

PHOTO FEATURES

Nam Sang Wai:

A Rural Sanctuary

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Antony (dressed in orange) takes wedding pictures for Chan and Tsang (left to right) in Nam Sang Wai.



In a city of concrete and glass, among the high rises and skyscrapers, Hong Kong people often lead harried lives. Time and again, they may yearn for the scenery of a horizon with endless green, of a haven of serenity and calm.

Nam Sang Wai provides a hideaway from Hong Kong's hectic lifestyle. Every visitor is entranced by its soul-soothing atmosphere as soon as they step into the area, which is just a stone's throw from the city, north of Yuen Long.

Nam Sang Wai is an extensive wetland area with a luxurious growth of reeds and mangroves, and it is also the habitat of unique wildlife in the territory, home to seagulls and black-faced spoonbills.

Karen Tsang Kei-man and Edwin Chan came to Nam Sang Wai to take their wedding photos. The pair posed on the balcony of a run-down old shack surrounded by reeds as high as a man. They held each other in a passionate embrace against the beautiful backdrop of Nam Sang Wai.

"It is our first time to visit Nam Sang Wai but we have seen our friends' magnificent photos taken here earlier. The view turns out to be gorgeous and tranquil," the bride said.

Their photographer, Antony Leung Wai-kwan, said: "Wedding couples usually choose Central, Shing Mun Reservoir or Nam Sang Wai for their wedding photo

shoots. But more than half of them picked Nam Sang Wai as you can hardly find a scene like this in Hong Kong."

The 30-year-old wedding photographer, who was working with a cannon-like camera, said he liked this job because it made him happy to capture the precious and crucial moment for couples.

Apart from courting and newly-wed couples, Nam Sang Wai attracts many migrant birds to stay for the winter. It is very common to see birds resting under a tree at dusk or soaring in the sky at dawn. These birds and other wildlife here also pull in a lot of visitors.

Chan Yuk-lai and Lai Kwok-hei, both 28 years old, have visited Nam Sang Wai more than 30 times. Equipped with his professional camera gear, Lai said they came to take photos of birds and butterflies. To them, Nam Sang Wai means a paradise of birds. "Whenever we saw birds, we would think of the place," said Chan.



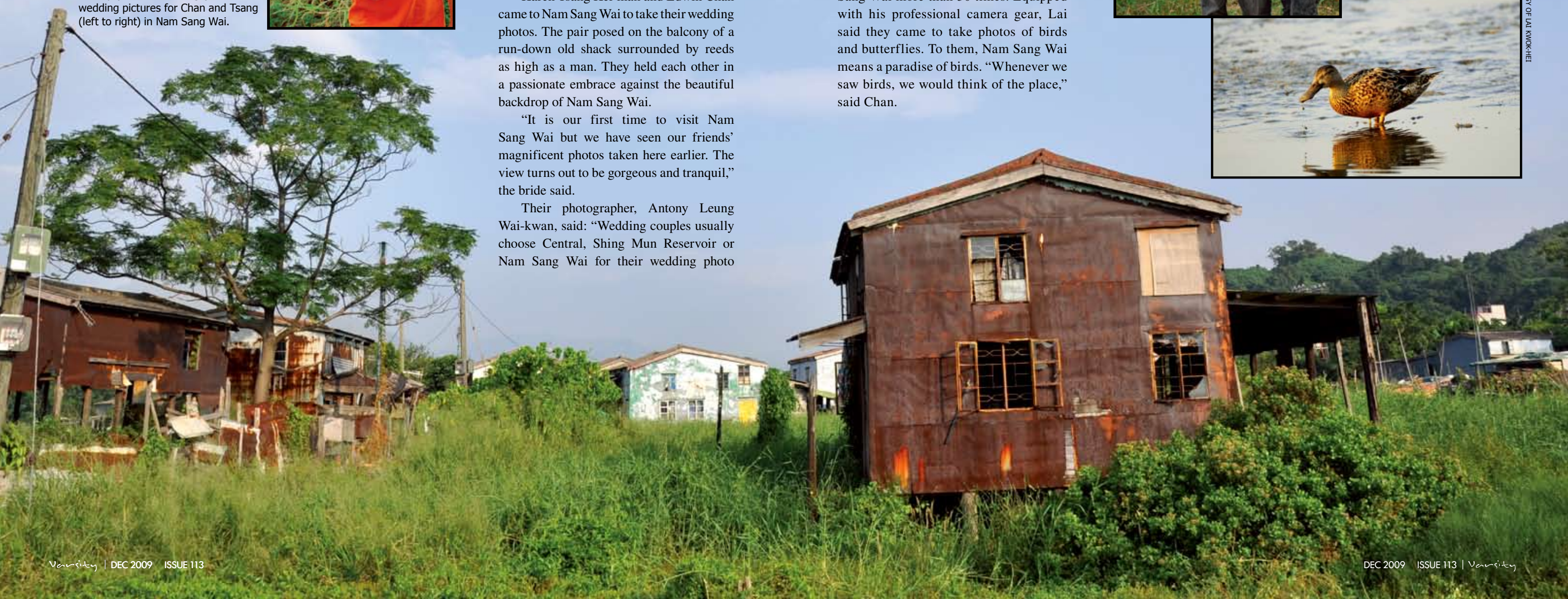
Nam Sang Wai is the paradise of birds to Lai and Chan (left to right), so they always come here to shoot photos.



