

Meet the Judges:



Jason Anderson - Shareholder, *Stradling*

Jason Anderson represents business owners and managers of closely held businesses in disputes over ownership, control, and direction, often arising from their success. He has successfully litigated these matters in California and Delaware courts, as well as in private arbitration. Known for his aggressive, strategic, and practical approach, Anderson frequently negotiates business separations, commonly referred to as “business divorces”, to minimize financial and reputational damage while preserving long-term growth. With over 30 years of experience, Anderson has also represented oil companies, auto manufacturers, tech firms, pharmaceutical and medical device companies, financial institutions, and celebrities. His litigation work covers securities, M&A, trade secrets, defamation, class actions, and real estate disputes.



John Bradley - Partner, *Troutman Pepper Locke LLP*

John Bradley’s experience and in-depth knowledge enable him to effectively represent public and private companies in a variety of corporate and securities matters. His practice includes representation in mergers and acquisitions on behalf of buyers and sellers; corporate governance and advising senior executives, directors, and public company boards and committees; periodic and other reporting under the Securities Exchange Act of 1934; debt and equity securities offerings venture capital financings; software licensing transactions; and drafting and negotiating a wide variety of business agreements.



Ashley A. Halberda - Orange County Office Managing Partner, *CDF Labor Law LLP*

Ashley A. Halberda is the Orange County Office Managing Partner of CDF Labor Law LLP, a California-based labor and employment defense law firm with offices throughout the state. Halberda advises and defends employers in a wide range of employment matters, including wrongful termination, discrimination, harassment, wage-and-hour, class action and Private Attorneys General Act (PAGA) claims. She is also a frequent speaker, author and trusted resource to California employers. Halberda can be reached at ahalberda@cdflaborlaw.com.



Steve Hanle - Partner, *Stradling*

Steve Hanle is a technology litigator who has dedicated his 30-year career to safeguarding the rights of patent holders and defending competitors accused of infringement. In high stakes situations, his strategic and practical approach aggressively protects the years of research and development his clients have poured into technologies behind medical devices, pharmaceuticals, telecommunications, optical advancements, automotive, and mechanical processes. He has an outstanding record of winning cases on summary judgment, thereby avoiding the expense of trial, but also succeeds before juries, judges, and on appeal when necessary. Hanle frequently leverages interim victories to achieve ideal settlements. In addition to patent cases, Hanle represents companies in federal court on trade secrets, unfair competition, trademarks, and complex business and licensing disputes. He also provides pre-litigation advice based on his extensive experience to help companies navigate intellectual property risks.



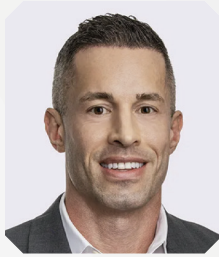
Mark Itri - Partner in Charge, *Baker & Hostetler LLP*

Mark Itri is the Partner-in-Charge of the firm’s Orange County office. He concentrates his practice on the preparation and prosecution of patent and trademark applications and litigation matters, focusing on high technology relating to electronics and computer software arts, semiconductors, analog circuitry, microprocessor design, Internet of Things, image processing, pattern and speech recognition, server and network systems, WiFi and Bluetooth, mechanical devices, medical devices, solid state memories, authentication, cyber security, instruments, AI and machine learning, and unmanned and autonomous vehicles. He also negotiates and drafts technology transfer agreements, joint development agreements and licenses and advises his clients on strategic IP planning, patent and trademark portfolio management, freedom to operate and other opinion work and due diligence in connection with technology and trademark acquisitions. A former electrical engineer, Itri worked in the research and development of microprocessor designs and flight control systems in the private aerospace industry, giving him an insider’s perspective of the patent and trademark process. He has been named among the Daily Journal’s Top 25 Portfolio Managers, one of the leading lawyers in the U.S. for utility and design patent prosecution by The Legal 500, and as one of “The World’s Leading Patent Practitioners” by Intellectual Asset Management (IAM) Patent 1000.



