



# Most-recommended LAW FIRMS



There's no better judge of the legal community than the legal community. That's why Our City San Diego turned to lawyers to help us determine the area's top law firms in 10 key practice areas.

**By Katie Thisdell**

How do you choose a law firm?

It's not an easy task. San Diego County is home to nearly 16,000 active, bar-admitted attorneys and more than 2,900 law firms.

So, we took this question directly to the lawyers themselves:

"What law firm would you recommend to a friend?"

Our City posed the question to 400 of San Diego's most respected attorneys. We asked for their recommendations in 10 practice areas, from business law to taxation, and presented them with more than 500 nominees in all.

We chose survey participants by using various sources, including Super Lawyers and other regional sources that recognize top attorneys. More than 40 percent of those surveyed responded.

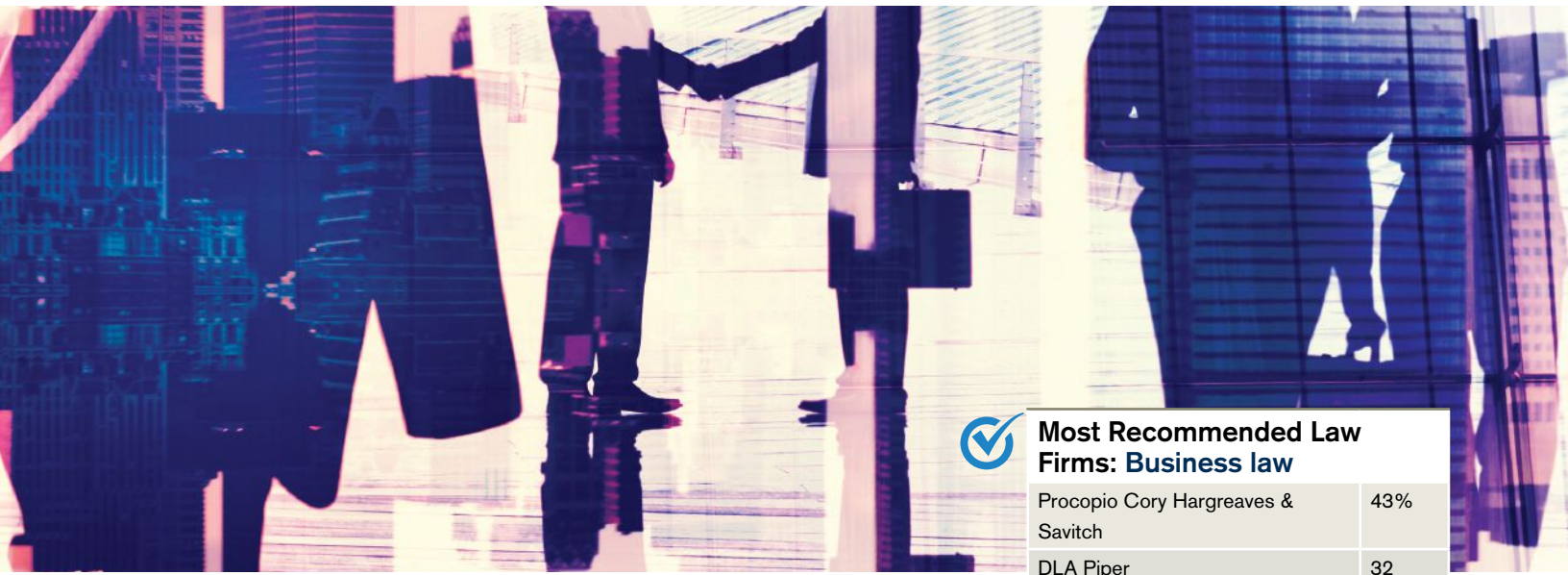
To be included in our final list, a law firm needed to finish in the top 10 and have at least 10 percent of survey respondents recommend it.

Our selection process benefitted the largest firms. In fact, Procopio Cory Hargreaves & Savitch, San Diego's largest local full-service firm, was recommended in nine practice areas, more than any other law firm. The more attorneys, the more contact a firm has with other law firms, and the better known it will be. That does not always translate into respect. But it gives larger firms more opportunities to rank well in a study like this.

But several mid-size and a few small firms also made the final list and are profiled here. These firms have established themselves as leaders in a specific practice area. Overall, we recognize 34 law firms, with 11 being recognized in more than one category. Procopio was rated particularly well for business law and government and administrative law, with more than 50 percent of respondents recommending it.

