUS STAYING POWER. HIS FIRST DESIGNED BAJA RESORT OPENS THIS MONTH WITH A PENTHOUSE CHAPEL THAT BREAKS COMMANDMENTS, A BLACK-ON-BLACK SWIMMING POOL AND FIRE DANCERS IN FULL EFFECT. AND THIS IS JUST THE START. TWO MORE DODD-IFIED RESORTS ARE ON THE WAY, INCLUDING HIS VERY OWN HOTEL FLAGSHIP, PLUS HIS OWN FURNITURE LINE. AND THEN THERE ARE RUMBLINGS OF A VEGAS CASINO. THIS IS DODD'S WORLD. WE'RE JUST LIVING IN IT.

When he was on top of his game, the man about town with an actress on his arm, the designer every A-list hotel *had* to have, Dodd Mitchell decamped Los Angeles. As in, *really* decamped. He sold his house and roared through rural Mexico in his 1968 Cobra for 18 hours straight, through rainstorms and cow crossings with no radio—or roof.

Consider the trek Mitchell's only harrowing experience thus far. He is *en fuego*, designing not one but three luxury resorts in Cabo San Lucas, one of which will be the first of his own hotel group. Braggs Hotel, as he named it, will be European-inspired (he's currently second home-hunting in Florence), and plans are already underway to roll out versions in Chicago and Miami. The other Cabo project is Bahia, a daybed-heavy property in the heart of Downtown. This from a man who designed four hotels at once, and is working a hush-hush deal for his own Braggs casino.

"If you would have told me that I would own a house in a beach community in Mexico in a \$10 million-and-up neighborhood, I'd have said you were out of your f****n' head. I didn't even own a pair of shorts," says Mitchell, whose latest project, Cabo Azul resort, opens this month.

These days, shorts and flip-flops are *de rigueur* on job sites, of which he has many. You see, when we say Mitchell is doing Cabo, we mean he is really doing Cabo. And views from his infinity-edged Palmilla manse—of One and Only Palmilla fame—are the ultimate motivation. The cranes across the way are for his future projects. Talk about home office: He's got a butler, a private chef and leased a \$6 million house next-door for his staff, who get mucho perks, including use of his private jet. And the yacht? More on that later.

