

# The New York Times

## Looking Beyond the Golf Course



Michael Meldman. John Russo

Michael S. Meldman, 60, wasn't a golfer when he founded [Discovery Land Company](#) in 1994, a real estate business based in Scottsdale, Ariz., that has developed 25 private high-end golf communities in North America and the Caribbean.

“Master-planned communities and golf were hugely popular and the premium drivers in real estate,” he said, “and I saw an opportunity, even though I hadn't ever really played golf. In fact, I only started playing seriously five years ago.”

Today, Mr. Meldman's luxurious communities with members-only golf clubs — Baker's Bay in the Bahamas, Yellowstone Club in Big Sky, Mont., and **Silo Ridge in Amenia, N.Y.**, among them — range from 450 acres to 14,000 acres, or about 180 hectares to 5,700 hectares, and have homes that command prices from \$3 million to \$80 million.

The communities stand out for amenities that rival five-star destination resorts, with golf courses designed by Tom Fazio and Jack Nicklaus, restaurants with top-quality farm-to-table cuisine and an extensive range of wellness-themed activities. And let's not forget the Casamigos Tequila bar at each resort. (Mr. Meldman founded the brand with the entrepreneur Rande Gerber and the actor George Clooney.)

Below are excerpts from a recent interview with Mr. Meldman.

**Tell me about your vision for Discovery Land Company.**

People were very interested in golf and master-planned communities, and my idea was to create a luxury concept that combined both. I wanted to find great pieces of land and build around the natural landscapes so that the communities looked like they belonged there, not like standard developments. They are all built to be sprawling with plenty of space between the homes and have lots of green space. And they all incorporate a lot of natural stone.

**Although the communities are in different locations, what characteristics do they share?**

They all have golf, of course. They're all gated and have guards, clubhouses with great gyms and spas and fantastic restaurants. They're also very family-friendly and casual. I think that a lot of golf clubs can be intimidating, but at ours, you can play barefoot in board shorts. And, we have two to three comfort stations on all the golf courses, which are basically mini-restaurants that serve everything from candy bars to foie gras to warm pretzels.



Silo Ridge in Amenia, N.Y. Jeff Lipsky

In each resort, we hire locals to teach residents about the outdoor activities in the area. At Iron Horse in Whitefish, Mont., for example, you can go fly fishing. At Makena, in Maui, you can go deep sea fishing, scuba diving and snorkeling. And in most of our oceanside locations, kids can release baby turtles into the ocean. My idea is that the people who live in my communities should embrace the areas that they're in.

## **How do you choose your locations?**

I seek out places where there is a good amount of land and where zoning allows us to build homes and a golf course. Also, there has to be enough to do in the area besides golf. In Silo Ridge, for example, in the Hudson Valley, which is the newest community, the horseback riding, hunting, mountain biking and hiking are all excellent.

## **If you had to give one piece of advice for someone looking to buy a home in a golf community what would it be?**

Make sure that the developer has a track record of success and is going to commit to the vision of what they initially present.

## **What are the most important features to get right when designing golf community homes?**

These days, I think they should have a more contemporary aesthetic as opposed to traditional, which was the norm when I started Discovery. They should have big windows that take advantage of the views, ideally of the golf course, and have spacious indoor and outdoor areas where families and friends can gather and spend time together like a nice-sized patio, a family room with comfortable, oversized couches and a dining room with a table that accommodates large groups. It's also great to have an open-plan home where the kitchen and family room are one big room, since these are the two areas where everyone tends to spend the most time. And the homes shouldn't be too close to each other so that everyone has enough privacy.

**In your opinion, how have golf communities changed over the last decade?**

They've gone from golf being the only consideration to being simply one of many drivers. There is now a greater emphasis on cuisine, the nongolf outdoor pursuits and activities, the family-friendliness and the safety concerns addressed by being in a gated community.

In a great golf community, there has to be something that's appealing to each family member. We have a lot of people living in our communities who don't golf. They're attracted to the other things Discovery clubs offer.

Also, the demographic skews much younger. In the past, golf clubs attracted a lot of retirees, but now, there are a lot of people in their mid-30s to mid-40s enjoying them with their families that include young children.

**Are golf community residents different than your usual homeowner?**

I think that they're inherently more social. They're looking to connect with other people on a regular basis and love the idea of a sense of community. I'm not saying other homeowners are antisocial, but they may not care as much about the social offerings and accessibility to the lineup of activities.