A CAREER AND LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE FOR TORONTO LAWYERS

Precedent

*So are you *actually* a partner? Or are you an *income* partner?

An investigation into a made-up job title P.20

FALL 2023

The Precedent A-List

Congratulations to all the lawyers who were recently announced on the Precedent A-List! a-list.lawandstyle.ca

The Precedent A-List is your online source for awards, promotions, new hires and other legal news


Smart & Biggar announces principal **Daniel Anthony**

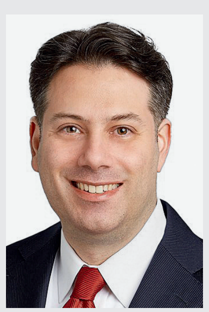

Strype Injury Lawyers announces partner **Reagan Bamel**


McCarthy Hansen & Company announces partner **Brigitte Barsalou**


Wildeboer Dellelce welcomes partner **Jesse Brodlieb**


Blaney McMurtry welcomes associate **Christian Carpino**

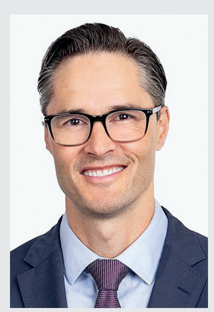

Loopstra Nixon welcomes associate **Steven Chadwick**

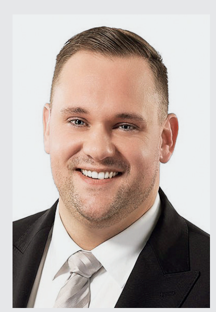

Loopstra Nixon welcomes partner **Alan Cofman**


Daoust Vukovich welcomes associate **Latisha Cohen**


WeirFoulds welcomes partner **Jennifer Corak**


Gluckstein Lawyers welcomes associate **Rebecca Coughlan**

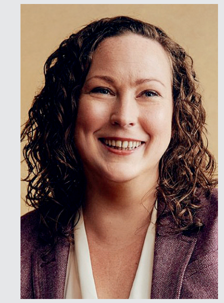

Mathews Dinsdale welcomes associate **Julian Dickinson**

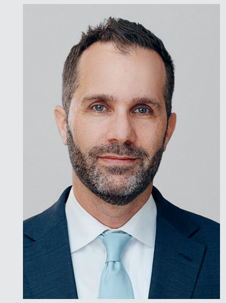

Blaney McMurtry welcomes associate **Kyle Duncan**

Get more news online at a-list.lawandstyle.ca

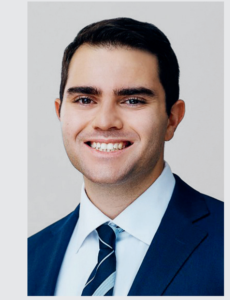

Loopstra Nixon welcomes partner **Maurice Fleming**

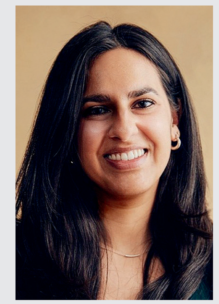

McCarthy Hansen & Company announces partner **Stephanie Garbe**


Rosen Sunshine announces partner **Emma Gardiner**

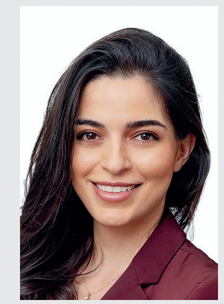

Torkin Manes welcomes partner **Matthew Getzler**


Mathews Dinsdale welcomes associate **Qasid Iqbal**


Torkin Manes welcomes associate **Paul Jacoby**


Rosen Sunshine welcomes associate **Alisha Kapur**


Mathews Dinsdale welcomes partner **Chris Leenheer**

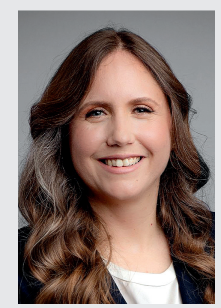

Mathews Dinsdale welcomes associate **Roza Milani**

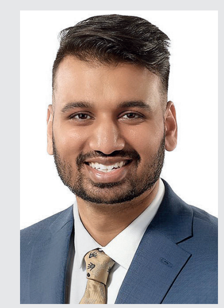

Jellinek Ellis Gluckstein Lawyers welcomes associate **Linda O'Brien**

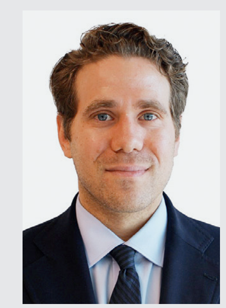

Pallett Valo welcomes associate **Adam Ostermeier**


Loopstra Nixon welcomes partner **Daniel Paperny**


Dickinson Wright welcomes associate **Griffin Peloso**


WeirFoulds welcomes partner **Laroux Peoples**


Blaney McMurtry welcomes associate **Leo Rebello**


Loopstra Nixon welcomes partner **Matthew Rendely**

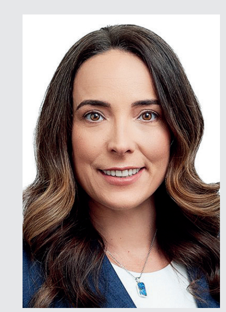

McCarthy Hansen & Company announces partner **Jonathan Robinson**


Loopstra Nixon welcomes partner **Michael Segal**


Wildeboer Dellelce welcomes partner **Divya Shahani**


Mathews Dinsdale welcomes associate **Monika Sharma**


Wildeboer Dellelce welcomes lawyer **Adam Solomon**


Mathews Dinsdale welcomes counsel **Virginie Vigeant**


WeirFoulds welcomes associate **Phil Wallner**

FALL 2023. VOLUME 17. ISSUE 2.

Precedent

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

ON THE COVER:
Photograph by Vicky Lam

IMAGES BY: ISTOCK (FRENCH PRESS), CHRISTIE VUONG (OSCAR THE GROUCH). HAIR AND MAKEUP BY: JASMINE MERINSKY (KRISTIN TAYLOR)

FEATURES

"We're trying to be thoughtful about what people need to succeed in their work."

Kristin Taylor, the managing partner of Cassels, on the firm's new office

← P.26

BACKPAGE

PHOTOGRAPH BY LORNE BRIDGMAN

Precedent

FALL 2023. VOLUME 17. ISSUE 2.

PUBLISHER Melissa Kluger

EDITOR Daniel Fish

MARKETING COORDINATOR Wednesday Bell

ART DIRECTOR Nicola Hamilton

ACCOUNTING Cathy Blewett

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS Deborah Aarts, Jeremy Freed, Rebecca Gao, Danielle Groen, Simon Lewsen, Luc Rinaldi

CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS & ILLUSTRATORS Lorne Bridgman, Melinda Josie, Vicky Lam, Melanie Lambrick, Arash Moallemi, Matt Tibbo Photography, Christie Vuong, Nick Wong

DIGITAL IMAGING SPECIALIST Paul Jerinkitsch Imaging

FACT-CHECKER Catherine Dowling

PROOFREADERS Amy van den Berg, Dustin Dyer, Lazarus James, Anna Maxymiw, Sarah Munn

ADDRESS CHANGES
To update your contact information, please visit precedentmagazine.com/my-account.

PUBLICATIONS MAIL AGREEMENT NO. 41484021
ISSN 1913-9985

HST NUMBER 84476 9398 RT0001

RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADRESSES TO:
Precedent Magazine, 2 Berkeley Street, Suite 205, Toronto, ON M5A 4J5

Precedent is a career and lifestyle magazine for Toronto lawyers, published twice a year by Law and Style Media Inc.

2 Berkeley Street, Suite 205
Toronto, ON M5A 4J5
416.929.4495
subscribe@precedentmagazine.com
precedentmagazine.com

DISTRIBUTION
Precedent is sent free to over 10,000 lawyers in Toronto. One copy per customer.

SUBSCRIPTIONS
Canada: $24.95 per year (2 issues)
International: $39.95 per year (2 issues)
Visit precedentmagazine.com/subscribe to order a subscription.

