

# THE MIDAS TOUCH

FURNITURE  
MAVERICK  
MITCHELL  
GOLD HAS  
BUILT A  
\$100 MILLION  
BUSINESS,  
WITH A  
14-CARAT  
HOME IN THE  
CAROLINAS  
TO MATCH

48

BY PATRICK JONES  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
J. SAVAGE GIBSON









**M**itchell Gold sits in conversation on the screened-in porch that adjoins the master bedroom of his comfortable North Carolina lake home. Sprawled comfortably near his feet is Lulu, his beloved English Bulldog and media darling.

Lulu has starred in numerous advertising campaigns for the Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams furniture design company.

After a quick belly rub by a visitor, Lulu contentedly stretches out as Gold traces the genesis of his successful business back to his formative years growing up in Ewing Township, near Trenton. As Gold tracks the inspirations for his current lake-side home to his New Jersey roots, Lulu dozes off. Stars need their beauty sleep.

Gold, whose business generates annual sales surpassing \$100 million, learned the value of extra effort and customer service when he was a boy working in his father's grocery. From his mother he learned "how to do things a step better and differently than other people would do them," he says.

But it is a seemingly inconsequential childhood limitation—denial of access to the family's living room—that left one of the deepest etches on his professional and personal philosophies.

"We never went in the front door," Gold says of his boyhood home. "We always used the side door by the driveway. We weren't allowed in the living room except on rare occasions. It had a huge influence on me."

These days, swayed heavily by that childhood restriction, there is little hint of rigid convention in Gold's essence. The uncomfortable, inaccessible cane-backed living room chairs of his youth ultimately spawned Gold's "relaxed design" approach to furniture. And his North Carolina home, sitting by Lake Hickory in the hilly Western Piedmont region, is the antithesis of stuffiness. Its stylish informality flows from room to room.

Gold designed the home a little more than 10 years ago with Williams, a company co-founder, current business colleague, and former personal partner.

"One of the things that we were looking for in a house was one that, when we left work, it would be like a retreat," says Gold, who was named one of the "26 Entrepreneurs We Love" by *Inc.* magazine. "It would be like a weekend house. Part of our thinking was also to build a house that looked like it was 80 or 90 years old, but with all the new accouterments and conveniences.

"And in my own home, I wanted to use every room," says Gold, dressed casually (not unexpectedly) in blue jeans and a long-sleeve red pullover. "There are no rooms that aren't used



**TOP:** One of many comfy corners, kept light and airy by windows facing the hilly Western Piedmont region of North Carolina. **ABOVE:** Lulu, Gold's English Bulldog, is a constant companion and a star in the company's advertising campaigns. **OPPOSITE:** Collectibles are a theme throughout the home. Framed originals of military troops adorn the staircase wall.





**OPPOSITE:** The master bathroom features doors originally from a Paris saloon and a heated tile floor set by timer. **TOP:** Gold wanted an intimate master bedroom, small enough so that the bed wasn't 100 feet away from the television. **ABOVE:** Details, like paneled walls, accent chairs, and a carefully edited art collection, make the house feel cozy.

here. I like that the home is very warm and relaxing. There are a lot of memories in here.”

Gold's 3,500-square-foot house features four bedrooms and 5½ baths. It sits on a wooded one-acre lot with 200 feet of water frontage. It is an elegant home that would blend in just as well in Maine's Lakes Region.

Luxuries in Gold's getaway compound—located 13 minutes and one stoplight from his office and factory—include a remote-control heated outdoor pool, a three-car garage, a boat dock, and a lakeside gazebo that provides stunning sunset views.

“It's not a big house by standards of people who spend this much money to build a house,” he says. “But it's got a lot of detail. And one of the things I really like about it is that the rooms are a really cozy size. I didn't want a house that had a master bedroom where you are in bed and the TV is, like, 100 feet away.”

**N**ot surprisingly, the house is filled with the same upscale furniture staples that consumers can buy directly from the Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams (formerly the Mitchell Gold Company) showroom stores, or through Gold's other prime outlets, such as Crate & Barrel, Storehouse, and the Pottery Barn. His company's offerings are interspersed throughout the house along with a mix of antiques and eclectic pieces acquired from artisans.

“People ask me how I furnished the house,” says Gold, who launched his company in 1989 after mostly dissatisfying stints earning paychecks at companies such as the Lane Company and Bloomingdale's, where he was once a lamp buyer. “I would not buy another manufacturer's product for my home. What do they expect me to do, put Henredon furniture in here?”

There is an abundance of customized details in the house, which Gold and Williams designed together. Most of the doors were retrofitted from an Atlanta home built in 1916. The doors leading to the master bathroom came from a turn-of-the-20th-century Paris saloon, Gold says. They were originally 14 feet tall and were trimmed to fit. The master bath boasts a heated tile floor set by timer.

Windows and skylights in the living room allow a panoramic view of the lake. To add to the natural lighting, a medieval-style black metal chandelier with 20 candelabras and chains



hangs from the vaulted ceiling. Williams scavenged the piece from a junkyard in Los Angeles and had it refurbished.

Gold and Williams decided to forgo a fireplace in the living room. Instead, there's a large entertainment unit with bookshelves. It is lined with bulldog collectibles in honor of Lulu.

Photographs of family, friends, and assorted bigwigs adorn the walls and shelves. There's Gold at a dinner with Bill Clinton. And there's Gold with Tipper and Al Gore.

**G**

old's desire to host family, friends, and business clients led to an open layout in the kitchen, where it is easy for a congregation of hungry and chatty guests to maneuver. The kitchen features a large island and limestone countertops. Gold installed side-by-side

stainless-steel ovens and a pair of dishwashers.

"Everything is in twos in this house," he says. "When you entertain a lot, you have to have that stuff." The basement laundry room contains two washers and two dryers.

Gold says he possesses only basic cooking skills and relies on a chef for anything other than quick personal meals.

"I follow my mother's favorite recipe: Hire someone," he says with a grin.

Gold's favorite room in the house is a glassed-in dining porch that seats up to 10. "It is just the greatest place," he says. "You can watch the sun set right over the lake."

The upstairs features a small office and two guest rooms with separate masculine and feminine themes. Gold's finished basement includes an additional guest room and a combination media and workout room.

Gold avoids talking about his age, but reveals he is "near 50." He has shaken up the entrenched North Carolina furniture industry, both with his monumental upstart success and the respectful treatment of his 750 employees, who are provided gourmet cooking, gym facilities, and on-site day care — all previously unheard of in the region.

Lulu continues to snooze on the porch as Gold reflects on the transformations that led him from Ewing Township to his place among the elite in the furniture business.

"It's kind of a joke with my parents now," he says. "Bob and I helped them furnish the condo that they live in. We organized it so that they would use every room. The last time I was there, they said, 'Let's sit in the living room.' They wanted to make sure it was used."

59



**TOP:** The sociable Lulu still maintains a vigilant watch on guests. **ABOVE:** Gold's North Carolina home would blend in just as comfortably in Maine's Lakes Region.. **OPPOSITE:** The glassed-in dining porch offers stunning sunset views. Gold calls it his favorite room in the house.