

The Counsel's Counsel

An Interview with
Steven G. Kobre, Co-Founder, Kobre & Kim LLP

EDITORS' NOTE *Steven Kobre practices in the area of complex civil litigation and arbitration, where he focuses on high-stakes financial disputes and international judgment enforcement/asset recovery. In addition, he is routinely called upon to represent clients in the United States, Asia, South America, and Europe in responding to government investigations. Prior to establishing Kobre & Kim, he served as an Assistant U.S. Attorney in the Criminal Division of the U.S.*



Steven G. Kobre

Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York. Earlier, he worked as an Assistant District Attorney in the New York County District Attorney's Office. After law school, Kobre clerked for the Honorable Lowell A. Reed, Jr. of the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania.

FIRM BRIEF *Recognized for excellence by virtually every major industry standard rankings publication, including Chambers & Partners, Benchmark Litigation, The Legal 500, and Vault in its "Top 10 Litigation Boutiques" list, Kobre & Kim LLP (kobrekim.com) is the premier choice for clients seeking a conflict-free, litigation-only firm to handle a cross-border international dispute. Operating out of seven offices worldwide, the firm offers a team of U.S. litigators, Hong Kong and English solicitors and barristers (encompassing three Queen's Counsel), and offshore attorneys (Cayman and British Virgin Islands), who provide the integrated legal strategy required for complex cross-border matters.*

What was your vision as you started this firm?

Before we started the firm, my partner Michael Kim and I were Assistant United States Attorneys in the unit of the Southern District of New York that handles cases involving securities and commodities frauds. From inception, we understood that we were entering a very competitive legal market in New York, and that we would need to identify differentiating factors to separate our firm from the others. We always thought to create something different, in this case the first litigation boutique focused on international cases. At the time, there were a lot of boutiques but none that focused on cross-border cases and none that was a true

litigation boutique – meaning having no transactional practice, i.e., just pure litigation.

What was the practice like at the outset of the firm?

In the beginning, drawing on our prior experience, we focused primarily on white collar investigations, lawsuits involving financial institutions, and asset forfeiture and recovery matters. One of the first cases for which we were hired involved a purchase of a large hotel whose seller had been subject to asset forfeiture allegations.

As there were not many lawyers who had experience in asset tracing and forfeiture, we were asked to assist. We were solicited and hired by an Am Law 50 firm to advise its Fortune 500 client regarding this matter on this discrete legal issue. The Am Law firm sought our assistance with its sensitive client relationship in a role that was complementary to the firm's representation. This model, working with large law firms to solve complex litigation matters on behalf of clients, served as a harbinger for matters to come. Fast-forward 11 years and approximately 80 to 90 percent of our business today comes by way of referrals from other law firms.

Since we first opened the firm, Kobre & Kim has evolved from a two-person boutique to an international litigation boutique with over 180 employees worldwide. We opened two additional stateside offices and four international offices addressing the demand for a pure litigation firm that can handle contentious multi-jurisdictional matters in Asia, the Caribbean, Europe, and the United States. In addition, we have added new practice areas to address the changing global market demands for legal services.

Why do law firms and clients turn to Kobre & Kim?

As I mentioned, because we do not have a transactional practice – we only handle litigation and arbitration – we do not stand as a threat to encroach upon law firms' client relationships. We are generally brought on to solve the discrete litigation problems of firms' clients. Therefore, we are a reliable, trusted source, which provides a high level of service to law firms and clients alike.

Our financial services practice involves litigation against large financial institutions often on behalf of private equity firms, hedge funds, or other banks. This is an area frequented by

conflicts for larger firms. We also represent officers and directors of Fortune 500 companies in criminal/regulatory matters and conduct internal investigations in cases where law firms need assistance.

Another one of our practice areas is international asset tracing and judgment enforcement. This involves taking large judgments on behalf of judgment creditors and identifying and locating assets throughout the world, and executing on them. For example, we have been engaged in the judgment enforcement space both on behalf of and against foreign governments, and private citizens and companies. We often staff these matters in our offices in various locations with personnel who have the knowledge and experience to solve the complex problems that arise in international judgment enforcement. Simply, there are not many firms that have lawyers with the same level of expertise in international judgment enforcement.

Finally, our offshore offices in the Cayman Islands and the British Virgin Islands, and our offices in Hong Kong and London, also contribute to our cross-border profile in both judgment enforcement and asset tracing, as well as conflict-free litigation.

What type of talent have you been able to attract?

To have a firm that is going to grow and be successful, there is a basic assumption that you have to be able to provide a high level of client service and work product – but that's just the beginning. We recruit top-tier lawyers who are looking to work on unique cases. Since we don't have repeat clients, we can choose the work we want and in turn ensure that we are doing the most interesting work that will challenge our lawyers.

In addition, because of our international footprint, we look for attorneys who can bring local market expertise. For example, we have a top Mandarin-speaking investigations team in Hong Kong; we were the first firm in the United Kingdom to have a unified practice with three Queen's Counsel and top barristers and solicitors, and our U.S. offices are made up of partners who were formerly U.S. federal prosecutors or top Am Law firms.

I truly believe that the reason we have been successful is that we offer a unique set of solutions to clients performed at a very high level by exceptional people. ●