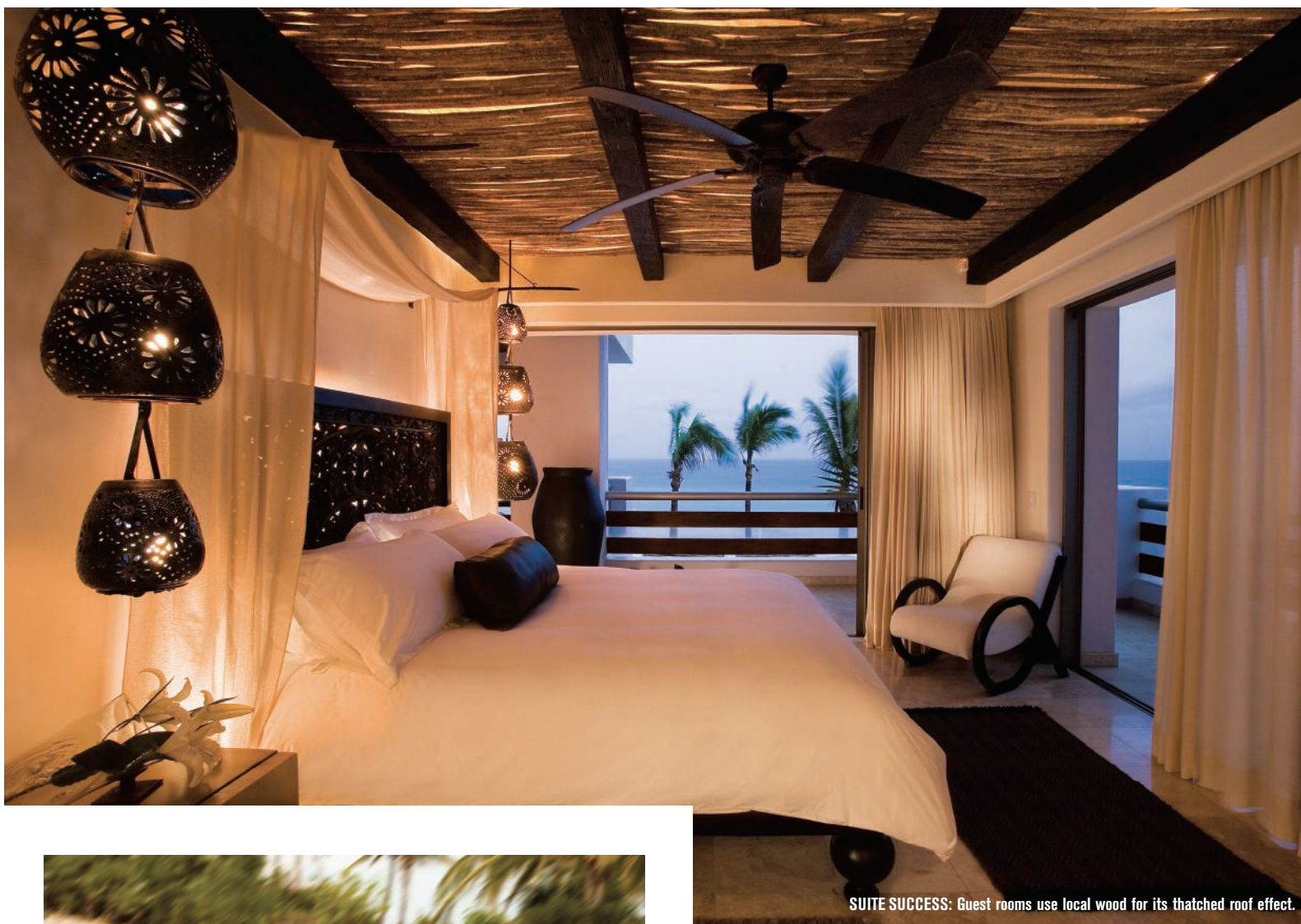
DODD, INC.

Dodd is running late. And it's buying the hotel staff some time. Time to light countless candles. Tightly roll the pool towels. Change the music. Turn on the fountains. Double-check candles. Stand at attention. Something will be overlooked. It's ominous. And so we wait. And wait.

"I WAS BORN THIS WAY. I SEE IN 3-D. I DESIGNED THIS HOTEL IN FIVE DAYS—THE LOGO, EVERYTHING," SAYS MITCHELL. "I'M THE MOST EXPENSIVE GUY OUT THERE AND I KNOW THAT."



NEW RELIGION: The open-air chapel, which boasts a retractable cross and Star of David, is a focal point of the resort.



"Why are the *other* ashtrays not out?" asks Mitchell when he finally arrives at the Palapas bar, where a tent-like ceiling is made of draped nautical ropes. "What are *these*?"

"These" are (yikes) plastic ashtrays, not the cool metal ones with the utilitarian lattice top. He orders a Margarita and returns it twice—or was it three times?—before half-settling down into a barstool. You see, the ash tray, and the stool, not to mention this entire Cabo Azul resort, is designed by Mitchell. Look closely at the leather tag on the bar stool, and it says: Dodd Mitchell Design Exclusive Furniture. The same tag can be found on the come-hither pool pods, the Platner-

inspired tables, and even the rocks lining the sprawling, lake-like pool. It's all been handpicked by Mitchell himself from the Mexico countryside. Talk about perfectionist.