Michael I. Katz - Managing Partner, *Katz Ruby & Carle LLP*

Michael I. Katz is the Managing Partner of Katz Ruby Carle LLP, a Chambers®-ranked litigation firm based in Costa Mesa known for its sophisticated handling of high-stakes intellectual property and business disputes. Before founding Katz Ruby Carle, Katz was a partner at Morrison & Foerster LLP. Katz is recognized as one of the leading trade secret lawyers in California. He currently represents InnoPeak Technologies in a high-profile trade secret dispute with Apple related to Apple Watch health-sensing technology, MaxLinear on claims that Comcast misappropriated technology critical to the operation of Full Duplex (FDX) DOCSIS networks, and BioCorRx in asserting trade secret claims related to addiction treatment modalities. A formidable force in any legal forum, Katz combines legal excellence with strategic discretion, earning him the respect of clients, colleagues, and adversaries alike.



Christian J. Keeney - Principal, *Jackson Lewis P.C.*

Christian J. Keeney is a principal in the Orange County, California, office of Jackson Lewis P.C. Keeney is an accomplished litigator and trusted advisor to a national base of corporate clients. Whether it is a high-stakes lawsuit or a sensitive internal matter, clients appreciate Mr. Keeney’s strategic and collaborative approach to employment law matters. Keeney represents employers in the full spectrum of employment litigation, including wage and hour class actions and PAGA representative actions, as well as individual claims of harassment, discrimination, retaliation, and wrongful termination. Beyond the courtroom, Keeney serves as a day-to-day strategic partner helping clients navigate an often confusing mix of federal, state, and local employment laws. He is recognized by Chambers & Partners and has been quoted on employment law matters in publications, including the Wall Street Journal.



Nikole Kingston - Partner, *O’Melveny & Myers LLP*

Nikole Kingston is an experienced M&A lawyer who represents a broad range of clients, including start-up, emerging growth, and Fortune 500 companies, as well as private equity firms, family owned entities, and individual owners, shareholders, and principals. She counsels companies with operations and interests in a broad range of industries, including health care, technology, personal care products, general consumer products, manufacturing, food, and agriculture, and has represented her clients in a wide range of business transactions, including stock and asset acquisitions, mergers, going-private transactions, minority investments, leveraged buyouts, joint ventures, related financings, spin-offs, and tender offers. To her client’s interests, Kingston identifies issues for each transaction—helping her clients weigh the pros and cons—and actively works on fostering the partnerships required for a successful transaction. She also has a general corporate practice, advising management teams, boards, and other governing bodies on securities compliance, fiduciary duties, and other corporate responsibilities. Kingston serves as O’Melveny’s Firmwide Hiring Partner, responsible for managing recruiting efforts across O’Melveny’s 17 offices.



Gloria Lee - Partner, *Rutan & Tucker LLP*

Gloria Lee is the firm’s client relations partner and responsible for the strategic growth of business development opportunities for the Firm’s attorneys and the implementation of client relationship initiatives for the Firm. Prior to becoming the firm’s client relations partner, Lee focused on the financing and development of commercial, residential and resort properties. Her practice included representing lenders, developers, landlords and tenants in all aspects of real estate transactions, including real estate secured financings, acquisitions, dispositions, title review and due diligence analysis. She also has experience with the structuring, development and regulation of residential, commercial, condominium, timeshare, and fractional use planned developments and associations. Lee is active in the community and currently serves on three non-profit boards including the Board of Trustees of Olive Crest and the Council of Korean Americans. In addition, Lee is an independent Board Director for Hanmi Bank (NASDAQ:HAFC) serving on the Nominating and Corporate Governance, Risk Compliance and Compensation and Human Resources committees. She has been honored with several national and state awards for both her legal skills and her community advocacy.



