

MoFo Brings On Simpson Thacher Private Equity Ace In SF

By James Mills

Law360 (February 21, 2024, 4:40 PM EST) -- Morrison Foerster LLP is bolstering its finance team, announcing Wednesday it is bringing in a Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP private equity pro as a partner in its San Francisco office.

Michael Vernace is joining Morrison Foerster's finance and private equity groups in the transactions department after spending the past 14 years at Simpson Thacher. He represents private equity funds and their portfolio companies in complex U.S. and cross-border financings, including acquisition financings and refinancings.



Michael Vernace

Vernace also advises clients on syndicated finance and other commercial lending transactions, including acquisition, leveraged, investment-grade, asset-based and hybrid financings. Additionally, he represents leading leveraged buyout sponsors and their portfolio companies in connection with a variety of recapitalizations and refinancings.

In an email, Vernace told Law360 he felt comfortable during his initial meetings with Morrison Foerster leaders.

"There was a pretty instantaneous connection around fit and culture, and from there I was sold by the team's recent growth and continued emphasis on finance and private equity," said Vernace.

In meeting with those leaders, he said they understood each other's "goals and strategies for success."

"The decision [to join the firm] was about being part of MoFo's continued growth around private equity and related financings and, from there, tapping into MoFo's global platform for my clients," Vernace said.

Vernace's new boss, Yemi Tépé, co-chair of Morrison Foerster's finance group, spoke highly of him.

"Michael's extensive experience advising sophisticated private equity sponsors and their portfolio companies also expands and further deepens our borrower/company bench strength, enabling us to better serve our public company and technology clients while expanding our dominant presence in the San Francisco market and beyond," Tépé said in a statement.

Vernace is the second partner to join Morrison Foerster's finance practice this year, following the arrival of Tammy Davies in the New York office last month. He is the seventh partner to join the firm's private

equity practice within the last three years, including James Beach who joined the San Francisco office in March 2023.

"The continued investment in, and growth of, our global finance and private equity capabilities remains a strategic priority for the firm," Darío Avram, the other co-chair of Morrison Foerster's finance group, said in a statement. "Michael's practice and strategic approach to business development offer an excellent complement to our finance and private equity teams' strategies on the ground in the Bay Area, while further accelerating the growth of our market-leading global finance and private equity capabilities."

Vernace earned his law degree in 2009 from Duke University School of Law. He joined Simpson Thacher in fall 2009 and became a partner in early 2021.

He was on the team guiding car and truck part supplier Dorman Products Inc. in its \$590 million acquisition of SuperATV LLC, a supplier of aftermarket power sports equipment, in 2022.

He was also on the team advising E.W. Scripps Co. on financing in its \$2.65 billion purchase of broadcasting business Ion Media in 2020.

Vernace was not immediately available to answer additional questions Wednesday.

Morrison Foerster was founded in 1883 in San Francisco and today has over 1,000 attorneys in 18 offices worldwide.

--Additional reporting by Tracey Read, Elaine Briseño and Benjamin Horney. Editing by Michael Watanabe.