


captain of industry

A man with dark hair, wearing a grey suit jacket over a white shirt, is leaning forward with his hands resting on a dark, reflective table. He is smiling slightly. The background consists of abstract, textured panels in shades of grey and brown.

# INNOVATIVE DEVELOPMENT

Pongphan Sampawakoo has always had an eye for leading the way in innovative property development. 'JJ' Jeremy Johanson was impressed to learn that many of Bangkok's iconic buildings are the fruit of his passion, creating living spaces for modern man

**F**or the past 30 years, Pongphan Sampawakooop has never feared to challenge the status quo, knowing fervently that his fresh perspective brings workable solutions to develop property that others might shy away from. Quite simply, he gives people what they want, at the time that they want and need it.

Having grown up in Bangkok, the son of a prominent lawyer and politician, Pongphan followed in his father's footsteps and studied law at Thammasart University, obtaining his Master Degree in Law at the University of Missouri. Not particularly impassioned about politics, his interests lay more in property: development, land subdivision and urban problems including planning, zoning law and real estate financing. These are all the tools that gave him a winning edge.

This was apparent from his very first project, Lang Suan Townhouses, the country's first residential townhouses built in 1975. But in those days, only suburban developments or commercial shophouses were recognized as viable projects. So when no one knew what to do with the small piece of land zoned for residential usage in the middle of Bangkok, Pongphan, along with a friend who was a newly graduated architect from Chulalongkorn University, saw the land's potential and came up with striking new townhouse designs.

The problem with 'newness' is that it is often misunderstood by the authorities that be. So while an original verbal "yes" was granted to the project, a "no" was given to the official application since the townhouses resembled commercial constructions.

Having sold out instantly on brochure, it would have been embarrassing to refund all the deposits. So, using his reason and knowledge of law, over a period of months Pongphan was able to gradually

make the administration understand the residential nature of these new structures. "Finally the letter came from the BMA saying 'yes', only asking us to change a little bit here and there. So we completely won the case, without using any money." This started Bangkok's ten year townhouse boom.

Pongphan's eye for innovation didn't stop there. He has since moved on to build the first condominiums in Bangkok and Pattaya, which quickly sold out. This includes the Orakarn, the first office condominium on Chidlom Road, as well as the Silom Shopping Plaza, an innovation on the commercial shophouse concept, and the well-known Silom Center Building. Each time he was confronted by administrative hurdles that he deftly overcame.

***"You could call this our corporate ideology on development, creating something new and special for our customers"***

But Pongphan's success comes from looking at the property from a buyer's viewpoint. "When we start a development, we like to create some new idea or new concept for the benefit of our buyers, like more usable space or better common areas, adding value to the concept and the additional facilities. You could call this our corporate ideology on development, creating something new and special for our customers. By doing this, we also avoid competition."

When asked what he does for leisure, the entire room spontaneously burst out laughing (as if to imply that Pongphan's work is his pleasure), with Pongphan himself joining in the merriment until he shyly confides. "In my free time, like any normal guy, I used to play sports like golf or tennis. Now, I more regularly

do fitness exercise and play guitar." His latest hobby is learning how to sail the beautiful Benetaux Lagoon 500 Catamaran, fifty feet long with four cabins, that belongs to his White Sand Beach project in Pattaya.

Another satisfaction comes from the learning institution he founded in Hua Hin a decade ago, Stamford International University, and their Bangkok Bachelor Degree campus which will open on Rama 9 Road for the 2008 academic year. His other 'business pleasure' is the 500 rai Khao Khor Coffee Plantation in Petchaboon province with 250,000 Arabica trees. It's the largest single owned Arabica coffee estate in Thailand. The Khor Koffe Brand is set to hit the market soon.

But property is still his main infatuation. Under Grande Asset Development PCL, his most recent projects are the Blue Lagoon Resort and Sheraton Hotel in Hua Hin, the Trendy Condominium, The Regent Residences and Regent Bangkok Hotel, as well as The Sails Resort Condominium and Le Meridian Hotel in Pattaya. In March this year, Pongphan sold out all of his interests in Grande Asset to other major shareholders due to conflicts in corporate management and policy.

In July he started developing again by taking over the Sun Tech Group PCL, owning a majority of shares, and changing its name to Apex Development PCL. As Chairman and CEO of Apex, Pongphan will be opening the White Sand Beach residential complex on the shores of Pattaya in 2009 to 2010. It will feature The Spinnaker high-rise condominiums, The Island Lagoon low-rise condominiums, as well as a five-star hotel with 300 rooms managed by Movenpick from Switzerland.

"The key to success is to make the right decision at the right time," he concludes, "moving fast with a mind for innovation." ■