Mutual honesty and trust is the only way forward

That's the opinion of Wandeegroup joint MD Nittaya Wongsin who has strong views about the way business is conducted in Pattaya

Times are tough in the property market – not just in Pattaya, not just in Thailand, but everywhere. And tough times call for closer cooperation between customer and supplier; a business regime characterised by openness, honesty and mutual trust to the benefit of all parties concerned.

Those are the views of Nittaya Wongsin, joint managing director of the Wandeegroup from where her husband and fellow joint managing director Mario Kleff makes his contribution to changing the architectural face of Pattaya.

Nittaya takes care of the day-to-day business operations of the Thappraya Road-headquartered company, freeing Mario to concentrate on what he does best – designing innovative buildings to grace the skyline of Pattaya and beyond. And with almost 150 people on the payroll and contracts worth billions of baht, her role is not only significant but vital.

Born and raised in Pattaya, Nittaya is the daughter of a successful and influential family of Chinese descent. After studying in Bangkok, Lancaster University and Cardiff, where she obtained a master's degree in business, Nittaya went to work in the international relations department of the Stock Exchange of Thailand. Her job was to act as host to visitors to the exchange and, along with her immediate boss, conduct roadshows in Europe.

"The Thai Government was keen to promote the stock exchange at that time," Nittaya said. "The roadshows involved a lot of research in which a background in finance and economics would have been very useful, but my background was in business. I felt that hampered my progress and besides, I wanted a more active role involving people, so after 18 months I left."



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Next stop on the career path was Japanese construction firm Teisei, working in Thailand coordinating engineers and architects. It was there that Nittaya honed the skills in human relations that have proved so valuable to the Wandeegroup today.

Then Avon called – yes, the cosmetics giant with operations across the globe. Not exactly an Avon lady, Nittaya worked in the Bangkok marketing office for seven years "smoothing the water and fighting for friends," as she puts it. "There I learned how to work with many different people from different backgrounds."

Nittaya returned to Pattaya at her mother's request to work in the family's long established and highly successful business operations. But it didn't take her long to realise it wasn't such a good idea. "Being in the family environment made me feel like I was a child again," she said. "So I left and started my own real estate agency."

Not long afterwards she met Mario Kleff and shortly after they married they launched the Wandeegroup, named after Nittaya's mother, Wandee, which in English means 'good day'.

Nittaya's role in the company is to maintain relations with key government departments, such as the land office, City Hall and the environmental agencies, deal with lawyers and generally help run the Wandeegroup's construction business. She also deals with developers on a day-to-day basis, a task which has helped shape her strong views on business conduct.

"One of the difficulties we have is that some of them don't tell the truth," she said. "They will lie about their financial situation or use stalling tactics to delay a stage payment, simply because they don't have the money. I wish more developers would be open with us. If they have cash flow problems – and many people do in the current economic climate – I want them to tell us. Then we can work something out together. There needs to be more trust. That's how the best partnerships succeed. But at

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WANDEEGROUP FROM 2007-2009

Not including the lesser-known projects

CONDOMINIUM	HOUSE/VILLA
Sky Park Twin Towers, high-rise	Wing House
Park Side Shopping, Department Store	Zen House
The W-Tower, high-rise	Koi House
The Baptist, high-rise	Leonardo House
J.R. Tower, high-rise	Capson House
Suan Sawarn, (11 buildings, low rise)	Japanese House
Club Royal, (6 buildings, low rise)	Falling Rain House
Leto Residence, low rise	Zig Zack House
Laguna Heights, low rise	Waterfall House
The Wave, (2 buildings, low rise)	Star House
Park Royal, (2 buildings, low rise)	Bird House
South Beach, low rise	The Japanese Townhouse
On The Hill, low rise	Village (3 buildings)
Premier Boutique, low rise	Resort (43 buildings)
I-Condo, (2 buildings, low rise)	W- Tower Showroom
Marraka Residence, (low rise)	Church, multiple storey

Honesty and trust is only way forward

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the moment there is too much conflict."

Asked what he feels Nittaya brings to the business, husband Mario said: "She is a friend, adviser and a perfect partner, but perhaps most important of all she is the calm antidote to the passion I put into the business. She has also opened doors for me with the Thai and Chinese communities here in Thailand."

Nittaya admits to having learned much from Mario. "When we launched the Wandeegroup we had different ideas how to go about it," she said. "Mario had the vision but I wondered whether the people of Pattaya needed this new company.

"Now I have to say I agree with his approach which was to think big from day one; whereas mine would have been more cautious.

"For instance, I questioned the money we were committing to our head office and its decoration. Mario's attitude was we would never attract the best customers if we didn't have an impressive and working office ready. He was right."

Conversely, Nittaya was proved correct in other areas.

> I have to say I agree with his [Mario's] approach which was to think big from day one ... he was right

"Mario expects everyone to be honest and straight with him, just as he is with them," she said. "But if my career has taught me anything it's that life isn't like that and I think Mario now accepts it."

Work for Nittaya and Mario has been constant and intense in the five years since they launched Wandeegroup. Days off are rare at best and non-existent at worst. "We both love work and love what we do," said Mario, "but that's not to say we can't switch off – we can."

Nittaya and Mario have never had a family holiday in five years of marriage. With a three-year-old daughter, it begs the question what will they do when they get the inevitable request to visit Disneyworld or one of the other must-see attractions of growing children.

"I would go tomorrow!" said Mario. "But then the problem might be Nittaya. People say I'm a workaholic, but she is even worse. She has just turned down an invitation to visit Russia with me because of the pressure of work here and potential new business coming from Russia."

"I would love to see Russia," interjected Nittaya, "but not now. Someone has to run the business here. Mario should go alone, settle the new project and then return home as fast as possible!"

Wandeegroup's business is built on a deep understanding of the architecture and real estate market of Pattaya. The company is working on large-scale projects yet to begin construction but scheduled for completion within the next five to six years.

And there are even more queued behind them waiting to get on the drawing board.

On the day he was interviewed, Mario was commissioned to design a further two condominium projects, and two days earlier he signed contracts to design three more. During the last two years alone, the Wandeegroup has been commissioned to design more than 30 condominium buildings, at least 26 villas, a complete resort and four high-rise developments in Thailand and abroad.

And Mario's diary included more meetings the following next week to discuss further potential projects in Jomtien and Bang Saray.

> Developers should prepare properly for projects and show more responsibility at the end of the day

It's difficult to see how the Wandeegroup can cope with such a heavy workload, but, as Nittaya put it: "It demonstrates that they trust in us.

"Our company is contracted on projects worth several billion baht. Investors and developers seek Mario's advice about long-term investments here on the eastern seaboard. I think that is because we do understand how a project should be planned and how to get all the necessary licences.

"But in return I want more developers to be open, not just with us but also their future buyers. It can't be good launching a project and later cutting costs to gain more profit, or even worse, not having it built at all. Developers should prepare properly for projects and show more responsibility at the end of the day." Ω



Above: Architect Mario Kleff.
Below: Wandeegroup workers await a steel delivery.

