

APPELLATE HOT LIST

A SPECIAL REPORT

When the stakes were high, the 20 law firms featured in this year's special report delivered—winning big in federal and state appeals courts across the country. They won landmark U.S. Supreme Court decisions on closely watched cases including those over affirmative action, patent infringement and a labor dispute. They also represented some of the most well-known companies in the land, among them Bank of America Corp., Chevron Corp. and the National Football League. These are their stories.

Stris & Maher

With just 12 lawyers, Stris & Maher is small, but the Los Angeles-based litigation boutique is also proving to be mighty.

The firm makes its first appearance on the Appellate Hot List this year after name partner Peter Stris racked up two wins before the U.S. Supreme Court in major business disputes. He's scheduled to appear again this term on behalf of a putative class of consumers in *Microsoft v. Baker*, as is partner Dan Geysler in *Midland Funding v. Johnson*, a consumer-protection case.

Impressively, Stris has managed to win even when conventional wisdom held that he barely had a shot.

In a path-breaking ERISA case, Stris in January prevailed, 8-1, before the high court on behalf of Robert Montanile. The court found that federally regulated insurers may only recoup unspent funds from an injured beneficiary who received a settlement.

Four months later, Stris won a unanimous decision on behalf of

seven sophisticated Escala Group Inc. investors. The justices permitted their securities fraud suit to remain in New Jersey state court, shooting down a bid to transfer it to federal court.

The firm represents many plaintiffs, but its client base is diverse.

Partner Elizabeth Brannen, for example, delivered for Barnes & Noble Inc. in October before the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit in a novel copyright infringement case involving cloud storage.

"Our clients have to be comfortable with who we are. We're on both sides of the 'v,'" said Stris, who described the firm's culture as "youthful and vibrant" and akin to a Silicon Valley startup.

The founding partners are longtime friends and Harvard Law School classmates. Launched in 2007 as a three-lawyer consulting practice, the firm didn't really come together until 2014. Now, Stris said they're turning down 90 percent of the work they're offered.



PETER STRIS

Will they grow? Stris said there is no plan to become a particular size. The firm is focused on a different goal. "We just want to keep handling really interesting cases."

—JENNA GREENE