COURTESY OF LAI KWOK-HEI



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Left: Kids enjoy playing around in the store by a pond.
Right: Yen Ji-dan left a sampan after the shooting of the film *Flash Point*.

The breathtaking environment not only draws in tourists, it also keeps Nam Sang Wai's inhabitants here. Walking along a narrow alley beside the reeds, we come across an old woman in a hut who asked kindly, "Want some rest and get a drink?"

She was affectionately greeted as Granny Mei Choi by locals and visitors. Granny Mei Choi has lived in Nam Sang Wai for some 30 years. She sells home-made Chinese herbal tea from her hut.

"The air here is good. Plus not many people come here so nobody comes to bother me," said Mei Choi. "I will stay here until the day when no one buys my tea."

As we kept walking through the alley, we saw three young children fishing from the bridge outside a 50-year-old wooden store by a pond. They suddenly burst into exultation as one of them caught a fish in her hands. Their uncle came over and praised the little girl for a job well done.

The children's mother Tam Ma-ling, the sister of the store owner, began to recount her childhood in Nam Sang Wai. "We loved to go fishing, flying kites and cycling during our childhood. Sometimes we would even dive into the river for a swim," she said.

Tam and her siblings were born and raised in Nam Sang Wai. She moved to the city after getting married. However, she still comes back frequently and brings her kids every now and then. She said the kids like the area very much.

Tam added that Nam Sang Wai is a popular location for film shoots. "The movie *Flash Point* was shot just over there in this store!" said Tam proudly of the popular 2007 action picture. "Yen Ji-dan (the leading actor of the movie) left that yacht here." She pointed at the yacht beside the store.

In Nam Sang Wai, taking a two-minute sampan-ride is a must-do. An elderly couple, Mr and Mrs Chan, started rowing villagers and visitors across the narrow river of Nam Sang Wai 10 years ago.

