

THE PROPERTY & *Lifestyle*

Issue 19

Nittaya Wongsin · Business and Lifestyle



Nittaya Wongsin – A Creative Business Acumen and Relational Artistry.

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of 16, where she studied business in French. Wishing to broaden her horizons, she next went to the UK, pursuing a Post-Grad Diploma in International Relations at Lancaster University, her academic career culminating in a MBA from Cardiff University.

Meow, at 24, began work for the SET (Stock Exchange of Thailand) as an international relations officer, organising road shows and promoting the SET internationally. Next, she went to work for the largest property construction firm in Japan, Teisei, as a co-ordinator, but rapidly became bored, especially with the chauvinistic attitudes of the Japanese. Fancying a complete change of direction, she began working for Avon, the cosmetics multinational, in marketing, where she received a salary of over Bt120,000. Here, she found her place and thoroughly enjoyed her 7 years with them, progressing through the ranks to end up as marketing manager, directly responsible to the female marketing director. During this phase she was completely work-oriented, in the classic Chinese manner, despite the Thai patina, the Thai veneer, and had little time for socializing.

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Meow's father had always said working for others was a hiding to nothing and as her family had many useful contacts in the property industry, especially in Pattaya, they persuaded Meow to start her own business, effectively recalling her from

Nittaya Wongsin, aka Meow, is the daughter of a traditional, and therefore, strict Chinese tailor, who, incidentally, used to be the personal tailor of the Queen of King Rama VII. Meow's mother, on the other hand, is a modern Thai-Chinese business woman, working both in Bangkok and Pattaya for over 40 years. Young Meow was educated at St. Paul's Convent School in Sri Racha, where she proved to be an adept student, not least in languages. So much so that she gained entry to ABAC University in Bangkok at the tender age





Bangkok to Pattaya. This was around 2003, the time of the first real property boom on the Eastern Seaboard, and Meow's first business, Real Estate & Services, grew fast, as she successfully sold land and homes, not least because she represented a solid and reliable interface between the often foreign buyer and the typically vacillating Thai owners.

Meow then suddenly went completely against her traditions and strict upbringing, which initially alienated her family, especially as Meow's parents had planned to marry her off to a rich Chinese businessman. Instead, she rebelled against her family's wishes and decided on a life with her new boyfriend, Mario Kleff; one of the most successful and renowned architects in town today. However, in

long to emerge from his eyes, especially when he bares his soul, as he had done to her.

For a time, Meow was torn between two worlds, on the one hand, a reluctant, but lessening obligation to the restrictive tradition in the form of her family and friends, who were constantly badgering her to return to the fold, and on the other, her one chance of freedom, life with her new boyfriend. Eventually, she resolved to make a stand, effectively burning her bridges, and returned all the properties and the business to her family. Now, instead of living in a lavish family home, she moved into a hotel, living out of a suitcase, signifying that she was determined to live her own life, come what may.

Having made her decision, Meow married designer and architect Mario Kleff and set up her new company, WandeeGroup. Thankfully, Meow's family and friends finally accepted her new life and not long after she became a mother, giving birth to a daughter, Jiang Li Wongsin, Ming.

P&L: How did you experience the difference between being an employee and a business owner?



those days, Mario wasn't quite as well off as he is now, quite the opposite, and was also experiencing considerable problems. To cut a long story short, she took him in hand and straightened out his life, largely because she felt sympathetic, but also because she recognised his power, which doesn't take

Being an employer and business owner gives me more chance of being able to both give and take.

An employee is constrained by company policy and is therefore less free. But if you ever want to become a successful employer, you have to exert yourself and be outstanding employee, first.

P&L: Why did you choose a life with an artist? Is it because you're artistic yourself?





Probably, yes. But my kind of art isn't painting or sculpting, rather it's the art of human relationship, using my talents of organisation and people-skills to manage and build team work. People working happily together with me are to some degree similar to the blended elements of a painting, where I play the hidden artist.

P&L: *How do Bangkok and Pattaya compare in terms of work?*

Bangkok only involved educated individuals, who were organised and committed to their duty and team work. My art was to be outstanding and successful, while structuring and handling the teams amicably. In Pattaya, the construction business has a huge gap between the foreign customers and local distributors or subcontractors who perform the work. I had to find a way to bridge this gap, which I did through my concept and strategy of better communication and being selective.

P&L: *Do you notice any radical difference in your working relationships, now?*

I'm working with the full social spectrum, from uneducated locals and the governmental authorities to rich, extravagant customers and self-educated people. Then there are the differences in culture, even between the Thais and Chinese. But I feel I can handle all these different groups very well, bringing them all together, whilst simultaneously helping my husband bring his projects to fruition.

P&L: *What is really important in your life?*

My family, especially my lovely daughter, Ming, and to be successful in whatever I do. I'm a lucky person and have never lacked anything. I've had a full education, power and responsibility. As for my husband, Mario, I trust his intellect, while I am the heart and his hand. I can accept him as a leader and head, even though we're joint managing directors of Wandee group and I have my own decision-making role. We can work together as a couple, an achievement that wouldn't work for most people, but it's not difficult for us. Whatever decisions we make together or independently, we go for, whether they succeed or fail.

Pictured top this Page - Wedding dress, designed by Mario Kleff

Pictured Lower - Wedding place, Royal Buddhism Temple, Wat Yansangwararam





Most *Property & Lifestyle* readers already know about the architect Mario Kleff, his dedication and love of work; today, you've learnt about Meow and her love for her work and family. So it's easy to understand from their interaction that Mario and Meow have a strong business rapport and a very romantic relationship, shown by the extraordinary degree to which both are prepared to go to exalt their love union, epitomized by their choice of wedding place, Wat Yangsangwararam, the royal temple under the patronage of HM King Bhumibol Adulyadej. The fact that they got married in Wat Yan is astounding, as normally only royalty is allowed to perform any ceremony in the temple's precincts, let alone mere commoners.

Meow can be exceptionally proud of being the one woman in Thailand who has experienced such a beautiful moment, but it also justifies Meow's comment about going for an idea even though it might succeed or fail. The Wat Yan wedding was basically made possible by Mario appealing to the head abbot, who gave them special dispensation because of what he intuitively recognised in Mario and also because of Mario's deep involvement with one of the most exalted religious texts of the West, the Book of Kells. Mario also designed Meow's wedding dress, himself, and personally cleaned the wat from top to bottom, as well as laying out the incense and other accoutrements for the wedding. Meow's part was to skilfully use her communication skills and translate Mario's wishes for the wat authorities.

They are perfect complements, Mario provides the vision and architectural expertise, and Meow grounds his often wild flights of imagination, with substantial business organisational skills and sound financial acumen. They are both incredibly fortunate to have a relationship, which spans both love and career, and their mutually supportive understanding and acceptance of each other's foibles, coupled with their fluid interaction can only deepen and create a perfect partnership; her ying to his yang.

It was a privilege to interview both Mario and Meow. They are both one of a kind and that is their uniqueness and their strength; Mario lives entirely for his design work and his family, whereas Meow lives to develop herself and her social relationships and, of course, to support her husband and his ideas to the best of her ability.

