

Extract from:

First among equals: Stars at the Bar 2012

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Author Ben Rigby profiles the 10 most acclaimed young commercial advocates making their mark in a fiercely competitive arena. Two of the ten are barristers at Essex Court Chambers

Essex Court
Chambers

Jern-Fei Ng, Essex Court Chambers



Called in 2002

Jern-Fei Ng achieves plaudits not just for a span of work notable for both its depth and breadth, but also for a combination of personality and perspicacity that few might match.

He is well-known in tax circles for his experience in VAT cases, having appeared as sole counsel on behalf of the Royal Bank of Scotland in the leading abuse of right case heard by the European Court of Justice against the British, German, Irish, Italian and Danish governments.

Yet his litigation experience is also top-class, having appeared in the Fiona Trust [2011] shipping litigation. One partner describes him as having "encyclopaedic" knowledge; another praises his "exceptional presentation skills, not only in court and written opinions, but at conferences and seminars".

Ng also represents the truly international dimension of the commercial Bar, regularly appearing in arbitrations in Singapore, Dubai and London.

He has also organised a highly successful moot competition for young lawyers in Singapore, and the range of Asian clients, which he has acted for, is likewise testament to a blue-chip practice that has also seen him instructed by City law firms, London shipping boutiques and major banks.

Ng appreciates "the epicentre of commercial dispute resolution is gradually moving eastward"; not for any decline in London work, but rather UK work "is being outpaced by growth in work from countries such as China, India, Indonesia and Korea".

Fully committed to Essex Court's office in Maxwell Chambers "to help better serve the needs of my clients", he says it has served as "a fillip to my development as an advocate", given that he frequently acts as sole counsel in arbitrations seated abroad.

One experienced chambers CEO praises him, saying his "enthusiasm for life, work and people is quite irrepressible and very infectious", hailing him as "an exceptionally good lawyer, who works extremely hard"

David Peters, Essex Court Chambers



Called in 2005

Lateral moves are still relatively uncommon at the Bar, but Essex Court Chambers saw three such moves this year, with Jane Russell, Anna Dilnot – highly commended by *Legal Week* in 2009 – and David Peters all joining chambers.

Peters, previously at 11 Stone Buildings, pays generous tribute to his former set: "[It] is a great set and I was very happy there." However, he says, joining Essex Court represented "an amazing opportunity further to develop

my practice in international commercial litigation".

He finds that lateral diversity to be "very useful, because it has given me a real breadth of experience", making him "lucky enough to do a substantial amount of my own work, including a lot of my own advocacy".

That, he says, adds "significant value in combining that experience with the huge amount learnt from working closely with more experienced practitioners" in both sets. This enables Peters to have "a good grasp of the commercial and tactical issues involved in running complicated pieces of litigation", noted one senior partner.

A senior clerk calls him: "A bright young man with a very bright future."

Peters also appreciates teamwork: "In a case where I am acting as sole counsel, what solicitors want and expect is likely to be very different from when I'm acting as a junior."

He stresses communication as the best way to fulfil the particular roles which solicitors see for him: "The key to which is being open and approachable."

One leader called Peters "very able, both client-driven and service-oriented... particularly handy at the commercial/chancery interface" in complex cases.

That can be seen in his role in the VTB litigation. Peters, led by Essex Court's Paul McGrath QC alongside counsel from his old set, took part in an appellate case involving commercial fraud and conspiracy claims, in a case worth \$320m (£200m) against the Russian oligarch Konstantin Malofeev and others.

The case pitted him against one of last year's Stars at the Bar, Fountain Court's Jamie McClelland.