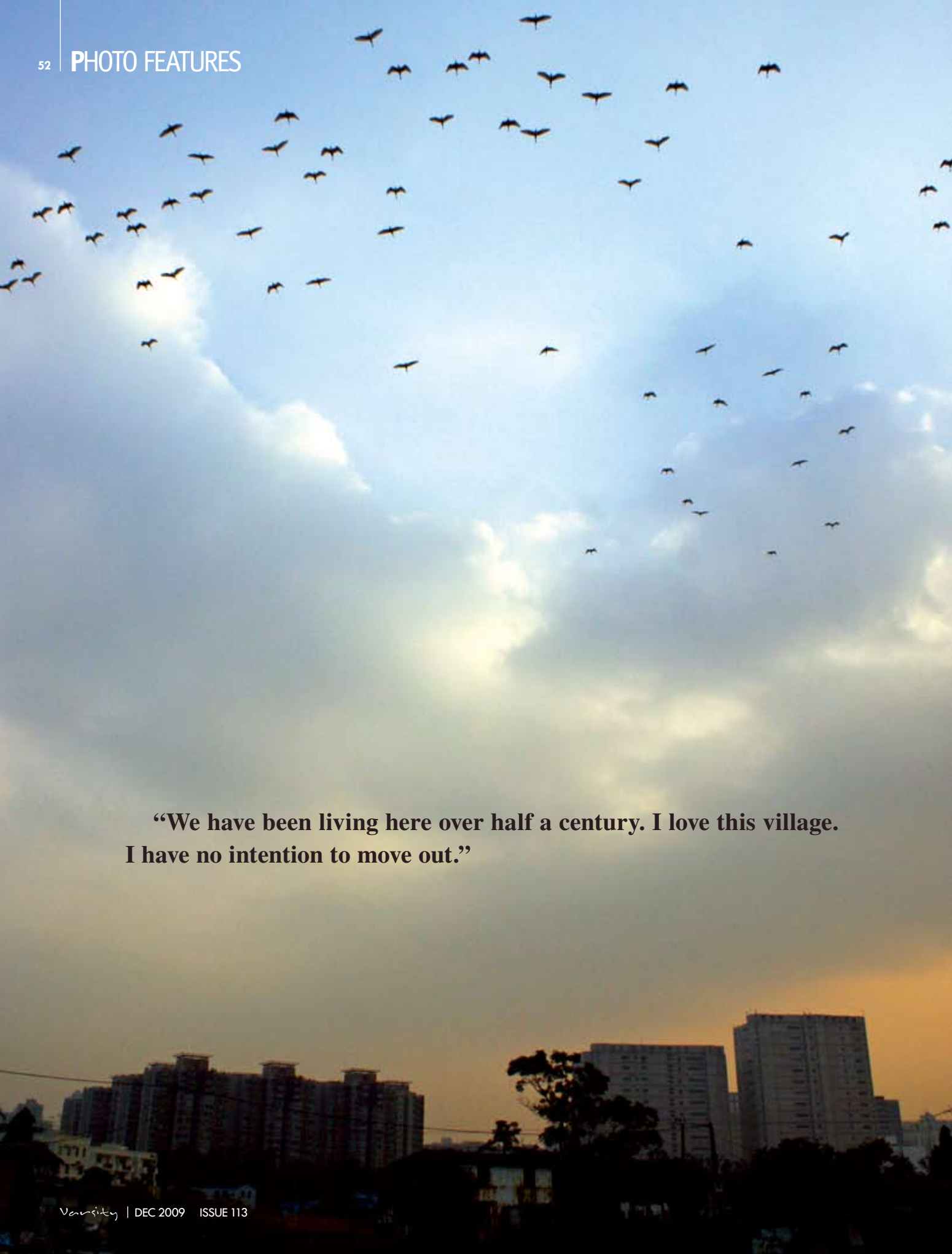
Having lived in Nam Sang Wai for 20 years, Mr and Mrs Chan are devoted to their roles. They maintain their service even when typhoon signal number eight is hoisted. They do not stop unless bad conditions forbid them from rowing on. The hardship and perseverance of their toil is shown on their calloused hands.

"We have been living here over half a century. I love this village. I have no intention to move out," said Mrs Chan. ▽



Chan has been rowing the sampan for 10 years, bridging Nam Sang Wai and Yuen Long for villagers and visitors.





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