Two global firms with local offices were recommended in seven practice areas each. DLA Piper has lawyers in more than 30 countries and was the most recommended firm for tax law. Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton has more than 750 attorneys in its 15 offices.

So next time your company is looking for a lawyer, consider the firms that other attorneys recommend. We profile five, as well as list the other honorees.



### Most Recommended Law Firms: Business law

Procopio Cory Hargreaves & Savitch	43%
DLA Piper	32
Latham & Watkins	31
Cooley	28.5
Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton	28
Higgs Fletcher & Mack	26
Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman	22
Allen Matkins Leck Gamble Mallory & Natsis	21.5
Morrison & Foerster	20
Seltzer Caplan McMahon Vitek	17



### Corporate & Securities

Cooley	47.5%
Latham & Watkins	39
DLA Piper	38
Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton	38
Procopio Cory Hargreaves & Savitch	33.5
Morrison & Foerster	31
Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman	23
Mintz Levin Cohn Ferris Glovsky and Popeo	18
Robbins Geller Rudman & Dowd	16
Paul Hastings	15
Perkins Coie	15



### Government or Administrative Law

Procopio Cory Hargreaves & Savitch	53%
Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman	25.5
Fisher & Phillips	11

## Procopio Cory Hargreaves & Savitch

While many major law firms struggled during the recession, one did not. Procopio Cory Hargreaves & Savitch continues to rocket forward.

Much of the recent growth has occurred under the stewardship of Tom Turner, who has been managing partner for the last six years. Indeed, during his tenure, the firm has grown to include more than 150 attorneys, making it the largest in San Diego.

“The exceptional growth in both headcount and client base is due in large part to the firm’s innovative approach to legal services, its ability to attract and retain top attorneys from ‘Big Law’, and its commitment to building deep relationships with the San Diego business community,” the law firm noted in a recent news release.

Procopio also has offices in the Silicon Valley, Phoenix and Austin, Texas. The firm’s attorneys practice in areas ranging from beer and wine to land use, to trademarks and copyrights.

While Procopio offers the full gamut of law specialties, it was rated highest in our survey for business law, litigation and government practice.

Procopio goes head-to-head with the big, traditional law firms in terms of the size and level of sophistication of the cases it’s involved in. The local firm also has a reach across Asia and Latin America.

However, Turner has said the firm still has a strong grasp on its roots. It was founded in 1946 and celebrates its 70th anniversary this year.

Writing in San Diego Lawyer magazine, he noted: “Perhaps the greatest challenge, one in which we have had great success, is maintaining the positive, collegial, fun firm culture that had defined us for decades as a smaller firm. We are determined to maintain but also enhance that culture as we move forward.”

Recent lateral hires have strengthened existing practices areas, including real estate. The firm’s niche practices draw from the strength and diversity of its attorneys. For example, it has a Beer, Wine and Spirits group, and, despite the name, it’s all business. As the firm notes on its website, California has seen an explosion of growth in those industries, and they face a myriad of legal issues.

In 2012, Procopio introduced its LaunchPad, an incubator for start-up companies, in the firm’s Del Mar Heights office. Procopio is involved in all aspects of the start-up process for technology companies, including securing financing. The firm offers free work space and a basic legal package, and this guarantees new long-term clients. Because of its success, the firm expanded that program in 2013.





## RJS Law

In 2003, Ronson J. Shamoun was on a job hunt. He had just received an LL.M. in taxation from University of San Diego, but he was having little luck landing a full-time position.

It was time to strike out on his own.

Since then, Shamoun has grown RJS Law from a solo practice to a 10-attorney firm with three offices in Southern California. In the past three years, RJS has opened offices in Orange County and Beverly Hills.

Growth is expected to continue, Shamoun said, and he hopes the firm maintains its midsize, personalized feel.

Practice areas range from IRS audits and appeals to real estate law, to the offshore voluntary disclosure program.

About 80 percent of the firm's practice is tax controversy and problems, Shamoun said, particularly small businesses that have issues with income, payroll or sales taxes, or companies that have been audited or have fallen behind on filings. A small portion of the practice comes from individuals with international tax issues. Shamoun has settled or litigated tax cases ranging from a few thousand dollars to more than \$300 million.

Why does he think his is among the most recommended tax law firms in San Diego?

RJS Law has a commitment to customer service and compassion and never wants a client to leave unhappy, Shamoun said.

"We truly care about each and every one of our clients," he said. "We work 110 percent on every case. Our fees are very reasonable. We truly fight for our clients, and we get great results for them."