Patricia Matias - Principal, *Jackson Lewis P.C.*

Patricia Matias is a principal in the Orange County, California, office of Jackson Lewis P.C. and is a co-leader of Jackson Lewis’ Hispanic resource group. Matias’ broad base of experience gained through practicing employment law for over 15 years makes her a powerful advocate for her clients. She successfully defends employers in high-stakes, single-plaintiff litigation, including discrimination, harassment, retaliation, and wrongful termination matters, as well as in complex Private Attorneys General Act and class action matters. In addition to litigation, Matias provides practical advice regarding personnel policies and decisions, performs workplace investigations, conducts audits, and provides management training. She regularly advises her clients on employment laws, such as those involving wage and hour compliance, leaves of absence, reasonable accommodations, and workplace investigations. Matias helps her clients navigate everchanging legal requirements in a manner that is business-oriented and focused on avoiding litigation and reducing risk while keeping her client’s goals in mind.



Susan Natland - Partner, Co-Leader of BakerHostetler’s Global Trademark and Brand Protection Team, *Baker & Hostetler LLP*

Susan Natland, a Chambers-ranked attorney and nationally recognized trademark litigator and counselor, serves as co-lead of the Global Trademark and Brand Protection team. Natland is uniquely ranked by the World Trademark Review in both Enforcement/Litigation and Prosecution/Strategy, reflecting her exceptional ability to guide clients through every stage of trademark, brand protection, enforcement and litigation. Natland advises some of the world’s most well-known brands across litigation, enforcement, trademark procurement, portfolio management and global brand strategy. Known for her strategic, creative, responsive and results-driven approach, Natland invests deeply in understanding each client’s business and goals to deliver practical, efficient solutions that enhance and protect brand value. Her diverse client base spans multiple industries and include Mattel, lululemon, Fox Media, Public Storage, Rivian, Olaplex, Thorne Research, Playtika, MySpace, Acorns Grow, Chicken of the Sea, Arbonne, Fear of God and Simkhai. Natland’s practice covers domestic and foreign trademark selection and clearance, trademark counseling, ex parte and inter partes proceedings before the Trademark Trial and Appeal Board (TTAB), licensing, trademark audits, domain name disputes, trademark strategy and procurement, counterfeit enforcement, customs matters, advertising law, copyrights, entertainment law, rights of publicity and intellectual property issues involving artificial intelligence.



Wendy Peterson - General Counsel, *Knobbe Martens*

Wendy Peterson is general counsel to the Firm and handles all of its internal legal matters. Prior to joining Knobbe Martens in 2002, Peterson was general counsel of Wynn Oil Company, a manufacturer of automotive additives and provider of service contracts, and assistant general counsel of Parker-Hannifin Corporation’s Seal Group, a manufacturer of rubber and engineered plastic products. From 1993 to 2000, Peterson was assistant general counsel of Wynn’s International, Inc., a publicly-held corporation traded on the NYSE. From 1995 to 2000, Peterson also served as corporate secretary to Wynn’s International. From 1985 to 1993, Peterson was a corporate and securities law attorney with O’Melveny & Myers. At O’Melveny, Peterson’s practice focused on mergers and acquisitions, equity and debt financings, SEC compliance and general corporate law advice. Peterson is active in the community, having served on the boards of directors of SoCal Legal Aid and the American Heart Association Orange County. She currently serves on the board of directors of Human Options, American Cancer Society Orange County, and the Pacific Asian Center for Entrepreneurship at the University of Hawaii.



Richard Reisman - Publisher, *Orange County Business Journal*

Richard Reisman is publisher of the Orange County Business Journal. Reisman joined the Business Journal in 1990. Since then, the publication’s acceptance by the business community has been dramatic. Paid circulation and advertising volume has grown significantly, making it possibly the top Business Journal in the country. Prior to the business journal, Reisman was director of marketing for the Orange County edition of The Los Angeles Times. Earlier in his career, Reisman practiced law in San Francisco and Washington, D.C. While in private practice in Washington, Reisman served as special counsel to the House Ethics Committee. Reisman holds an MBA from UCLA, where he was awarded the R.C. Baker Foundation Fellowship, and a law degree from George Washington University, where he graduated with honors. Reisman is listed in “Who’s Who in America” and has served on numerous boards.



