

Channel Islands: premier independents

Alongside the legal giants of the offshore world, Jersey and Guernsey are home to a number of high quality smaller independent firms

Jersey

BAKER & PARTNERS

Among the big offshore firms whose offices line St Helier's Esplanade and the surrounding streets are several highly-capable boutiques – mostly, but not exclusively, specialising in litigation. Prominent among them is Baker & Partners. Senior partner Stephen Baker established his eponymous firm after moving from London.

“When I started here 20 years ago, I didn't perhaps appreciate the particular challenges in setting up in an offshore centre,” he says. His efforts have since paid dividends: Baker himself now has a Band 1 Chambers and Partners ranking for Offshore: Dispute Resolution while his firm enjoys a Tier 1 ranking for Jersey Dispute Resolution in the Legal 500, alongside Carey Olsen, Collas Crill, Mourant and Ogier.

Much of the firm's work is international. “We were instructed to coordinate the offshore asset recovery efforts in 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB), a sovereign wealth fund,” he says. “For the last two years, we've been heading up the recovery team everywhere outside Malaysia with litigation in more than a dozen jurisdictions. Proceedings are ongoing in many jurisdictions, including Switzerland, the United States, BVI and Cayman. We run it with a pretty streamlined team. We're doing the Cayman

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Stephen Baker, senior partner, Baker & Partners





and BVI aspects with our local offices.”

Caribbean growth

The firm is also instructed in some cutting-edge regulatory matters, which will probably become public later this year, and in multinational building projects relating to Anti-Money Laundering / Countering the Financing of Terrorism (AML/ CFT).

The recent addition of Cayman (2020), London (2020) and BVI (2023) offices has helped to grow the firm’s international dispute resolution profile. “Cayman has gone to plan and better, and in BVI, we’re already very busy,” says Baker. “Jersey’s a different market, but the core message is the same: we’re genuinely conflict free and independent. We find sophisticated purchasers of legal services understand that when they need to forcefully pursue a point, they need someone who will really point a finger – be that at an individual or an institution.”

Jersey remains the engine of the firm with 40+ staff, he notes. “The bulk of work probably still originates outside Jersey, but we’re also getting more local trustees, financial institutions and high-net-worth individuals coming to us – a lot of trusts work, commercial disputes.”

As competitors, he points to Carey, Mourant, Appleby, Bedell Cristin, Ogier and Collas Crill, although he believes that for strength and depth in litigation, “it appears to me that we are leaders.” Nevertheless, he reserves particular praise for Jared Dann at Appleby, Ed Drummond at Bedell and Damian James at Collas Crill, as well as lawyers from his own team.

“Lightning-strike work”

“Simon Thomas and James Sheedy are doing an increasing amount of trust work, Lynne Gregory is much sought-after, particularly in corporate disputes, and William Redgrave is acting in a trial representing a senior

▲ Jersey remains the engine of Baker & Partners, with 40+ staff

lawyer: the former partners of Collas Crill are in dispute about the terms of sale of their trust company,” he says. “William is instructed in most of the major commercial litigation (in Jersey). If he isn’t, I ask myself: why not?”

Looking ahead, Baker predicts more Middle Eastern disputes and increased Chinese business in Jersey. “That’s obviously dependent on geopolitics, but I can see attractions for the mainland Chinese structuring things through Jersey, not least that the time zone is so much better than the Caribbean,” he says. “Our work is lightning-strike: it comes from all over and in strange ways. It’s unpredictable and that’ll stay.” Building the firm remains a priority. “It would make sense for us to have someone in Hong Kong and building our London office is quite important,” notes Baker. “I’d like to get another senior person involved in running the London show, getting out and shaking hands.”