

Kirkland partner: ‘the skills we develop from prior cases are portable to new clients’

Grace Brier recently became a partner in the firm’s Washington DC office, focusing on restructuring, complex legal disputes and arbitrations

By Alice Tchernookova



Kirkland & Ellis lawyer Grace Brier was recently made a partner in the firm’s litigation practice in Washington, DC.

Having joined as a summer associate in 2016 between her second and third year at the George Washington University Law School, Brier returned to Kirkland as a first-year associate in 2017. Having subsequently left the firm to clerk for the judge at the US District Court for the Northern District of Illinois, she returned to Kirkland in autumn 2020 and has remained there since.

Over the course of her career, Brier has accumulated experience in advising clients on matters involving contract disputes, class actions, fraud claims, restructuring matters and government-facing litigation and investigations. She also maintains an active pro-bono practice, for which she has received an award from Kirkland.

Brier's appointment was part of a wave of promotions announced by Kirkland last month, through which 205 attorneys were made partner in offices including Paris, Washington DC, New York, Shanghai and others, across practices such as ESG, M&A, private equity and capital markets.

What attracted you to Kirkland specifically, and how did the opportunity for your current role come about?

During law school, one of my close friends encouraged me to participate in a mock trial competition for the first time. I loved it, along with other litigation-centric classes in law school, so I was very excited when I learned about Kirkland's strong litigation practice. During the interview process, I was impressed by Kirkland's focus on training and creating real opportunities for young litigators. In my experience, those two principles go hand-in-hand – Kirkland devotes significant time and resources to its training programmes, and in turn, younger lawyers are prepared and ready for new challenges.

I also recall speaking with a number of Kirkland lawyers about the meaningful pro bono work they had done at Kirkland, and that was a huge draw for me. I strive to maintain an active pro bono practice, and I really appreciate the firm's dedication to its pro-bono clients and the resources the firm devotes to these cases.

Can you describe the culture at Kirkland? What differentiates it from other firms?

Kirkland is fast-paced, and it has a rich history of fantastic lawyers who have achieved great results for their clients. The attorneys I work with pour their energy and creativity into their cases, and they pass on many of the lessons and practices they've learned from their own mentors. When we are up against talented peer-firms, I am consistently impressed by the tireless efforts of our teams, particularly when it comes to dedication to details and to the craft.

Kirkland also puts together really strong

teams that work well together -- often across practice groups -- on complex cases. It is really rewarding to work on a team that encourages everyone to think creatively and leverage their own unique strengths towards a common goal.

How does your appointment contribute to the firm's wider strategy and expansion?

My promotion to partner allows me to join a talented and hard-working group of litigation partners in the D.C. office and across the firm. As a member of the Kirkland partnership, I hope to contribute to the firm's success in many ways, including through a continued commitment to the firm's tradition of cultivating and training talented young lawyers.

What trends do you currently observe in your practice area, and how are you advising your clients accordingly?

As general litigators, we routinely encounter unique challenges in each case, so trends do not necessarily apply across the board. That said, as I have gained experience on trial teams that dealt with wide-ranging issues, it has become apparent that excellent trial lawyers are consistently great listeners and great strategic thinkers. As I continue to develop as a litigator, I intend to prioritise listening carefully to our clients to identify their goals early in the representation so we can recommend and adopt a litigation strategy that reflects those goals.

What experience and skills are you bringing to the firm?

Everything I've accomplished here has been the result of a true team effort. As a litigation team member, I do my best to bring a strong work ethic and a willingness to jump in wherever needed, and I strive to keep an eye out for longer-term strategic issues or opportunities when making day-to-day decisions.

Many of my skills are the result of my experience and training at the firm, and I am deeply grateful to the lawyers who dedicated

time and energy to my professional development so I could learn from them and apply those lessons to future cases. Now, it is fun to get the chance to work with younger lawyers and to teach them the same lessons I learned from the lawyers I look up to.

What attracted you to the legal profession in the first place?

I've always been interested in being a lawyer. My father is a lawyer, and I really look up to him and always admired the work that he did. That said, I wanted to be sure it was the right career path for me personally, so I worked in a different industry for a few years after college. That experience confirmed that law school was the right path for me. At the time, I hoped becoming a lawyer would allow me to help people navigate complicated legal issues and the legal system, and that has definitely been true in my practice.

I have especially enjoyed working on cases that go to trial -- I love the excitement and fast-paced nature of working on a trial team, and I learn so much from every trial experience.

What do you see as the biggest challenges in doing your job?

As a new partner at Kirkland, I am shifting into a leadership role on my cases. While that certainly presents new challenges -- particularly on cases that I joined as a much younger lawyer, where I have played many roles -- it is exciting to develop and execute our strategy as a more senior member of the team.

Finally, what big trends do you foresee for 2024 in your practice area?

Again, it is tough to predict trends, but that is somewhat by design -- we have a general litigation practice. The skills we develop from prior cases are portable to new matters and new clients, so we are ready to apply those skills to new trends that may be on the horizon.