

# A room with a view

The power of unique, client-friendly office space.



When Gillian Butler left her job at one of Newfoundland's largest law firms to set up her own litigation and mediation shop, she wanted to do things differently. For her venture to be a success, she knew the location had to be unique and welcoming to clients — the polar opposite of the office towers that many firms call home.

"In breaking away, I wanted to put my own personality on my work, which is difficult to do in a large firm," she explains. "I didn't feel the need to be in a mainstream space." What she found surely fits the bill.

Butler's firm is located on the second floor of a 50-year-old boathouse on the shores of Quidi Vidi Lake in St. John's. Dubbed simply "The Boathouse," her offices take up the



bulk of a 2,500-square-foot space that comes complete with cathedral ceilings, hardwood floors, two decks, and some of the most stunning scenery in the country.

The unique office space was borne from a major renovation of the rundown boathouse building, which plays host to the annual Regatta rowing race each August. The second-floor addition was originally built with an eye towards a restaurant space, but that all changed when Butler set her eyes on it.

"When I saw it, I knew I had to have it," she says. After

signing a long-term lease, Butler quickly started to map out her version of a client-friendly office.

In addition to the ample windows, which included an oversized porthole in the boardroom, she added plenty of pine highlights and a soothing yellow paint job offset with off-white trim. "The image I wanted to create was one of warm confidence," Butler says. "I feel I exude an air of confidence, but I'm not aloof — I've always been extremely approachable. So that's the image I wanted."

She continued that down-to-earth theme in all aspects of her image, with specially designed advertising (her motto: "Small firm. Big results.") and a soothing blue colour scheme for her Website.

The ambiance of her Boathouse office seems to have had

an effect outside her target audience. "The clients, other lawyers, and even people who drop by to service equipment or for deliveries, everyone who comes in to the place has exactly the same reaction," she says. "They're like, 'Wow!'"

The end result of all the hard work (aside from the blockbuster views of rowers or flocks of seabirds) is a lot of free publicity and new clients. It's an approach that she thinks more small firms should consider before they set up shop.

"I think it's extremely important that they do so, because small firms can do everything that a big firm can do," says Butler. "They're not necessarily competing for the same clientele, so why do they have to dress and talk and behave exactly the same as a big-firm lawyer?" **N** — Brad Mackay

GREG LOCKE

## Quote Unquote

### Selective solos

To market a solo practice, be selective. Focus on areas in which you have good referral contacts and a track record, and on those areas being affected by trends. For example, if real estate is booming in your area, focus on house closings, zoning appeals and business leasing agreements; market to real estate developers, moving consultants and executive search firms.

Offer services that can be differentiated in some way from every other lawyer providing those services — either because you have more experience, obtain better results, or have better contacts.

By Susan Saltonstall Duncan, President of Rainmaking Oasis Inc. ([sduncan@rainmakingoasis.com](mailto:sduncan@rainmakingoasis.com)); adapted from "Solo & Small-Firm Marketing Hurdles" in the March 2005 issue of the ABA's Law Practice Magazine ([www.abanet.org/lpm/magazine/home.shtml](http://www.abanet.org/lpm/magazine/home.shtml)).

## A second look

### Secondments give young lawyers a client's perspective.

Secondments — whereby a lawyer spends several months working inside a client's in-house legal department — have long been popular with articling students and young associates in law firms. Hardly surprising, when you consider that it's one of those rare situations where everyone involved — the firm, the client, and the lawyers — benefits.

Catrina Card, an associate at Torys LLP in Toronto, praises her three-month articling secondment to the Bank of Nova Scotia. "It gave me exposure to different types of work," she says. "It was interesting seeing law practised from a client's perspective, and I worked in smaller

# L'été à l'école

*Un programme où théorie juridique et visites culturelles font bon ménage.*

Cet été, dans le cadre d'un programme de stage alliant formation en droit chinois à un volet culturel et touristique, l'Université de Montréal, en collaboration avec la faculté de droit de la *China University of Political Science and Law*, enverra pour la troisième année consécutive des étudiants canadiens et étrangers à Beijing.

« Il s'agit d'une introduction à la Chine. En trois semaines, en plus des cours sur le droit chinois dans les domaines du droit commercial, droit de la famille, droit constitutionnel et droit criminel, les étudiants visitent la Cité Interdite, la Palais impérial, la Grande Muraille de Chine et bien d'autres ».

Philippe Painchaud a participé au programme, l'été dernier. Il s'agissait de son troisième voyage en un peu plus de cinq ans au pays des empereurs. Aux yeux du jeune homme de 26 ans, étudiant en deuxième année de droit à l'Université de Montréal et détenteur d'un baccalauréat en études chinoises, la pertinence d'un tel stage ne fait aucun doute.



