

# Becker's Big Bet: Gibson Dunn's Chair on How the Firm is Supercharging its London Base

By Molly G Smith

March 20, 2026

**G**ibson Dunn & Crutcher has made no secret of its London ambitions. Alongside rivals like Sidley Austin and Paul Hastings, it is among the City's fastest growing U.S.-headquartered firms.

What began as a plan to bolster the office's transactional capabilities alongside its longstanding disputes strength has evolved into a broader push to make London a hub for the firm's work across Europe, the Middle East and Asia. The strategy has been driven in large part by the firm's chair and managing partner Barbara Becker, who took the reins five years ago.

Becker sits down with Law.com to discuss the thinking behind a strategy that could see the firm hit 500 London lawyers in the coming five years, the challenges of scaling at pace, and why London remains central to Gibson Dunn's wider European growth story.

**What made London the right strategic priority for Gibson Dunn and why was now the moment to accelerate growth there?**

London has always had a fantastic disputes team, but as an M&A lawyer by trade, what was critical to me was building out our transactional capabilities so that London could become a true hub—one that would allow us to bring our entire platform to clients across Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and beyond.

When we laid out our strategic priorities in 2021, London was central to our vision. As we always do, we are focused on building destination practices in all that we do. That is what clients expect from us.



Courtesy image/Adobe Stock composition.

**Barbara Becker, London.**

We started by finding transactional lawyers who were not just excellent technically, but who also had that entrepreneurial gene and drive. Our first move was bringing together a core M&A and private equity team that had previously worked together but had since dispersed across different firms. We brought the band back together, and they have been phenomenally successful.

From there, we built out all the adjacencies. We added finance capability, then tech transactions, project finance, transportation finance, and public-to-private expertise. We built a phenomenal real estate team to mirror our A+ team in the U.S. We brought in a restructuring team to complement our top BRR practice in the U.S. and Paris. We are doing the same with investment funds and other practice areas. And we strengthened our energy practice in London to connect seamlessly with our exceptional energy teams in Texas and across the firm.

But it is not just about lateral talent. We elevated more partners from London than from any other office last year—11 in total. That is our homegrown talent in action. We have fortified practices like antitrust, where we have always had exceptional capabilities outside the U.S., by adding five antitrust partners—a mix of elevated and lateral talent—across London and Brussels who all function as one team.

Our growth strategy has always been about the right combination of developing homegrown talent and bringing in exceptional lateral partners who complement our platform. On the disputes side, we just brought in a KC with a stellar reputation in international arbitration who works across both our London and Zurich offices.

Everything we have been doing has been about executing on the clear intention we set in 2021—to build out the transactional side of the house in London while continuing to invest in our already exceptional disputes practice.

### **What does success for the London office look like in three years from now in concrete terms?**

Success in three years means London continues to be a revenue and talent powerhouse that is fully integrated into our global platform.

Concretely, I want to see continued revenue growth driven by both our transactional and disputes practices. We have more than doubled London's revenue over the past several years—I want that trajectory to continue as we deepen existing client relationships and win new mandates.

On the talent side, success means continuing to elevate our homegrown associates to partnership while attracting the best lateral talent in the market. We are moving into One Exchange Square—more than double the size of our current space—and I want to see us growing into that footprint with exceptional lawyers across all our practice areas.

But revenue and headcount are outputs. What really matters is that London continues functioning as a bridge—seamlessly connecting clients to our capabilities across the U.S., Europe, the Mid-

dle East, and Asia. Success means our London partners are both originating sophisticated cross-border work and being pulled into matters from anywhere on our platform to deliver the integrated Gibson Dunn experience our clients expect.

Success also means continuing to invest where we see client demand and market opportunity—whether that is adding bench strength to PE and M&A, building out our funds practice, or strengthening areas like restructuring and energy where we are already seeing tremendous momentum.

### **What has been the hardest part of scaling in London so far and what have you changed as a result?**

Successful scaling is about two things: being particular about the “who” and being intentional about integration.

On the “who”—we are very disciplined. For laterals, we look for lawyers who have that entrepreneurial gene, who want to build, and who understand what it means to work collaboratively across a platform. Just as importantly, we ensure our homegrown talent has a clear path to partnership. As I mentioned, we elevated more partners from London than any other office last year. That investment in our people protects our culture while we grow.

On integration—when you are bringing in exceptional lateral talent while simultaneously elevating homegrown partners at this pace, you need to be deliberate about how everyone connects—with each other, with our U.S. practices, and with our other international offices.

I meet regularly one-on-one with all our lateral partners and with each elevated partner several times throughout the year. But beyond that, I spent a few months in London last spring, and I am about to do that again starting at the end of February. Being there—working alongside the teams, having those conversations, participating in the day-to-day—is how we maintain our strong culture and support real collaboration.

The move to One Exchange Square underscores our commitment to the London market

and gives our teams the space they need to continue growing.

**Looking beyond London, what is your approach to European expansion and what factors determine where you invest next?**

Our approach to Europe is the same as our approach everywhere—we build destination practices in markets where our clients need us and where we can deliver excellence.

London is our largest European office and functions as a hub, but we have been intentional about our presence across the continent. Paris is our oldest international office—we have been there for over 55 years. We also have strong, established offices in Brussels, Munich, and Frankfurt, and recently founded our office in Zurich.

Where we invest is driven by client demand and the opportunity to build or strengthen a destination practice. Madrid is a good example. We just added a top corporate lawyer in the market who serves some of the same clients and was well known by colleagues in London and throughout the platform. This strengthens our European offering, particularly in private equity. Similarly, we just announced the addition of a leading restructuring partner in Germany, who will join our Munich office to further our build of a destination restructuring practice with Paris, London, and the U.S.

It is the same strategic thinking that guided our London build—find exceptional talent with an entrepreneurial mindset, integrate them into the platform, and build around them.

**What are you most proud of from the last few years of your work and why does that matter to you personally?**

I am most proud of how we have grown the firm while maintaining who we are. When I took this seat in 2021, we were coming out of the pandemic, the legal market was in flux, and there were real questions about how firms would evolve. We set a clear strategic vision and have

executed on it in a way that is true to our culture of excellence and collaboration.

The numbers tell part of the story—decades of consecutive record revenue and record profits. We have grown from roughly 1,700 lawyers in 2021 to over 2,200 today. We have more than doubled our London office and expanded into new markets like Riyadh and are adding Madrid. And we have done this while staying true to who we are—the talent we continue to attract, retain, and elevate is a testament to the culture we have built and protected.

**What would you tell your 18-year-old self about building a career and a life and what do you wish you had understood earlier?**

I was a go with the flow person from way back when, and that served me well. I would tell my 18-year-old self to embrace that—stay open to where life takes you.

Be open to opportunities, even unexpected ones. Say “yes” to things you had not planned for. Some of the best things in my career came from exactly that.

And finally, you can build a successful career and have a life. Set your priorities—family has always been at the top for me—and be disciplined about protecting what matters most. Control what you can control. Of course, it does not always work out perfectly, but being intentional makes all the difference.

**How does cycling in London compare with cycling in New York?**

I love cycling in both cities. That is how I commute to work.

In London, it took me a bit to get used to riding on the other side of the road! But once I adjusted, it has been great. I love the chaos of the streets and exploring as much as I can on two wheels.

And to my partners—I do wear a helmet and obey the traffic laws. I try to be as safe as possible.