Meet Astrid Amaya

by Tassapon Sutthidetkul

Astrid is a wife of the Colombian Ambassador in Thailand, Andelfo Garcia, who also covers Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar. Astrid is the Chairwoman of InterMinds, a leading creative agency, dedicated to discovering top creators and innovators to produce interactive art experiences at the nexus of art and technology.

Astrid met her husband, Andelfo in high school where they became teenage sweethearts. More than 30 years later they are still an inseparable couple, travelling the world and engaging in both international and Thai societies. Astrid and Andelfo have three sons. Two live in San Francisco and one in New York. Two of them are already married and one is engaged. They also have 2 adorable grandchildren, Danielle and Sebastian. Astrid proudly carries their initials on her necklace.

With her 30 years experience in international art world, Astrid wants to bring the First International Light Festival to Bangkok. She explained to us that light festivals are the new magnet to attract the rising wave of experiential tourists spend more money and share their unique experiences with others. It enhances the city's/country's branding whilst boosting the economy.

Astrid does not hide her enthusiasm and genuine confidence that she can make it happen next year with the engagement of the government and the private companies. In December 2016, InterMinds will be the creative producer of the Macao's second Light Festival.

Please tell us more about the light festivals. What can this kind of event bring to Thailand?

Light Festival is one of the biggest

marketing promotions to raise the profile of some of the world's leading cities because it brings cultural tourism to those countries involved. It is well known that cultural tourism delivers international, upmarket visitors to the host city. They are affluent and have more money to spend.

For example, the Sydney Light Festival grew from 50,000 visitors in its first year to over 2 million in 5 years. The numbers speak for themselves. Its popularity is growing quickly and spreading like a gorse fire.

Our company built a unique interactive art platform with currently around 200 interactive artists and top tech teams from all over the world. We want the 'wow factor' with every piece and must admit that this is the challenging part because viewers become accustomed quickly to innovative ideas and that's why interactive art is now at the forefront of art and culture.

You also talked about the Asian Art Wave. Can you explain more about it?

Asia is undergoing The Great Art Wave. China, for the first time in history, is now the 2nd art buyer in the world with 22% of the 54 Billion US dollars of annual art sales. For the last 3 years, Singapore and HK have been working to promote themselves as the leading art cities in Asia. Bangkok has the potential to develop as the next big art destination in Southeast Asia. As in other cities, this will need the support of the government and private companies.

We want to extend an invitation to the leading retailers, hotels, the telecommunication and the utility industries, the food and beverage companies in Thailand to benefit from this Asian Art Wave.

Tell me a bit about yourself. Where did you live before Bangkok?

Andelfo and I have been in Bangkok for three and a half years. Before that, we lived in London, New York and Madrid.

How often do you normally meet with other Ambassadors' wives?

Normally we have one meeting every month in a different ambassador's residence where we socialise, discuss current affairs and engage in different community projects. I will take the opportunity to invite everybody to visit YWCA Diplomat Bazaar on November 18, 19 and 20th at CentralWorld. It will offer a variety of products, such as food, wine and jewellry, brought directly from the 42 countries that are diplomatically represented here in Thailand.

We are also working on a recipe book of dishes from around the world and on a book of a collection of kids stories from many countries. All the profits will go towards sponsoring different charities here in Thailand.

How do you start your day?

Andelfo and I go to the gym at 7am every morning, well actually I go three times a week, but he goes every day I tell him not to go on Sundays, but he is very disciplined, he loves his exercise and also eats very healthy.

In the evenings, what do you do? Do you entertain or you go out?

Yes, we like very much to invite friends and guests to the residence. Apart from the normal dinners, I host a monthly dinner where I invite 14 Thai women from all different fields. We have met some very interesting, smart and strong women of all ages.

Also one Saturday a month, I have an open house for art students at 10am to hear their opinions and to offer some guidance. Last year, I invited one of the graduate girls, Thidarat Chantachuat from Silpakorn University to exhibit her art twice in Boston. The Boston News covered the event and published images of her work. We also promoted her in an international magazine in London where she was on the front cover in December 2015.

We also have other commitments and events to attend during the week.

How do you feel in Thailand?

Bangkok is a very nice city to live in. We have built very dear Thai friendships. I feel grateful being able to participate and support projects with the Thai community. Thailand is living in a very interesting moment with the Asian Art Wave. I am certain that Bangkok could become one of the leading art cities in Asia. It would be my pleasure to offer my expertise to make this happen.

Do you have to travel a lot?

As a diplomat, I have had the opportunity to live in different countries and through my work and my passion I have travelled a lot in search of new creative talent, to build teams of artists, architects and technicians to offer top art installations to promote leading luxury retail centres and cities.

How often do you get to Colombia?

I haven't got back for a few years now, but Andelfo goes almost every year.

The view from your home is stunning looking over the city (they live on the 64th floor of The Met Condominium in Sathorn Road).

It is, it is! It's funny even people from Bangkok come here for dinner and they admire it very much. On one side you can see the modern side of Bangkok, and on the other side you see the part that has not been developed yet, so you see both worlds.We have a full 360 degree view. We have lived here since we moved to Bangkok. We started from scratch and I made a lot of changes in the apartment, I love to decorate, yet I like things very simple.

I told them we just need walls to enjoy our art, no need for so much furniture and shelves.

Where did your interest in art come from?

My parents' house was full of art. They would take us to museums and talk about artists. When Andelfo and I got married, the only art I had was something worth 500USD and a collection of posters from all of the countries that I have travelled to. We didn't think that the furniture was the priority like everybody else, I thought art on the walls was the priority. The funny thing is that my sons are exactly the same. The first thing that they did when they got married was ask us for some art. We didn't tell them that, they just thought that that was the thing to do, it's like encrypted in them. Everybody has a table, chairs, a fridge etc. These are only some of the basic things that do not tell me anything about a person. What can really describe you and your lifestyle is the art on your walls.

I left Astrid but I could have talked to her all day - she is such a charming, entertaining and engaging woman. The perfect Ambassador's wife ....