



Quiet giant recruits strategically to expand



NIKKI SHORT

John Emmerig says he is very happy to be joining Jones Day because of its excellent staff and sophisticated expansion plans

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YEARS before the overseas firms came knocking on the shingles of Australia's law firms in earnest, one of the world's largest operators, Jones Day, quietly went about its business in Australia with a small Sydney office.

But in recent times the firm has made a strategic decision to significantly expand its Australian offering and has been poaching some of the nation's best lawyers. It has also taken on an extra floor at Sydney's Aurora Place.

John Emmerig, the former head of the class action practice at Ashurst and its senior government litigation partner, is the latest recruit to join Jones Day. Emmerig, who has acted in dozens of class actions for a range of cli-

ents including banks, governments and liquidators, resigned in June last year, but it is only now he can speak out, after being held by Ashurst to a six-month notice period and sent on gardening leave. He was gagged from talking to clients, colleagues or the media during that time, and started with Jones Day last month.

"At a personal level, I have to confess that I really enjoyed the time off," says Emmerig, who spent the time completing a wine-making and viticulture course, making his first vintage of shiraz cabernet, and indulging in his passion for painting. "I feel rested, re-energised and fantastic for it."

At 8.30am on his first day at Jones Day, Emmerig received a call from a client he had worked for at Ashurst wanting to be "Client 001". By lunchtime,

Emmerig also had his first set of instructions out of Singapore and other clients have since moved with him.

Emmerig first came across Jones Day in the late 1990s but it was not until more recently that he began to seriously think about moving firms.

"It became apparent some time ago that the make-up of the top-tier players in the Australian legal market was going to change. I felt that, going forward, practising from a leading global platform was never going to be optional; it was going to be a necessity.

"So the key question became 'which global firm would provide the best platform'. For me, Jones Day and only Jones Day ticked every box. It was a global legal powerhouse with 800-plus partners, 2500-plus lawyers, operat-

ing across 37 offices, with an exceptional calibre of personnel."

Part of the attraction of joining Jones Day was that "there were no merger issues to deal with and all that entails", Emmerig says.

"The firm was committed to the Australian and regional market and the global managing partner's plans for Jones Day's growth in Australia seemed to me to be sophisticated, well-resourced and in every respect built around a focus on quality. It also provided something that many of the other global or regional firms did not: that is, the chance to do the sort of litigation I enjoyed doing in Australia — class actions and major disputes — but with the added benefit of being able to take part in more first-order regional and global litigation."

On the outlook for legal ser-

vices, Emmerig says he believes "the major league" for legal practice in Australia has been permanently redefined. "The dominant component of the new major league comprises global brands and I don't see that changing.

"I have no doubt there will also be major-league quality work available for an unaligned major local firm or a limited number of quality boutiques, but the key houses ... in the high-end sector will be predominantly global in nature — and the rise of the global brands in this market also redefines the professional opportunities to work on cross-border and international transactions. I suspect we will end up looking a lot like Paris.

"That means a lot of global firms with offices of varying sizes and a number of established domestic boutiques."