

People are right to call me arrogant

Arrogance is not a trait that most people would care to be accused of. But it's one that doesn't seem to bother architect, designer and Wandeegroup MD Mario Kleff too much.

"A number of people have told me I am arrogant," he said during an interview with *Real Estate magazine*. "I don't think I am any more arrogant than the next person and, after all, we all have a little bit of arrogance in us. But then I think if my building designs are considered arrogant then I too must be arrogant, because they reflect my personality."

Here's how the conversation continued:

RE_m: So what is it your designs say about you?

Mario Kleff: They say everything about me. I like to think they express smartness and sophisticated aesthetics. For me a building design is like a woman – an art sculpture.

My designs express my own experiences. For me they are not buildings, they are art sculptures. My design challenge is to find something that reflects the personality of the client while allowing me to put myself into it too.

RE_m: Do you regard your designs as arrogant?

MK: It depends what you mean by arrogant. To me arrogance is a word that is used to describe something or someone that is unconventional, and in that respect yes, my designs are arrogant and I do things that people might construe as arrogant.

RE_m: Unconventionality certainly permeates all aspects of your life. For instance, you have designed

your own car which is being built in the UK. Most likely it will be the most powerful car that Thailand has ever seen – more powerful, for instance, than a Formula One car. It is totally impractical, so why did you do it?

MK: Because people said it couldn't be done. It's as simple as that. I am a designer and at the moment I happen to be designing buildings for a living, but whatever it is I design I like to push the boundaries. I think my buildings do that and certainly my car will do that.

I look around Pattaya and I see a concrete jungle in which nothing is beautiful. Many buildings you see are based on a hundred year old design which hasn't changed. Well I want to help change things. Right now I look around me and I see a mess.

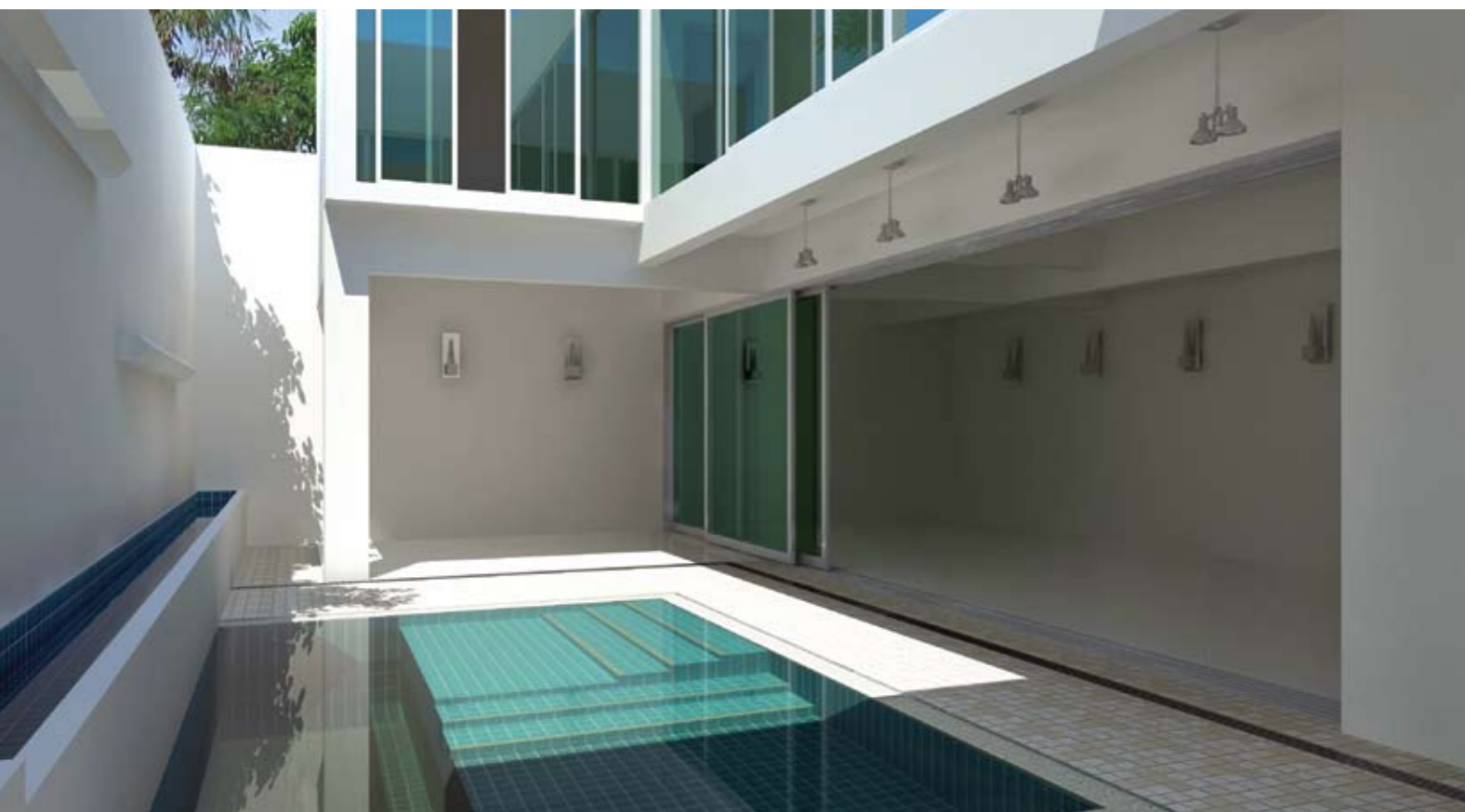
RE_m: You have said that when you are commissioned to design a building you like to have a completely free hand. But how many clients are prepared to give you that freedom when they are paying handsomely for your work?

