

Member Spotlight: Daniel Jimenez Garcia

Why boutique is best – Daniel Jimenez Garcia values the personal approach



SLJ Abogados is an exclusively litigation boutique. Their activity is that of the defence of their clients' interests in civil, commercial, bankruptcy and/or criminal cases both at courts or through arbitration.

The firm was founded in 2014 by Daniel Jimenez, a former partner and Head of Litigation and Arbitration at Ashurst Madrid office and a leading lawyer on dispute resolution at Chambers & Partners Directory. He has more than 20 years' experience in both national and cross-border litigation and arbitration matters and has taken part in some of the most significant civil and criminal cases in recent years.

For Daniel Jimenez Garcia, the ideal law firm is a small boutique with a large reach.

After working for years at Ashurst – the international legal behemoth – Daniel was ready for a radical change. He wanted his own small firm but with an international presence to draw in big clients.

As a specialist in complex litigation law, Daniel cut his teeth at Ashurst for five years at the firm's Madrid office. He admits the experience was invaluable.

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"It was a very good place to work," Daniel says. "If you're going to work for a big law firm then Ashurst is a good one to join – I learned a lot while I was there."

Nevertheless, after a few years Daniel was looking for something different, away from a large firm with its corporate structure and internal politics. Furthermore, as litigation was not a core practice at Ashurst Daniel felt he needed to work somewhere that was more specialised. After giving it some thought he decided to set up his own firm, SLJ, a law firm specialising in litigation.

"I started my own firm in 2014," Daniel says. "I wanted to keep it small and after seven years we still only have six lawyers in total. We carry out the same kind of

work that I did when I was at Ashurst – with very similar clients."

Those clients include big funds and large multinational corporations. Daniel deliberately aimed to narrow the focus down to litigation and criminal work, while maintaining an international client base of big companies: "For instance, we do all the work for an international private in Spain. All our activity – litigation and criminal law – is based around commercial issues. I first started getting involved with criminal law at Ashurst and it seemed like a perfect fit when I set up SLJ."

Consequently, about 50% of Daniel's work deals with criminal cases, although he stresses this is not so different from commercial litigation: "It's very similar work because the commercial markets we're in are very similar. The only difference is that some have committed crimes in the corporate space, but the parties involved are pretty much the same."

"It's probably worth noting that I've been doing criminal law since I started as a lawyer. Litigation and criminal work are very similar for me. And that makes us very different from many other boutique firms. Usually, they're either criminal, or civil and commercial, but not both."

Another area of practice that Daniel brought into the firm is insolvency work – again, often linked to his litigation practice.

"Insolvency has become part of our practice area recently," he says. "Again, this ties in with our other work. We have

several insolvency jobs going on at the moment – some of them are large Spanish companies, so we have our work cut out."

Moving forward, Daniel wants to place the emphasis on international work – it's an area that's always been close to his heart: "Our plan is to have more international work. In many ways we've already achieved that. We have very strong relationships with several London firms. We receive a lot of work from them, and we work closely with other international firms from different jurisdictions.

We're a small, boutique firm but with a broad international reach. That's how we want to be known

"We are also part of the IR Global network. At Ashurst I had about 60% international work, and that's what I want to see going forward with our firm. That's the kind of balance I'm after across the litigation, criminal and insolvency practices.

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Despite its size, SLJ has been on the radar of others in the legal sector in Spain and in 2018 the firm was nominated as one of the best 10 boutiques in the country. For Daniel it was a fitting achievement for all the hard work he'd put in since leaving Ashurst.

"That was a great achievement for us," he smiles. "It showed that we already have a strong position in the legal sector in Spain – and the competition is very big, so it was a huge achievement. It confirms the value of being smaller and independent for our clients.

"We often cooperate with other firms, but I would never want us to be a global

firm with offices in different jurisdictions. It's just not who we are. We don't want to grow up, we don't want 20 lawyers. For us, six to seven is an ideal size."

For many law firms adapting during the pandemic has been difficult, but for Daniel there has been no drop off with international work – and using Zoom and Teams has been a simple transformation for the partners.

"We've actually been using Zoom in the past and it's not been difficult to adjust to this new way of working. In my experience, most legal firms have had no choice but to change their modus operandi to suit the times we live in. We're small enough to be flexible in everything we do."

When he was younger, Daniel believes his innate shyness was the main reason he became a lawyer. It was at school that he realised lawyers were confident people who speak out and challenge other people. He wanted to be like that.

"My shyness was never a handicap," he recalls. "But I knew that being a lawyer you need to speak out, to fight with words and use your intellect. Above all, you need to be heard when you speak out in court. It was really good for me."

It was also why he chose litigation as his specialism: "I like to solve real problems. Y'know, very big problems. With litigation and criminal law, you're able to help clients with very big, important issues, seeking justice for them. For me it's very rewarding when I win the case for them and I've helped them."

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And Daniel is good at his job – good enough that SLJ seldom market their services. Almost all the work is through

referrals: "Actually we don't do any marketing or commercial selling, almost all is through referrals from our friends. That's our main way of getting new clients, or through firms that have worked with us in the past.

"I guess it illustrates that we already have a good track record that people can see, so we don't really need to do any active marketing of our practice areas."

Outside work, Daniel is an avid golfer. Indeed, he's the founder of a Spanish golfing club for lawyers that play in mini-Ryder Cup-style tournaments with their French and English colleagues. Before the pandemic they played several matches against the Bar Association of Paris – the London equivalent has been postponed because of Covid-19, but Daniel is hopeful this will start soon.

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He's also a huge travel fan, particularly visiting the US where he's a member of the American Bar Association: "I think I've been to almost all big US cities because the American Bar organises its annual event in August every year. I've been across the US from New York and Boston to Los Angeles, San Francisco and Atlanta. I also travel to London a lot each year and hopefully I'll be doing that again soon after the restrictions have lifted."

For Daniel, that active networking spirit on the international circuit is far more valuable than establishing offices around the world. It goes back to his philosophy of maintaining a small practice but keeping an eye on the big deals. And for SLJ, it has worked wonders.



Daniel Jimenez Garcia

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