ADVERTISING
Please email advertising@precedentmagazine.com for our full media kit.

Precedent does not accept financial compensation in exchange for editorial content.

Made possible with the support of:

Canada | Ontario Creates | Ontario Créatif

BEHIND THE SCENES

What Precedent looks for in a story

BONUS FACT

TORONTO'S LIFELESS DOWNTOWN RECOVERY

In the wake of the pandemic, researchers at the University of Toronto have tracked the downtown activity in North America's largest cities. At the end of every season, the researchers tally up the number of mobile phones that entered each city's downtown. This year, mobile-phone activity in downtown Toronto has hovered around 45 percent of its pre-pandemic levels—earning it a consistent ranking near the bottom of the 62-city list.

At the Cassels office, *Precedent* editor Daniel Fish chats with managing partner Kristin Taylor and deputy managing partner Noble Chummar

Speculation about what the post-pandemic workplace will look like has been relentless. Academics, corporate strategists and self-anointed futurists have issued a sea of predictions on what lies ahead. At *Precedent*, we've noticed the abundance of ink spilled on this topic—and puzzled over the best way to inject our voice into the conversation. "The future of the legal workplace is a top concern among our readers," says Daniel Fish, the editor of *Precedent*. "But we don't want to publish the same forecasts that have already appeared countless times in the mainstream press. After all, at *Precedent*, we strive to produce journalism that our readers can't find anywhere else."

So when Cassels announced that it was moving into a new Toronto headquarters, we took note. "This presented us with an opportunity," says Fish. "We could report on an actual law firm that had designed an office with the lessons of the pandemic in mind."

In May, Cassels officially decamped to its new space. Over the summer, the *Precedent* team toured the workplace and interviewed lawyers throughout the firm. The result of those efforts is a photo-rich feature—beginning on page 26 of this issue—that centres on a real-world example of a post-pandemic office. No speculation needed. **P**

IMAGES BY: ISTOCK (PHONE). HAIR AND MAKEUP BY: JASMINE MERINSKY (CASSELS OFFICE)

PHOTOGRAPH BY LORNE BRIDGMAN

LET'S TALK ABOUT SUCCESSION

When a managing partner steps down, how do law firms select the best replacement? • *By Luc Rinaldi* • Kimberly Whaley knows what happens when people fail to plan for the future. As the founder of WEL Partners, an estate-litigation boutique in Toronto, she helps families sort through the sensitive affairs of the dead, dying and vulnerable. "If I've learned anything in my practice, it's that people don't do succession well," she says. When estate planning is left to the last minute—or neglected entirely—this invariably leads to chaos. Siblings sue one another. Family businesses collapse. "I see it all the time," she says. ¶ Whaley's clients have provided her with more than just work. They've taught her a valuable lesson about the importance of succession planning in law. After launching WEL Partners, in the early aughts, she worked tirelessly to win clients and turn her small firm into an industry leader. Now in her mid-50s, she's started to think about how she might scale back her leadership responsibilities in the near future. "I'm excited about seeing the firm continue," she says. "But there is a certain amount of fear attached to it, too, because it is your reputation that you worked hard for decades to achieve." ¶ The fact that Whaley is looking ahead sets her apart from many of her peers. Last year, a working group at the Law Society of Ontario issued a report lamenting the lack of succession planning among sole practitioners and small-firm owners. When such lawyers can no longer practise—whether due to death, illness or licence revocation—and there's no clear successor on record, the Law Society has to appoint a trustee to handle the fallout. Over the past decade, there have been so many instances of inadequate succession planning that the Law Society's trustee-services division has nearly doubled in size and budget. It now costs close to $2 million per year to run the department. That figure stands to rise as the Baby Boomer generation continues to exit the workforce: in 2020, more than 2,000 of Ontario's sole practitioners were older than 65, an almost 240-percent increase since 2005.

To respond to this problem, the Law Society's working group recommended mandating succession planning at all law firms. Implementing such a measure, which is currently under consideration, would follow in the footsteps of Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan, both of which already have such policies in place.

Of course, even without a mandate, law firms of all sizes regularly announce new managing partners. Indeed, the legal world is flush with press releases that celebrate these appointments. What's not well known is *how* firms decide who to promote. And yet, the selection process matters a great deal. Lawyers need to feel confident that their leaders—who play a central role in everything from partner compensation to long-term strategy—are qualified and have earned the top job fairly. How have law firms sought to meet that challenge?

A few years ago, Lerners LLP, which is home to about 145 lawyers, started to notice how it might improve its management structure. At the time, a four-person executive committee ran the operation. It consisted of the managing partners at the firm's flagship offices, in Toronto and London, plus another partner from each city. Quite often, the committee got bogged down on operational tasks, such as handling HR issues or overseeing the marketing team. This left little time for strategic planning or to practise law. Meanwhile, no policy set out when a leader had to step down. Partners could serve in management for years without having to declare a date of departure.

After careful consideration, Lerners settled on a number of reforms. First, the firm hired additional management executives, including a chief information officer and a chief marketing officer, to help oversee business operations. And it drew up a plan to replace the executive committee with a single chair and managing partners in Toronto and London. With an expanded C-suite in place, the chair could focus on overall strategy and the managing partners could oversee and support the firm's lawyers. All three leaders would have the capacity to maintain a legal practice.

Lerners also devised a new method for selecting leaders. Equity partners with an interest in one of the new roles had to notify a three-person nominating and review committee. After assessing the options, the committee would put forward a slate of recommended candidates. The partnership would then have to approve each choice in a secret-ballot vote. To prevent stagnation at the top, Lerners introduced term limits: each leader would serve for four years, with an option to stand for re-election for a second term.

The goal was to have the new structure in place by January 2022. With that in mind, the nominating and review committee endorsed Anne Spafford, who'd become Toronto's managing partner in 2020, to stay in that role for at least two more years. It put forward Yola Ventresca to take the top job in London. And it proposed that Graham Porter, who previously led the London office and chaired the executive committee, serve as the chair for at least one year. The equity partners ratified each recommendation.

In January 2023, Porter stepped down and Cynthia Kuehl assumed the role of chair. The nominating and review committee had put her forward. "But it wasn't an anointing," says Kuehl. She had openly presented her vision to the partnership.

