



THE STRONG AND SILENT TYPE

Though his client list includes some of Los Angeles' most powerful, the only names you'll hear architectural designer **Scott Mitchell** drop are Rudolph, Kahn and Foster.

BY MICHAEL WEBB PORTRAIT BY SAM FROST

As an architect, one has to be a bit of a psychologist, helping people discover what is important to them," says Scott Mitchell. "It's not about impressing your friends, but finding a sanctuary from the turmoil of the world, and cherishing your family." Though he prefers to help guide his clients, steering them away from excess, and into a place where he and they feel comfortable at home, he won't hesitate to part ways if there's a major disconnect, citing one residential project that mushroomed from 20,000 to 37,000 square feet. "That was grotesquely oversized for a childless couple, and I felt profoundly disturbed."

The son of an Air Force pilot, Mitchell had a peripatetic childhood, moving from Japan (which kindled an enthusiasm for sketching traditional houses) to Jordan, where he explored Roman ruins with his father. He loved buildings without knowing what architecture was, never dreaming it could be a career, and went to Texas A&M as a pre-med student. At the end of his first year, bored with the complexities of biochemistry, he impulsively switched to architecture without telling his family or friends. "It felt quite natural and I never looked back," he says. As a graduate he worked for a protégé of the Brutalist architect

Paul Rudolph, a virtuoso of poured concrete, and briefly in London for Norman Foster, the maestro of glass and steel.

Mitchell opened his own office in Los Angeles and has been so busy for the past 15 years that he still hasn't found time to secure an architect's license, relying on a structural engineer to vet his plans. It hasn't held him back. He has realized houses as far afield as Melbourne, and has a full slate of projects from the Hamptons to Seattle. One of his favorites is a 200-foot-long block of poured concrete—raw, monolithic and monastic in its rigor—that hugs a slope in Malibu, overlooking the Pacific. Inspiration for the concrete and reclaimed oak floors and cabinetry came from the legendary master, Louis Kahn—especially his Salk Institute and Kimbell Art Museum—and from the ruins eroding into the landscape that he remembers from his teenage years in Amman. What makes this house so remarkable is its reticence. "I wanted people to feel I had come with a surgeon's scalpel and inserted the mass into the land," he explains.

A mile down the coast, Mitchell designed a beachfront restaurant for Nobu, drawing on memories of Japan: Glass sliders open onto a

deck, and its free-flowing interior is a masterpiece of finely crafted joinery. "Shinto minimalism, which relies entirely on wood and stone, has always resonated with me," he says. "I think it was Kenzo Tange, the Japanese Modernist, who said 'You take away until there's nothing left to take, and then you stop.' Natural materials, honestly expressed, are really all you need."

So it's no surprise that Mitchell adores traditional barns for their warmth and the functional beauty of their structure. Those forms fed into several shingled houses in Beverly Hills and Long Island—projects that might seem far removed from the austere, hard-edged work the designer prefers. "It's not that I'm drawn to traditional forms, but I see these houses as clusters of barns," he explains. "Modernism has been around for 100 years and it's become a historical style with a rich legacy. It cannot be confined to flat roofs."

Mitchell believes that architecture should stimulate the emotions and promote spiritual growth. "I'd love to work on a larger scale—in India, perhaps—and help change people's lives," he says. "Architecture has a huge unrealized potential that shouldn't be limited to a handful of millionaires and developers."

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PHOTO COURTESY OF SCOTT MITCHELL STUDIO

A residence in Australia reflects Mitchell's penchant for Japanese Modernism.