

Globe Trotting Attorney Takes Root in Sonoma County

England, France, Spain, Holland, Germany, Belgium, Vietnam, and Japan. Are these fabulous vacation destinations? Of course, but they are also just a few of the 26 countries in which Burt Fohrman of Perry, Johnson, Anderson, Miller & Moskowitz, LLP., has practiced law during his 46 year career.

Burt began practicing law in Beverly Hills, California, shortly after graduating from the UCLA School of Law. His desire for a more rural lifestyle relocated him to Riverside County, where he practiced with a small firm in the City of Riverside. He later opened a solo practice, specializing in real property and farm and ranch law, since at that time most of Riverside County was an agricultural community. As he had no mentors, Burt became active in the L.A. Bar Association and began commuting to Los Angeles, where he benefited from the experience of members of the Los Angeles Bar Real Property section; after several years he became chair of its Real Estate Finance section. By the early 1970's, he had formed a partnership with two other lawyers, a boutique practice limited to real property, water law and eminent domain.

In the early 1980's, after the California State Bar established its Real Property section, Burt was appointed to the first Executive Committee and took on the task of developing a newsletter for its members. The publication grew into the California Real Property Law Journal, with Burt serving as editor and sole staff, until his wife, Raleigh, took over two years later. This successful publication is now in its 27th year.

It was back to Los Angeles for Burt and Raleigh in 1983, where Burt joined Jones Day as a partner and was the head of their California real property section. That year he was also elected chair of the California State Bar Real Property Section. Raleigh was in solo practice representing developers and title companies. She was also active in the L.A. Bar and was the founder of the L.A. Bar Title Insurance section. In 1989, the suitcases were packed again and Burt and Raleigh moved to London. That year Burt was named chairman of Jones

Day's Real Property Section. Burt was headquartered in London but also spent time working in the Jones Day offices in Paris, Brussels, Geneva and Frankfurt, in addition to working on significant projects in Barcelona and Amsterdam.

Burt and Raleigh returned to Los Angeles in 1992, where he joined White and Case. Though he worked from the Los Angeles office, Burt spent a great deal of time in Europe, and in 1995, Raleigh and Burt moved again, to Hanoi in advance of the U.S. establishment of diplomatic relations. In 1998, White & Case asked Burt to transfer to the Tokyo, Japan office, where he was admitted to practice and became a member of the Tokyo Bar Association.

"I have had some wonderful assignments," Burt recalled. "Three of my most fun assignments in Asia included acting as attorney for the Republic of Italy in Japan and negotiating with the People's Committee of Ho Chi Minh City for the first Proctor & Gamble plant in Vietnam. However, there was one assignment that became a Tokyo family affair. Merrill Lynch sent a team from New York for the purpose of establishing the first collateralized mortgage bond transaction in Japan.

Raleigh was general counsel of the Japanese development company that was to issue the bonds, I was outside counsel and our son, Joshua, an executive with Lend Lease Japan, was the special servicer. When the project was completed and sold, son Matthew, who was practicing in Tokyo with Orrick, Herrington, handled the sale."

In 2003, Burt and Raleigh "retired" to their small ranch in Sonoma County, where they concentrated on establishing an olive orchard and producing the ranch's own Quattro brand of olive oil. He and Raleigh also returned to their passion for horses. Burt now rides regularly with three groups: Sonoma County Trail Blazers, the Reno Sierra Riders (rides are in the Sierras and primarily off trail/cross country) and the Wednesday Riders, a local group of about 30 that has been riding together since 1952.



Burt takes "Kate," his wife's paint mare, on a recent Sonoma County Trail Blazers ride.

After 23 months, Burt found that retirement was not “adequately challenging,” and joined the Perry Johnson firm in 2005. “Literally the day we worked out our arrangement, I received a call to represent Baroness Rothschild in regard to the Opus One Winery, following the acquisition by Constellation Brands of the Robert Mondavi Company,” Burt said. When Burt initiated the firm’s conflict check concerning his representation of the Baroness, partner Les Perry remarked: “Nobody better have a conflict.” Raleigh also joined PJAMM and along with son Jeremy Olsan, created a “family trio” at the firm.

Burt continues to provide advice on some international transactions and remains active in international legal transactions. He served as Editor in Chief of the International Law Journal, published by the State Bar. Last year he “retired” as the editor.

“I am having the best time and most enjoyable practice experience in my career,” Burt said.” A good part of

that is the firm. This is a wonderful group of people and it is a real treat to be here. In addition, Raleigh and I have been working on some very challenging assignments and we did not anticipate that we would have those types of challenges in Sonoma County. The work is every bit as challenging as some of the mega deals we have worked on and the level of work required is the same; the only differences are the dollar amounts of the deals and as a general rule, the people we have dealt with are much nicer.” ☺

by Joni Boucher

Joni Boucher is a contract paralegal and an associate member of the SCBA, serving as the Redwood Empire Association of Paralegals representative as a member of the SCBA Board of Directors. She is currently working with SRJC to develop a Paralegal Studies Associate Degree major. She can be reached at jboucher@santarosa.edu.

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