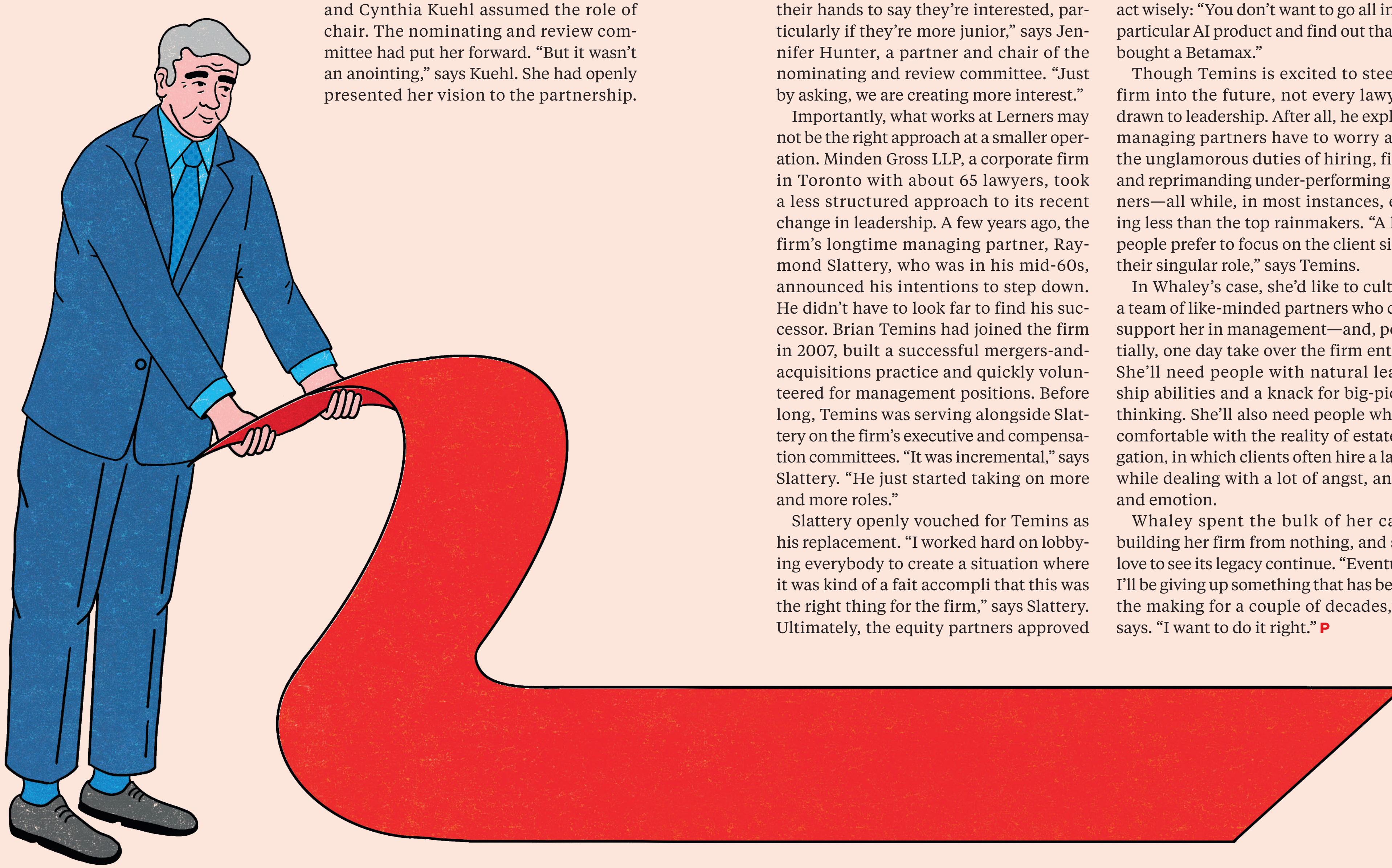


 ILLUSTRATION BY MELANIE LAMBRICK

And, she points out, another partner could have challenged her candidacy, triggering a competitive election. In the end, that didn't happen: she ran unopposed, and the partnership approved her appointment.

To Kuehl, term limits are essential. "There's so much change in the legal profession," she says. "Your leaders need to change, too, so they bring new ideas." Her hope is that term limits will provide lawyers from equity-seeking groups with regular opportunities to break into management.

The nominating and review committee is also responsible for identifying and nurturing future leaders—not just chairs and managing partners but also practice-group leaders and committee members. The committee regularly administers a survey to gauge all partners' interest in leadership. "People sometimes hesitate to put up their hands to say they're interested, particularly if they're more junior," says Jennifer Hunter, a partner and chair of the nominating and review committee. "Just by asking, we are creating more interest."

Importantly, what works at Lerners may not be the right approach at a smaller operation. Minden Gross LLP, a corporate firm in Toronto with about 65 lawyers, took a less structured approach to its recent change in leadership. A few years ago, the firm's longtime managing partner, Raymond Slattery, who was in his mid-60s, announced his intentions to step down. He didn't have to look far to find his successor. Brian Temins had joined the firm in 2007, built a successful mergers-and-acquisitions practice and quickly volunteered for management positions. Before long, Temins was serving alongside Slattery on the firm's executive and compensation committees. "It was incremental," says Slattery. "He just started taking on more and more roles."

Slattery openly vouched for Temins as his replacement. "I worked hard on lobbying everybody to create a situation where it was kind of a fait accompli that this was the right thing for the firm," says Slattery. Ultimately, the equity partners approved Temins's promotion with unanimous support. In 2021, he officially became the managing partner.

According to both Slattery and Temins, the process was organic and relatively painless. "It was never my goal to come here and say, 'I want to be managing partner,'" says Temins. "It was a natural progression." Slattery remains a partner at Minden Gross, which means Temins can still seek his advice when thorny issues arise.

Temins—who still finds time for his busy practice—says the current generation of managing partners needs to confront tough questions: How often should lawyers have to come into the office? How can firms hang on to clients as senior lawyers retire en masse? How should firms employ artificial intelligence? In a rapidly changing world, he says, leaders have to act wisely: "You don't want to go all in on a particular AI product and find out that you bought a Betamax."

Though Temins is excited to steer his firm into the future, not every lawyer is drawn to leadership. After all, he explains, managing partners have to worry about the unglamorous duties of hiring, firing, and reprimanding under-performing partners—all while, in most instances, earning less than the top rainmakers. "A lot of people prefer to focus on the client side as their singular role," says Temins.

In Whaley's case, she'd like to cultivate a team of like-minded partners who could support her in management—and, potentially, one day take over the firm entirely. She'll need people with natural leadership abilities and a knack for big-picture thinking. She'll also need people who are comfortable with the reality of estate litigation, in which clients often hire a lawyer while dealing with a lot of angst, anxiety and emotion.

Whaley spent the bulk of her career building her firm from nothing, and she'd love to see its legacy continue. "Eventually, I'll be giving up something that has been in the making for a couple of decades," she says. "I want to do it right." P

ADVICE

TORONTO'S BEST WEEKDAY LUNCH SPOTS

Downtown lawyers reveal their go-to restaurants

ARUN KRISHNAMURTI
Senior counsel, Google Canada
At Pai, the Thai food is incredible. The panang curry, in particular, is among the best I've had. As for the space, it's large and comfortable. And the restaurant always plays fantastic music. In short, it's a great place to forge a meaningful connection with friends and colleagues alike.
Location: 18 Duncan St.

JORDANA GOLDLIST
Founder, JHG Criminal Law
The lobby lounge at the Shangri-La Hotel has terrific food and the ideal vibe for a weekday lunch: the energy is on, but it's not too loud for a conversation. Best of all, the French-press coffee is strong enough to carry me through the afternoon back at the office.
Location: 188 University Ave.

ROSEL KIM
Senior staff lawyer, LEAF
Teriyaki chicken, savoury mochi, Japanese mayonnaise—these are just some of the toppings you can have on your pizza at Pizza-Saint-Tropez. The personal-size pizzas are delicious and filling. You can also share a bento box (a 10-inch pizza with karaage and fries) with a colleague in the dining area upstairs.
Location: 78 Gerrard St. W.

Fancy and bright

In Yorkville, Leila Rafi's condo sets itself apart with lavish interior design and a stunning terrace

BY JEREMY FREED

In 2008, Leila Rafi bought a one-bedroom condo in Yorkville. Right away, the second-year associate on Bay Street fell in love with the neighbourhood's fashion boutiques, lively bars and high-end restaurants. For more than a decade, she had no inclination to move. Then the pandemic hit—and suddenly, the place felt a bit cramped. "When COVID happened, I realized how small it was," says Rafi, now a partner at McMillan LLP. Ultimately, she decided to find a new home.

Amid the frenzied housing market, Rafi went looking for a larger unit with a nice outdoor space. Although she came across a loft in Rosedale that was perfect, the neighbourhood was a bit too residential for her taste. And it didn't have an elevator, which would've made it uncomfortable for her parents to visit. "I'm really close to my parents," she says. "I didn't want them to have to go up and down 80 steps."

In January 2022, Rafi toured a spacious two-bedroom condo on the fourth floor of Yorkville Lane, the bustling residential and retail complex in the neighbourhood she'd come to adore. "I loved the space," she recalls. "It felt big and airy." The building had an elevator, ideal for her parents. And, perhaps best of all, the unit came with a large terrace. Soon after making an offer, the place was hers. Rafi toasted the deal with friends at Blu Ristorante on Avenue Road, a favourite local haunt. *Continued on P.14*

↑ **THE GREAT OUTDOORS**

The terrace, pictured above, is accessible through the living room of Rafi's condo. The outdoor space is an ideal spot to entertain friends.

→ **LOCAL FLAVOUR**

Rafi is a long-time resident of Yorkville. You'll often find the Bay Street partner browsing the latest fashions at boutiques like TNT and George C. or having post-work drinks at Alobar or Trattoria Nervosa. Like many of her neighbours, she prefers to go out on weeknights. "I love Mondays to Thursdays," she says. "It's all locals."