Joel Staples - Advisor, *Cooper McManus*

Joel Staples earned a baseball scholarship to St. Mary’s College of California and was drafted by the Florida Marlins in 2008, playing two seasons. After baseball, he practiced law before pivoting to wealth management in 2016. He began at Northwestern Mutual, later joining DJM Financial, where he helped manage over \$1 billion in client assets. In 2022, he brought his practice to Cooper McManus, where he now helps to lead the team and has been instrumental in growing the firm’s assets to more than \$1 billion. Staples and his team are go-to advisors for high-net-worth individuals, families, settlement specialists, and plaintiffs’ attorneys seeking bespoke financial strategies for themselves or their clients. Whether managing the complexities of a significant liquidity event, structuring estate plans, or optimizing one’s portfolio for tax efficiency, they excel at turning complexity into opportunity. Staples resides in Tustin, California with his wife, Miranda, and their two kids, Cooper and Cortland. He is an active member of Compass Bible Church in Aliso Viejo. In his spare time, he enjoys spending time with his family, escaping to the outdoors in Lake Arrowhead, and playing basketball.



Sheila Swaroop - Partner, *Knobbe Martens*

Sheila Swaroop is a Partner and Chair of Litigation at Knobbe, Martens, Olson & Bear, LLP, where she has practiced for over 25 years. A registered patent attorney, Swaroop has litigated over 100 intellectual property cases across federal district courts, the International Trade Commission (ITC), and the Patent Trial and Appeal Board (PTAB). She co-chairs the firm’s ITC Litigation practice and brings deep industry experience in life sciences, pharmaceuticals, medical and dental devices, and consumer goods—representing clients from high-growth innovators to global market leaders. Swaroop is a founding member and past President of the Howard T. Markey Intellectual Property Inn of Court. She has served as a member of the Ninth Circuit Judicial Conference, a board member of the Orange County chapter of the Association of Business Trial Lawyers, President of the South Asian Bar Association of Southern California, board member of Working Wardrobes, and a trustee of Harbor Day School.



Vince Verde - Equity Shareholder, *Ogletree Deakins*

Vince Verde is the head of the firm’s Trial Practice Group. He is a litigator and former prosecutor with extensive jury and non-jury trial experience. He has tried and won jury trials in multiple jurisdictions and represents employers in state and federal courts in single and multi-plaintiff actions. Verde founded Ogletree’s Orange County office and was instrumental in the creation of Ogletree Trial University. His diverse practice includes the representation of regional and national clients in all phases of litigation involving employment, labor matters, commercial disputes, insurance and coverage matters, including D&O, E&O, and health and disability. He has handled claims involving unfair competition, trade secret and non-compete matters, workplace violence, intellectual property rights, class action lawsuits, and claims against insurance agents and brokers. Verde has extensive experience in all areas of employment law, including wrongful termination, retaliation and 1102.5 claims, discrimination, harassment, wage and hour issues, family and medical leave, disability discrimination and accommodation, and employee privacy. He draws on his skills as a trial attorney in order to successfully resolve matters early in litigation or obtain dismissals through summary judgment.



Peter Villar - Office Managing Partner, *Troutman Pepper Locke LLP*

Peter Villar is a seasoned trial attorney who has successfully tried and defended dozens of high-stakes commercial disputes across the U.S. including several of the largest cases in the Central District of California. Villar represents companies across a spectrum of industries including private equity, technology, aerospace, apparel, manufacturing, energy, finance, life sciences, and real estate, and has litigated claims of securities fraud, breach of fiduciary duty, unfair competition, among others. Villar also has served on the board of directors of the Association of Business Trial Lawyers, Federal Bar Association, and Constitutional Rights Foundation. Additionally, Villar was recognized as a Best Lawyer in America for Securities (2026), and Commercial Litigation (2026).