

# LOOKING FOR A NEW PLACE TO PRACTICE?

**P**robably more than at any other time in recent memory, lawyers are giving serious thought to picking up and taking their practices elsewhere. An increase in job dissatisfaction, the impact of the continuing recession, the migration of long-established clients, and a concern over the quality of life all contribute to this trend.

But, if practicing somewhere else really were the right move to make, where would you go? Who's to say what would be a better city to practice in?

As it happens, I have given this matter some thought. I often weather cold winter nights at home buried in my easy chair, sipping steaming hot cocoa, and reading through piles of my old time records. During a recent late-night review, I thought about all the cities my litigation practice had taken me to over the past few years.

I nostalgically recalled a lengthy trial in Seattle, a contentious deposition in Chicago, an unscheduled landing in Denver. I began to think about where I would consider practicing if I were ever to leave New York City for longer than a two-suitcase stay. There were dozens of choices, and an equal number of criteria for differentiating among them.

Finally, unscientifically, superficially, and with undue regard for dining opportunities, I came up with the following "10 Best" list.

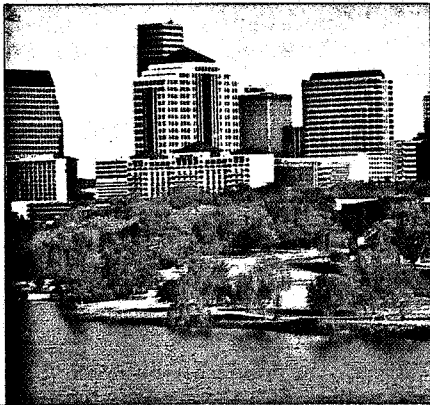
These are, of course, cities that appealed to me, and I would not presume that my views about practicing in a particular city would be shared by other lawyers. With that disclaimer, I hereby apologize in advance to—and realize I will never again get a decent hotel room in—all the other cities that I foolishly have omitted from the roster.

---

*Lawrence Savell is a lawyer and free-lance writer in New York City.*

## The 10 Best Cities for Lawyers

BY LAWRENCE SAVELL



AUSTIN

Despite the fact that it was originally named Waterloo, Austin always has attracted lawyers. Indeed, back in 1840, when the city's total population was only 856, the town already claimed four attorneys (along with 20 gamblers).

Located in the hill country of central Texas, along the Colorado River, Austin is in an area of natural beauty. As the state capital, Austin's single largest employer is the government, providing opportunities to attorneys interested in legislative and regulatory work.

Law practice in Austin is increasingly focused on the high-technology industry, as more and more such companies are either headquartered or strongly represented in this alternative Silicon Valley. These include IBM, Motorola, Advanced Micro Devices, Texas Instruments, 3M, Dell Computer, CompuAdd, and the high-tech consortia Microelectronics and Computer Technology Corp. and Sematech. Of Austin's 700 local manufacturers, 200 are high-tech; 150 service-based high-tech firms are also located there.

The costs of doing business in Austin are attractive to both lawyers and clients. There is no corporate or personal income tax, state or local (although Texas does impose a franchise tax based on net worth and profits).

Space is inexpensive: The office lease rate is approximately \$16 a square foot. Qualified support staff are also easy to find: Of the 50 largest cities, Austin is arguably the most highly educated community, as 31 percent of adults have completed 16 or more years of schooling.

Perhaps of greatest interest to lawyers, Austin boasts more softball players per capita than any other city in the United States; over 20 public and private playing fields allow approximately 2,500 teams to participate in league play almost 300 days a year.

