

m e e t d o d d m i t c h e l l

“Cabo is very L.A. It is our paradise that we’re two hours away from. It’s very exclusive. It’s very expensive. That’s why everyone’s going down there now.

I started in Scottsdale, Arizona and I drove for 26 hours. I was training at the time and eating like a bird. I had no map. Anita (from my office) planned it out for me, gave me everything. I left the hotel without it. I made my way. I spent the time thinking.

You think about design. I wish I had a top (it was a convertible). The sun. The second degree burns on my face. You think about not tilting your head up because your baseball cap will blow off (a few were lost). This is the biggest leap of faith ever. I just got this car today (1965 Shelby Cobra). You get happy. You think what a life — I go from a high school dropout — from nothing — to this huge fucking house in Cabo. Whose life is this? I have a job that I absolutely live and die for and the perks to go with it.

You think, ‘oh my god. I’m 41 going on 12.’
Amazing.

Then it started raining like I’ve never see it rain before. And I started laughing. I’m upset about what? Look at my life. Fuck it, if the car gets damaged, I’ll fix. You have no choice; you can’t stop. You’re in the middle of nowhere. It was quite an experience.

I’m going to do it on a motorcycle now, a new Suzuki Hayabusa. It’s all power. I want to see how fast I can get from L.A. to Cabo on that thing.”

The man, the myth,

the world's biggest design force is about to become a household name.

His energy is palpable. Can you feel it?

BY REBECCA GOLDBERG

Dodd Mitchell is a character more than an interior designer. His work emanates from a strong sense of self. It is a level of confidence that can only be earned and never inherited. It comes from a life of seeing things differently and the pride that one earns when one knows that his or her instincts are good. He sees through the cracks and knows that his audience expects that of him. High-style, high-society clientele like to be catered to — they're artists, they're famous. They have a different level of expectation, and luckily, he does too.



"I like to challenge myself on everything," said Mitchell.

Mitchell is a self-made man. He dropped out of high school and made a name for himself as a set designer. It was in this role that he proved himself as pain-stakingly thorough—staying up all night to organize the shop—and a creative talent.

"It was a natural progression," he said. "I've always worked really hard. I was willing to learn anything at any time I could. I moved up through the ranks."

"Back in the day, if I didn't get a job, I would just go back to work. It's all about hard work. And ignorance helps out a lot too."

He was lucky, however, that his talent and drive rallied on his behalf.

"I was just born this way. While all the other kids were playing, I was building forts in the backyard (in Bakersfield). I would take my mom outside to show her and I would watch her eyes. Then I would tear it down and start over. I didn't have enough space to keep it and I wasn't one to hang out in it," he said.

It is not the display that he was interested in then, or now, but the impression that it left.

As an adult, Mitchell has built up L.A. only to leave it behind. He has headed south and moved his home to Cabo San Lucas, Mexico.

Despite his association with Hollywood, where Dodd Mitchell Design (DMD) is headquartered, the L.A. lifestyle isn't something he's enamored with. Mitchell doesn't like being photographed. He claims that he has never attended any of his openings because he doesn't like the attention.