HAIR AND MAKEUP BY JASMINE MERINSKY

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ARASH MOALLEMI

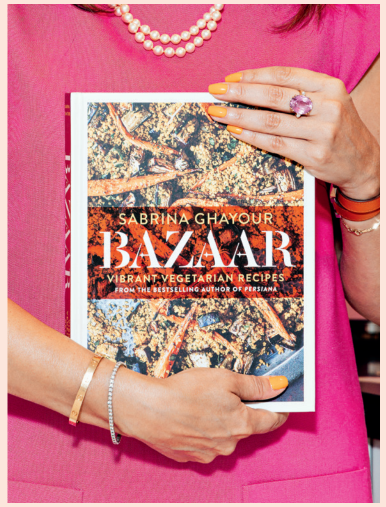
BY THE BOOK (LEFT) →
Despite growing up in a Persian household and loving Persian food, Rafi didn't learn how to cook dishes like Tahchin Morgh, a traditional rice-and-chicken pie, until she was stuck at home during the pandemic. "I worked through two Persian cookbooks that had been given to me years before," she says. "Now, I have people over and I cook them Persian food."

LA VIE EN ROSE (RIGHT) →
Rafi outfitted the powder room with rose-print wallpaper that she found on Etsy. "I've always loved red," she says. "But I didn't want the colour in the main part of the home, so this was the perfect compromise."

LOUNGE IN STYLE →
"If I'm home and no one's over, I will usually be reading in the living room in my fancy Herman Miller chair," says Rafi. This Eames lounge chair is a mid-century design classic.

Continued from P.12
Over the next few months, Rafi embarked on a large-scale renovation of the condo. She replaced the dark floors with pale engineered hardwood, overhauled the kitchen, installed white motorized shades and swapped out the original interior doors for modern ones. Then she set about making the space her own, in accordance with an aesthetic philosophy that she describes as "elegant with a bling twist." To cultivate an aura of elegance, she filled the unit with modern furniture and a carefully curated selection of contemporary art. For the bling twist, she hired a painter to add black- and gold-leaf accents to the walls, doors and other surfaces.

Once the renovation was complete, she hosted no fewer than three housewarming parties. Rafi's friends immediately saw her unique character in every aspect of the home: the location, the interior design, the colour palette. "I love fancy things and bright colours," she admits. "My home is the perfect illustration of my personality."



↑ ANIMAL INSTINCTS
Rafi's gold-plated zebra dining set is one of many animal-print accents throughout the home. "I bought the entire set from the former owner of my old place," she says.

HAIR AND MAKEUP BY JASMINE MERINSKY

← COCO JE T'AIME
This Chanel-themed artwork by Toronto artist Briony Douglas occupies a place of honour on Rafi's living-room wall. "I love the stories that I've read about Coco Chanel," she says. "She was fiercely independent, unique and not afraid to be different. I identify with that."

← FUR BABY
Rafi named her Scottish Straight cat Herman, but she lovingly refers to him as Hermie, after a common mispronunciation of Hermès, one of her favourite Yorkville shops. "I find it hilarious how his face is full of expression," she says. "He loves watching what's happening outside the window in the dining room like a hawk and sleeping next to me with his own mini pillow at night."

To see more photos of Rafi's condo, visit precedentmagazine.com

Evening the odds

In her progressive tax practice, Bhuvana Rai is proud to represent the average person

BY DANIELLE GROEN

I

In 2018, two years into her stint as tax litigation counsel for the Department of Justice, Bhuvana Rai found herself in a courtroom in remote Manitoba, defending a decision that had taken EI maternity benefits away from the mother of an infant. After tallying up how much the federal government spent on her time, her flight from her office in Ottawa, her hotel and her expenses, Rai, then in her mid-20s, realized it had cost more to fight the case than it would have to pay the benefits. It didn't feel great. "Tax legislation is so opaque, and when it comes to these smaller cases, the average person rarely knows how strong their argument is or when to settle," she says. "I think a substantial proportion of smaller taxpayers and self-represented people do not walk away from the tax system feeling like justice has been done."

Taxpayers face a number of hurdles when they appear before the Tax Court of Canada. Unlike in other forms of law, the government is the respondent, and individuals—who are typically there to dispute how the Canada Revenue Agency handled a particular matter—are the appellants, so the burden of proof falls on them. Assumptions of fact, no matter how wild, are presumed to be true, a far cry from how it works in criminal law. And in smaller cases, the bench strength very rarely balances out. "I think the system is fairest when each side has a certain level of resources and understanding," says Rai. Other than in cases that involve relatively wealthy people or institutions, "that's just not the reality in tax." This makes it all too easy for auditors to go after the lowest-hanging fruit: those with lower and middle incomes who don't have representation.

"I kept watching people trying to fight perfectly reasonable cases and not having the procedural knowledge to navigate these rules," says Rai. This realization played a large role in her decision to move from government to private practice, first at Borden Ladner Gervais LLP in Ottawa, as a senior tax associate, and then—when Toronto's size and diversity beckoned—at EY Law in early 2021.

At larger firms, though, it's hard to take on small files that might not make much, or any, money but would ensure ordinary taxpayers have someone in their court. She began to toy with the idea of starting something new.

In April 2022, Rai launched her own firm, Mors & Tribute P.C. The name is a cheeky nod to life's only two certainties—these are the Latin-based words for death and taxes—but it's also very deliberately not her own name emblazoned on the door. "The point is that the firm is bigger than me," she says. "It's about the team and the vision." (That team currently includes a law clerk who doubles as an administrative person. She also hired a law student over the summer.) Rai's caseload moves between advising smaller, privately held corporations and acting for individuals or small-business owners who have disputes with the CRA. She helps people deal with issues like unfair audits and clawed-back CERB payments. The bigger files allow her to take on low-bono work on behalf of less affluent clients.

The job often asks her to serve as a sort of translator between taxpayers and the CRA. Every single audit of immigrants that she's seen, for instance, requests corroborating information from an international bank—so Rai is left explaining geopolitics to a tax auditor, noting that corroboration isn't possible for anyone emigrating from a country that Canada does not have banking relationships with, like Iran. And with her clients, she has to gently point out that the CRA isn't calling them a cheat or a fraud or a terrible person—it's just sending them a bill. "I really like trying to get very different people to understand each other," she says. It comes instinctually: "My family arrived in Canada from Mumbai when I was 10, and as an immigrant, I'm always translating. Culturally, generationally, situationally, I'm always in code-switching mode."

> *"I think the system is fairest when each side has a certain level of resources and understanding."*

Erin Durant, an informal mentor to Rai since their time together at BLG, says that Rai makes the intricacies of tax law accessible to everyone—whether that's clients or even lawyers like herself. "Bhuvana is so good at being able to explain a very technical and scary area of the law so that it's understandable to the many, many of us who don't have that underlying foundation," says Durant, who now runs her own practice just outside of Ottawa. Rai is formalizing that foundation by building an online database that provides free legal information to self-represented litigants in tax law. She's focused first on the disability tax credit, which she considers one of the hardest benefits to get. But she plans to expand to other programs like the child disability benefit.

Rai also recognizes that one person can only do so much to solve a systemic problem. In 2020, she co-chaired an Ontario Bar Association program that, in part, examined how the tax system disproportionately harms people from diverse backgrounds. "Tax is the area of law most of us will interact with, and at the end of the day, it's an access-to-justice issue, even if it's not a particularly sexy one," she says. "I want this to be a problem we all solve together."

But Rai never loses sight of the individual caught up in the system. When Filippo Cognigni, a wine importer in Toronto, retained her in 2022, he'd already spent six and a half years fighting an audit. "The CRA slapped me with an $80,000 penalty, but Bhuvana took one look and immediately saw what had happened," he says. More specifically, she found that the limitation period had passed, a fatal flaw in the CRA's case. "She was super kind, extremely competent and efficient"—so efficient, in fact, that she had the dispute resolved in his favour in less than three months. Cognigni still can't believe the ordeal is over. "I never could have gone up against the government without her," he says. "I call her my personal angel now." P

BHUVANA RAI'S CAREER TIMELINE

2001
A 10-year-old Rai arrives in Calgary with her parents from Mumbai, India.

2014
Having completed an undergraduate degree in philosophy at the University of Calgary, Rai graduates from law school at the University of Toronto. As a law student, she realized that a career in tax law, whose rules form a complex system of logic, might let her tap into her passion for philosophy.