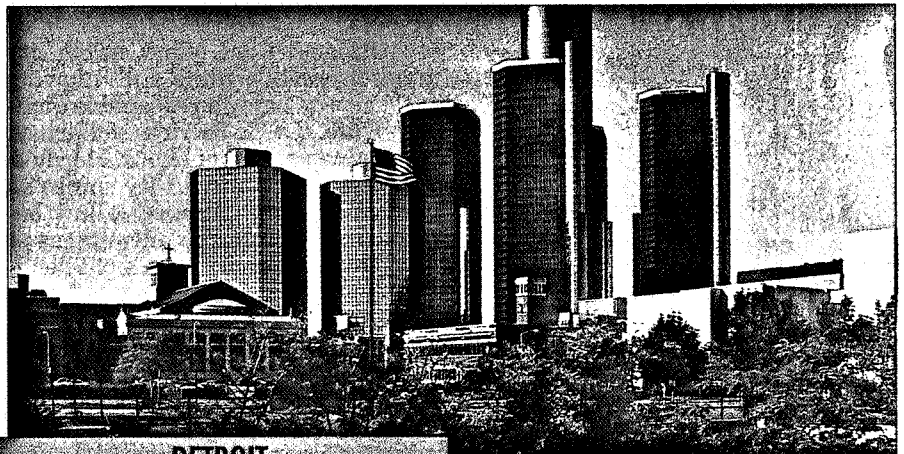
## CHICAGO

It goes without saying that any town known as the "Windy City" must have attracted a lot of lawyers. And Chicago has done just that, due in no small part to its roster of more than 35 Fortune 500 industrial and service firms, including Amoco, Sara Lee, Stone Container, Quaker Oats, Navistar International, Borg-Warner and Fruit of the Loom.

Chicago also appeals to lawyers interested in working with clients in the financial arena. Chicago is home to three of the nation's four largest futures exchanges and the world's largest listed stock options exchange, which possibly explains why two of its professional sports teams are the Bulls and the Bears.

With O'Hare, the nation's busiest airport, Chicago provides virtually unlimited travel options to other cities. (I personally have spent so much time waiting to change planes there that I have qualified for resident status.)

Although Chicagoans work hard, they also know how to relax. It is not uncommon for a Cubs game played on a workday afternoon to be sold out to tens of thousands of locals in white shirtsleeves returning to their favorite ivy walls.



DETROIT

To an extent, the fortunes of a city's bar rise and fall with the fortunes of the business community that it services. In no city is this truer than Detroit, which has shared the troubles of the automobile industry and its related enterprises.

Not surprisingly, as Douglas S. Ellmann, who has spent his 10 years of practice there and since 1988 has served as a U.S. Bankruptcy Panel trustee, notes, "Here in Detroit, bankruptcy is one of the few growth industries."

Despite the adversity, Ellmann concludes, "Detroit is still a nice

## The Motor City has a close-knit (perhaps survivalist) legal community.

town to practice in." In his opinion, this is due in no small part to the close-knit (and, perhaps, survivalist) nature of the local legal community.

"Detroit is rumored to be the largest small town in America," he notes. "If you practice in a certain area of law you are likely to meet the same attorneys over and over again. My grandfather started practicing in the Penobscot Building in the early '30s; my Dad practices here, and now so do I."

In such an environment, Ellmann notes, "Relationships with opposing counsel are generally cordial. In other words, a Kevlar sportcoat is an unnecessary addition to one's professional wardrobe."

There are signs of—to borrow the name of one of the city's majestic

hotel towers—a renaissance in Detroit. The city is working hard to turn things around. Rents are remarkably low, and developments such as the Heinz Building and 15 West Jefferson are the first new structures to dot the Detroit skyline in quite a while.

The bottom line is that the practice of law in Detroit is appealing to those who foresee the long-anticipated revitalization of the local economy. "I feel optimistic that with time, things will turn around," Ellmann says. "I believe in the cyclical and resilient nature of the city."

## INDIANAPOLIS

Any city whose most famous attraction involves professionals feverishly going around and around and ending up just where they started, cannot help but appeal to lawyers.

But the competition becomes more civilized as one moves from the speedway to the office. One of the best things about practicing in Indianapolis, according to Thomas G. Stayton of Baker & Daniels, is the way local lawyers treat their counterparts.

"It's great," he says, "mainly because the lawyers do not try to kill each other. The Indianapolis bar is very congenial. We try to beat our adversaries without making life miserable for them."

Michael R. Maine, also of Baker & Daniels, concurs. "Indianapolis' charm, friendliness and Midwestern work ethic foster a camaraderie and professionalism among the city's lawyers not often found today in other metropolitan areas."