MK: I have also said that I don't work for money – and that is true. If people want to pay me two million baht that is fine, but that's not the reason I do it. I do it because it is art and I love it. For me the purest form of art is a human being, and the closest expression of a human being is the house he or she lives in.

I often have just a few minutes in which to analyse a client in order to project their personality on to my design and harmonise it with my own. If people cannot accept the way I work I refuse the job. I think this is why some people think I'm arrogant. Ω



Falling Rain: A Japanese-style house designed for a French client and located on top of a hill at Banglamung. Named Falling Rain because "it is a straight design, much like a waterfall". Construction materials are pre-cast concrete with no columns or bars, clear and frosted glass, aluminium, black marble imported from Greece and tropical woods. Other features are, in Mario's view, "extreme engineering" with slanting walls. The exterior is white concrete. A detail of the design is shown right.



Zen: Another Japanese-style house in Pattaya town for a British professional piano player. Designed to maximise acoustics, this house features light superblocks, columns and bars with large spans of 15 metres, green reflective UV glass, heavy duty aluminium and tropical woods. Named after the zen-like pool and waterfalls inside the house.



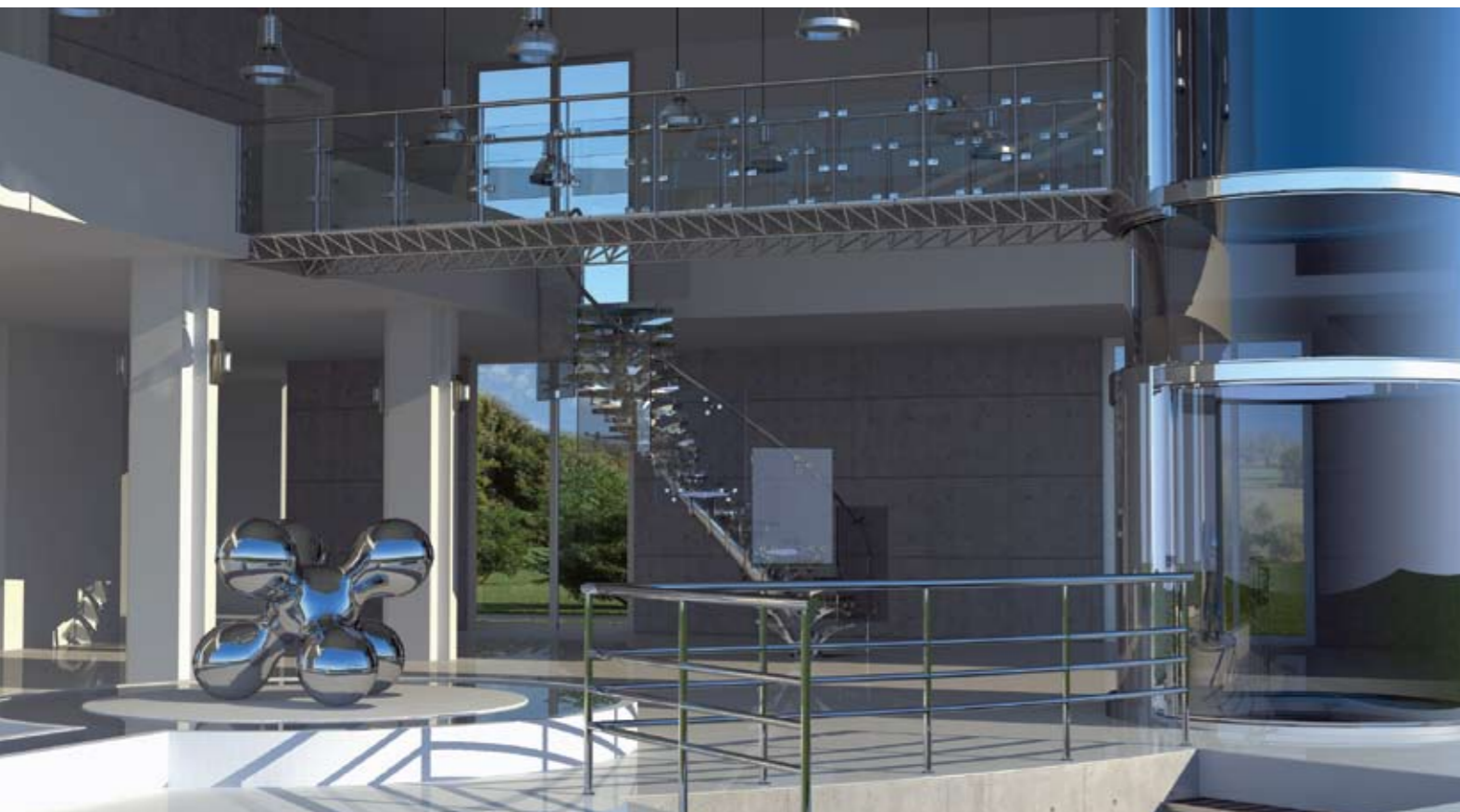
Is Mario Kleff arrogant and is it reflected in his building designs? Judge for yourself from these six villas he has designed (shown on the facing and following pages). Five are in Pattaya and one in Phuket. All fall within the 10m-23m baht range for construction and all were subject to the same, open design brief to Mario – design what you want while making maximum use of the available land. As Mario put it: "They don't follow any specific design requirements, they are architectural sculptures; pure art. What makes them special is the lack of columns or bars in some and very large spans in others."