2015
After articling at a civil-litigation firm, Rai is called to the bar. In the fall, she begins a clerkship at the Tax Court of Canada and a part-time master of laws program in taxation.

2016
Rai joins the Department of Justice in Ottawa as tax litigation counsel. Eventually, she becomes uncomfortable seeing so many taxpayers go without representation.

2018
Like hundreds of thousands of public servants, Rai had run into trouble with Phoenix, the federal payroll system that didn't actually pay people—or paid people too much. "It stressed me out more than I could afford to be stressed out at the time," she says. Due to that concern, combined with her growing dissatisfaction with the work, Rai moves to the Ottawa office of Borden Ladner Gervais LLP.

2021
Along with her spouse, Rai leaves Ottawa for Toronto, where she takes a job as a tax lawyer with EY Law.

2022
In April, Rai launches her own firm, Mors & Tribute P.C.

ILLUSTRATION BY MELINDA JOSIE

THE SABA TORONTO AWARDS GALA

In July, close to 400 partygoers packed into the Palais Royale to attend the South Asian Bar Association of Toronto's annual awards gala. The event began with a cocktail reception on the venue's two-tier deck, which offered scenic views of Lake Ontario. The crowd then moved into the ballroom for the awards presentation. Neal Katyal, the former acting United States solicitor general, was on hand to deliver the keynote address. In his remarks, Katyal reflected on his career as a Supreme Court litigator and the importance of a fair and equitable justice system.

Atoosa Mahdavian (CIBC), Imran Kamal (Ministry of the Attorney General), Shima Heidari (Ministry of the Attorney General), Colin Elsby (Landlord and Tenant Board)

Aaron Bains (Aird & Berlis), former acting United States solicitor general Neal Katyal, Devin Persaud (Goodmans)

Brenda MacDonald (Ontario Power Generation), Lou Fortini (BLG), Sanjeev Dhawan (Hydro One)

Meghan Thomas (Osgoode Professional Development), Andrew Pinto (Ontario Superior Court of Justice), Daniel Fish (Precedent Magazine)

Gurvir Sangha (McCarthy Tétrault), Davin Michael Garg (Ministry of the Attorney General), Kelvin Ramchand (Public Prosecution Service of Canada)

Renu Mandhane (Ontario Superior Court of Justice), Ena Chadha (Ena Chadha), Tara Raghavan (Rakoczy Molino Mazzochi Siwik)

Rajesh Dhir (Ministry of the Attorney General), Attorney General Doug Downey

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATT TIBBO PHOTOGRAPHY

Paul Fruitman, a partner and commercial litigator at Lax O'Sullivan, in his downtown office

5

1

Keeping it light

Inside the office of a litigator whose offbeat decor injects a welcome dose of levity into the workplace

BY REBECCA GAO

2

3

4

Paul Fruitman has decorated his office with animation art, toys and collectibles. The idea is to surround himself with objects that lighten the mood. "I like having a bit of whimsy in my life," says the partner at Lax O'Sullivan. "It keeps the atmosphere relaxed and helps me think creatively."

1. PLAYTIME
Before the pandemic, Fruitman sometimes dropped into the now-closed Toys Toys Toys, located in the PATH, scooping up little knickknacks—like this Oscar the Grouch figurine—when they caught his eye.

2. A GOOD LAUGH
This limited-edition Looney Tunes animation cel—in which Daffy Duck cross-examines Santa Claus—is one of four that hang in Fruitman's office. Colleagues often get a kick out of it when they pay him a visit.

3. MINT CONDITION
About 15 years ago, Fruitman received a free sample of Coca-Cola Blak, a coffee-flavoured drink that was discontinued in 2008. "I never found the right moment to open it," he says. Fruitman now sees the bottle as a cool artifact.

4. BRAINPOWER
When puzzling over a tricky problem, Fruitman sometimes relies on this Slinky. He'll hold the toy in both hands and transfer its weight from one palm to the other. The calming rhythm helps spark new ideas.

5. PROUD PARENT
Fruitman and his wife, Lisa, a dentist, have two daughters, ages 14 and 16. At the office, he displays artwork that his children made as youngsters.

6. IN THE NEWS
Before law school, Fruitman travelled around the South Pacific, picking up odd jobs. Just before Christmas in 1997, he hit the streets of Sydney, Australia, to sell foam reindeer antlers on behalf of a local charity. The *Sydney Morning Herald* printed this photo of Fruitman in action. When looking at the image today, he says, "It makes me feel young."

6

You'll find more photos of Fruitman's office at precedentmagazine.com

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRISTIE VUONG

The stop before the top

Income partnership has a complicated reputation.

To some, it rewards talented associates with a pay bump and an impressive job title as they transition to equity status.

To others, it allows firms to retain profitable lawyers without giving them power or meaningful ownership in the business.

Which story is true?

by SIMON LEWSEN
photography by VICKY LAM

Had you been a lawyer in the early 20th century, you would likely have worked in a small chambers.

Perhaps you'd have been one of five associates in a firm with three partners and an assistant. Those partners literally ran the shop. They bought the tables, the chairs, the leather-bound volumes, the coal for the stove. As an associate, you were a kind of apprentice. In time, you'd be asked to buy in and become a partner, too. Or you'd get the boot and have to make it on your own.

Throughout the broader business world, traditional models—like joint partnerships and family-run shops—have largely been displaced by modern corporations, with shareholders, boards of directors and executives. But law firms, despite having ballooned in size and complexity, are still structured in the same way: with partners who buy into the business and associates who work tirelessly to make those partners money.

Firms have stuck with this antiquated model in part because they have no choice. In Canada and most of the United States, only lawyers can legally hold equity in a law firm, which means that, to raise capital, a firm cannot bring in outside investors or sell shares, as a corporation might. Instead, it must do the same thing it did a century ago: admit more partners and have them make a capital contribution.

There are also cultural factors behind the profession's devotion to the partnership model. "Lawyers want to be able to tell their parents, their friends and the people they're jealous of, 'I'm a partner now!'" says Jordan Furlong, a legal-sector analyst who runs the consultancy Law21 and has written extensively about the evolution of the private-practice business model. "The word partner has a lot of status."

And yet, traditional partnership has come with its fair share of challenges. By the 1980s, the largest law firms had turned into enormous enterprises, with hundreds of lawyers on the payroll. It had made sense for an eight-person shop to have three owners, but an 800-person shop with 300 owners all trying to run the show is a recipe for disaster. Such a massive team of decision-makers cannot possibly make coherent choices. No functional army would have a similar ratio of generals to foot soldiers.

At most law firms, authority became concentrated in the hands of a small managerial team, such as an executive committee, that excluded the majority of partners. The road to partnership got longer, too, in part so that firms had more time to vet lawyers for the mighty responsibility of ownership. Back in the '80s, explains Furlong, a talented associate could expect to make equity partner after six years; today, that number is closer to 12.

Unsurprisingly, many associates disliked this change. By the 1990s, says Norman Bacal—a legal consultant, author and the former managing partner of Heenan Blaikie LLP, one of the largest firms in Canada before it dissolved in 2014—this aversion to adding owners caused retention problems at the biggest firms. Smaller firms, after all, could poach talented associates with the promise of a faster track to partnership. "Imagine that your friend, who works at a mid-sized firm, just made partner after seven years," says Bacal. "But you're at a large firm that's saying you have to wait 10 or 12 years. You then have to tell your peers that, for some reason, you're *still* not a partner. That's embarrassing."

Around this time, North American firms introduced a compromise: partnership without ownership—or, to use the technical term, income partnership. The invention seemed like a win-win. Status-conscious associates would now get to *call* themselves partners and, often, take home a tidy raise. And law firms wouldn't have to worry quite so much about attrition among the junior ranks.

