

JANUARY 2008

| \$4.95 US | \$5.95 CAN



FOOD & BEVERAGE

MAGAZINE



Designer

Dodd
Mitchell

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Dodd Mitchell

By Howard Riell

Dodd Mitchell laments having to eat. "If I could take a pill to not have to eat again I would," he says, "because that's another thing that just slows me down." Nor is he particularly pleased with the coming of the holiday season. "I'm waiting for it to be over," Mitchell admits. "This month it's really hard to work. Everybody slows down, they get in the holiday mode. Everyone has family, they have lives and stuff. Design is my life. It's all I do. I'm single, no wife, no kids, no pets, and I live and breathe design." His toughest challenge, perhaps understandably, is "keeping the people around me as passionate as I am about my work."

Mitchell also prefers to maintain total control of a project. “When I take on a project... I do everything. I really work to have it be completely my vision instead of selling out and taking direction. At no time in my career have I ever taken direction from anybody for my concepts. I design the sheets, uniforms, logos. I name the restaurants and bring in the people I think would be proper to have run them. If I can’t do everything then at least my fingerprints are all over it. I even do the marketing material. My hands are all over that, checking paper samples, type style and everything else.”

And if operators don’t want to cede that much control? “They can go somewhere else,” Mitchell responds. “I don’t need money enough (to give in). My way has worked. It’s worked for me, and it’s made a lot of people a lot of money. I have extremely high success rates of my restaurants still being open, and you know the old expression: if it’s not broke, don’t fix it.”

Did someone say driven? Dodd Mitchell, President and Founder, Dodd Mitchell Design, is known for having designed such high-profile Los Angeles restaurants as Katana, Dolce, Sushi Roku, and Dakota. He also designed Javier’s at the Irvine Spectrum. In 2007 he’s been designing hotels in Los Cabos (Mark Post’s Cabo Azul Resort & Spa, opened in late summer), Beverly Hills and San Diego.

As one magazine writer breathlessly noted, “Mr. Mitchell is the human machine churning out nightclubby restaurants that have popped up around Hollywood with sleek, one-word names, cutthroat waiting lists and a celebrity clientele.”

Mitchell began his career in the film industry, designing and building sets. The experience helped him understand how elements such as lighting can change a room in a moment. He eventually transitioned to “the world of design and nightlife” and became one of the best known designers in America.

DON’T PAY ATTENTION TO NUTHIN’

Mitchell walked to center stage in 2004 with his highly anticipated restoration of the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel. The project and his involvement became the subject of a Style Channel television program entitled Hotspot: the Making of the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel. A year later he was honored by the annual Hollywood Style Awards as the Interior Superior of the Year.

Mitchell doesn’t exactly follow design trends. As he puts it, “Don’t pay attention to nuthin’. I dropped out of high school in my junior year. I was born this way.”

Renowned for designing spaces “with earth mind,” Mitchell has earned a reputation for fusing a palette of elemental materials into seductive spaces that mesmerize A-listers and critics alike. Established in 1995, Dodd Mitchell Design has been the creative force behind such high-profile properties as Dolce Enoteca, Falcon, Hotel Valencia, and The Kobe Club New York, a speakeasy dinner club with 2,000 Samurai swords suspended over the center of the dining room.





When Dodd Mitchell designs a property, he says, "You'll find a lot of natural materials," and the look is "very timeless. It's not trendy by any means. I was a set designer, I did TV commercials, and that's some of the best type of work you can do in my opinion because you don't have a year to think of something. You have three days to get something drawn on paper, and then you're building it. So it forces you to really think on your feet." The consumer press loves Mitchell, and he has collected design awards and feature profiles in such publications as Interior Design, In Style, Los Angeles Magazine, Angeleno, Detour, Esquire, Dwell, W Magazine, Wallpaper, The New York Times, The LA Times and Condé Nast Traveler.

The recently opened Cabo Azul offers guests an eclectic experience, that is "tropical mixed with all different continents," Mitchell says. "It's got a little Indian influence, a little Moroccan influence, it's got Mexican influence. Being eclectic will keep the product fresh. One thing I never want for my hotel rooms is to have them be remodeled. I want things that just keep going with this timeless feel." When a guest arrives at one of his hotels, Mitchell muses, "I want you to feel like you're staying in a room at my house. I live right up on the beach in Cabo, and when I have guests come over and stay in the house my maid sprays the pillows with lavender. I run my home like it's a very high-end hotel, also." Logistics count. "I want to make sure, for instance, 'if I'm in room 202, where is the kitchen? How do I get there?'" says Mitchell. "When I order room service, what does the guy have to do to get to me? That's a big part of my product, the service element of it."



When putting together a kitchen, he says, he examines the space “and then I bring in the chef. He will tell me, ‘When I’m doing this product I want to be able to reach down here and pull this out. That will allow me to speed up my plating, which gets my food out quicker.’”

That said, it is Mitchell who remains in control at all times. “You’ve got to deal with other creative people, just be careful you don’t give them too much. I’ve had kitchens get out of hand because of chefs helping me design them.”

With Sushi Roku, for instance, he did everything from the overall design, to the logo, and even finding its general manager. “When I redid the Roosevelt Hotel we completely remodeled and revamped the whole thing, then brought in the management group, Thompson Hotels. I knew that what I was designing wasn’t going to be able to be run by the current owner. They needed something more cool and hip, and I wanted to tie it with New York.”

He recently partnered with some investors out of New York. “They financed me, we bought our first hotel in downtown Cabo. It’s going to be called Bahia, and it’s going to be a condo/hotel renovation.” Also on his plate: beginning construction on the Bragg’s Hotel and a partnership in the Hooter’s Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas “if we get it closed. We’re still dealing with financing. We’ve had it tied up for a year now.”

Most recently, Dodd’s gaze moved south to Cabo Azul, a resort and boutique hotel in San Jose del Cabo, Mexico. What started as a two-day consultation has grown into the complete redesign of the entire project, a new branch of Dodd Mitchell Design (DMD Cabo), and the relocation of Dodd’s residence and headquarters along the beach. Two other boutique hotel projects with which Mitchell is now involved are Thompson Beverly Hills and Thompson Lower East Side.

Mitchell has taken the liberty of conceiving a pilot for a television reality show called, fittingly enough, Dodd Mitchell Makes Over America, which he has described as a cross between Trading Spaces and Charlie’s Angels. In it, he and three sexy assistants would travel to small towns to make over their nightclubs. In his spare time, he recently started a lingerie line called Sleep.

On tap for the year ahead are such projects as Sushi Roku in Scottsdale, AZ due to open in January; Javier’s Cantina in Newport Beach, CA; Maxim Prime in San Diego’s Diegan Hotel; both Rowan Lofts and Double Seven Lounge in Los Angeles; the Grand Kona Resort in Hawaii; Thompson Lower East Side in New York City; the Mi Vida Hotel + Corazón in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico; and the Bahia Hotel, also in Cabo San Lucas. ■

“One thing with me,” Mitchell concludes,
“I always keep moving.”