Capson: A Japanese house on Pratamnak Hill for a Danish client. A cube or capsule design – hence its name – this house is of pre-cast concrete with no interior bars or columns, blue reflective UV glass, a heavy-duty aluminium frame, blue reflective pool tiles, tropical woods and stainless steel. Finished in white concrete, the house is another example of extreme engineering with 55 degree walls containing windows overlooking the pool. It also features an industrial, heavy-duty air conditioning system.



Koi House: This Japanese house in Pattaya town, designed for a Thai client, is named after the huge koi tank that meanders around all the interior rooms. Construction materials include pre-cast concrete, steel beams with very large spans, multiple layer green reflective glass curtain walls, an aluminium and wood frame, travertine imported from India, black marble imported from Greece, black granite and a heavy-duty industrial air conditioning system. The exterior finish is concrete and aluminium.



Leonardo House: Designed for a US client, this Phuket villa features pre-cast concrete with massive columns, steel beams with spans up to 23 metres, green reflective UV glass, a heavy-duty aluminium frame, acrylic glass, V2 and V4 stainless steel, T6 aluminium, granite and marble. The exterior finish is concrete and distinctive features include a walk-way with a spiral staircase, glass elevator and underwater pool views.



Merit Villa: Located at Wongamat, this house has been designed for a German client and features pre-cast concrete, steel beams, green reflective UV glass, a heavy-duty aluminium frame and tropical woods. Finished in white concrete, the villa has large spans and no columns, a white tiled swimming pool and an underground car park.