« Le droit est l'outil du futur en Chine. Avec les relations commerciales croissantes entre le pays et l'Occident et les pressions de l'OMC pour le développement d'un état de droit, les Chinois n'auront d'autre choix que de développer leur système judiciaire et politique afin de donner une légitimité à la règle de droit ».

Selon M. Painchaud, les juristes canadiens ont un atout de taille pour se mesurer au défi chinois. « Le pays possède une constitution en plusieurs points semblable à la nôtre et le système juridique est un système de droit civil ». Ce qui n'empêche pas les étudiants de se sentir parfois bien loin de chez eux, là-bas, à l'autre bout du monde. « Parmi tous les stages universitaires offerts, celui de la Chine est le test d'adaptation

par excellence. Les étudiants doivent apprendre à surmonter des barrières linguistiques, culturelles, politiques... et juridiques! ».

Heureusement, l'encadrement mis sur pied par les deux institutions d'enseignement est étroit et efficace. Accompagnés par des professeurs de l'Université de Montréal, les étudiants, une fois sur place, sont pris en charge par des professeurs de l'université d'accueil. L'un d'eux, maîtrisant parfaitement le français et l'anglais, agit comme personne-ressource, accompagne les participants lors des activités et voit à régler les problèmes susceptibles de survenir durant le séjour.

Les mots seuls ne suffisent pas à Philippe Painchaud pour rendre compte la magie de ce pays qui le passionne et de l'expérience vécue l'année dernière en compagnie d'une vingtaine d'étudiants de son âge. « Il est fascinant de pouvoir rencontrer et échanger avec des professeurs et étudiants qui ont

## 5 Sites

### The nightmare client

**We've all experienced one. But more often than not, they can be avoided or subdued simply by managing client expectations. Here are 5 sites to help you deal with the most difficult clients:**

[www.practicepro.ca/practice/DifficultClients.asp](http://www.practicepro.ca/practice/DifficultClients.asp)

How to keep potentially difficult clients in check.

[www.lawsociety.bc.ca/library/buletin/2004/body\\_bb\\_04-02-22\(Inter-difficult\).html](http://www.lawsociety.bc.ca/library/buletin/2004/body_bb_04-02-22(Inter-difficult).html)

Examines difficult counsel and colleagues as well as clients.

<http://marketing.lp.findlaw.com/articles/meyerowitz4.html>

Learn how to handle billing complaints and unrealistic time demands.

[www.alaskabar.org/index.cfm?id=5337](http://www.alaskabar.org/index.cfm?id=5337)

15 no-nonsense tips for dealing with the problem client.

[www.lsuc.on.ca/services/advisory\\_diffclient.jsp](http://www.lsuc.on.ca/services/advisory_diffclient.jsp)

The importance of heeding the warning signs at the client screening stage. **N**

— Mark Kuiack

souvent les mêmes préoccupations que nous, mais dont la vision des choses peut parfois être tellement différente ». Une chose demeure certaine : il espère pouvoir y retourner, encore cet été, afin de goûter une fois de plus aux plaisirs de la découverte de l'inconnu... en tant qu'accompagnateur, cette fois. **N**

— Hugo de Grandpré

teams, with more responsibility.”

Her colleague, Jennifer Sandford, spent her articling secondment at Ernst & Young and received more diverse legal training than the firm could have offered. “I didn't do a litigation rotation at Torys, and my principal at E&Y came from a litigation background,” she explains. “He exposed me to a lot of litigation experience I wouldn't have had otherwise, both in a case at the Court of Appeal and in a case in its earliest stages.”

That diversity of experience is a key attraction for articling students who seek the widest possible exposure to potential legal career routes. The profession, in turn, benefits from new lawyers with a broader range of experiences. The Law Society of Upper Canada, for example, encourages split articles and other non-traditional articling arrangements in

that crucial year before call.

However, Torys' Director of Legal Recruitment, Sarah MacKenzie, notes that recent changes to the Bar Admission process in Ontario have reduced the articling period from 12 months to 10 months. That has had an adverse impact on secondments, she says: “They're a little less popular now than a few years ago. There's more of an interest in the training opportunities within the firm.”

MacKenzie thinks secondments are particularly beneficial to new lawyers. “[It] helps them assess the choices they've made,” providing an opportunity for “a different sort of training. They see what client concerns are.” With clients increasingly demanding legal services that focus on their needs, this kind of experience should only become more valuable. **N**

— Craig Burley