"Another advantage of practicing law in Indianapolis is that the lawyers do not try to kill themselves either," Stayton says. Local lawyers

**In this Rust Belt city, lawyers try to win without making life miserable for their adversaries.**

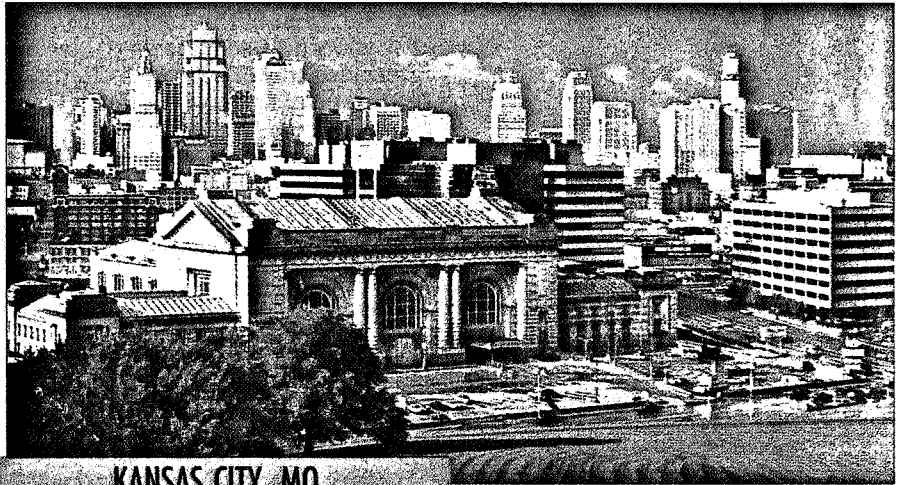
"work hard but also are able to enjoy other things in life." In essence, due to features such as short travel time to work, Indianapolis offers lawyers the benefits of practicing in a large metropolitan area while avoiding many of the drawbacks other big cities can have.

Indianapolis' downtown area is in the midst of a rejuvenation, as one-quarter of its buildings are new or renovated. The city is home to several major corporations, led by pharmaceutical giant Eli Lilly, as well as many key players in the retailing, transportation and amateur-sports industries.

As Maine notes, "Real estate development and the influx of businesses, manufacturing plants and

corporate headquarters into the area have contributed to its growth." This is due in part to Indianapolis' low business costs, including its reasonable commercial rental rates and central location.

With such a track record, this "Cinderella of the Rust Belt" finishes as one of the top cities in which to practice.



KANSAS CITY, MO.

Despite Kansas City's well-deserved reputation for great food, especially steaks and its world-class barbecue, it also has the reputation of offering lawyers a chance to practice without getting roasted in the process.

Kansas City offers a big-city level of practice while still allowing attorneys to enjoy a reasonable quality of life. As C. Patrick McLarney, managing partner of Shook, Hardy & Bacon, says, "Kansas City shines as a mecca for the practice of law because it combines the advantages of a lovely, livable city with a challenging, world-class legal practice."

Kansas City has all the amenities of large cities: theater, ballet, opera, major-league football and baseball. Yet you can drive from beautiful, tree-lined residential communities with golf courses to work in the center of downtown in 15 minutes. There are no long commutes, no trains and no smog. Lawyers can go home for dinner with their families and return to their offices in the evening because of the easy commuting distance.

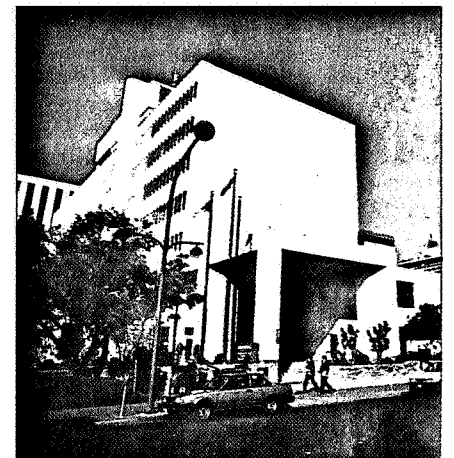
Although Kansas City firms have developed an extensive national practice (furthered by a geographically central location) as well as an international practice, the bar is still relatively small.