By most accounts, the compromise worked. One paper, published by the *North Carolina Law Review* in the mid-aughts, found that associates with an income partnership option were more committed to building a long-term career at their current firm than those working in an equity-only model. The article put forward a range of potential explanations. Income partnership, it posited, might "be attractive to talented lawyers who want the title of partner but may lack the ability or desire to engage in business development." Ultimately, the paper argued that "the primary economic benefit" of offering income partnership was stability: associates would be less likely to leave.

Of course, the story is a bit more complicated. For one thing, income partners are sometimes surprised to learn how little has changed after earning the promotion. Some associates, meanwhile, accept the position of income partner with an implicit understanding that a promotion to equity partner will soon be forthcoming, only to find themselves languishing in professional purgatory. The title itself is also a kind of contrivance. "In the past, I've referred to income partners as superannuated associates," says Furlong. "They are borrowing the title of partner."

Despite those drawbacks, the position was created in response to a particular set of historical pressures that the profession can't ignore. How, then, should we feel about income partnership today?

***

One answer—which is by no means definitive—is that we should feel just fine. Most big law firms in Canada have adopted some version of the model. Small and medium-sized shops have, too. If firms are regularly offering these positions, and if associates are regularly accepting them, they surely have their reasons for doing so.

"In the past, I've referred to income partners as superannuated associates. They are borrowing the title of partner."

Blair McCreadie, the managing partner at the Toronto office of Dentons Canada LLP, argues that the model gives lawyers flexibility. Equity partnership comes with serious pressures, including an ongoing expectation to originate new business. In the past, lawyers who weren't ready for those pressures would often leave for an in-house position. Income partnership allows them to remain at the firm. "In a world where the number of high-calibre in-house roles is expanding," says McCreadie, "the income partnership option is necessary for talent retention." (Income partners at Dentons don't hold an ownership stake, but their compensation is partly tied to the firm's financial performance.)

Indeed, income partnership can offer a bridge to equity partnership. In many instances, explains McCreadie, an abrupt transition from associate to equity partner can be destabilizing. "Income partners are often in the process of ramping up," he says. "They're building their practice. They're building their books of business." The position enables them to learn the ropes without the pressure to be a consummate manager and rainmaker from day one.

For Pamela Chan Ebejer, a Dentons income partner, the position affords an opportunity to reimagine her practice. As an associate, Chan Ebejer was a labour- and employment-law generalist, but she had an interest in pensions. She hopes to carve out a niche helping employers that sponsor pension plans navigate the regulatory environment. But this area of law is highly technical, and it requires a great deal of esoteric expertise.

The income partnership position, she says, gives her the space to make the transition. She can shed parts of her former practice and put time into the kinds of endeavours—blogs, public talks, conference papers—that bolster her professional reputation. "Having the title of partner gives me the credibility to build this practice into something greater and bigger," she says. "But I can do it gradually, because there isn't an expectation that I'm fully formed." The position, for Chan Ebejer, is a kind of safe zone, a place for experimentation and growth.

***

That safe zone, however, can come with its own unique dangers. Income partnership can contribute, for instance, to false expectations that undermine morale. Consider the case of Julie. When she made income partner at her big law firm, she was surprised to find that her life remained mostly unchanged. ("Julie" is a pseudonym. To protect her identity, both her name and the name of the firm where she worked have been withheld.) She still had the same clients. She still took instructions from the same cadre of bosses. She still felt peripheral to the centres of power at her firm.

Julie wasn't naïve. She knew that, as an income partner, she wouldn't be voting on major decisions or electing the management team. Still, she thought she'd at least have a seat at the table. She imagined that partner meetings would be like parliamentary sessions, where ideas are discussed openly and everyone's opinion counts. In reality, they were more like pep rallies. Senior management announced new policies, and income partners were expected to nod along. "The meetings were informational," says Julie. "There wasn't much consultation or debate. My role was to be a cheerleader for decisions that had already been made."

Sometimes, those decisions were drastic. Shortly after Julie's promotion, the pandemic hit, and the firm announced a series of sudden moves: layoffs, salary cuts, changes to the operational structure. The logic behind these decisions often eluded Julie. The firm cut valuable team members while allowing less-productive employees to stay on. They slashed the size of a key practice group just as it was revving up for a major court date. "People would be let go," says Julie, "and I'd think, *Shit, that's not the person I would've picked*."

Then again, nobody had asked her. Often, Julie and her fellow income partners were apprised of major decisions the night before a firm-wide announcement.

Julie had always aspired to be a change-maker, a person who takes on the boys' club and pushes for greater equity at the firm. But after being admitted to the partnership circle, she realized that it contained a series of smaller circles from which she was still excluded. "As an income partner," she says, "you're not in the room where changes are discussed."

Meanwhile, her female colleagues had started referring to income partnership as a "pink ghetto," a place where women languished, even as their male colleagues moved up to ownership and eventually management. This concern is widespread. The income partnership model has come under regular attack for enabling law firms to juice their diversity numbers by promoting women and racialized people to partner but not in a way that truly counts.

Ronit Dinovitzer, a professor of sociology at the University of Toronto, says that the scope of this problem in Canada is difficult to measure. Domestic firms, she points out, tend to be secretive about partnership data. But her research from the United States is hardly encouraging. "It's clear, when you look at the large American firms," she says, "that the equity partners are still the white men, and the non-equity partners are overrepresenting racialized lawyers and women." Given the overall equity gap inside Canadian law firms—where white and male lawyers are more than twice as likely to have made partner, of any kind, as their racialized or female peers—it's hard to imagine that the situation here is wildly different.

Even those in management have seen downsides to income partnership. In 2016, when Michael Slan took over as the managing partner of Fogler, Rubinoff LLP, which is home to about 120 lawyers, he worried that income partners, unable to enjoy a percentage of overall profits, have little incentive to contribute to the broader well-being of the firm. Performance numbers, such as billings and client originations, determine the size of their year-end bonus. What Slan calls "firm-minded behaviours"—sharing resources with colleagues, mentoring associates, contributing to CPD—generally have no bearing on an income partner's pay.

Slan saw that as a potential problem. The firm started to ask both income and equity partners to complete an annual self-assessment, reflecting on how they support the organization as a whole. The idea is to nudge partners in the direction of firm-minded behaviours.

"There's no mystery. We offer our junior lawyers a series of clear incremental goals as they move toward ownership."

Foglers also adjusted its approach to recruitment. In recent years, as the firm's income partners have either graduated to ownership or moved elsewhere, Slan has been reticent to replenish their ranks too eagerly. When Foglers does bring on new income partners, it seeks out people who have a track record of collaboration and thinking beyond the needs of their individual practices; an impressive book of business isn't enough on its own. And the firm tries to swiftly transition income partners to equity status, at which point softer skills like mentorship play a more concrete role in compensation. These reforms have had a clear impact. "Over the last decade," says Slan, "we've reduced the number of income partners by half."

***

Income partnership might not be an unalloyed good, but the model is here to stay. The salient question, therefore, is this: how can it be deployed honestly? Counterintuitively, the best approach may require adding *more* intermediary steps between associate and equity partner, rather than fewer. Such a model can offer much-needed clarity—a clear path to ownership, with signposts along the way.

WeirFoulds LLP has adopted such a philosophy. According to Paul Wilson, the chief operating officer, the firm wants a strong base of entrepreneurial equity partners working hard to grow the business. "At many firms, income partners stay at that level for long periods of time, which is not what we want," says Wilson. "We want people in our partnership thriving and making us successful."

Four years ago, WeirFoulds introduced a three-tiered partnership model. At year five or six, associates who are showing true potential are promoted to income partner—a salaried position, with a degree of income variability. Once they've met key benchmarks in terms of business development, they're promoted to supported partner, at which point they hold a small equity stake. During both stages, lawyers can request, or the firm might assign, tailored business-development training and external coaching. They are told from the outset that the goal is to move them briskly to the equity level. Each transitional step should last two or three years.

