

# Lawyer of the year

WINNER

## Peter Cornell

Clifford Chance

*A defining tenure*

Cornell retired from the CC partnership in December 2006, after navigating the firm through one of the most difficult periods in its recent history. Much of his legacy is defined by the firm's new remuneration system, which he fought for tooth and nail during his time as managing partner. The new structure, which was voted in at the end of 2005, allows for different equity ladders in different jurisdictions, but is tied to rigorous partner performance monitoring. 'If the compensation review hadn't been sorted out with such a strong vote in favour, I wouldn't have chosen to stand down,' he admits in a candid moment talking to *Legal Business*.

The decision to leave his family in Spain and relocate to New York in 2005 is testament to Cornell's dedication and commitment to the firm, and many partners believe that his presence there was critical to getting the US to buy into the reforms. He is also responsible for the successful transformation of the New York office, bringing to an end the protracted departures and injecting a positive and upbeat atmosphere. 'I hope that I will be remembered for introducing a far more open system of communication to proceedings,' he said, in relation to the New York practice.

Cornell leaves behind a firm in great financial shape and with a clear strategy to become the world's number one global law firm.

### HIGHLY COMMENDED

GORDON BENNETT

New Square Chambers

On 13 December 2006, the Gana and Gwi bushmen won the right to return to their tribal lands in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve, from where they had been evicted by the Botswana government in 2002. Lead counsel for the bushmen was Gordon Bennett, a commercial barrister with an interest in indigenous land rights. Bennett helped achieve victory in Botswana's

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longest-running and most controversial court case, arguing that the removal of the bushmen from the lands where they had lived for some 20,000 years was unconstitutional. The dispute garnered much domestic and international attention, to the point where the court verdict was screened on Botswanan TV. A rare positive outcome in a truly David and Goliath struggle.

DAVID CHEYNE

Linklaters

After a 30-year career as one of the City's top transactional lawyers, Cheyne finally stepped up to



Peter Cornell of Clifford Chance (centre) accepts the award from Julie Morrison of Ernst & Young

senior partner at Linklaters last autumn. In a closely fought election, he beat the firm's global head of finance Giles White and global head of restructuring Robert Elliott to take the top job. As part of a revered and exclusive group of corporate lawyers who have managed to penetrate the FTSE-100 boardrooms, he brings a wealth of client understanding to the job. His legendary work ethic and commitment to clients should not be taken lightly. 'David is a hawk in the underperforming arena,' said one Linklaters partner, and many predict that he will bring to Linklaters an even stronger focus on the bottom line; a move that could give Slaughter and May a run for its money.

CLIVE STAFFORD SMITH

Reprive

For 25 years, Stafford Smith has represented hundreds of people on death row in America. He runs a not-for-profit organisation in Louisiana and launched UK-based human rights group Reprive in 1999. In 2000, he was awarded an OBE in the New Year Honours list 'for humanitarian services in the legal field'. Despite coming under fearsome attack from the American authorities, he has continued tirelessly to act on behalf of 45 of the detainees accused of al-Qaeda activity and held at Guantánamo Bay. Most recently, he was accused of co-ordinating what was described as an 'act of asymmetric warfare', designed to discredit the US government, a charge he strenuously denies. Nevertheless, he has been successful in rallying support from some of the world's top commercial law firms, despite their early reticence.

10th  
anniversary

# Congratulations

to all of the award winners at the

## Legal Business Awards 2007

The world is changing for professional partnerships. Legal structure, regulation and ownership compete with financial management and tax structure for space on the agenda. Understanding and managing the levels of risk in the practice must also be a high priority.

In times like these you should look to your professional advisors for support and advice.

Our multi-disciplinary Professional Partnership Services Team works locally, nationally and internationally to deliver tailored solutions and practical advice to clients wherever they are based.

We understand the issues and opportunities which arise from the operation of a professional practice: not only can our team advise on best practice as a result of their experience with other clients but we can also share with you our own firm's experiences as one of the world's largest professional services organisations.

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To find out how we can contribute to your business please contact Julie Morrison at [jmorrison@uk.ey.com](mailto:jmorrison@uk.ey.com) or 020 7951 8631.