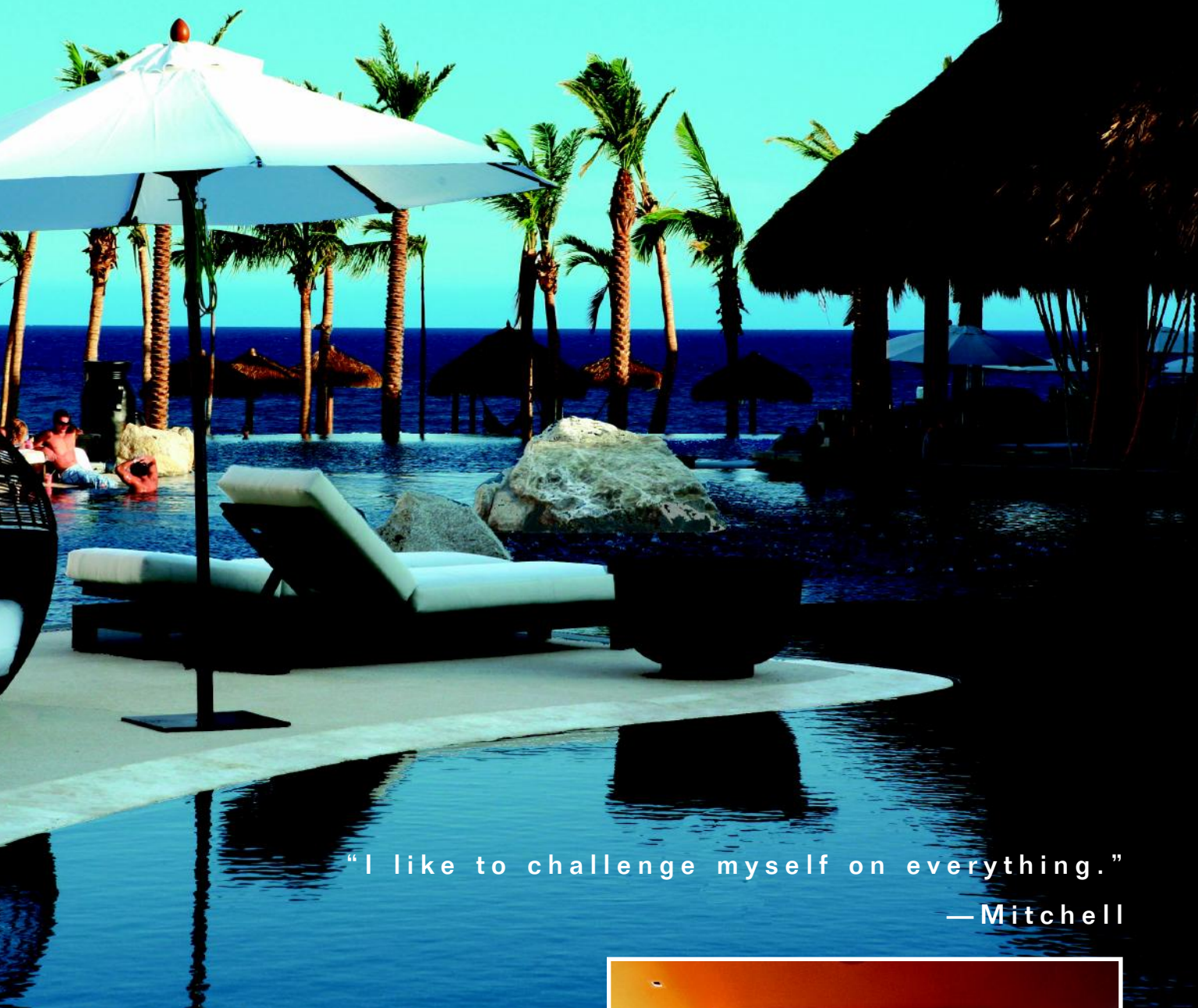
This is coming from the man who is responsible for a list of hotspots longer than the lines to get into them. Dolce, Roosevelt Hotel, Sushi Roku and well over a dozen others in L.A. alone, as well as Double Seven, Kobe Club and the

LES Hotel for Thompson in New York have all thrust his name into the spotlight, willingly or unwillingly.

It's as if he takes pride in being a paradox. Like the forts, he builds the scene, but doesn't hang out in it. His bragging rights come from a job well done. He's got it down to a formula. He builds the sets, the actors and actresses perform in them, the business of design succeeds, he gets to build more sets.

"My whole thing is that I like to brag about how little money I spend on how much money I spend," said Mitchell. "Yes, I am more expensive than most because I'm so dedicated; I'm there. You get more out of me. You're paying for how fast I work, all the years of experience and the tricks of the trade," he said.

"It's training clients to think differently. A lot of people want to brag on how much money they spent. That's why I like old buildings. That's something to brag about. Remodels are a lot more fun. They're challenging. I did The Crescent Hotel for pennies and it's still open."



"I like to challenge myself on everything."

— Mitchell

Mitchell plans to redo L'Ermitage in L.A. He claims that he will change the rooms completely, making them look like they cost tens of millions and do it for nothing. That's nothing in the figurative sense, of course.

Within the last few months, DMD has also opened F&B outlets at the Setai Hotel in San Diego, Cabo Azul, Thompson Hotel Beverly Hills, Bond Street Sushi, Sushi Roku in the W Scottsdale and Javier's Newport Beach.

The Bahia, another Cabo San Lucas hotel, and the purchase of Hooters Casino in Las Vegas are also underway. These projects are all part of the next phase for Dodd Mitchell — greater ownership over his work.

