

# Why Wandeegroup is consistently successful

**S**uccess represents different things to different people. Many see it as the attainment of wealth; others find it in the accomplishments of their professional or private lives; and for some it is high social standing by gaining the admiration and respect of fellow human beings. But whatever yardstick you use to measure it by, it is an undeniable fact that Mario Kleff is a successful man.

The Pattaya-based architect with an aristocratic background has in five years become one of the leading architects on Thailand's eastern seaboard. With a number of outstanding architectural projects and a clutch of records already to his credit, he is now the signature architect for several national and international clients.

Among the records he holds are the highest number of submitted construction designs in the region and the largest construction spans used in residential units in Thailand.

In fact, his architectural designs incorporate innovative engineering solutions that go far beyond the ordinary. He is personally in charge of numerous architectural projects across Thailand and has been contracted to participate in or create master plans for modern high-rise building projects in the USA, Russia and Dubai.

The man himself, however, has a very different notion of his own success. Rejecting the traditional trappings of success – money and possessions – he takes most pride in his lesser-known accomplishments which have singled him out as a being

A conversation with star designer Mario Kleff, left, the man who became Thai



A rare quiet moment – Mario with his daughter, Jiang Li.

of rare talent and, indeed, as one with great fortitude in the face of adversity.

#### Fortitude in the face of adversity...

A resident of Thailand since 2002, Mario built his first house

the traditional Thai way – with bamboo, hewn from the jungle with his bare hands and lashed together with hemp rope he made himself. For two years he found himself without a roof over his head nor walls surrounding him, subsisting on the few baht

he earned every day from selling coconuts – garnered at the crack of dawn by scaling the nearby coconut trees.

“Climbing those trees was a skill I had to learn and one that I became very proud of,” he said. “I felt that in order to live here I needed to learn about the Thai culture and to live like Thais. It was quite a challenge as I hadn’t got a clue how to go about it. The language, of course, was my first barrier. But I decided to stay and live like these people, giving up the life of luxury I had enjoyed in the West up to that point.

“It was the best experience of my life. I didn’t have the luxury of a shower or, indeed, a home with roof and walls, for two years. I bathed in the clongs (small canals) and ate the food that the local surroundings were able to provide. In the process I learned the art of survival and when I managed to climb my first coconut tree and build my first, small, traditional boat, I began to get a sense of why Thai people are so proud of what they achieve in their daily lives. It’s all about patience and making the effort to learn. In order to learn, one first needs to fail.”

#### Success and winning

With success being the central theme of our talks, I asked Mario how he was able to build a successful career as a foreign designer in Thailand, writes Robert Collins. Here’s how the conversation continued:

**MK:** I believe success is about your attitude and not the consequences of your actions. Successful people are born with the ability to be successful,

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Where the Wandegroup is on the local maps – the one above shows the six different projects in the Naklua area. Right are the two to be found currently in Bang Sare.



The developments at Phoenix Golf Course (above) and Pratamnakh Hill (left).

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rather like artists are born with the ability to become artists. It's not something that can be taught. I was born with the ability to be successful and so it was relatively easy for me to build a successful business providing perfect solutions for clients who hire my services.

**RE:** But clients have many architects to choose from, so why do they choose you?

**MK:** I believe it's because I think differently. For instance, I am unlike the many people out there who constantly want more. If they don't get it, or if they have to give up what they have already achieved, they get frustrated at the very least. The fact is you can't win without losing.

**RE:** What exactly do you mean by that?

**MK:** Only winners can lose, but that doesn't mean losers can't win. Both winners and losers can achieve success because it has nothing to do with winning or losing, it has everything to do with the satisfaction and happiness you derive from achieving the goals you set yourself.

Someone who likes to win will certainly lose when the time comes. After all, there is no mountain that you can climb that you don't have to come

down again. For a winner that is the hardest thing to take; for a successful person it's a natural consequence of his actions and an opportunity to draw breath before moving on.

**Wealth and success**

**RE:** You are clearly a wealthy man, despite the fact you spent your first two years in Thailand virtually without a baht to your name. Do you now harbour ambitions to make even more money?

**MK:** Money has never been the reason I have done a job and it never will be. I work to see the realisation of a good idea, to achieve the goals I set for myself and to support others, such as my family and those who work for me.