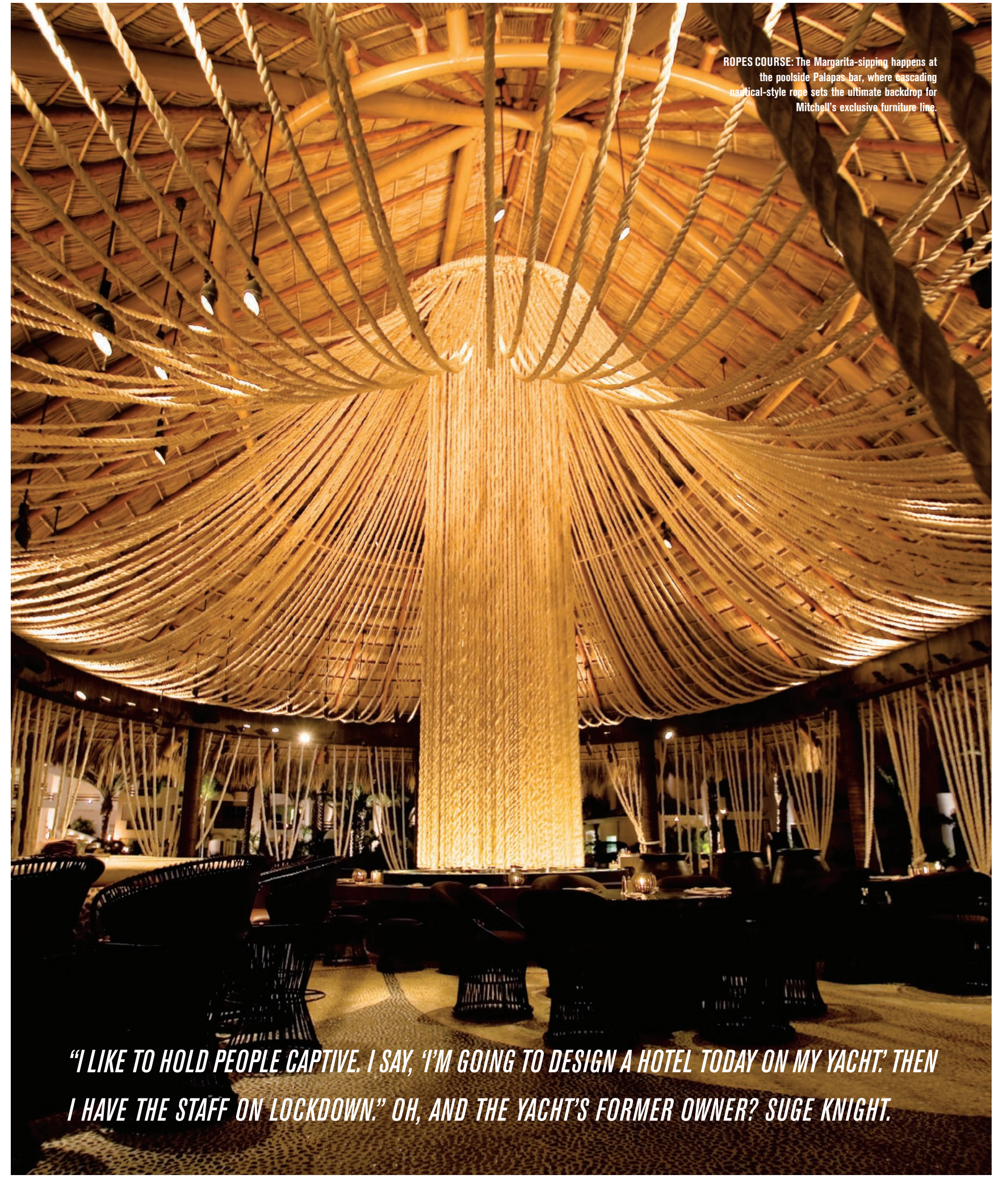
Dodd is his brand. For the last decade, he was synonymous with red-hot design and gained celeb-status in the town that makes 'em. The Roosevelt. Two Hudson hotels. And those little restaurants Dolce, Le Dome, Sushi Roku? All Dodd. He even has the actress/ex-fiancée on the résumé: breathy Jennifer Tilly. "That's always been my lifestyle," he says, "the hustle and bustle of hotel living."

His first brand started seven years ago when he created the Sleep linen line, which is available for purchase. The dreamy queen bed at Cabo Azul was downright room service-worthy. And for hotel guests digging the metal-and-leather DMD furniture line, it's all for sale. Meanwhile, other brands are turning to Mitchell for re-branding, including Dom Pérignon, which recently enlisted him.

MASS MEX-ODUS!

Mitchell didn't want to come to Cabo. At all. You wouldn't know that by the way he illegally parks his Cobra in front of his fave sushi restaurant in the bustling, *cerveza*-fueled downtown Cabo—like he owns it. "I came to Cabo for a weekend and never left," he says. The sushi chef knows his order, and several people come up to him at the restaurant and re-introduce themselves.

