

Interview with Pascale Longuet, a French-speaking lawyer in New York, specializing in business law

Who are you and what is your activity?

I am a bilingual and bicultural attorney based in Manhattan and a member of the Paris and New York bars. My main activity consists in the representation of French-speaking corporate clients in American business law.

Can you outline the main points of your professional career?

My professional career began in France, as a Paris Bar trainee lawyer, *avocat stagiaire*, after I was admitted to the Paris Bar. I had obtained a master's degree in business law and taxation, *Maîtrise droit des Affaires et Fiscalité*, from the University of Paris II Assas and a master's degree in law (L.L.M.) from New York University, in New York. Following my admission to the New York bar in 1990, I practiced for several years in law firms in New York before starting my private practice.

The core of my practice consists in the assistance of French or French-speaking corporate clients, in many aspects of their corporate law operations and commercial transactions in the United States. More specifically, setting up of companies, their reorganizations, acquisitions and disposals, and the review, negotiation and drafting of numerous contracts. This also includes intellectual property aspects, such as trademark registrations and implications in additional legal areas.

I work in cooperation with other expert colleagues and legal professionals, both in France and the United States. According to the needs of my clients and files, I represent them in such matters as litigation and arbitration, commercial leases, employment laws. I would like to point out that I do not practice immigration law.

The firm also assists French or American individuals in patrimonial matters where connections must be researched between the legal systems and requirements of the two countries. These matters include, without limitations, liquidations of retirement or life insurance accounts, cases of validation of foreign guardianship judgments in order to release and repatriate US assets and French aspects of inheritance.

Why this passion for your profession?

I consider myself very fortunate to be able to assist companies beyond their borders and their legal system of origin, often a civil law one, and provide guidance to the best of my ability, in the United States. Foreign investors in the US face a highly complex and litigious legal system, with different habits and customs which may be specific to their sector of activity, and a volatile clientele. On an individual level, it is very exciting to have the possibility of being able to create connections and bridges between different countries and cultures that are sometimes very distant from each other.

Why did you expatriate?

I have always been attracted by the US with a strong curiosity; then I seized the opportunity of a double university curriculum and was admitted to two bars. Working with international lawyers in Paris and New York, as well as personal circumstances, all contributed to this decision.

The major factors which contributed to my “stay” in the United States for more than thirty years, certainly lie in the great American capacity to be optimistic, trusting, welcoming, and open to training.

How is the practice of your profession in the United States different from that in France?

Because I left France 35 years ago, my knowledge of the practice of the profession in France has undoubtedly become more distant.

In general, in the United States, access to the bar is common to all law students. Each individual then chooses his or her specific field of practice according to acquired skills. In France, the legal profession is not only the one of the attorneys, *avocats*, but of numerous other legal professionals officers such as justice assistants, judges, notaries, bailiffs and *avoués*.

Is it difficult to find a place in your sector in the United States?

Yes. You have to show a lot of perseverance and persistence, (a trait that sometimes displeases depending on the culture), to constantly develop and maintain a network of contacts in different countries, and in various fields, so as to adequately resolve client issues.

Among your different experiences as an expatriate, which one has taught you the most and why?

Creating and managing my own firm is a continuing education experience whether legally, socially and on a personal level. This consists in developing numerous skills and knowledge, and/or the establishment of administrative and legal assistance resources. (Client intake, billing, website, accounting, computers, interns, employees, etc.)

A great satisfaction comes from working on files which turn out to be more and more complex. The longer one practices law, in cooperation with colleagues who are also more experienced, one has the opportunity to progress and to keep learning.

What do you like most about the United States? What do you like the least?

The most: the easiness of relationships and networking, working with great professional colleagues, the rigor of detail, and a lot of pragmatism.

The least: The over excess of detail and the complexity which appear both in social relations and in the handling of numerous matters.

What advice would you give to future francophones embarking on an adventure in the United States?

These are aimed more specifically at aspiring American lawyers.

First, I strongly suggest that they invest in an American law degree, whether or not they then take a US bar exam. France has a codified and unified civil law system while the United States has one of “common law” in which federal, state and local regulations are superposed to each other. The American legal and judicial system is particularly complex.

Also keep in mind that proficiency in English is essential for an internship in the United States, and internships are subject to the requirement for work authorization in the USA.

Show determination, curiosity and the willingness to see your own country from the outside of its borders. Learn about legal and cultural differences, work in a reactive mode, and for international clients.

You should also like to travel, meet people and share your knowledge.

Have a strong sense of ethics and professionalism from the start of your career and maintain it throughout, despite all the challenges along the way.

What are your plans and what can we wish you?

To continue to learn and transmit, as best I can, in collaboration with other professionals and on behalf of numerous clients!