

LAWDRAGON

The Lawdragon 500 Lawyer Limelight: George “Gar” Bason

By Xenia Kobylarz

There are two other Georges in [George R. Bason, Jr.](#)'s family tree, his grandfather and his father, which is why he got the nickname “Gar.” But it is safe to say the [Davis Polk & Wardwell](#) partner is the only George Bason that has earned numerous American Lawyer “Dealmaker” and other M&A distinctions.

His A-List pedigree is well earned. The [Harvard Law School](#) graduate maintains a busy practice handling some of the most complex and largest deals, year after year. In 2008, for example, he played a lead role in helping ink the \$306 billion loss protection deal between Citigroup and the U.S. government. More recently, in February, Bason took center stage advising CNOOC in its \$15.1 billion acquisition of Nexen.

In addition to his practice, Bason has helped preside over one of the most active and profitable M&A groups in the world. Davis Polk's M&A group got the top spot in Bloomberg's latest [Global Advisory Mergers & Acquisitions Rankings](#), which ranks law firms based on the total value of their corporate clients' M&A transactions in the first three months of 2013. The group advised on 30 transactions with a combined total value of \$92.7 billion, according to the survey.

Lawdragon: How long have you been the head of Davis Polk's M&A Practice? How do you juggle the demands of your own busy practice with managing a practice as big and as high-profile as your firm's?



George Bason: I've been head or co-head of the practice since around 2002. From 2002-2005, I was co-head with Dennis Hersch, then the head from 2006-2012, then co-head with David Caplan beginning in 2012. Our group is an incredibly cohesive and cooperative group of friends and colleagues. That makes David Caplan's and my tasks working as co-heads of the group much easier. That being said, we are both first and foremost practitioners.

LD: You've done more than your fair share of deals in your more than 30-year career. Does it ever get old? What keeps you coming back for more?

GB: It never gets old for me. One of the great things about M&A is that every deal is different. The technology, approach and the ins and outs of the practice are changing at an incredibly rapid pace, which means it's always new and fun.

LD: Most of the transactions these days are global, and Davis Polk competes with bigger law firms in terms of attorney count and offices worldwide. What keeps the firm competitive in this market?

GB: We like to think that we offer an unparalleled mixture of global reach, cutting edge deal technology and intellectual capability. We think firms who can offer these qualities will always be competitive.

LD: Speaking of global practice, your job takes you around the world. For example, you went to Russia in 2010 to help PepsiCo in its acquisition of a Moscow-based dairy and beverage company Wimm-Bill-Dann. What's the most exotic place you've had to go to for business?

GB: I've been to Russia, China, Japan, Peru, Mexico, Brazil and to most countries in Europe. It's hard to say which is the most exotic place. However, I've learned useful tidbits. For instance, if you go to a board meeting in Cuzco, Peru, make sure you don't mind the high altitude. But don't worry, you can buy bottles of oxygen if you do.

LD: One of your biggest clients right now is Chinese state-owned energy giant CNOOC. How did you end up getting hired by them?

GB: We have been lucky enough to work with CNOOC for nearly 10 years.

LD: We keep reading that the legal market has changed and corporate counsels are becoming more cost-conscious than ever. Has that affected your practice? Have cost-conscious clients changed the way you practice? Or do you think that cost-consciousness applies to routine legal transactions and not the high-end complex M&A work?

GB: Cost-consciousness applies to all aspects of the legal profession. We feel that good lawyers need to embrace cost-consciousness and work with clients to deliver top quality legal product in a thoughtful, efficient and economically sensible way.

LD: Law school was a while back, but do you have any regrets or mistakes you wished you hadn't made when you were in school?

GB: I skipped Administrative Law. I wished I'd taken it.

LD: You worked out of Davis Polk's Paris office both as an associate and as a partner for two multi-year stints. What was that like? Why did you decide to live in Paris twice during your career?

GB: Paris was an amazing experience personally and professionally. For a lawyer to work in an overseas context is tremendously helpful in terms of developing both at an interpersonal level and also professionally. I learned the importance of developing adaptability while not losing sight of what's important in a critical transaction, which is a key part of living overseas. My experiences in Paris have been extremely important to the international component of my practice, which is still critical to what I do.

LD: If you can only give one piece of advice to an aspiring lawyer, what would that be?

GB: You are in a service profession – return calls quickly and be enthusiastic.

LD: I read that you like to travel and take photographs. How did those interests develop and how do you fit this into your work schedule?

GB: I've been an avid amateur photographer since 1969, and always carry a camera with me when I travel. From 1969 to 2006 I shot in black and white film, developing and printing it myself. After 2006, I made the switch to digital