**RE:** So if money is not the motivation, how have you acquired all your properties?

**MK:** Being paid handsomely for my work doesn't mean that I work for money.

I like to achieve goals that usually reflect my profession as an architect and create building solutions that fulfill the aspirations of all interested parties. That means pleasing my clients, boosting profits for investors and providing the ultimate buyer with the perfect product for his money. So I charge

what I need to charge to keep our company, Wandegroup, operating efficiently and to support my family and relatives. On some projects I charge hundreds of thousands of dollars for a design, not to make us rich but to invest in our business. That, in turn, enables us to exploit new opportunities and to extend the boundaries of our service even further.

**RE:** At what point will you think the Wandegroup has achieved enough?

**MK:** Right now I feel as if we have only just started. When you build a house you start with the footings, and that's just about where I feel we are with the Wandegroup.

**RE:** And what do you think the Wandegroup needs to produce even better products and provide even better service?

**MK:** This is a process of constant evolution. We invested heavily in the supercomputers you see in our offices to extend our capabilities on computer designs.

It means our staff are able to work at a much higher and more professional level to provide perfect 3D presentations to our clients.

We invested in laser-cutting machines to produce perfect miniatures and models for them

– and we do build many of them every year.

Next we invested in construction site machinery. I think it makes perfect sense for the architect who designed a project to be in total overall control of the construction process, so the Wandegroup became a construction company and I personally oversee construction to ensure perfect results.

There is no limit to the improvements we can make. We need developers to allocate bigger budgets in order to raise construction quality to a level where I believe it should be.

**RE:** Property development is all about making money, so you do think about increasing your wealth...

**MK:** Let me put it this way, to make money you need to spend money.

For example, say you had a glass of champagne that you bought and had no money for another. You would drink it slowly to make it last, right? I would do the opposite – drink it quickly while it was still fresh and at its peak and stand there with an empty glass because someone with a bottle might just spot it and fill it up again.

It's the same with money

– poor people are frightened to spend because they think they will have nothing and rich people are frightened to spend because they think they will lose something. How can the system work with people who have attitudes like that? Their motto should be: Spend for something or work for nothing.

**The price of success**

**RE:** You have achieved a lot at a relatively young age and are currently in charge of some very large and complex construction sites with probably more to come. Why do you insist on such a heavy workload by taking personal control of every project when you could easily bring in additional help?

**MK:** I am a self-educated designer and trust my ability to come up with solutions others can't imagine.

Yes I took two masters degrees in design and architecture, but when I started to build my first house in Thailand seven years ago these didn't help me one little bit. I didn't even understand how to organise the materials needed to construct it.

It was built of traditional bamboo and palm leaves and while constructing it I was

surrounded by curious, smiling Thai people.

I built it after weeks of cutting bamboo by hand and learning from local people how to use the palm leaves.

When these people saw how hard I worked, more came to help me. They saw that I was a fighter with no fear, and that is the quality you need to push the boundaries and let people feel the power you have. That way they will support you and accept you as a leader.

**RE:** You prefer to call yourself a designer rather than an architect. How is design related to your success?

**MK:** Design is everything – without it there is no success. We all need design to shape the direction of our lives so that we can grow.

The success of a company depends on the quality of its design. Success comes naturally and can't be learned – you either have it or you don't. And if you are successful there is no reason to fear, because you have nothing to lose or to win.

Part of my role is to provide design solutions for those people who are unable to be successful in order to make them feel like winners.

**RE:** So this means you must

provide a custom design for every client?

**MK:** Yes, of course. You can't copy a design. Custom thinking is the driver of a designer's work. I studied design in its many different forms, researching back as far as the oldest written scripts about it.

I trained for two years with a Japanese master designer to learn more and understand how simple a complex system could become if I took the time to understand the source of it.

I have a strong feel for physiology, religion and physics and I understand the philosophy of Zen. We are only restricted by our own limitations to learn more. Design surrounds our daily lives and we need to harness it to bring success to every project we undertake.

**Consequences of success**

**RE:** It seems every time I turn on the TV or radio here in Pattaya or pick up a local magazine I see or hear the name Mario Kleff. How do you feel about having such a high public profile?

**MK:** It's a good way of making friends and introducing myself to people.

Some, perhaps out of envy, just see me as a show-off or as just another guy full of his own

self-importance, but I think there are others who see it as an opportunity to make contact with a real designer – the kind of person you don't encounter every day, particularly not here in Pattaya.

Designers usually work in high-profile locations where there is an abundance of potential clients. I embarked on this public relations programme because I believe it is important to show people in the business the difference between talking and doing.