"Most lawyers know each other," McLarney says. "There is still the collegiality that is associated with the practice of law in the '40s and

'50s." One example of the courtesy and cooperation that characterizes Kansas City practice is the monthly Inns of Court program. "Experienced trial lawyers, state and federal judges, and beginning lawyers gather for trial practice exercises and critiques," McLarney says. "This is followed by adjournment to a local watering hole where all exchange war stories and

ideas."

The city's economy is rapidly diversifying from simply being a hub for agriculture-related industry. Among the largest local business players are Hallmark, Farmland Industries (petroleum refining), IBC Holdings (food), and Butler Manufacturing. The city is also home to the Marion Merrell Dow pharmaceuticals company, guaranteeing lawyers beset by the hazards of their profession a fresh supply of vital remedies such as Cepacol throat lozenges and Gaviscon antacid.



LAS VEGAS

For lawyers willing to gamble on starting over in a new city, Las Vegas is obviously a natural.

According to David Goldwater, a solo practitioner, informality has

from an early point been the order of business. "When I first came to Las Vegas," he says, "it was really a very small-town practice involving 30 or 35 lawyers, where you called judges by their first names. Most lawyers had offices in the same building or near each other, and there was really no need for telephone calls because you saw each other at lunch or after work."

Some of the informality was a reflection of the weather: "Summers were so hot in Las Vegas, and there was so little mechanical air conditioning even in my time, that you were permitted to wear short-sleeve shirts in the courtroom, and no trials were held during the summer."

Although the practice of law in Las Vegas has evolved since those days, remnants of an earlier time remain. "There are still a lot of small-town mannerisms and approaches," Goldwater says. "Even today, all of the real property searches and real estate closings are handled by title companies."

Obviously, the presence of legalized gambling in Las Vegas has affected the practice of law. There are now many local lawyers who consider themselves "gaming attorneys." They have become expert in gaming regulations, including the representation of clients for gaming licenses. They also represent local gaming licensees and, in some cases, lobby regulators on their behalf. This area of practice, not surprisingly, is often quite lucrative.

Las Vegas is coming into its own as a major legal and economic force in the West. It offers lawyers the opportunity to service West Coast clients without paying West Coast prices for office space and support staff. There are no city or state personal or corporate income taxes.

As Goldwater notes, despite the vestiges of its origins, "Las Vegas is no longer a small town." And the odds are good that its growth will continue. "If the future portends anything," he observes, as dryly as the city's 29-percent average relative humidity, "I suggest that lawyers deciding to practice in Las Vegas bring their own water."

## LOUISVILLE

Another contestant worthy of being entered in the attorney relocation derby is Louisville.

Louisville boasts a first-rate stable of local businesses, including seven alcoholic-beverage distilleries, Humana's health-care headquarters, GE operations, and KFC headquar-

ters. Operating costs are reasonable: Office lease space is priced at an affordable average of \$16 per square foot. Housing is also moderately priced.

The practice of law in Louisville reflects an attitude of courtesies coupled with a sense of priorities. According to R. Van Young of Greenebaum Doll & McDonald, the judiciary shares such qualities as well.

He tells a story of a Louisville attorney who requested a federal court judge to reschedule a pre-trial conference. The court naturally asked the grounds for such a motion.

The lawyer replied, "Well, your honor, the date you have previously set conflicts with the NCAA Basketball Tournament."

Although such a response might have elicited a contempt citation or even disbarment in other jurisdictions, the court simply inquired further. "So, counselor, you think one of our local institutions of higher learning may have a representative team in attendance?"

"Yes, your honor," came the reply.

