

Latham Beefs Up Real Estate, Hospitality Practice With Dentons Hire

By Patrick Smith
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Latham & Watkins is moving to boost its real estate offerings with the addition of former Dentons' partner Meghan Cocci, who is joining as a partner and global co-chairwoman of the firm's hospitality, gaming and leisure group, the firm said Thursday.

Cocci, named one of The National Law Journal's Outstanding Women Lawyers in 2015, helped lead Dentons' global hotels and leisure practice, from Phoenix, Arizona. At Latham, she'll be based in New York to start and will grow a practice in Los Angeles, the firm said.

"For me, this was a long, hard decision," Cocci said. "I'm at the point in my career where I have a lot of great clients in the hotel and real estate industry and I wanted a platform that was good for both me and them."

Cocci said she will be spending the early part of 2020 in the firm's New York office and transitioning to Latham's L.A. office later in the year in order to shore up her California-based clients.

She said that she is hopeful that clients from Dentons will accompany her in the move, but didn't go into further detail. She also said that, as of now, she did not anticipate anyone from her team at Dentons joining Latham with her.

"Meghan is a nationally recognized hospitality and real estate practitioner of the highest caliber,



Meghan Cocci of Latham & Watkins

(courtesy photo)

and we are thrilled to welcome her to the firm," Marc Jaffe, global chairman of Latham's corporate department, said in a statement. "Meghan's arrival reflects our continued focus on expanding our premier real estate practice nationally and globally, and our steadfast commitment to continue evolving with our clients' needs."

Cocci's practice has focused almost exclusively on the hotel and leisure sector for 20 years, according to Latham. In addition to her title as co-chairwoman of Latham's hospitality group, Cocci will also be a partner in the firm's real estate and corporate practices, the firm said.

"Meghan's experience leading extremely sophisticated and complex real estate transactions is

perfectly aligned with the type of work for which clients turn to Latham,” Robert Buday, global co-chairman of Latham’s real estate practice, said in a statement. “She is a tremendous addition to our premier global real estate practice, and her targeted expansion into California also complements our leading hospitality and REITs industry groups in that market.”

She advises real estate investors and owners on acquisitions, management and development of properties such as spas, hotels, golf courses and mixed-use properties around the globe, the firm said.

Among other projects, Cocci was part of the Dentons team that was involved in the Chinese company Abang Insurance Group’s 2015 acquisition of the famed Waldorf Astoria in New York. Abang purchased the iconic building for a record \$1.95 billion, and Dentons was one of five Big Law firms that facilitated the deal, along with Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom, Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson and Greenberg Traurig.

Cocci said that topics her clients have been dealing with lately include the presence of “disrupters”

in the industry, such as Airbnb, and other questions about the future direction of the hospitality sector.

“From a transactional perspective, clients are wondering if we are sitting at the top of the market,” she said. “But last year was busy for me and we are seeing a lot of hotel development, which indicates a shift in the market as it takes a couple of years to get a hotel off the ground.”

Before her time at Dentons, which she joined in 2006, Cocci had two separate stints at Squire, Sanders & Dempsey (now Squire Patton Boggs), served as legal counsel at Cole Capital and was an associate at Mendelsohn, Oseran & Eisner.

“Meghan has been a valued part of our best-in-class global hospitality practice. We wish her all the best in this new chapter of her career,” said a Dentons representative.

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