This approach, which treats intermediary partnership as a time-limited program with an imminent graduation date, ensures that people don't become stagnant. As of early September, of the firm's 110 lawyers, 33 were equity partners, three were supported partners, 16 were income partners and 58 were associates. "We want the process to be structured and speedy," says Wilson. "Our approach doesn't allow us to have people languishing."

Loopstra Nixon LLP, a Toronto firm with just over 100 lawyers, has devised a similar partnership track. The firm breaks down its path to partnership into two steps: salaried partner, an apprenticeship phase, wherein people are paid a salary plus a bonus; and income partner, wherein people make variable incomes based on the profitability of their individual practices. Equity partners get paid the usual way, with a share of the firm's annual take.

In each of the two initial stages, partners are given detailed metrics outlining what they must achieve—in terms of business development, origination and profitability—to graduate to the next level. Salaried and income partners meet annually with a member of the management team to discuss their progress. Compensation for all partners, including equity partners, is determined not via closed-door meetings but via an algorithm that's available to the entire partnership.

"We wanted to break down the career path for a young lawyer into its component parts," says Allan Ritchie, the firm's managing partner. "There's no mystery. We offer our junior lawyers a series of clear incremental goals as they move toward ownership." (As of early September, the firm had 19 equity partners, 31 income partners, nine salaried partners and 47 associates.)

Junior partnership is, primarily, the firm's way of acknowledging a given lawyer's competence. "We want to recognize people as partners when their legal skillset warrants it," explains Ritchie. "We're honouring a milestone in their career development."

The firm's approach, Ritchie argues, enables a degree of clarity. Loopstra Nixon, with its algorithmic compensation schemes and tiered partnership model, is working to be as transparent as possible about what lawyers can do to move up the ranks.

***

There's no denying that the income partner model makes a kind of business sense. Still, if firms are going to use it, they should at least deploy it well. Transparency is key. Firm managers must communicate thoughtfully with their employees. The advancement process may be difficult, but it needn't be opaque.

At a minimum, everybody at the income partnership level should know what comes next. "At Heenan Blaikie," says Bacal, "I would sit down with my lawyers when they hit their five years and ask, 'Do you want to become an equity partner?' If the answer was yes, I'd say, 'Here's what you need to do. Are you prepared to do it?'" No matter how firms try to soften the truth, equity partnership is about generating revenue. Bacal would tell lawyers how much business they would have to bring in and the hours they'd need to work. "Some associates would then leave the practice. But at least we'd had an honest discussion."

If managers need to be candid with income partners, income partners need to be candid with themselves. The partner title may be a useful pretense—it's helpful to introduce yourself to prospective clients as a partner—but it's a pretense nevertheless, resting, as it does, on an elastic definition of the word partner. Income partners will always have limited managerial influence. People who decide to climb the rungs should expect a lengthy journey. And they should be honest with themselves about what they're getting into.

Income partnership simply isn't for everyone. Shortly after making income partner at her law firm, Julie realized that, if she stayed, she would likely never enjoy the kind of influence she craved. A place in the inner circle seemed perpetually out of reach. So she decided to strike out on her own. While planning her new business, she found herself working through questions she hadn't contemplated before: Who would her firm work with? (The answer: many of her former clients, but not the annoying ones.) Would she pay for luxurious offices? (She invested in human capital instead.) Each decision was hers and hers alone, and she relished her newfound freedom. Julie had traded in Big Law prestige for scrappy autonomy, and the deal felt right to her. She opened shop in the spring of 2021. She made equity partner that same day. P

BUSINESS

THE POST-PANDEMIC OFFICE

Inside the brand-new Cassels headquarters, an office that's bright, open and designed to meet the challenges of hybrid work

By Deborah Aarts
Photography by Lorne Bridgman

UPON ARRIVAL AT CASSELS,

the midnight-blue walls, caramel leather sofas and terrazzo tiles are as luxe and carefully considered as one would expect at the reception of a blue-chip Bay Street firm. But it's the light that steals the show. Even on a cloudy afternoon, the sun's glow reaches the deepest recesses of the elevator bay near the top of the Bay Adelaide Centre's newly built North Tower. In fact, light touches every corner of the firm's five-floor Toronto office. This is the result of two pivotal design choices. First, individual offices have been pushed back from the floor-to-ceiling windows, preventing them from blocking the natural light along the perimeter. Second, the ubiquity of glass walls—both for boardrooms and interior offices—allows sunlight to filter into the entire floor plan. At Cassels, the era of grim overhead fluorescents has ended.

In May, Cassels moved into a brand-new office that was meticulously built with the future of work in mind. Back in 2019, the firm signed a four-floor lease at the Bay Adelaide Centre's then-under-construction North Tower. And, in February 2020, it exercised its option to take a fifth floor. But the design process didn't begin until 2021—well into COVID—which offered a unique opportunity. The firm could create, from scratch, a legal workplace for the post-pandemic world. "We started to dream about what that could look like," says Kristin Taylor, the managing partner at Cassels. The goal was to build something "a bit transformational for the firm and for the people who work here."

In biweekly conversations with Gensler, the design firm that Cassels hired, about a dozen partners and a range of other employees discussed how to turn that desire into an achievable vision. "It was immediately clear to us that Cassels wanted something fluid and dynamic," says Matthew Kobylar, the design director at Gensler who led the project. "We asked, 'Well, what are the guardrails?' And they said, 'There are no guardrails.'"

Those meetings relied on collaboration. "It wasn't just the architect or the small steering committee dictating the

THE TOP BRASS
Kristin Taylor, the firm's managing partner, and Noble Chummar, one of two deputy managing partners, meet in the client lounge at Cassels (right). This custom-built space—which is also pictured in the images above—allows clients to relax, get some work done or wait to see their lawyer in a setting that's as well appointed as a boutique coffee shop. In some cases, a lawyer might also use the lounge for a client meeting, rather than defaulting to a traditional boardroom. "We are setting a higher standard for law firms with our new way of working," says Chummar. "And it's going to change the profession."

HAIR AND MAKEUP BY JASMINE MERINSKY

way things would go and everybody else nodding their heads," says Casey Chisick, a partner and a member of the executive committee. "There were a lot of really meaningful, substantive discussions."

Scotia Plaza, which Cassels called home for nearly 35 years, was built as a monument to Bay Street ambition. The tower's red-granite sawtooth edge allowed for nearly 1,500 corner offices. Throughout its tenure in the building, Cassels upheld the design orthodoxy of the 1980s: prime window spaces went to heavy hitters, and the artificially lit interiors were divvied up among everyone else. At Bay Adelaide North, Cassels has abandoned the "partners get glass" mantra that has long dominated the legal profession. In another potent move against hierarchy, the individual offices are all the same size: approximately 10 feet by 11 feet. A partner has no more space than an associate.

The new headquarters was also designed on the premise that hybrid work is not a circumstantial blip. Meeting rooms are wired with cameras and screens at eye level, as well as high-tech microphones, to make videoconferencing as seamless and natural as possible. The office also features dedicated rooms for virtual court appearances. In a thoughtful nod to comfort, one of these rooms has a wooden lectern equipped with screens, for litigators who feel most confident speaking at a podium.

