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The California Legal Market

Is Thompson Hine about to get its star close-up?

After expanding into Los Angeles with the acquisition of a local boutique, Ohio's Thompson Hine LLP is growing fast—adding lateral talent, preparing for a move to Century City, and eyeing entertainment law as its next frontier. Managing Partner Tony White reflects on how L.A.'s legal market defied his expectations and fits the firm's national strategy.

By David Houston
Daily Journal Editor-in-Chief

Tony White, the managing partner at Thompson Hine LLP, thought he understood large legal markets before the firm opened in Santa Monica a year ago. After all, the Ohio-origin firm has seen great successes in New York since it opened there in 2002.

"I was expecting it to be a type of New York market with a lot of people moving around and the types of practices you would see: People with big books on the street looking for the right firm. What I found was a bit of a Midwest lateral legal market - lots of lawyers with \$1.5, \$2 million [books]," White said in a recent interview.

That state of play is perfectly fine for White, who is based in Ohio. "That's our sweet spot," he said.

Los Angeles, with its big-city vibe and mid-market realities, has allowed Thompson Hine to flourish since it opened in July 2024, with the acquisition of 11-attorney Conkle, Kremer & Engel PLC. Since then, the firm has brought in six lateral attorneys - including construction transactions partner R. Michael Viayra Jr. in March and real estate transactions partner William Ticknor last month - and has plans to bring on at least one more in the coming weeks.

"What this says is that our unique national firm brand" - operating at the higher end of the legal market but charging roughly two-thirds of coastal rates - "has been very well received in Los Angeles," White said.

Founded in 1911 in Cleveland, Thompson Hine initially provided general legal services to prominent clients such as Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co. Over time, Thompson Hine expanded its practice areas, and its Construction practice has become well-known throughout the nation. The firm represents sport teams that build new stadiums and has been involved in most of the new stadiums built throughout the country.



TONY WHITE

The firm was involved in the Los Angeles Stadium at Hollywood Park for J.P. Morgan Securities (insurance and risk management), serving as construction counsel for the Golden State Warriors' Chase Center, and providing legal, risk, and insurance consulting for the Sacramento Republic FC's new stadium. Additionally, they supported the Levi's Stadium project for the San Francisco 49ers and acted as project counsel for the Warriors' Oracle Arena renovation.

"Our construction practice group, in my humble opinion, is one of the best in the country," White said.

These days, the firm has 400 attorneys in 10 offices, including Atlanta, Chicago, Minneapolis and Washington, D.C., and offers a full suite of legal services including corporate transactions, business litigation, construction, transportation, government contracts, intellectual property, and privacy & cybersecurity.

The New York office, launched in 2002 through the acquisition of a corporate boutique, tested the firm's brand beyond the Midwest and has since become a key hub for its capital markets practice—most notably advising SharpLink on its \$450 million ETH treasury-focused capital raise announced June 2. New York partners handle corporate and M&A matters for private equity funds, major domestic and international companies, and family offices, including over \$1.1 billion in transactions for Fairfield-Maxwell. The firm also represents investor Carl C. Icahn and his affiliates in mergers, strategic deals, shareholder advocacy, and SEC compliance.

To mark its first year in Los Angeles, Thompson Hine will move into a 12,000-plus square-foot office to Century City on June 23. White said he would like to see more growth and new practices in Los Angeles but wants it to happen organically.

"We want to hear what the market is telling us," he said. "We want to make sure we are adapting to the market."

Having said that, White said he would like to see the Los Angeles office add corporate and general mergers and acquisitions capabilities. And then he said what so many others have said after they saw the twinkling lights of Tinseltown:

"We would love to have an entertainment practice to further solidify that we are in Los Angeles, that we are really in this market."

Thompson Hine's new office is at 2049 Century Park East.