

## California Powerhouse: Wilson Sonsini

By James Mills

*Law360 (August 25, 2023, 2:03 PM EDT)* -- With a large roster of tech, fintech and life sciences clients, it's only natural that California's largest law firm, Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati PC with 539 lawyers in California, is headquartered not in San Francisco or Los Angeles, but in Silicon Valley, the area that has become the economic engine for the Golden State.

It's also only natural that Wilson Sonsini has been named one of Law360's Regional Powerhouses. This is the second year in a row Wilson Sonsini has been named a Law360 California Powerhouse. The firm earned the honor thanks in no small part to its handling of Twitter's \$44 billion sale to Elon Musk as well as guiding identity and management software firm ForgeRock's \$2.3 billion acquisition by software investment firm Thoma Bravo.

Wilson Sonsini also scored victories for Hulu and Disney+ when local governments tried to levy franchise fees imposed on cable services onto the streaming services. Similarly, it also helped cloud storage giant Dropbox avoid a securities class action.

And in a case not related to technology, Wilson Sonsini scored a \$43 million settlement for Vanessa Bryant, the wife of late basketball star Kobe Bryant, and their children over graphic photos Los Angeles County first responders took and shared of the site of the helicopter crash that killed Kobe Bryant and eight others.

"[Being named a Regional Powerhouse two years in a row] doesn't come as a surprise given our reputation for excellence in all aspects of the practice, when you look at our brands and our culture, our exciting and innovative clients and our excellent attorneys," Allison Spinner, head of Wilson Sonsini's corporate department, told Law360 during a recent interview. "I was very pleased that we received the recognition again this year."

Wilson Sonsini has earned its reputation for handling tech cases given that the tech industry and the law firm have grown up together. Launched in 1961 in Palo Alto, just four years after the first semiconductor firm opened in what would come to be called Silicon Valley, Wilson Sonsini built a reputation for being a go-to firm for handling transaction deals as well as litigation in the technology field.

"I think it's just our established brand and legacy and our history of building, advising, representing clients from startups to established public companies and helping them along the way," Caz Hashemi,



head of Wilson Sonsini's litigation department, told Law360. "All they need from a corporate perspective is to have a unique range of interesting and innovative clients. That really helped us become the largest firm and develop a strong reputation for excellence."

Wilson Sonsini has followed the tech industry throughout its existence, opening new offices in burgeoning tech centers around the world. Today, the firm has 19 offices and about 1,060 attorneys firmwide.

Serving those tech clients has proven to be a draw for attorneys at Wilson Sonsini. Spinner, who has been with the firm for 26 years, reported she joined because she wanted to "work with the most exciting client base in the world."

"What has kept me here for over 25 years and what still excites me every day when I go to work is the client base and the fact those clients are doing such disruptive and innovative things," said Spinner.

Hashemi, who has been with the firm for 17 years, concurs, saying the clients are what makes the work interesting and satisfying.

"We have disruptive and innovative clients looking to grow," Hashemi said. "They bring unique issues, sometimes issues of first impression in particular, in the litigation area that makes it exciting and engaging work."

Perhaps the most talked about deal of the past year was Musk's on, then off, then on-again deal to acquire Twitter. Wilson Sonsini advised Twitter throughout it all, eventually suing Musk to follow through with the purchase after he tried to back out of it.

"Our team's work on this matter was a true collaborative effort throughout the entire process — from the initial approach to Twitter, through the negotiation and enforcement of the definitive acquisition agreement, and through closing in October," Marty Korman, the lead mergers and acquisitions counsel for Twitter, told Law360 in an email. "At every stage, matters moved quickly and were in the public eye — we focused on getting the deal done for the benefit of the stockholders."

Spinner pointed to the Twitter deal as an example of Wilson Sonsini representing companies throughout their life cycle, advising them throughout the journey.

"That transaction was the culmination of about a decade of transactional work with the company," said Spinner. "It demonstrates the type of relationship that we build with a company that endures for many years."

Meanwhile, according to Hashemi, the Bryant case demonstrated that the firm's lawyers can handle litigation beyond the tech world.

"One of the goals that we have is to create a litigation department that can litigate and try high-profile, high-stakes litigation matters on any subject matter, on any case anywhere," said Hashemi. "That's what I think [the Bryant victory is] symbolic of, and we're very proud of the team that worked on that case that got a great result for our client."

In the Bryant case, Wilson Sonsini scored a \$15 million settlement for Vanessa Bryant and then

negotiated a \$28.85 million settlement of all claims against Los Angeles County, including potential claims by Bryant's children.

"The \$28.85 million settlement that we secured was the result of hard-fought litigation to hold accountable those who violated the privacy and civil rights of Mrs. Bryant and others. It is our hope that this settlement brings a measure of relief to the bereaved family, the city of Los Angeles and Kobe Bryant's global fan base, and will lead to reform in police and first-responder practices nationwide," Luis Li, lead counsel to Vanessa Bryant, told Law360 in an email.

Both Spinner and Hashemi said their strategic focus is to keep growing their respective departments and to continually recruit talented attorneys, as well as foster connections between attorneys in the firm's various departments.

As for the future, look for artificial intelligence to play an increasingly important role in the coming years. AI, which just a year ago still seemed to be "off in the future," is here now and already an active part of Wilson Sonsini's business. The firm reported it has over 1,000 AI clients, including tech and life sciences companies integrating AI into their businesses. In 2022, Wilson Sonsini helped 117 AI clients raise more than \$5 billion in venture financing.

"I expect that companies focused on AI will continue to be a major part of our client base and the type of work that we do for those clients will grow and evolve," said Spinner. "That's just another example of how Wilson Sonsini works in rapidly evolving industries and sectors."

At the same time, the firm said, look for more litigation involving AI.

"Over the next five years, I think for much of our firm, AI is going to be a big part of our client base and the type of work we do for AI clients across all departments," said Hashemi. "When something like that comes up, there's obviously litigation, regulatory aspects to it. I don't exactly know how it's going to play out. I don't think anyone can right now."

--Editing by Kristen Becker.