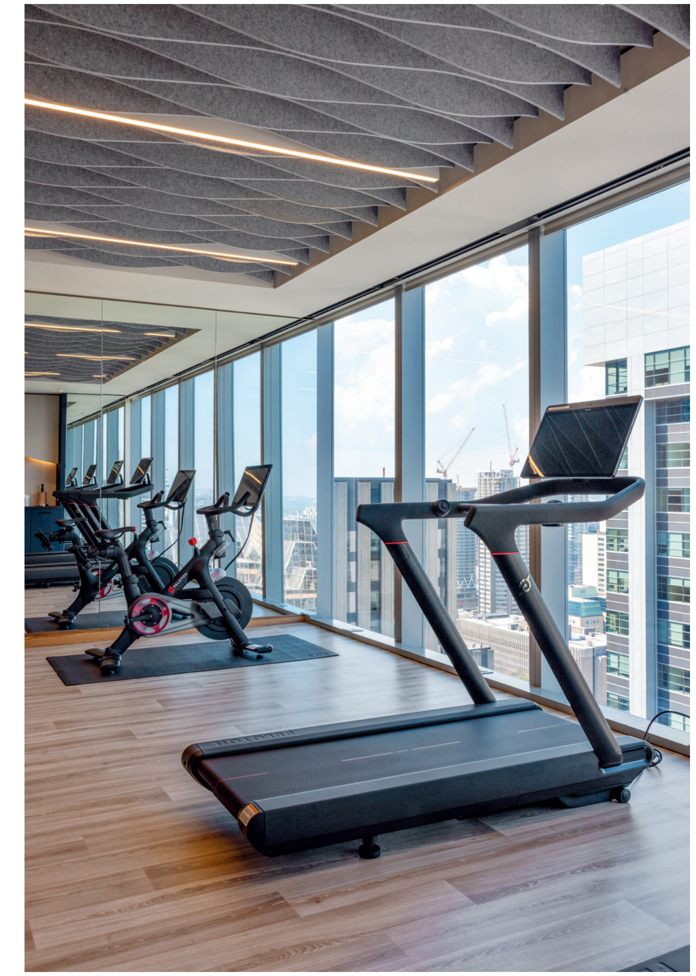
During the pandemic, Cassels announced a hybrid-work policy that has remained in place after the move. Folks have to commit to coming in at least three days a week to get a dedicated workspace—open-concept workstations for legal assistants and operations staff, an office for almost everyone else—while those who come in less have to hotel. Those who opt for the latter choice can log in to a user-friendly app, known as Tango Reserve, to see who's coming in and decide where to work for the day. Importantly, the workspaces reserved for hotelling are as well appointed as any other.

"My whole attitude towards how I interact with the office has completely changed," says Peter Wismath, the chief marketing officer, who signed up for the hotelling option. Moving around gives him regular exposure to different legal teams, a professional asset given his department-spanning role. And it quashes the complacency and routine that can make office life feel like such a drag. "It does require a bit of getting used to," he says, "but the vibe that comes from it is so positive." *Continued on P.33*

IN THE LIGHT
Alexander De Pompa, a second-year associate in the intellectual property and entertainment group at Cassels, spent most of the pandemic working out of his Fort York condo. A craving to work around other people made it easy for him to commit to at least three days a week downtown, earning him a permanent office. "I'm in one of the most interior offices, third in a cluster from the windows," he says. "I still have more than enough light. I never feel like I'm in a dark, enclosed space."

HAIR AND MAKEUP BY JASMINE MERINSKY

SWEAT IT OUT
During the pandemic, many lawyers had the opportunity, while at home, to take short exercise breaks throughout the workday. At Cassels, this is now possible at the office, thanks to the gym inside the firm's capacious wellness centre. Employees can go for a run on a treadmill or a ride on a Peloton bike.



PARENTAL PERKS
Cassels designed its new office to help support the working parent. The firm's wellness centre includes a toy- and book-stocked family room (left) for days when children have to tag along to the office. There's also a carefully furnished lactation room (above), so that breastfeeding parents can pump in comfort and dignity. "If you've got kids, those first few years are really tough," says Kristin Taylor, the firm's managing partner. "A lot of women have to back off their careers, and a lot don't come back." Taylor recalls having to pump in bathroom stalls when her children were young. "We're hoping to demonstrate that we want women here. If we can make it a little bit easier in our workplace design, we're absolutely going to do it."

COLLABORATION STATION
Kayla Smith, a third-year associate in the litigation group at Cassels, makes ample use of the firm's multipurpose lounges, including this one on the 31st floor of Bay Adelaide North. "I've gone to group meetings with juniors, and we've been able to actually collaborate and brainstorm and do real work in that space," she says. "It's replacing the formalities of the boardroom."

HAIR AND MAKEUP BY JASMINE MERINSKY

FIRST IMPRESSION
Cassels asked its design team to construct an ultramodern reception area. The spacious lobby stands out with its terrazzo tiles and stunning view of the city. Above, the firm's managing partner, Kristin Taylor, sits on one of the space's caramel leather sofas.

Continued from P.30

Some of the design choices have had a similar impact on law-firm culture. "The glass offices really help to create an open-door environment," says Kayla Smith, a third-year associate in the firm's litigation group, who helped inform the design as a member of the firm's inclusion and diversity committee. She finds it easier to pop into colleagues' offices for a quick chat about work or a casual visit.

That team spirit is also evident on the northeast corner of each floor. Traditionally, this prime location—which offers vantage to both the lively Yonge corridor and the Port Lands fringe of Lake Ontario—might have gone to senior partners for private offices. At Cassels, it's devoted to five lounge spaces (four for employees, one as a dedicated area for clients) that have been stocked with free snacks (early reports indicate the candy goes quicker than the kale chips) and premium coffee (with a rotation of different local roasters on each floor—a clever way to prompt intra-office mingling, as folks might need to travel up for Balzac's or down for Pilot). Each lounge offers an appealing alternative to a subterranean food court. You might spot an ear-budded associate tapping away on a laptop at a café table or a trio of lawyers hashing out a document over chocolate chip cookies.

"We're seeing everybody meeting with and interacting with each other," says Noble Chummar, one of the firm's two deputy managing partners. "We're getting to know people that we work with, which is difficult when everybody's just in their own cubicle or office, and then hitting an elevator button and dispersing to the PATH."

Taylor is particularly proud of the firm's all-new 4,000-square-foot wellness centre. There's a light-filled gym; a prayer room, with a dedicated station for ablutions and storage for mats; a yoga and meditation studio; a family room with books and toys, for those inevitable days on which stuck parents have to bring tots along to work; and a lactation room with a fridge, sink and comfortable chair. The symbolic value of these amenities equals their practical function. "We're trying to be thoughtful," says Taylor, "about what people need to succeed in their work without having to hide who they are."

To see more photos of the Cassels office, visit precedentmagazine.com

“I had a prior career as a software developer, but I left it behind for law school.”

The Precedent questionnaire with Evan Thomas

The head of legal at Wealthsimple’s cryptocurrency trading platform on document review, fitness and the power of taking risks

WHO
Evan Thomas

AREAS OF PRACTICE
Regulatory and commercial

ROLE
Head of legal at Wealthsimple’s cryptocurrency trading platform

FAMILY PROFILE
Married to Maryse, with two children, Olivia, seven, and Ben, nine

What’s the best part of your job?
I work in a business, cryptocurrency trading, with a small body of established law. As a result, I have an opportunity to influence how that law develops.

Tell us one thing you’d change about the legal system.
Documentary discovery in civil litigation. As a former litigator, I know it adds incredible cost and complexity without materially affecting most cases.

Do you have any pets? A one-year-old Labradoodle, named Piper, who loves rope toys and stealing food.

What would you be if you weren’t a lawyer? I’d write code. I had a prior career as a software developer, but I left it behind for law school.

Who’s your favourite author?
Neal Stephenson, the speculative-fiction master who, back in the 1990s, wrote novels like *Cryptonomicon* and *Snow Crash*. These books were prescient about technology, both the good and the bad.

What hobby are you passionate about?
Skiing. I like the fresh air and the scenery. It can also be solitary or social, depending on your mood.

What’s your hope for the future?
In my career, I hope to positively influence the law and society. In my life, I just want to make sure my kids have the luxury of choice in terms of education and career.

How do you stay in shape? There’s a big assumption baked into this question, but I try to stay in shape through walks with the dog, riding my Peloton and skiing.

What’s the best investment you ever made? In 2016, I bought Ether when it was valued at $10. Unfortunately, I didn’t buy very much, so I still have to work.

Where do you live in the city? Sherwood Park, otherwise known as the neighbourhood north of Yonge and Eglinton. I love being close to the ravines that feed into the Don River.

What advice do you have for new lawyers?
Take more risk. Pursue a new practice area. Change employers. Start your own firm. The upside, particularly in the early part of your career, vastly exceeds the downside.

To read an extended version of our interview with Evan Thomas, visit precedentmagazine.com

HAIR AND MAKEUP BY ALANNA CHELMICK

PHOTOGRAPH BY NICK WONG