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Q&A

*10 Perfect Minutes with
Dodd Mitchell*

Written by Dean May



"It's not about me, it's about the product."
— Dodd Mitchell

On the heels of a string of international successes (Thompson Beverly Hills in California and Cabo Azul in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico), the influential interior designer and development mogul Dodd Mitchell continues his unstoppable takeover/makeover and beautifies the world with distinctive destinations ranging from lounges and restaurants to hotels and yachts. During a brief, recent pit stop in LA, the elusive, funny, jeans-and-sandal-clad Mitchell catches up with longtime pal, 944's own Dean May, over mojitos and brews.

944: What was the first thing you ever designed?

DODD MITCHELL: A Lincoln Log cabin when I was 2.

What do you consider your big break?

That's a big one. In the design career it's hard to say what is your first break because all of them are. Every time you design something it always leads to something bigger, and I get excited about everything I do at any given moment, and then a hotel will come out of it — either a restaurant or another hotel, so every single day seems like another big break.

How do you feel when you see the finished product of something you've designed?

Disgusted. The only thing that happens is it never, ever in my entire career has turned out as good as it looked in my mind.

Clearly you're your toughest critic.

No. It is hard to see because I am so detailed-oriented and you have to lose a lot of that stuff ... a lot of details for cost, timing, the budget issues and stuff. So the first numbers that came to my head on how the place should come out, how the hotel rooms should come out — [the] lobby, [the] restaurant — always seem to get watered down. Every time I just wish they pushed the envelope a little more and had given me more of what I want.

But it must feel good to know you've built structures that will be around for a long time to come.

That is the best part of it — especially now that I am able to build buildings from the ground up. And now I have stepped into more of the development side of my career and taken ownership of the new hotels that I am doing. That is the most exciting part, knowing that something is going to be there long enough to rock on.

Two years ago, you moved from LA to a beautiful home in Mexico. What's the transition been like?

It actually has been amazing. The traffic is a lot better, so I get to drive a lot faster. What is even more amazing is I didn't even own a pair of shorts two years ago.

What are you working on now?

I am in the process now of buying a Greek Isles hotel in Vegas with 200 rooms, which I am going to turn into a boutique hotel. [Also], I am doing something really crazy. We have been buying up little harbors all over Florida. The one I am doing right now is in Hollywood, Fla., and is going to be anywhere from a 60 to 100-room hotel with 36 yacht slips that are up to 130 feet. I have designed it with under-glowing decks so when you pull in you will see this opalescent glow coming off the water. And when you walk into the restaurant, nightclub and the hotel suites, they glow. I named that place, "A Special Night." It's a special night to me because when I went there the first time, I was lucky enough to have my client give me a boat to work on and we have been using the boat to pull up to different clubs in South Beach. So every night that I get to do it is more and more special. "Special Night" sounded like a boat name to me, so what a good name for a hotel.

Do you have a lot of projects in Mexico?

I bought a little 100-room motel called The Mahia that I am remodeling right now. Then I am doing a 240-room ground-up next door to be called Brax. I just finished Cabo Azul, which I am very, very proud of. And I have another 100-room hotel that is going to be opening in front of Cabo Azul in about a year, so we pretty much have Cabo on lock down right now.

Which accomplishment are you most proud of?

I haven't designed it yet. However, I was actually very proud of the church I just finished at Cabo Azul. It is six stories with two two-story waterfalls, eight of them with water falling behind eight inches of hand-carved wood.

What do you think is the biggest misconception about Dodd Mitchell?

It is hard for me to say, because I don't surround myself with people enough to hear what they are saying.

You've been called a perfectionist. Are you?

If I am driving people to make a better product, a better restaurant and a better hotel, who does it hurt? My clients make more money. I make more money and the product comes out better at the end of the day. It's not about me, it's about the product.

What is one perfect object you want to design?

A bidet that also waxes at the same time — the wash and wax.

Live in the lap of luxury at www.doddmitchell.com