Shamoun credits his success to his mentor, longtime University of San Diego law professor Richard Carpenter. When he decided to start his own practice, Shamoun leased office space from Carpenter, who passed on small cases that he wasn't taking.

"Because of him, I've grown," Shamoun said.

Shamoun, who is also a real estate investor, is an adjunct professor of law at USD School of Law, and his tax practice and penalties course is required for a master of laws degree in taxation.

## Allen Matkins

When San Diego attorneys think real estate, their minds quickly turn to Allen Matkins Leck Gamble Mallory & Natsis.

Headquartered in Los Angeles with

## Taxation



DLA Piper	23%
Procopio Cory Hargreaves & Savitch	21.5
RJS Law	18
Henderson Caverly Pum & Charney	14
Higgs Fletcher & Mack	14
Cooley	10

offices in four major metro areas of California, including San Diego, the firm is known as a powerhouse, handling real estate deals across the country. Founded in 1977, the firm currently has about 200 attorneys, 24 of whom are in San Diego.

Locally, Allen Matkins attorneys have handled some of the largest and most high-profile projects, from Kilroy's mixed-use One Paseo to Illumina's build-to-suit expansion at the new i3 biotech campus.

"Our real estate lawyers, both transactional and litigation, are extraordinarily well prepared, experienced and, chances are, because we have a focus on real estate, whatever the issue is or the transaction is, we've done it before," said partner Valentine Hoy, one of the firm's head litigators in San Diego. "In order to be an Allen Matkins lawyer, you have to be at the top of your game and the top of your field."

Hoy's work includes reaching a settlement for Kilroy Realty Corp., which was sued by community groups over its One Paseo development in Carmel Valley; filing a Civil Rights Act case against the city in federal court; and defending the developer of the BLVD63 apartment project near San Diego State University against a citizens' lawsuit.

Allen Matkins is a one-stop shop, added partner Martin Togni, with a strong breadth and depth to its practice.

"Because of our size, there isn't a transaction that we haven't seen before," said Togni, who focuses on leasing with an emphasis on the biotech industry. "We can really leverage everything so the work is performed at competitive rates and . . . by the right people."

Togni works with many clients who



Martin Togni and Val Hoy from Allen Matkins



**Real Estate**

Allen Matkins Leck Gamble Mallory & Natsis	35.5%
Procopio Cory Hargreaves & Savitch	21
Hecht Solberg Robinson Goldberg & Bagley	17
Higgs Fletcher & Mack	16.5
Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton	16
DLA Piper	15
Latham & Watkins	13
Solomon Ward Seidenwurm & Smith LLP	12
Seltzer Caplan McMahon Vitek	10



**Construction**

Higgs Fletcher & Mack	25%
Allen Matkins Leck Gamble Mallory & Natsis	17
Lorber Greenfield & Polito	16
Procopio Cory Hargreaves & Savitch	16
Epsten Grinnell & Howell	13
Marks, Finch, Thornton & Baird	11

PHOTO BY MICHAEL TITGENYER

have a national presence. He’s currently working on a 3,000-acre ground lease development in Nevada, and he has done almost all of San Diego-based Illumina’s real estate work since the company’s inception. He said driving past a building — especially one where life-changing science is taking place — and knowing that he helped make that project happen is particularly rewarding.

For 10 years, the firm has partnered with UCLA Anderson School of Management to produce a biannual real estate survey. Professionals in the development and investment markets statewide are polled on their outlooks for various markets and building conditions for the next three years.

While recent reports have been fairly positive, expect some pessimism to show up in the latest report, due out in late July, particularly in the office-space sector.

“I think people are pulling in the reins a little bit,” said Michael Guzzo, the firm’s marketing and communications manager. “There was a ton of money in play, and



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Pope Berger  
Williams & Reynolds



### Labor or Employment Law

Paul Plevin Sullivan & Connaughton	26%
Littler Mendelson	25
Wilson Turner Kosmo	15
Procopio Cory Hargreaves & Savitch	14
Brown Law Group	12
Ogletree, Deakins, Nash, Smoak & Stewart	12
DLA Piper	11
Pope Berger Williams & Reynolds	11
Higgs Fletcher & Mack	10
Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton	10

I think now people are becoming a little more conservative.”

But currently, the market is still very active.

“We’re really busy, our clients are really busy, and there’s a lot of activity out there in the marketplace,” Togni said.

