Inside the Thriving Houston Legal Market: Haynes Boone Partners Discuss Trends in Chambers Associate Q&A

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Houston Chambers

Haynes Boone Partners **Valisa Berber-Thayer**, **Ellen Conley**, **Garrett Martin** and **Kelli Norfleet** recently spoke with *Chambers Associate* about the Houston legal market – covering everything from their practices and the city's evolving legal landscape to the industries driving Houston, what junior lawyers can expect, how compensation stacks up and what makes the Houston office culture unique.

Read an excerpt from their Q&A below.

Chambers Associate: How would you describe the Houston legal market to someone coming from New York, Chicago or California?

Ellen Conley, energy partner: *The Houston legal market has a distinctly Texan culture that values directness, pragmatism and long-term client relationships. It is heavily concentrated on energy work, with a strong client base constituting energy companies, their private equity sponsors and related financial and industrial partners. This diverse, yet focused, group fosters legal experts with sophisticated transactional and regulatory practices.*

Valisa Berber-Thayer, mergers and acquisitions partner: *Houston is incredibly diverse and at the forefront of economic opportunity in the U.S. The Port of Houston and the energy industry place Houston in the heart of international trade and investment, and the business-friendly tax and legal frameworks of the State of Texas encourage investment and innovation from across the world.*

Kelli Norfleet, restructuring partner: *Houston has a unique legal market in that Houston lawyers are able to work on sophisticated, high-stakes commercial matters and also enjoy a collegial atmosphere among the Houston bar.*

Garrett Martin, litigation partner: *The Houston market is a highly competitive mix of large Texas-founded firms and the international/coastal elite firms. The Texas-founded firms like Haynes Boone continue to have large offices and a massive presence, but most of the Am Law 100 firms have some presence here, varying in size from well-established offices to strategic outposts.*

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Chambers: How has Houston evolved over the past five to 10 years?

Martin: *In terms of the legal industry, Houston has seen a major influx of coastal firms, and I would wager more than any other U.S. city. This has made the market more competitive in terms of lawyer hiring and retention, but also in winning and retaining clients.*

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Conley: *The arrival of a significant number of national firms has intensified competition for legal talent. Texas firms like Haynes Boone, however, have shown remarkable resilience, adapting strategically and continuing to obtain record financial results. We represent what the Houston legal market is known for – a culture that values its people and relationships.*

Chambers: What industries drive the legal work in Houston?

Martin: *One primary driver is obviously the energy industry. That simple description, however, obscures a bit just how diverse clients in that space are. … What many people have missed is that many of the traditional major oil and gas companies have shifted to becoming integrated energy companies with much broader focuses that include things like renewables and direct electricity development.*

Berber-Thayer: *While Houston's economy has always been firmly grounded in the energy industry and manufacturing and industrial sectors, Houston has also built a world-class medical community and thriving life sciences and biotechnology industries, has invested heavily in the energy transition and power and infrastructure sectors, and is a hub for investment and innovation from across the globe.*

Chambers: What legal practices are thriving in Houston at the moment?

Conley: *Transactional practices broadly, particularly those having ties to the energy industry.*

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Martin: *From my perspective, litigation is really having a moment in the Houston market. The introduction of the Texas Business Courts in 2024 has generated a lot of opportunities with clients seeking to litigate in Texas forums.*

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Chambers: What can the Houston legal scene offer junior associates starting out their careers?

Norfleet: *In a city the size of Houston, there is a lot of variety in the types of legal work that you will find here. That variety allows junior associates to find a practice that is truly a good fit for a life-long career.*

Martin: *Houston is unique in the sense that it presents opportunities for really complex work that match the opportunities in the coastal markets, while still offering a relatively low cost of living and a sense of ease that most coastal markets cannot touch. … The jumpstart that this offers for building a family or paying off student debt is tough to beat, especially when you aren't sacrificing quality of mentorship, prestige of client or complexity of work.*

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Chambers: How would you describe the culture of Haynes Boone's Houston office?

Berber-Thayer: *Haynes Boone's Houston office, like the rest of the firm, has a culture focused on excellence, service and collaboration. Practice leaders see mentorship and development of the next generation of firm leaders as a key part of their role, and attorneys at all levels look for opportunities to support one another.*

GM: *Our practice groups are deeply integrated, and it would be an unusual week if I didn't work with at least a couple of my transactional or restructuring colleagues on some project. … I also genuinely like the people I work with and see them (and their families) outside of the office regularly. Many of the partners are younger with small children, which I think contributes to more energy in the office and a high level of understanding of the unique challenges young lawyers face. … We want to succeed as a group, which I think is really unique.*

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Chambers: What advice would you give to a law student looking to begin their career in Houston, or to an associate looking to transition their practice to Houston? Why would you recommend Houston as a legal market to practice in?

Berber-Thayer: *I would recommend reaching out to as many current Houston attorneys as you can that practice at the type of firm and in the practice area(s) in which you think you are interested. … Also think about your "why" for coming to Houston. Unlike some markets, not having personal ties to the city will not preclude you from finding opportunities here, but a thoughtful answer to the question of "Why Houston?" will help to open doors for you.*

Martin: *I always tell law students, regardless of their target market, to focus on mentorship and growth opportunities above all else. … When interviewing with firms, ask what kind of tasks or responsibilities associates have at various points in their practice. … We often end up being who we work with. If your mentors aren't getting the development they need to reach partnership and succeed long-term, it's a safe bet you won't either.*

Conley: *As one of the largest cities in the U.S, Houston is a premier city of opportunities, with a robust economy, rich diversity and continuing growth. The cards are stacked in your favor.*

Read the full *Chambers Associate* article **here**.

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