He's even launched Dodd Mitchell Development, which

Left: "What I opened for Cabo Azul is 100 percent timeless. I used a lot of natural materials. Mother nature never goes out of style," said Mitchell. He used his own bedding line called SLEEP for the guest-rooms; Center: The pool at Cabo Azul; Bottom: Another example of Mitchell's work, Bond Street





I do a lot of bouncing of light, backlighting. I like to play with curiosity. We're natural born explorers. There's always something in one of my rooms that pulls you.



Left page top: It's all in the details in this high-end, rustic restaurant in Cabo Azul; Bottom: Talk about drama, this lounge space in Cabo Azul focuses its light source on a rope column and ceiling cover

featured the Brand Hotel in Las Vegas as its first project on its website. It will open later this year.

"We're a branding house. I name 90 percent of things I design. The name and logo will come to me as I'm doing it," he said.

"There's amino acid out there, Braggs Amino Acid," Mitchell said he overheard this and decided it would be the name of his condo-hotel, the first for his very own hotel group. Braggs will open in Cabo San Lucas before summer. It will house new brands including Little Door Spa, Selfish Sushi and Braggs Yacht club.

These are his names. After all, it's his vision. As he does on other projects, it's a safe bet that he'll create all the graphics, marketing materials, uniforms and music selections.

Cabo is giving him the opportunity to prove himself in an arena that is relatively brandless at the moment. It's unblemished, uncharted territory — the new old west. It's no wonder he has chosen this part of the world to put his flag in the ground. There, he can build on the lessons that he's learned in L.A.

His work here will require him to create the ultimate well-balanced property — one with impeccable service, that's cool, but not too cool. He isn't a fan of an over-the-top nightclub scene overflowing into the hotel.

"The funny thing is that I never liked that. I've never been to one of those nightclubs," he said, referring to his portfolio, which could double as Time Out L.A.

"I had a drink in one of my projects during construction just once, when it was me and Kid Rock. We kicked the lock off of the piano. It's the only time I've ever sat in there in and listened to music."

Mitchell is going to capitalize on his preferences, and use them to strengthen his own brand.

"I'm 41 now and Four Seasons is too stuffy and W is way too trendy. My brand (Braggs) is going for that elegance, high-end service," he said.

"I want people to feel and look the best that they can. It comes from years of watching set design. I do a lot of bouncing of light, backlighting. I like to play with curiosity. We're natural born explorers. There's always something in one of my rooms that pulls you. There's always something of interest. It might be a piece of furniture. It keeps the room moving."

Mitchell understands one major key to the hotel business. "I'm only as good as management. I'm only as good as a housekeeper, the bellman. It's a team effort. If you come to the hotel and the room service comes two hours late and cold, that's all you're going to think about. That's why I'm such a control freak."

With knowledge of the industry as a designer, developer, brand architect, and with his connections — he can do whatever he wants.

"I don't work with anybody I don't like. This is like giving birth. I don't want to work with idiots or losers or rude people. Don't get me excited unless it's real. I will stay up all night and start sketching."

That kind of passion is what his clients are buying into, like any good investment.

Mitchell doesn't need to be cool. He knows what he likes and stays true to that.

"I love speed and cars. My idea of an evening is doing my work. In Cabo, I have stacks of Boston Legal, West Wing and Law & Order. Law & Order and a bottle of Vicks — I love the smell," he joked. "I spend 99 percent of my time inside of my head. I just daydream. Everyone jokes I'm two seconds away from peeing in jars like Howard Hughes. I just love drawing and working. This why I'm the luckiest guy in the world. This is my entertainment."

BD

So, what hasn't Dodd Mitchell done?

"If you asked me a year ago, I would have said a church," said Mitchell.

"I still want to do sustainable homeless shelters."

"That's how all of this started when I was a kid. I knew that I needed to get my name out there and get famous then I can get backing. I saw the igloos in downtown L.A. (called Genesis I). They had these little communities. I thought, 'Who could come home and feel good about themselves living in one of these?' With what they paid for that igloo, I could put together something better, made

from sustainable materials. You'd be coming home to a temporary house but you'd have the feeling of a temporary home."

The church that he referenced is in Cabo Azul and opened in early 2008.

He created a place of worship that allows both Catholics and Jews to practice comfortably.

"You hit the button and the Star of David comes down and the cross goes back up," he said. "What I'm trying to show to people is the minute that you think you know me, I switch it up on you."

