

Translated article – “Pascal Chadenet, associé gérant de Dentons”
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Pascal Chadenet, Dentons Paris managing Partner

Is it possible to go from teaching math and philosophy to becoming the leader of a law firm of 2,500 lawyers? Unbelievable? Pascal Chadenet did it.

Pascal Chadenet burst into the Dentons conference room in a jovial mood. Clémence, the eldest of his three children, had just obtained her driver’s license, and the partner specializing in mergers & acquisitions wanted this to be known. With a smile, he told the story of a trainee who had sent an email to all the Dentons lawyers to announce similar news. “Having one’s license is synonymous with liberty and independence,” he commented. Pascal earned his own independence through different experiences and horizons. He made some occasionally surprising decisions which caused him to meander several times before he reached the comfort gained through his recent nomination to the position of co-manager of the Dentons Paris office

A time of choices

The 57-year-old, who grew up in Boulogne, was torn between his grandfather who was a banker and gave him the love of numbers, and a teacher who inspired a love of philosophy. To satisfy both, he followed two programs at Nanterre University, obtaining a double Masters in math and philosophy. A Marine officer in Brest during his military service, he was in charge of giving math lessons and remembers “around thirty people, all standing at attention” when he entered the classroom. That was a rather impressive start, which made him want to continue teaching. After answering an ad in the newspaper, he arrived in Los Angeles in 1981 to give math classes at a prestigious French high school...with many children of celebrities in the classrooms...

But this travel enthusiast abandoned the experience two years later for a road trip to Asia, before returning definitively to France in 1984. At this time, Emmanuel Brochier and François Martineau launched an editorial adventure with a collection revisiting great criminal 19th century legal cases in the form of “pulp fiction”. Pascal Chadenet followed them and published “*Mariage sous Arsenic*” (“Marriage under Arsenic”), which illustrated the famous Lafarge affair. Pascal proudly recalled that the work was even presented by Bernard Pivot during the “Apostrophes” literary television show. From writings in philosophy, notably at the Compiègne University of Technology in 1986, he studied and improved but could barely make ends meet. Reading a political philosophy work by Rousseau finally led him to discover law, which attracted his curiosity. After obtaining a law degree at Paris I university, he flew back to the USA, this time bound for Georgetown.

“After my LLM, I sent resumes to the FMI and a few banks and American law firms, but no one answered,” Pascal relates. A friend told me that Carl Salans was hiring in Paris; I went, and got an offer at the end of the day!”

On each side of the border

What better for this veteran globetrotter, than a multinational and multicultural firm? Arriving in 1988 at Salans, then located on the rue Boissy d’Anglas, he nevertheless spent just a brief time and followed

the team which split one year later to join Wilkie. He practiced there 11 years as European counsel and has memories of a few unforgettable clients, such as the famous Japanese billionaire Masako Ohya. He is the only person who set the dates of his closings according to the advice of his astrologist," Pascale remembers, amusedly.

In 2000 he returned to Salans. "Wilkie was certainly becoming the 'Rolls Royce' of private equity, but I had more of a desire for international. What I want is to have a foot on each side of the border," Pascal explains. When the opportunity of a merger between the firms Salans, British-American SNR Denton and Canadian FMC presented itself in 2012, Pascal was still a board member. "Today, it's a 'baby' of 2,500 lawyers," remarks the partner with a smile, who, since last January, has been co-manager of the Paris office along with Benoit Giroux. While the latter takes care of day-to-day firm management, Pascal is in charge of developing the office's international activity. This is a boon for Pascal, who nevertheless admits a certain apprehension before the scope of the task. "It took me ten years to learn to get to know 200 partners during the Salans period; I now need to know 600 more!"

The new co-manager has set some new immediate challenges. They include rapidly replacing an orphaned restructuring team, since the departure of Gabriel Sonier and Caroline Texier for Gide last January, and also promoting the new Dentons. "We must increase visibility, but also, and especially, the 'readability' of this new entity," he explains. Without forgetting to devote some time to the Carpeaux circle, which rewards a dancer from the Paris Opera each year, and of which Pascal is a member. "I love dance, and am passionate about music in general. My tastes run from Puccini to Eminem" concludes Pascal Chadenet, a man who sees as far geographically as he does musically.

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For further information, please contact:

Paola Pozzi-Dazza
Marketing & Communication Director
Paris
+33 1 42 68 92 72
paola.pozzi@dentons.com

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