**RE:** Why do you think people envy you?

**MK:** Human nature. Most foreigners who come to live here try to make money and they find it hard, so perhaps they get a little resentful.

**RE:** And Thai people ... do they envy you?

**MK:** Some may, some may not, but really there is no reason for them to be envious because there is nothing I can take from them. This is their country and we are their guests.

I love Thailand and try to improve things as much as I can, so hopefully they can profit from my efforts as well. However, there is a Thai proverb which says: Don't be too outstanding...

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Three projects at Huay Yai (above) and five at in the Jomtien Beach area (right).



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**RE<sub>W</sub>:** You have designed your own car – not just an ordinary car but a monster of such unimaginable power that it threatens to be one of the world's fastest road cars. And you are now having it built. Why?

**MK:** It will be my proof.

**RE<sub>W</sub>:** What proof do you need?

**MK:** Proof that the impossible really is possible. Many people tell me that such a powerful road car is totally impractical and that a vehicle of 2,000 or more horsepower simply won't work.

Well I want to prove them wrong. The car will be the culmination of a 20 year dream. As you know, I designed the car from scratch with most of the parts created on our supercomputers and then engineered and manufactured them in different countries. The car will be unique and as powerful as a small aeroplane.

I can design almost anything but I also need to supervise its construction to its completion.

It's all about achieving goals and the goal is to get the car street legal.

People need to understand that a designer loves to design, so if I design a car for myself it needs to be unique and reflect my design thinking – and perhaps also the power of success.

**RE<sub>W</sub>:** Over the past year I have come to know you not only as a highly talented architect and builder of innovative houses and condominiums of rare distinction, but as a single-minded individual who understands his responsibilities and the consequences of his actions, but at the same time one who insists on having his own way. Tell me, at what point do you compromise?

**MK:** I don't. If a client wants me to compromise then he really needs another designer.

Like I said, I don't work for money, I work to see the realisation of a good idea and when you do that there is no room for compromise. The same with my new car; if I have to compromise I will walk away from it and leave a 20-year-old dream in ruins. And I'm not going to do that, am I?

**RE<sub>W</sub>:** No, somehow I don't think you will ...

Just over the past few weeks Mario has come up with more new architectural designs to be built in Pattaya.

In total another eight condominium blocks engineered to tie in perfectly with the land plots, budget, sales and the requirement for beauty.

With these the success story just continues and seems to be

bringing Wandeegroup "above the footing level" as Mario puts it. He has delivered in excess of 34 condominium permits in just two years.

The Wave condominium project, with more than 150 units, is the record design by Mario Kleff. Within just two weeks he took the project from master planning and engineering, on to 3D and blueprints and then to the official construction permit.

With Heights Holdings' Park Royal No 3, this speed record has been pushed to something really unbelievable ... Mario designed and engineered two nine-storey condominium blocks in detail. In co-operation with Height Holdings' CEO Haim Bar-David their combined masterplan sees the perfect harmony of both budget and sales.

Mario planned this project together with Haim on a Friday evening.

Wandeegroup started construction and piling after just another four days. Sales have already picked up. And this sets yet another record.

Just before this magazine went for printing Mario sent us further updates ... Park Royal No 3 with more than 150 units won't be Wandeegroup's last design of 2009. Plans have already started on Park

Royal No 4 and construction will follow soon!

In Jomtien Beach the Wandeegroup has completed its final master planning and the details on the mega project Suan Sawarn which has 13 condominium blocks.

After delays on building processing, architect Mario Kleff has committed himself to support the project with solutions on-site to optimise construction as fast as it possible and accelerate the process on receiving OR6.

**And what of 2010?**

We'll be telling you ...

- Why international working architect Mario Kleff has changed his nationality to become Thai;
- Why Mario Kleff was chosen to design an architectural icon for Thai Government;
- What is it about the Wandeegroup's construction engineering that makes it so different and efficient
- What really is up on Mario Kleff's supercars and how fast they actually can go;
- New developing projects and construction updates on several on-going construction sites;
- What the Wandeegroup improved and upgraded on their 3D presentations to make them even better. ☺

# MERRY CHRISTMAS & A HAPPY NEW YEAR!

MARIO'S DAUGHTER:  
JIANG LI WONGSIN (MING)



MARIO KLEFF, NITTAYA WONGSIN AND MING WISH ALL REAL ESTATE RELATIVES HERE IN TOWN A GOOD BUSINESS START IN 2010 AND HOPEFULLY FOR MANY OF THEM

A BETTER YEAR OF SALES.