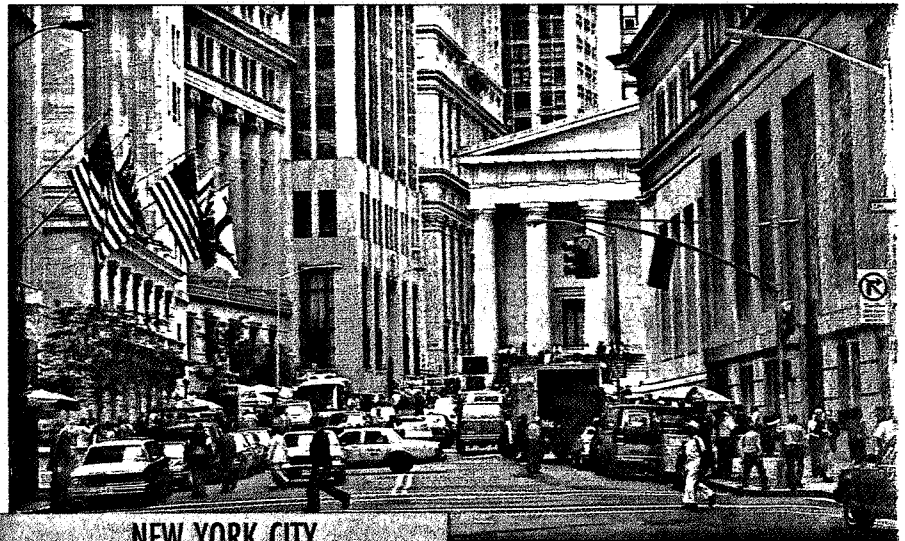
"Motion sustained," the judge ordered.

## The Big Apple—the hardest city to succeed in, but the one with the biggest rewards.

reality, of course, the practice is quite diverse, due in no small part to the number of different industries and businesses in which New York plays a pivotal role.

New York is the home for leaders in finance, media, arts and fashion; thus, its law firms service a vast variety of clients. Indeed, nearly 10 percent of the Fortune 500 industrial and service companies are headquartered in the five boroughs.

New York courts have spearheaded the development of new areas of the law. This represents something of a turnaround, as the purchase of Manhattan Island from its original owners for only \$24 suggests that doctrines such as unconscionability of contracts were late in taking



In "New York, New York," Frank Sinatra, who previously had claimed that another city was his "kind of town," sings, "If I can make it there I'll make it anywhere. ..." That assertion is particularly true for the practice of law in New York—this is the city where it is hardest to succeed, but where the rewards of success are also the greatest.

A distant observer experiencing New York via headlines in a local newspaper might assume that virtually all lawyers in New York specialize in criminal work, due to the abundance of potential clients. In

hold there.

While it is probably true that, on average, New York attorneys work longer hours than lawyers in other cities, these efforts are rewarded with some of the highest salaries paid nationally. Moreover, once they finally leave the office, New York offers them the greatest choice of cultural diversions of any major city. There are nearly 50 art museums, over 25 symphony orchestras, 14 professional opera companies, numerous dance companies, and even more numerous on-, off-, and off-off-Broadway theaters to choose from.

## SAN FRANCISCO

Although its official ballad, "I Left My Heart in San Francisco," would suggest that the city is known only for its medical malpractice bar, the truth is that law practice in San Francisco is quite diverse. Nevertheless, the term "fault" is never far from the minds of most San Francisco residents.

Seismological considerations aside, San Francisco is home to many movers and shakers of industry, including Fortune 500 firms Chevron, Raychem (electronics), Potlatch (forest products) and Shaklee (pharmaceuticals). With a skyline marked by the distinctive Transamerica Pyramid, the city is considered the insurance and financial capital of the West. The proliferation of local computer software and hardware companies offers many opportunities in the technology field. Additionally, the area is home to leaders

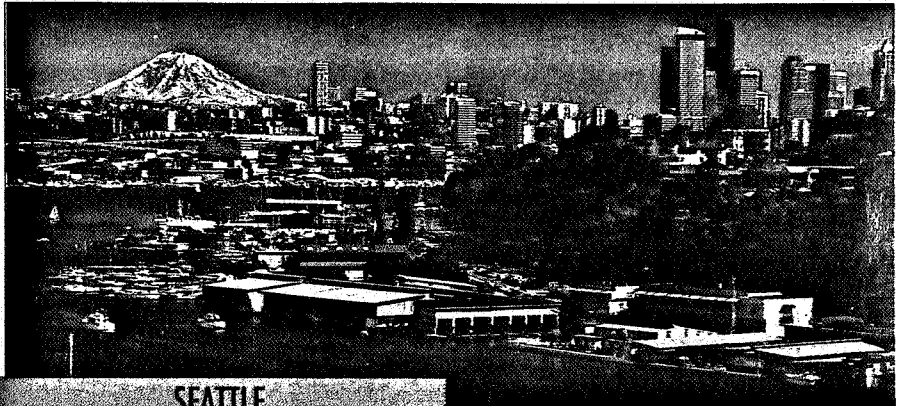
## The City by the Bay offers much charm and a large corporate base.

in the growing biotechnology arena, including Bio-Rad Laboratories, Cetus and Genentech.