### Pope, Berger, Williams & Reynolds

This summer was a big one for the five-attorney firm of Pope, Berger, Williams & Reynolds LLP: It celebrated its 20th anniversary in June.

Founded in 1996 by A. Mark Pope and Harvey C. Burger, the firm has grown slowly, with a core practice in labor and employment as well as other business litigation. It is the smallest firm among the recommended law firms.

So what makes it stand out?

“We’ve carved out a niche of doing both employee and employer work,” said partner Timothy G. Williams.

That means the attorneys know how the other side thinks.

“When I’m representing an employee, I know exactly what the employer’s counsel is thinking,” said Williams, who joined the downtown firm in 1999. “The knowledge of what’s happening on the other side gives you a better perspective on how to litigate. You know how they’re going to react.”

The firm has represented a fairly even mix of employers and employees, Williams said.

“We’ve been able to be very selective of the clients we’ve been able to take,” he said.

For employees, the firm has recovered well over \$50 million on behalf of individuals; and for employers, Pope, Berger, Williams & Reynolds has successfully defended “bet the company” cases.

Pope, Berger, Williams & Reynolds handles cases primarily in Southern California.

For perhaps the first time in its 20-year

history, the firm is representing plaintiffs in a case that's pending before the California Supreme Court. Williams hopes oral arguments in *Lee v. Dynamex Operations West* (Case No. S222732) will be set before the end of the year.

"Delivery drivers were classified as independent contractors, even though they formed an integral part of Dynamex's business: delivering packages for its customers," the firm wrote on its website.

There is currently much litigation by workers against companies who hire independent contractors. For instance, a recent class action suit against Uber was settled for \$84 million, and a second one is in the works.

If the California Supreme Court upholds a ruling by the state Court of Appeals, "it will make it easier for workers to hold companies and individuals responsible for paying them minimum wages, reimbursing their work expenses and providing them with the protections of both California and federal law," Williams said.

### Higgs Fletcher & Mack

Headquartered in Little Italy, Higgs Fletcher & Mack is San Diego's oldest full-service law firm.

"You can trust that we'll create the right team to provide the expertise your case requires," the firm says on its website.

**"Our attorneys have a reputation in the community for civility, knowledge and experience."**

**—Christina Denning, construction partner, Higgs Fletcher & Mack**



Higgs Fletcher & Mack

"We are known for clients both large and small, providing the same high level of care and competence to everyone."

The firm's recent celebration of its 75th year in business included volunteering more than 7,500 hours in the San Diego community during 2014.

Higgs has more than 75 attorneys in 24 practice areas. Our survey participants recommended it in six practice areas, including business law and litigation, real estate, taxation, construction and insurance.

Clients include companies ranging from A to Z – from Amazon to the Zoological Society of San Diego.

"Our attorneys have a reputation in the community for civility, knowledge and experience," said Christina Denning, construction partner.

Denning has grown her construction

### Insurance Law



Higgs Fletcher & Mack	22%
Gordon Rees Scully Mansukhani	18
Procopio Cory Hargreaves & Savitch	16
Neil Dymott Frank McFall & Trexler	11
Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton	11
Cozen O'Connor	10
Seltzer Caplan McMahon Vitek	10





practice since joining the firm in 2011, after maintaining a practice in construction law, business litigation and personal injury. She litigates a wide array of disputes from the claim stage through arbitration or trial.

“I take pride in helping my clients

achieve business success while minimizing risk,” Denning said.

Her recent construction contract negotiations include a \$40 million aviation facility, a \$75 million luxury high-rise condominium project and a \$55 million development of 200 residential homes.

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Higgs Fletcher & Mack	22%
Gordon Rees Scully Mansukhani	18
Procopio Cory Hargreaves & Savitch	16
Neil Dymott Frank McFall & Trexler	11
Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton	11
Cozen O'Connor	10
Seltzer Caplan McMahon Vitek	10

## Business or Corporate Litigation



Procopio Cory Hargreaves & Savitch	31.5%
Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton	24.5
Cooley	22
DLA Piper	21.5
Higgs Fletcher & Mack	20
Morrison Foerster	20
Jones Day	18.5
Kirby Noonan Lance & Hoge	16.5
Seltzer Caplan McMahon Vitek	16.5
Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman	14

## Intellectual Property or Patent Law



Knobbe Martens	35%
Fish & Richardson	34.5
Cooley	32
DLP Piper	20
Morrison & Foerster	18
Perkins Coie	16
Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton	16
Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati	15
Procopio Cory Harhreaves & Savitch	14
Latham & Watkins	13