When he was approached by Pacific Monarch Resorts a year-and-



ROPES COURSE: The Margarita-sipping happens at the poolside Palapas bar, where cascading nautical-style rope sets the ultimate backdrop for Mitchell's exclusive furniture line.

"I LIKE TO HOLD PEOPLE CAPTIVE. I SAY, 'I'M GOING TO DESIGN A HOTEL TODAY ON MY YACHT.' THEN I HAVE THE STAFF ON LOCKDOWN." OH, AND THE YACHT'S FORMER OWNER? SUGE KNIGHT.



LOUNGE ACTS: The three-tier infinity edge pool, made of black pebbles, is tranquil by day and sexy after dark, when firepits glow and DJs set up shop. Dodd-designed poolside pods are decidedly come-hither.

a-half ago, he was ready to leave his California perch and had been house-hunting in New York, having grown tired of L.A. and "boutique" hotels being marketed to death. "I had to get out of L.A. It's so self-absorbed," he says, smoking a Marlboro. "I'm 40 now. I don't want velvet ropes. I want Four Seasons with an edge. Somewhere between stuffy and fun."

But he also wanted his own gig, to have total day-to-day control. At Cabo Azul, he is an investor/designer. With Braggs, it will be pure Dodd. "It will be my version of a resort 100 percent, and I own it. Imagine what you're going to get," he says with a no-brainer tone.

While Mitchell kept his L.A. office, he also brought his four-person Dodd Squad to Cabo, and held planning meetings on his 100-foot, six-estate-room yacht, formerly rapper Suge Knight's. "I like to hold people captive," says Dodd of his staff. "I say, 'I am going to design a hotel today on my yacht,' and I have them on lockdown."

DEVIL IN THE DETAILS

Cabo Azul's presidential suite by the numbers? Three bedrooms. Three Jacuzzi tubs. Four daybeds. Eleven oversized urns. Twelve Moroccan lanterns. Fifty-three light switches. Two dozen calla lilies. Fifty-six pillows. And tons of romance delivered. Pocket doors open the entire suite up to an MTV-worthy veranda overlooking the beach. And the resort manages an exacting dichotomy: During the day, it's a downright cinch to drop into vacation mode, lazing poolside with mango Margaritas. But come nighttime, firepits roar, water features purr and every hallway twinkles. And then there's Mitchell's visions of fire dancers perched on pool pedestals and DJs replacing towel boys in beachside palapas. Meanwhile, Javier's—that O.C. import that

Mitchell also designed—is the signature hotel restaurant, featuring an outdoor ceviche and tequila bar and Phase 2: an open-air beachside nightclub. (Javier's custom silverware and china are also for sale.)

The church is the centerpiece of the resort. Like many of the materials on property—black canterra stones, copper—the church sources local cobblestone. Don't even get us started on Phase 2, a boutique hotel, sushi bar and 24-seat cinema, all connected by a bridge. Meanwhile, a Cirque du Soleil set designer has been tapped to help with the resort's spa design. Think Morocco meets mod—white molded concrete chaises; domed, shell-encrusted ceilings; and a private penthouse called the Champagne Terrace.

BORN TO BE DIALED

"I was born this way. I see in 3-D. I designed this hotel in five days—the logo, everything," Mitchell says. "I'm the most expensive guy out there and I know that."

Mitchell is the ultimate anomaly. He is an admitted high school dropout who surrounds himself with savvy, certified architects. The DMD tag line is "the architecture is our attitude," and it flies in the face of the overhyped hotels that Mitchell so despises. The design goal: "It says I am not cooler than you are... It's cool and you don't know why and that's how it should be."

Oh, and lest we forget Maxim Prime lounge at the Diegan, a new Javier's in Newport and the Grand Kona resort, all set to open this year. Not to mention yacht-shopping, as he already outgrew Suge's.

"I was proposed to twice. I still can't find a girl who can keep up," he says, pressing the ignore button on his buzzing BlackBerry.

"I love the lifestyle I create." ■