According to Paul R. Griffin, who heads Pillsbury Madison & Sutro's business litigation group in antitrust and intellectual property matters, "San Francisco is a great city for the practice of law. I enjoy challenging and satisfying litigation cases that draw upon the exceptionally strong corporate base in San Francisco."

San Francisco is also an attractive place to practice because of its inherent charm. "My professional life takes place in one of the most beautiful cities in the world, with a climate, natural beauty and scenic vistas to match," Griffin says. "Where else can I enjoy playing golf year-round with clients and potential clients?"

The practice of law in San Francisco is as demanding as that in any other big city (to say nothing of the demands on the thigh muscles imposed by the steep hills). For those up to the task, as the original '49ers learned more than 140 years ago, the potential riches are lofty as well.



## SEATTLE

If you are easily distracted by bright sunny days, Seattle is the place for you to get your work done. Its legendary overcast, drizzly climate is ideal for billing long hours, as well as for growing potatoes or developing film.

All that water does serve a purpose, however, as Seattle has an admiralty practice that is second to none. Moreover, as the "Gateway to the Orient," Seattle is also attractive to those interested in developing or maintaining a cross-Pacific practice.

According to Anne M. Bremner of Stafford Frey Cooper & Stewart, part of Seattle's appeal to lawyers is the way the practice of law reflects the varying cultures that make up the fabric of the city. In how many other jurisdictions could lawyers have the opportunity to handle Native American fishing rights cases?

Bremner also observes that most Seattle lawyers put a high value on maintaining a reasonable quality of life. This is perhaps most obvious in the way local attorneys dress. More than in most other large cities, Seattle attorneys are likely to be nonsuited—with men wearing sport jackets and slacks, and women in dresses. Coupled with an attitude of courtesy and even occasional forgiveness of an opponent's lapses, there is, in her words, a definite "small-town feeling" to the practice there.

Obviously, from a business perspective, Seattle has evolved since the early days of Westward expansion. Just how far it has come can easily be seen. After a huge fire destroyed much of Seattle at the turn of the century, the city was rebuilt on top of what was left. As a result, you can actually tour the old Seattle underground, and maybe even see the dusty and charred remains of unfinished memoranda and unsent bills of ancestral attorneys.

Perhaps because of its attractive (albeit damp) atmosphere, Seattle is bucking the current demographic tide and is growing in population—perhaps

even too much in the eyes of some locals. Seattle's economy appears strong, a plus to attorneys seeking some stability in their client base. With aerospace giant Boeing serving as its major private employer, along with its many subcontractors and other companies like Paccar (motor vehicles and parts), Burlington Resources (mining, crude-oil production), and Ohio Mattress, Seattle seems destined to reach even greater heights in the future.

It is highly unlikely that this article will prompt a stampede of lawyers—bearing short haircuts and battered litigation bags—toward the 10 cities I have listed. After all, I'm still practicing in New York, despite the crime, the high cost of living, the low chance of success, and the crawling wildlife with which I share my claustrophobic apartment.

And maybe that's not surprising. While the grass—or the money—sometimes may seem greener elsewhere, the truth is that we lawyers generally tend to stay where we first practiced. To some extent, the onus of learning new rules, the risk of losing personal and professional contacts, and the very thought of taking another bar exam keep us where we are.

But, the truth is, most of us really like practicing where we do. As much as we may deny it, there is a comfort in knowing where the courthouse is, whether paper with numbered lines is or is not required, and which is the best all-night deli that delivers.

The unifying thread among the comments of the lawyers I talked to for this article is a genuine affection for their city and for practicing law there. And so, while it's often nice for a meeting, a deposition or even a trial to change our venue for a while, for most of us the "best city to practice in" is the one that waits for us at the end of the last "red-eye" home.